

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
ELECTRONIC MEETING VIA ZOOM AND PHONE CALL-IN
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 2021

Present:

Trustees: Steve Hatfield, Diane Lehouiller, Will Jennison, BJ Putvain, Ken Tourangeau

Others: Meredith Dolan, Rosemary Audibert, Jasmine Yuris, Joie Lehouillier, Ken Nolan (VPPSA), Kyle Nuse, Mike Dunham, MJ Smith, Lydia Putvain, Shayne Spence, Athena Parke, Barbara Backus, Lotty Roozkrans, Bobbi Rooney, Gordy Smith, Heather, Nadeau, Troy Dolan

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Will called the meeting to order at 6:34.

2. Administer Oath of Office to Newly Elected Village Trustee

Rosemary administered the oath of office to Ken Tourangeau.

3. Changes, Additions to Proposed Agenda

Meredith added an update on the sidewalk project. She is going to sign the contract on Monday with Capitol Earthmoving. They arranged a subcontractor for the concrete work. She noted the order of agenda items 5 and 6 may be switched based on availability of the village's attorney. Will asked if the contractor has a start date for the sidewalk. Meredith said she believes they are ready to be on site June 28.

4. Approve Contract with the Dufresne Group for the Katy Win Preliminary Engineering Report

Meredith said we were awarded a USDA SEARCH grant to do a preliminary engineering study for the Katy Win pump station upgrade that is needed. The cost of having Dufresne do the preliminary engineering report is \$18,000. The grant will cover 100% of the cost. **Steve moved to approve the contract with the Dufresne Group for the Katy Win preliminary engineering report and the motion was seconded and passed.**

5. Approve Village Return-to-Work & Office Reopening Plans/Procedures

Meredith said throughout the pandemic a core group with representatives from the town and village has been meeting to discuss the rules and regulations that needed to be put into place to deal with COVID. At Monday's meeting they discussed that the governor will soon lift all required regulations related to COVID and how the town and village will move forward. The consensus was that once the restrictions are lifted we would remove any requirements for our staff. They would not be required to wear masks or social distance, though we would recommend it, particularly if they are not vaccinated. Morning health checks would no longer be required. Scott Meyer, who has a history in public health and knowledge of VOSHA and OSHA, confirmed that is in line with OSHA recommendations. The hope is that once the restrictions are lifted by the governor we would move quickly to reopen the municipal building office.

Diane asked about resuming in-person trustee board meetings. Meredith said she is going to put discussion of how the board wants to conduct trustee meetings on the next agenda. Some communities have talked about a hybrid model where Zoom would still be available and some are going back to the way things were before COVID. She is anticipating that Monday's meeting will be remote.

Will said his understanding is that even if restrictions were lifted today, the municipal building office would still not be open until the following Monday because training is needed. Meredith said yes; one employee is on vacation. There is one brand new employee and another employee who has only been working here since the office was closed. It seemed better to wait until more experienced staff were back in the office to reopen.

Diane moved to implement the return-to-work and office reopening plans and procedures discussed by Meredith as soon as the governor lifts statewide COVID-related restrictions, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.

6. *Discuss Village Manager Position and Next Steps*

Meredith said her last day will be next Tuesday. She has had initial conversations with office employees, Dan and Troy about things that will be easy to delegate to someone else until a better plan is figured out. The board should consider whether it wants to hire a replacement for her or think about a different structure. Ken Nolan from VPPSA can speak about current situations in Barton and Jacksonville and give a sense of some resources that might be available.

Ken Nolan explained that VPPSA was created in 1979 by the state to help municipalities like Johnson that have their own electric departments operate and get economies of scale. It seems that their role is expanding rapidly in recent years. There have been similar situations the last couple years in other communities. About 2 years ago the Village of Barton lost their entire staff in about a week. Since then VPPSA has been helping them look at alternatives. They have hired Vermont Electric Coop to do their line work and VPPSA is providing office management services and also handling water and wastewater for them. They anticipate continuing with that until the trustees decide what direction to go in. It seems to be going well. VPPSA doesn't normally deal with non-electric issues but they are trying to do their best for Barton. The Jacksonville clerk had to resign for health reasons. Jacksonville has one staff member now. They rely on Green Mountain Power for line work and just approved a contract with VPPSA to help them. There will be VPPSA staff in Jacksonville to help run the office, handling financial reporting, billing, customer service, etc. VPPSA is available to help as much as they can with the electric side and to the extent Johnson needs help beyond the electric department, they can't promise they will help but they will try to.

Will said Walter Pomroy, who used to be a representative to VPPSA, has said he is willing to help to some degree.

Diane asked if help from VPPSA is something we would contract for or a free service. Ken said it depends what they are being asked to do. Johnson already pays dues for a pretty broad slate of services. They can provide some help at no additional cost. With Barton and Jacksonville they have a contract for management decisions or non-electric work. There is an hourly charge for that. For day-to-day help with billing, net metering questions, line extension billing, etc. they can help without charging. Diane asked what the hourly charge is. Ken said for Barton and Jacksonville it is \$85 per hour for any work above and beyond what VPPSA normally offers to its membership.

Rosemary said we have really good existing relationships with VPPSA staff. Rosemary, Susan and Marla already go to them with questions and let them do some tasks for us, so there is an existing relationship and lines of communication.

Meredith said she can ask VPPSA staff to alert village staff if there is a communication from the Public Utility Commission that we need to pay attention to. There are some reports Meredith does that we might have VPPSA do in the short term.

Will asked if Meredith can have a list for Monday of things we may ask VPPSA to handle. Meredith said yes.

Diane said it would help her to see Meredith's job description. Meredith said she can try to have that for Monday. There hasn't been one done since she joined the village. It probably will need some updating. Her thought was to list all the routine things she does, status of bigger projects and next steps for Monday.

Kyle Nuse said she is sorry to hear Meredith is leaving her position. It has been a pleasure working with her and she wishes her the best. She wants to plant the seed of an idea with the board. During her first term on the selectboard there was one administrator for both the town and village and one economic development coordinator for both, Lea Kilvadyova. There was a better relationship between the selectboard and the trustees and millions of dollars in grants came into the town, thanks to Lea. Now that both village and town voters have voted in favor of continuing merger talks and Meredith is stepping down, we could save the village money and move the community together. She suggests that the trustees consider not replacing Meredith, at least not in a permanent way, but working with the town to merge as quickly as possible and get back to one administrator position and one economic development position. It would be good for the town to go after the recovery money that is available. Having a single administrator is not precedent setting for our town. Many other communities have gone down this path and are better for it.

BJ said we don't know when the town and village are merging and from what he sees Meredith has her hands full. He can't see someone doing her work and the other work on top of that. It seems it would be an injustice to put that all on someone hoping the town and village will merge quickly. He thinks it would be overwhelming for one person.

Will said from what he is hearing if we all decided tomorrow to merge it would take two to three years for it to happen. To leave us hanging for that time would be an injustice to the village.

Steve thanked Meredith for her service and wished her well in whatever venture she pursues in the future.

7. *Executive Session – Confidential Attorney-Client Communications & Personnel Matter*
Steve moved to find that an executive session is necessary for confidential attorney-client discussions, premature disclosure of which would put the village at a substantial disadvantage, BJ seconded and the motion was passed. Steve moved to enter executive session for confidential attorney-client communications pursuant to 1 VSA § 313 (1)(F) and the motion was seconded and passed.

Steve moved to go into executive session for a personnel matter pursuant to 1 VSA § 313 (4), Diane seconded and the motion was passed.

The board entered executive session at 7:13, including Meredith, the village's attorney and Troy Dolan. The board came out of executive session at 8:00.

8. *Executive Session – Personnel Matter*

Diane moved to enter executive session for a personnel matter pursuant to 1 VSA § 313 (3), Ken seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 8:01. The board came out of executive session at 8:24.

9. *Accept Village Manager Resignation & Approve Payment of Accrued PTO to Outgoing Village Manager*

Ken moved and Steve seconded to accept the village manager's resignation and to approve payment of accrued paid time off to the outgoing village manager. Meredith clarified that our personnel policy states that an employee who is leaving is entitled to be paid for accrued PTO. It is usually paid in a lump sum but she requests that it be paid in 30-hour increments. That will reduce her taxes. Rosemary thought that would be doable but that it would be good for the board to formally allow it. **Ken and Steve agreed to a friendly amendment allowing payments for accrued PTO in 30-hour increments until the amount is fully paid.**

Diane asked Rosemary what the PTO hours are. Rosemary said it is about 6 weeks' worth. Meredith said the total as of right now is about 186 hours and she will accrue about 10 more so it will be around 200.

The motion was passed.

10. *Adjourn*

Steve moved to adjourn at 8:30, Diane seconded and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths