

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
ELECTRONIC MEETING VIA ZOOM AND PHONE CALL-IN  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2021

**Present:**

Trustees: Steve Hatfield, Will Jennison, Scott Meyer, Athena Parke, BJ Putvain

Others: Meredith Dolan, Rosemary Audibert, Sophia Berard, Kyle Nuse, Diane Lehouiller, Jackie Stanton, Marla Emery, Lynda Hill, Margo Warden, Kim Dunkley

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. *Call to Order***

Scott called the meeting to order at 6:03.

**2. *Changes, Additions to Proposed Agenda***

Meredith said she realized that when putting the agenda together she had put discussion about dates for future meetings in different places on the agenda. She thinks we probably will need a special meeting because she didn't put approving the warning for the annual meeting on this agenda. Scott said his understanding is that if it is an item that will be voted on it should not be added to the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. Meredith agreed that she wouldn't feel comfortable adding it now.

**3. *Determine Plan for Requested Special Meeting***

Meredith said last week there was an offer to help us find a moderator. Her understanding is that that hasn't been successful. Scott and Kim have been working through people they know to find an impartial person from outside Johnson.

Kim Dunkley said her friend gave her the number of a conflict resolution mediator who did not have time for this but he has been in touch with a person who runs a college mediation program. It was suggested that maybe a student with mediation skills might be willing to be a moderator. Hopefully we will hear back about that in a few days.

Meredith said she anticipates needing a special meeting later this week or next week and hopefully by then she will have been able to speak to a potential moderator and have potential dates.

Sophia Berard said she thinks at the last meeting a deadline for setting a date was suggested. What was that date? Will said his suggestion was that by the next regular meeting (March 8) we should have found a moderator or move forward with an alternative.

Jackie Stanton said at previous meetings the public questioned the need for a moderator, which turned into a mediator, and now it has turned into conflict resolution. Kim said it is a moderator. Mediation and conflict resolution are their skills. Jackie said there is not a big mob of disrespectful, threatening people. The people who want information are people who are here tonight, neighbors and friends. They have demonstrated their ability to speak respectfully and ask pointed questions and the board has demonstrated its ability to not answer the questions. What is the holdup? Can we get where we need to be?

Athena said she is interested in having a moderator. If that is the reason for the holdup, she contributed to it. She wants a moderator because she wants to see someone handle this better than

she could. She is hearing that these issues haven't been handled well. She would like to learn from the moderator how to do it. She is completely unsure how to give them members of the public the information they want. She would like the moderator to help her with that.

Steve said he doesn't feel he has the skills to handle or moderate this meeting. The issues are things that happened before he joined. He read over the minutes and the issue is convoluted. He doesn't know where to start.

Will said he supports having a moderator because of the volatility of the topic. We are neighbors and friends and misspoken words without someone able to rein it in could cause damage to that. He doesn't want to see that.

BJ said he agrees with will. He watched the past four or five months of board meetings to catch up. If one side feels like they need a moderator to make the meeting run smoother for whatever reason he feels like we should have it for them.

Kyle Nuse said she wants to remind everyone that we are talking about a list of very pointed questions that have been presented to the trustees that members of the public want answered. It is not about having volatile back and forth conversation but about questions that need to be answered. They have been asked at least half a dozen times. People are going to be adults. She thinks we can do this. All the public wants is transparency and answers to the questions that have been presented numerous times. She doesn't see why we need someone facilitating when the board has the questions and the public just wants the answers.

Margo agreed with Kyle. She thinks we can do this with ground rules.

Kim said some people have been offended and some of the people here haven't recognized that. It makes it evident that a moderator is needed, someone who can see that getting stepped on is not okay. She is hearing people saying the meeting should be an easy thing but from past experience it doesn't seem that it will be. If it was easy, people would have gotten the answers immediately.

Margo said we are all on a level playing field as far as people being offended. The way Kim put it, it sounded like maybe people on the board are offended about the questions or pushback. She thinks members of the public are feeling equally vulnerable and offended but hopefully we are coming to a place of being willing to sort it out.

Jackie said she agrees that not just the trustees felt disrespected or offended; the public did too. We are at a point now where someone might know someone who might know a student who might be interested. Finding a moderator is taking a long time. Can we prepare ourselves that if this doesn't pan out we will figure it out? There are just questions that need to be answered. Then the board will get feedback from the public based on the answers.

Scott said Kim has worked hard on this. The student who might be able to moderate would be someone going for a master's degree. He said Kim is feeling offended and this is what we are talking about. Jackie said she is feeling offended that this is taking so long. She feels we have to let some things roll and not have such a large amount of feeling offended.

Kyle said a question she has for everyone on the trustee board is: why are you trustees? What do you feel like your role is? She would hope it is to serve the people you are representing. If it is, there is no question in her mind that the trustees need to respond to the questions placed before the board. Every time she hears a delay or excuse or feeling of personal attack, she comes back to the question: why are you trustees? Why are you in positions of leadership?

Steve said he just wants to help the village. He realizes there are going to be situations where there will be different viewpoints and compromise might be necessary. Regarding Black Lives Matter, he thinks a reasonable compromise was reached. It is incredibly convoluted how it got there. He thinks sometimes we just have to be happy with what we have now. Maybe we could just move on from there. It was not necessarily the most just thing. He doesn't think everyone was represented in that decision. The town kind of punted it. A lot of suggestions were put forth and now we have one that is okay. He thinks we could even get a Black Lives Matter flag at other locations. He would love to see one in the park by the bread oven. People are saying that what is requested is just simple answers but it's not really. They aren't yes or no questions. That is part of the difficulty.

Kyle said she is wondering why Steve and other board members have stepped up to the positions they are in. Steve said when he volunteered no one else wanted to do it. There were two people and two slots. If someone younger and more active than him wants to do it, he would just step down. He is not attached to doing this. He is doing it because he loves Johnson and wants to help.

Will said his answer is that he grew up here, he has done the job before and he thought there was a need. There was a position he could fill and with his experience with running the village and the financials he thought he could be an asset.

BJ said he is very new to the village. He and his wife plan on living the rest of their lives here. He would like to help the public make changes they feel need to be made. He would like to do it in a professional way, not with negativity. He has noticed that the board is very passionate and residents are very passionate. With that passion comes some volatility. That is where the moderator comes in. If a question is answered and the answer is not acceptable to the public that is where he thinks a moderator will be needed.

Athena said she loves Johnson and she wants to help. If Kyle wants a longer answer she would be happy to email her.

Scott said he saw that the village needed sprucing up when it came to the electric utility and the public water supply, so he stepped up. People voted him in. He has 30 years of experience with safety and emergency response. He thought he had the background to move things forward. He and Gordy didn't always see eye to eye but Gordy said he felt diversity was good. Scott believes that too.

Margo asked if the board has thought about using David Williams as a moderator. Scott said they have and they have thought about Eric Osgood as well. If the work Kim has done fails he thinks we should ask one of those two people. Margo said she would put in her vote for David. He has moderated town and village meetings over three decades. He has been part of some difficult conversations and debates. She thinks he focuses on keeping the relationships intact and he is somewhat removed from the goings on of town, as opposed to Eric.

Kim said it's not just the people who are at here at this meeting. When the trustees are trying to make decisions and answer questions the whole rest of the town comes into it and there is a question of how to make sure they come to the table. If people don't feel they are being heard and respected then the whole community isn't involved. She is glad people here feel comfortable talking without a moderator but it needs to be comfortable for everyone.

Sophia asked if it would be helpful to have a date set first to see if potential moderators are available on that date. Scott said he thinks that would make it harder because people are pretty booked. It would be very hard for him if he were asked to do something on a specific date.

Sophia asked if the board is going to reach out to David Williams and Eric Osgood before March 8 or wait until then to see if they are available. Scott said he thinks we could reach out to them before that. Will said his intention is that a meeting date will be picked at that meeting whether we have a moderator or not.

Lynda Hill said it is frustrating because March 8 will be 6 months since this started. She is shocked that it has been so many months. When the special meeting is scheduled she highly doubts there will be any people there other than the people who are here right now. She doesn't understand why no one contacted David Williams back when a special meeting was first considered. He will be busy now with informational meetings coming up. She sometimes feels like board members feel that if they put this off it will go away, that if they ignore it the public will forget about it.

Scott said that is not his intention, nor would it ever be. He wants to make sure people know that he is not dragging this on hoping people will go away and the conversation will end. Not even close.

Diane Lehouiller said she thinks we should set the special meeting for March 8, see if any of the three potential moderators that have been suggested can make that meeting and if they can't then we will deal with the situation and be done with it.

Will said the March 8 meeting is the trustee board's regular meeting. The board has business to attend to that day. He doesn't think it is fair to the board or the public to try to squeeze in the special meeting issues. He thinks it is better to have a meeting focused just on that. The date for that meeting will be set at the March 8 meeting.

Diane suggested that if the board doesn't want the special meeting on the 8th it could be done on the 9th. Will said we want to give any potential moderator an open schedule. If we demand they come on a specific date that lessens flexibility. We wouldn't want to reduce the options.

BJ said he is sorry Lynda feels like she the public is being pushed off but the board will take care of it and does have a hard deadline. They will make sure this gets moved forward.

Kyle said she would like to make one more play for someone on the board to make a motion to set a date tonight for the special meeting so people can plan to be there and we can get this done and move on.

Margo said this meeting has been requested since October. The people at the special meeting will just be the people here tonight. It will not be a bigger meeting, right?

Scott said his idea was that in addition to town and village residents, members of the fire department would be invited because he felt he couldn't answer for them. He felt a good moderator was needed and the idea was that it would be a bigger audience. Otherwise we could do it right now. He feels there is a need for the fire department to be present to answer questions.

Jackie said she does remember Scott saying Arjay should come to this meeting, which was a relief. Members of the public were also asking who supervises Arjay. She thinks Arjay and his supervisor are the most important ones to come to the meeting. Is that who Scott is talking about having there?

Will said Arjay answers to the board. Scott said the board was hoping Arjay and maybe others from the fire department would come. It is up to them who they want to have come

BJ said he knows some people are frustrated with the length of time this is taken and he thinks people are assuming that when the date is set on the 8th it will take another month before the meeting it will put off the meeting by another month can we give people more of a timeline? He knows we don't want to set a date but could we say that it will be within about a week of March 8th.

Meredith noted that a special meeting was requested and agreed to on December 14th, not in October. She thinks if we find a moderator and they are not available until later in March, the board will have to decide whether that is too far out. Not knowing availability of moderators she thinks it would be hard to say that we will have the meeting within a certain amount of time.

Will said he thinks setting the timeframe would be limiting our options. He thinks having a moderator is crucial to saving relationships. Let's not set a hard date and limit our options as far as moderators go. Steve said he is willing to set a date that is really soon, but he thinks we still need a moderator.

Jasmine Yuris asked why we need a moderator. Can someone tell her why it is important? She has full faith that the community can have a civil conversation. Kim said everyone in our community should have a say. Some in our community don't feel safe and respected. They feel they will be attacked for expressing their position. If we have a moderator, the moderator will hopefully bring awareness to people who don't know they are stepping on others' toes. Jasmine said she would assume that people in leadership roles on the trustee board would be able to make the meetings an open environment for people to participate in. She doesn't see why we need someone other than the people who already run these meetings. Kim said there are other community members who haven't felt safe in that situation. Jasmine asked if they will come now that there will be a moderator. Kim said it is her understanding that that will help them come to the table. Jasmine said if having a moderator will bring people to the table who have been following this all along, then she is for it.

#### **4. Review Annual Meeting Deadline and Process**

Meredith said the deadline for people who want to run for the trustee board to submit consent forms is March 1.

The general department budget figure needs to be on the warning. The warning needs to go out at least 30 days before the meeting, so by the end of next week we have to have the warning approved.

The deadline for petitions has passed. Rosemary said no petitions were received.

**5. *Set Date for Required Informational Meeting***

We are required to have an informational meeting 10 days or less before the Australian ballot vote. The vote will be on April 6. Meredith suggested March 29 for the informational meeting and the board agreed.

Kyle asked if all the heads of departments will be at the informational meeting. Meredith said she thinks Troy and Dan will. She doesn't know if Arjay would be available. His budget is part of the general department budget. Kyle asked if the board would be willing to strongly encourage Arjay to be there as well. About 35% of the general department budget is the fire department and she has questions she would like to ask. Meredith suggested that now is a better time to ask questions because the budget has not yet been approved. She would encourage her to ask her questions now. The fire department budget is similar to last year's. Kyle said she would still appreciate Arjay being at the informational meeting.

**6. *Select Dedication for Village Annual Report***

The board discussed possible dedications for the village annual report. **Will moved to dedicate the annual village report to Gordy Smith, Athena seconded and the motion was passed.**

**7. *Review Draft General Department and Electric Department 2021 Budgets***

Meredith said the board needs to approve the general department budget within about a week in order to get the budget number into the warning. She has gotten it to balance, unlike the other three departments' budgets. It is a very tight budget. Meredith went through the general department budget line by line.

Last year's update to the village grand list resulted in the tax rate going down. Meredith assumed the same tax revenue as last year.

According to the village charter the town is required to pay the village 10 cents on the grand list for maintenance of sidewalks and storm drains. That amount has gone up about \$2,500 since last year because the grand list went up.

The state makes PILOT payments for state-owned property within the village (NVU.) The actual PILOT payments for 2020 went down slightly. Part of the pilot payment is based on the village tax rate so if our tax rate goes down our PILOT payment goes down. She budgeted a little less for 2021 than 2020.

Will asked the PILOT amount Meredith budgeted is using the same tax rate as 2020, correct? Meredith said yes. Will asked if the PILOT payment is based on that rate or another factor. Meredith said she believes it uses the village tax rate. Rosemary said that is her understanding too. Will said if the tax rate is the same as in 2020 then the number should be the same as last year's actuals. Meredith said the state always calculates what the payment should be but decides not to give communities the full amount. She was trying to be conservative. Will asked, if the rate goes up does our chance of receiving a higher amount go up? Meredith said she thinks so. She thinks we might get a little more if our tax rate goes up.

Meredith said the electric department gives a payment to the village in lieu of taxes. When our tax rate goes down the payment goes down, so she assumed a little less revenue there.

Grant revenue includes \$42,550 in VTrans grant funds for the Pearl Street/Clay Hill sidewalk project and also grant funds Meredith applied for from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for village green electric improvements and holiday decorations. After she submitted that grant application they pushed the notification date back to the end of the month. This revenue will have a corresponding expense so it will be a wash.

Revenue includes funds to be taken from the reserve fund – \$42,550 for our 50% match for the sidewalk project plus an additional \$10,000 for engineering and legal assistance for that project. The state grant is only for construction.

Total projected general department revenue, including fire department and grant revenue is \$536,319. That is around what we budgeted last year. Our actuals didn't come close to that because we didn't move forward with the sidewalk project.

Meredith budgeted the same amount for board salaries and auditor salaries as last year. We pay a nominal amount to the elected auditors when they come into the office. The actual amount for auditor salaries last year was zero because they didn't come into the office.

Actual 2020 expense for office administrative salaries was higher than budgeted. Meredith spent quite a bit more time on the general department than she allocated in the budget and she also did not include pay for the minute taker in the budget. That has been corrected for 2021.

Legal expense was over budget in 2020. Meredith budgeted more for 2021 than was budgeted for 2020, but less than the actual expense.

In 2020 we budgeted \$1,000 for consultant service – our share of the merger report. In 2021 Meredith thinks we will need to pay about \$1,000 for an engineer to consult on the village garage.

Under beautification, Meredith budgeted 8,950 for grant funded Main Street decorations and \$500 for other beautification efforts. We could talk about getting more revenue from property tax to increase that.

Under parades, events and celebrations she included \$2,000 for event support. That could be for Jubilee insurance or for other events. It is a smaller amount than in past years because the budget is tight.

The general department budget includes \$500 for the general department share of the planned open meeting law training. She added \$500 under computer support because we talked about sharing the cost with the town for a website upgrade. The general department share of the cost of finishing up the siding project and concrete repair work at the municipal building is \$3,000.

The village has a plan to replace lighter duty vehicles every 5 years. We have one that is 5 years old. The estimated cost of a new truck with the utility body and plow is about \$55K. We expect to

get about \$20K for a trade in so the net cost is about \$35K. The electric department pays 60% of the cost and the general department pays 40%. The general department's cost would be \$14K. We can't pay that much out of pocket so we would borrow money over 5 years. This budget includes 9 months of those payments. Meredith played around with a shorter loan term but this is what she needed to get the budget to balance. We make sure to look at vehicles with at least a five year warranty.

Meredith reviewed fire department expenses. Last year call volume and labor cost were down due to the pandemic. This budget includes a 50 cent per hour raise. The current rate is \$11.50. The raise would put firefighters at 25 cents above the current minimum wage.

Meredith said level funding the tax rate leads to a general department budget that is balanced but includes very little for community support.

Steve said his only concern is that if the budget is really tight he wonders what will happen if we have an unexpected expense. Meredith said we have some cash on hand. We have a sidewalk reserve fund for sidewalk projects. If bids for the planned project are more than we anticipated there is additional money we could use for that.

Athena said she noticed what was budgeted for salt for roads was a little less than in the past. Will we be in a bad place if we have a really bad winter? Meredith said last year we spent less than what was budgeted. It wasn't a horrible winter. She thinks we have a little room to buy additional salt with what she budgeted.

Athena asked if the sidewalk and village green projects are off the table if we don't get the grant money. Meredith said we already received the grant for the sidewalk project and we have our 50% match in our sidewalk reserve fund. She feels pretty confident in funding for that, unless bids are way over what we were expecting. For the village green project and Main Street decorations she doesn't see how we could move forward with the funds available to us, even if we increase the tax rate. We could work with other entities to try to fund raise but the projects couldn't be funded from revenues we currently have available.

Kyle said there have been fewer calls the last couple of years but every year there is an increase in the fire department budget, which usually gets passed to town tax taxpayers but not the village (though the village is part of the town so village residents pay anyway.) She is wondering how a decrease in cost doesn't lead to a decrease in expenses.

Meredith said she knows at least for this last year there was a decrease in expenses related to the decrease in calls. Labor was way under budget. She doesn't think call volume will be as low in 2021.

Kyle said she is hearing that calls have gone down so the fire department wants to get paid more for less work.

Meredith said the request for the pay increase was to bring firefighters above minimum wage.

Kyle said her impression was that it was a volunteer fire department and that people were not there for the money. It is almost like they are employees but they are volunteers. That is murky for her.

Meredith said the term “volunteer fire department” is used when there are not salaried firefighters available as their primary job. Our firefighters are people who do not do the work as their primary job or source of income, but they are compensated slightly above minimum wage for the time they take out of their lives to do that important work. She considers them employees for some reporting she has to do. They are employees because they are paid by the village. They get worker’s comp but no other benefits.

Kyle asked if that also applies to junior volunteers. Will said there currently aren't any junior volunteers. Juniors aren't paid.

Kyle asked how many firefighters there are. Meredith said she thinks 27 or 29.

Kyle said that seems like a lot for the 3 structure fires she thinks we had last year. She asked why the village is always level funded for the fire department.

Meredith said it has been a decision of the board to keep taxes as level as possible for village residents. Scott said village residents pay village taxes and also pay town taxes. They pay out twice. That duplication happens with a lot of work that is done and he feels that is a disservice.

Kyle said she has to think about that more but it feels strange that the village is always level-funded and the town has to come up with a 3% increase.

Will said village residents also pay town taxes. Every resident of the town gets the increase.

Kyle asked if either in this budget or in the future there could be some village crew time devoted to shoveling and maintaining the cold spring area. The crew clears snow off the sidewalk but doesn't shovel the steps or maintain the pit area. It is hazardous. She knows a lot of elderly people use it. She would ask that it be maintained better, particularly in the winter.

Meredith said she knows people drink that water even though it is posted that they should not. She worries that shoveling the path could invite people to drink that water that isn't tested, bringing liability to the village. She thinks it is not good for the village to do things that encourage people to drink the water. There could be contaminants in that water and we would have no idea. That is something for the village to discuss.

Will suggested putting it on the agenda for a future meeting, getting input from the crew about labor costs and looking at options for either closing it off or maintaining it in the winter. Meredith agreed.

Kyle said having the parades events and celebrations item be the sacrificial lamb in the budget is heartbreaking to her. Those are things that bring people in the village together and bring joy. Investment in the local economy and people is important. She hopes the board hears that is important to make a tangible investment that we can see and appreciate.

Kyle said the storm drains on Railroad Street seem to be sinking into the ground. It is a hazard when biking and she has to swerve around them when she is driving. There are huge potholes that make the roads scary to navigate, whether on a bike or in a car. She doesn't know if the village plans to bring those back up to the level of the road.

Meredith said the storm water infrastructure is very old and in bad condition. She was on a conference call this morning with the consultants working on the stormwater master plan. They did a 30% design for a new system to take stormwater away from Railroad Street and she brought up that we also need a design for pipes that lead up to that structure. She is going to have a conversation with LCPC about getting that design also so all the work can be done at once. We can't seek state funds until we do a certain level of planning. Kyle said she is thinking about more people coming off the rail trail on bikes with the trail getting finished. She feels the work to fix those drains needs to happen.

Kyle said the fire department budget is 48% of the general department budget. She hopes Will keeps his word and recuses himself from the vote.

Scott said when he hears Kyle talking about how firefighters should be doing their work for love of the community for free and how costs are increasing while calls are decreasing, he wants to throw out a parallel. Last year the selectboard took a \$500 increase across the board and he didn't see any selectboard members saying they didn't want the increase or would donate it for love of the community. Health officers for the town were also given a stipend even though people have had a hard time getting responses from them. We still have the same amount of highway but the highway budget is going up. School populations across Vermont are dwindling but costs are going up. It is the cost of doing business. This is not an anomaly for budgets, especially for municipalities. He has a love for this community and he takes his \$1,000. Costs go up and that is reflected in budgets. He commends Meredith and staff for doing what they can to help out village residents. We are a low income town and village and anything we can do to reduce costs while still providing services is helpful. It is a hard balance. He thinks Meredith and Arjay did a good job.

BJ asked if mutual aid is considered in the count when it shows calls are going down. Will said the total number of calls per year includes mutual aid. He said Kyle had mentioned 3 structure fires. Most calls are not structure fires. They include medical assistance, etc. The fire department's Facebook page lists the number of calls and the nature of the calls.

BJ said, regarding the pay, he was on an ambulance crew for 11 years and was a volunteer for half of that time. The amount first responders make is low for what they do and the danger involved. He believes they should be getting higher pay. All volunteer EMS or fire squads give per diem pay.

Will noted that a decrease in the number of calls does not necessarily mean a decrease in hours. A call can last several hours. There can be fewer calls in a year and more hours. In 2018 there were 139 calls, the highest call volume ever. He thinks when he joined there were 40 or 45 calls a year. In 2019 there were 129 calls. In 2020 there were 98 calls. He thinks the reduction last year was mostly because people were staying home more. Meredith said the point about hours is important. A call can take half an hour or 6 hours.

Steve said some of those calls come at 3:00 in the morning. If you call someone at 3:00 in the morning because your oil burner is out he thinks they charge a lot more than their regular rate. He thinks it is harder and harder to get people who want to be volunteers, especially young people. We can see that with ambulance services going to private or semi-private because they haven't been able to get enough people. He would hate to see fire departments have to go that way because it will be far more expensive.

Scott said regarding the number of volunteers the more there are, the better as far as he is concerned. A few years ago he came across a rollover accident that was within sight of the fire department and it was 20 minutes before they were able to come because volunteers were working out of town.

Will asked, part of the reason for the raise is because minimum wage increased in the state, right? Meredith said yes. Will said for as long as he can remember the fire department has made 25 cents over minimum wage. The money does help people. He doesn't feel we should be concerned about 25 cents over minimum wage for people who are doing what they do. He will abstain from any vote on rate of pay for the fire department because he directly benefits from that.

Kyle asked if Will knows where meeting minutes from fire department meetings can be located. Will said he doesn't know. Kyle asked if Meredith knows. Meredith said they are training events. She is not sure if minutes are taken. They are not a board. She can ask if there are minutes taken. Kyle said if there were minutes that would help to educate her as a taxpayer.

Scott asked what we are offering firefighters for care after traumatic incidents. Will said they take care of each other. Anytime there is an event with trauma involved the chief is open to anyone who wants to talk to him. If they need professional help the fire department has access to counselors through the state. They can go to the chief and he keeps it private. There have been group counselings before that were not mandatory but a lot of people showed up. The resources are there and firefighters are made aware of them. If they need help they can ask for it and they will have it.

Meredith said the electric department budget is not finalized yet but that budget amount doesn't go in the warning so we have more time to work on it.

Last year we were over budget for merchandising and jobbing revenue, which is money paid by customers for a specific job they need done. She budgeted \$25K for 2021 and she hopes that is not too optimistic.

We will be using some of the deferred revenue from the budget to pay for pole replacement work we did this year on 100C. What is budgeted for deferred revenue for 2021 is the amount we have left after that is taken out. There is offsetting expense so it is a wash.

There is a slight increase in projected revenue from interest in dividend income.

Meredith is proposing to spend \$45K out of the reserve fund for the pickup truck mentioned during the general department budget discussion. The budget includes a \$20K deposit for the all-electric bucket truck.

In 2020, residential revenues were higher than budgeted. But most other sales revenue line items were well under budget. Revenue from NVU was \$100K under budget due to the college being shut down and then not many students returning to campus. Meredith is not assuming much change in revenue for 2021. The first 3 months have been similar to 2020 and recovery will take a while.

We didn't get any revenue from connect and disconnect fees because of the disconnection moratorium but she budgeted a little for 2021.

Total anticipated revenue for the electric department is close to \$2.3 million.

VPPSA manages our power supply for us. Purchased power expenses for this year were not down despite sales being down because VPPSA has contracts to buy a certain amount of power and when we sold the excess we could not recoup what we paid because of market prices. We budgeted \$1.2 million dollars and were over budget by about \$9K, despite load being down. Meredith budgeted more for 2021, partly because transmission costs are going up. But she noticed that the figure she got from VPPSA is based on a higher load than she is predicting, so she thinks the number will come down. She will be talking to VPPSA staff later this week about that.

We are part owner with Morrisville Water & Light of the B22 line. They invoice us 15% of maintenance costs (\$3K) every year. She put in another \$6K in expense because GMP is doing some work to the B22 line. Some of that is work we would have had to do anyway, so we agreed to reimburse them for some of it. They agreed we can pay interest free over 5 years.

Safety and training cost will decrease because the two people who were attending the NEPPA apprentice program graduated.

Meredith kept labor for the substation at \$10K. There are some issues with the recloser for our circuit and Troy thinks we will need assistance from outside with that. That \$10K will help pay for a contract crew to come in and help us.

When budgeting for labor for distribution system work, Meredith took the 2020 actual figure and increased it by 3% because of the wage increase included in the contract. There is a 2% increase for administrative salaries. There is a big jump in VPPSA dues this year. There are more projects coming online and they will need more administrative time. Property insurance is a slight decrease from last year. Meredith budgeted less for uniforms.

Currently the electric department budget has a projected \$215K deficit. Meredith believes she can get rid of some of that when she adjusts the power supply budget with VPPSA. She is assuming revenue for 2021 will be as bad as for 2020. She doesn't think there is much to do about that right now. She does not think now is the time to think about a rate increase with everything that is going on. She thinks we need to get back to normalcy first. She can't figure out a way to increase the revenue figure. On the expense side there are some items where we have a cushion. We could probably save \$30K but then we would be down at bare minimum. She is not sure that gains us that much. She is hoping she can reduce power supply expenses by \$75K.

Will said putting off the new vehicle purchase is a possibility, but that is a gamble. Meredith said she knows Troy is open to looking at a lease option. We could also borrow the full amount. Will

said we could also defer the purchase for a year. Meredith said we could, but other vehicles will need attention next year.

BJ asked where the village trucks get their fuel. Meredith said she believes we fill up our diesel vehicles from a tank we share with the town. Rosemary said that is right. Meredith said she believes for gas vehicles we have a Maplefields card. BJ said he asks because in Newport EMS and others, instead of going to a gas station, have been saving \$1.15/gallon money by purchasing solely from a company like Fred's Plumbing. He is wondering if we could save money by doing that. Meredith said she can look into it to see if there is potential.

Meredith said from 2016 to 2019 net metering has cost us about \$100K a year. That has been a lot every year for the electric department budget to withstand. She thinks once things settle out we will need to look at whether we need a rate change. She doesn't anticipate being able to close the budget gap. In the past we predicted a deficit and ended the year with a positive balance. Things can turn around during the course of a year. The board can look at the electric department budget again next week or wait until March 8. Will and Athena suggested approving it at the next meeting if there are no changes.

Kyle asked if Meredith has anyone other than the board look over the budget to get fresh eyes and a fresh perspective. Meredith said she usually has Susan proofread it and highlight things that have big jumps to make sure they are intended.

Meredith said she thinks the board can wait until the special meeting to adopt the general department budget and she can check it again before then. The board agreed.

It was agreed to schedule a special meeting for March 1.

7. *Adjourn*

**Will moved to adjourn at 9:20, Athena seconded and the motion was passed.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*