

\*JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, AUGUST 9, 2021

**Present:**

Trustees: Steve Hatfield, Diane Lehouiller, Will Jennison, BJ Putvain (by phone), Ken Tourangeau  
Others: Rosemary Audibert, Dan Copp, Troy Dolan, Meredith Dolan (by Zoom), George Pearlman, Don Blais, Seth Jensen (LCPC), Kyle Nuse, Eric Nuse, Mark Woodward, Jennifer Burton, Chris Kaufman (Aldrich and Elliott – by Zoom), Hugo Martínez Cazón (VT DEC – by Zoom), Cynthia Parks (VT DEC – by Zoom)

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

**1. Call to Order**

Will called the meeting to order at 6:00.

**2. Review of Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes, Additions**

No changes to the agenda were suggested.

**3. Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings**

Diane said it is not her recollection that she asked Troy to give her the key to the garage because she was a trustee. She recalls that Troy said no one gets keys. She asked, even trustees? He said no. She told him that if it was a trust issue she could ask Will to come with her. She never said that he should give her a key because she is a trustee.

**Ken moved to approve the minutes of July 12, 2021 with the amendment that Diane disputes the fact that she said Troy should give her a key because she was a trustee, Diane seconded and the motion was passed.**

**4. George Pearlman**

George Pearlman said he owns a home on Pearl Street and the Studio Store on Main Street. He wanted to paint his building and had someone come to take a look at the job but Richard Whittemore said the painter could not set ladders on his property to paint the side of the building adjoining his property. Many places have an ordinance stating that people can have access to get up onto their building for maintenance. He always thought Johnson had something like that. It was in the interim zoning we used to have. He thinks this issue of access to buildings for maintenance will come to the trustees because it doesn't just affect him. He also heard that Richard stopped working on his building on Railroad Street because he had an argument with the village about a sewer permit. Troy said to his knowledge the permit was approved.

George said he wants the board to do something so people have the right to access their buildings for maintenance. Will said with board approval he can talk to Richard on behalf of the board. George suggested Will could also talk to him about the building he is not maintaining. Will said he talked to him about that and he said he plans to bring it back to its original condition after he finishes his current project. The board agreed that Will can approach Richard Whittemore about allowing George to use his property to access his property.

Diane said we might need to discuss as a board what we can do for the village as a whole. Would it require an ordinance? George said yes; because there is no zoning it would need to be an ordinance. Diane asked if the selectboard is working on that or if the trustees are. Will said we had

interim zoning years ago. George said that ended. Diane said she thought someone was working on an ordinance that would apply to the buildings at the end of 100C. Rosemary said there is an ordinance about dilapidated properties. It mostly applies to vacant properties. Will said Eric Osgood told him that his intent was for the town to do more enforcement for that this year. Diane asked if we should work on an ordinance for homes people live in. Will said he doesn't think that would be well received. He thinks that it does make sense to have an ordinance about access for maintenance, stating that with a certain amount of notice ladders can be put up on an adjoining property. George said another concern is people letting their buildings go. Will said there would be a difference of opinion about telling people what to do with their properties. He suggested starting discussion on an access ordinance at the next meeting.

**5. *Water/Wastewater Report and Action Items***

Will suggested having Dan's report next so Dan could leave. The board agreed.

Dan said the E-DMR and Wr-43 were submitted for review. He gave a tour of the water and wastewater facilities to Steve and Diane. His company's corporate safety officer visited the plant and did a safety office audit. Several minor issues were found and taken care of. The lack of grating over the channels in the basement where the influent comes in was noted. VLCT notes that every year when they do their inspection but they have never enforced it. We probably will need to add grating at some point but there are five different locations that need to be accessed for raking each day and removing the grates would be hard. He doesn't think the safety officer will say we have to add grating now. They are going to put yellow marking along the edges of all the channels. It has been the way it is for 25 years and no one has fallen in. The channels are about two and a half feet deep. Will suggested we could look at aluminum gratings. They would be lighter but more expensive.

Dan said staff replaced the battery in the security alarm panel. They replaced the old fluorescent lights that were in the UV room with LED lights at a cost of \$180. Dan attended the bid opening for the River Road pump station replacement project. Staff did some pressure washing. They painted safety yellow on several trip hazards. They removed several sections of the lower cupola roof to inspect for rot. No moisture was present and the roof trusses and sheathing looked great. They repaired a broken drain on the press. They removed an air valve on the press that wasn't operating properly, cleaned, lubricated and reinstalled it and it is now operating properly. They will remove, clean and lube each of the remaining valves one at a time for preventive maintenance.

Coliform results were negative. Staff sampled for disinfection byproducts. Water loss for July was 14%.

**6. *Don Blais – Water Line Fix Repair***

Don Blais said years ago the village put a faucet in his basement. It was installed before the water meter. The village wanted him to let it run because they were worried about the pipe freezing outside of his house. He can't turn the handle anymore. There is rust. He is afraid of the faucet breaking or leaking. He thinks it might be wise for the village to shut the water off and take the faucet out.

Troy said his understanding from Nate is that the village crew was worried about the water line freezing so they installed the faucet, which could be turned on in cold weather to keep the water flowing. To his knowledge there is nothing else like it in our system. A previous board decided that anything beyond the first curb stop other than the water meter and connections that go to the water

meter is the responsibility of the homeowner, but in his opinion this is a little different from anyone else's circumstance. The pipe comes through the wall and before it gets to the meter there is a valve so it can be run during winter. Don said he never runs the water now because he had his cellar foamed and he is not worried about the water freezing anymore.

Troy said Nate told him that they felt the water line wasn't deep enough and could freeze. There is now a new line feeding on the outside of the house so there are no concerns. The village crew doesn't do plumbing inside of houses anymore for liability reasons so we would need to use a plumber to remove the faucet. Troy thinks it would cost \$250 or less. The village crew would shut off the water outside while the work was being done. The board agreed that Troy should arrange for a plumber to remove the faucet, with Diane recusing herself from that decision.

7. ***Executive Session for a Personnel Matter***

**BJ moved to go into executive session for a personnel matter pursuant to 1 VSA § 313(3), Steve seconded, the motion was passed in the board entered executive session at 6:10.** The board came out of executive session at 6:50.

8. ***Public Employees Staff Reductions***

Will said we have been short one employee for 9 to 10 weeks and the crew of 4 has maintained all the requirements of the department. So with our budget issues the board is going to lay off one employee.

**Will moved to lay off Paul Stankiewicz, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.**

9. ***River Road Pump Station – Finding of No Significant Impact Public Meeting***

Meredith said in order to move forward with the River Road pump station project we have to have a public hearing related to environmental review. The state is proposing a finding of no significant impact. If anyone present wants to make comments about the project, now would be the time to do so.

Hugo Martínez Cazón from the DEC said there is a 30-day period that has been extended a little to accommodate this meeting. So far no one has made any comments.

No one present wished to comment.

10. ***River Road Pump Station – Construction Contract Award***

Meredith said we had four bidders for the project. The low bidder, JA McDonald, came in nearly \$40K under the engineered estimate. That lowers the amount of the loan we need to take out to complete the project. Aldrich and Elliot noted an irregularity with one of the forms that was required to be submitted as part of the bid process. But Aldrich and Elliot felt they made a good faith effort so they don't feel that irregularity poses any significant risk to awarding the contract to them. JA McDonald has been debarred from contracts with VTrans due to issues that occurred over 10 years ago but that does not prevent us from being able to award this contract to them. When Meredith checked their references, two were very positive and one was also positive but less so. We have not received the final loan award or project signoff from the state so there would be some risk in awarding the contract tonight. Meredith recommends making the award contingent on getting the necessary funding and project approval from the state.

Chris Kaufman of Aldrich and Elliott said there were minor irregularities with one form but the Water Investment Division feels comfortable awarding the contract to JA McDonald. Aldrich and Elliott feels the bid was well balanced and based on JA McDonald's experience they should be able

to do a capable job. They are disbarred from contracts with VTrans but that happened under prior ownership and it should not have any impact on this project or with the state Water Investment Division. Cynthia Parks from WID said she concurs with Meredith and Chris. There are some logistical things WID is working through but she doesn't see that that poses any issue regarding funding.

**Ken moved to award the construction contract for the River Road pump station project to JA McDonald contingent on receiving final approval and funding from the state and to authorize Meredith to sign the contract, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.**

***11. Seth Jensen, LCPC – Grant Writing Options***

Seth Jensen of the Lamoille County Planning Commission reviewed the information in the memo he had sent to the board about grant writing and grant funding opportunities. We are entering a period where very likely there will more grant resources available than usual. When considering funding a grant writer to secure those resources, there are three options. The first is incorporating grant writing into the manager / administrator position. That has been successful in some communities if the community finds a person with the right skill set. But the administrator also has to deal with day-to-day management. If an issue arises grant writing often gets pushed to the back burner. With grants that have short turnaround times that can be a challenge.

Another option is to have a standalone municipal employee position. That can be effective because the person is able to put their full attention on securing grants. But grant cycles are often not evenly spaced. They can come all at once, which can be overwhelming. If the municipality goes that route it is a good idea to have flexibility in the hours.

A third option is to have a grant writer under contract on an as-needed basis. If the contractor is working for multiple communities they will pay the most attention to the community that makes them pay attention. So Johnson would need to pay attention to what they are doing and encourage them to work on Johnson's needs.

All the options have pros and cons. LCPC is available to assist with some grant writing but they have generally found that applications tend to be successful when it is clear that the municipality also played a role. LCPC is also available for management of complex grants.

As far as strategy, Seth suggests rather than finding a grant and asking what can be done with it, thinking of what the village wants to do and selecting grants based on that. It is always clear to grant organizations when a municipality is trying to create a project for a grant.

The village needs to evaluate program rules and requirements before applying for grants. The most onerous strings tend to come from implementation grants but there is a lot that can be done with planning grants. A municipality can often use a planning grant to get to the point where a project can be done by a local contractor or where the municipality is ready to apply for an implementation grant. The village should think about how resources can be used to maximize the benefits of grants and minimize the overhead that comes with them.

Having scoping already done to refine project costs and designs means the village will be ready to jump when resources become available, or to start to do a small enough project with local funds or village forces. An example is that Jeffersonville did a scoping study of sidewalks around the village

and determined that several projects that were needed were simple enough that the strings that came with federal money were not worth it so they put forth to voters a single project and put the project out to bid to local contractors. The planning and scoping they had done meant they knew about design and drainage issues. Diane asked if they got a grant for their planning. Seth said yes, they had a grant for planning and providing basic cross-sections. Because some projects did not need complex engineering they were able to go forward. Other sections were too complex and would need more engineering so they focused on what they could do locally and will deal with the more complex areas in the future. The planning grant let them figure that out.

Seth noted that the Village of Johnson is eligible for a reduced local match share for several programs because of its demographics.

Seth said LCPC currently has funding available for technical assistance related to disaster mitigation, broadly defined as anything that reduces flooding or stormwater. The funding can pay for initial planning and design work to get a project application-ready or, for small local projects, shovel-ready. They do not have a match requirement. They do not have a formal application. The village just needs to discuss a potential project with LCPC. He suggested a project would need to be under about \$100K for this work to make it shovel-ready. It would be good to know whether or not the Village of Johnson is interested, so if it is not the money can be released to other areas.

Another grant source available is a hazard mitigation grant program. Johnson is eligible for a significantly reduced share. It can be used for things like flood mitigation or retrofitting infrastructure or private buildings.

Will asked if Seth is aware of anything that would mitigate the risk of flooding in Johnson. The water from the two rivers can't go anywhere else. Seth said LCPC did some advanced flood modeling for the Village of Johnson. That was presented to the selectboard and not the trustees. He probably should show it to the trustees. Will is right that there is not much that can be done to mitigate the risk. But there are things that can be done to protect property and infrastructure to lessen the damage.

Diane said we want to protect Sterling Market. Seth said there are some things that could be done to lessen the potential for damage at Sterling market. Questions regarding stormwater drainage in the area of the library could be addressed under a technical assistance grant.

Meredith said she and Seth have talked about technical assistance funding for Railroad Street and discussed her approaching an engineer we have worked with in the past to get a ballpark estimate for engineering work to get closer to being ready to apply for funds. Other things pushed that aside. If the board wants her to she could reach out to that engineer and try to move that forward. The board agreed Meredith should do that.

There was a question about whether the village could get reimbursed for a contracted grant writer's work. Seth said that varies from program to program. The Community Development Block Grant program will reimburse for grant writing costs. Some other programs will not. Will asked how many grants people have gotten that included reimbursement for the grant writer. Seth said in his experience probably about 20% of grants have allowed that. Those grants tend to be for big projects.

Kyle Nuse asked if any of the salary for the position that was just eliminated came from the general department. Rosemary and Will said it came from all departments. Kyle said then there has potentially been money freed up for hiring a grant writer. Will said a lot of other things have taken money. Eliminating the position just means that we will be closer to breaking even. Diane noted that because Meredith is working less there is also a savings on her salary.

#### **12. Foreman Report and Action Items**

Troy said on July 20 there was an outage on Plot Road that affected a single customer. It was the result of a lightning strike. Power was restored in about an hour. On July 22 there was an outage that affected about 150 customers on Route 15 due to a truck making contact with telephone lines, which shook our lines. Power was restored in about 1 hour 50 minutes.

The crew retired an overhead service and installed a protective coverup. A ledge anchor that pulled out during the July 22 outage was replaced. Batteries were replaced in a control unit at the substation. A broken cutout on Plot Road was replaced. The crew continued tree trimming and felled a washed out pole. Right of way mowing was completed. The crew has continued in-house right of way cutting. Multiple street lights were repaired in the village. All line guard was removed for the GMP B-20 line upgrade. The crew also completed monthly meter reading, high/low checks, and Dig Safes.

The main water valve box on the corner of Pearl and Main Streets was repaired. A new curb stop and box were installed at an address on Lower Main West. A hydrant valve box was repaired. We have continued fueling state trucks with water. The crew raised four manholes in preparation for Ken Harvey's paving project. The crew used the digger truck to dig holes for the town at the site of the trailhead building and also completed some brush hog work for the town.

The online portion of the crew's first aid and CPR training was completed. Pole top bucket rescue training was completed. Troy attended the final walkthrough for the Pearl Street / Clay Hill sidewalk project with the engineer and construction project manager. Troy met with Dakota Dubie to discuss the sidewalk removal in front of his property on School Street. That work should begin in a couple of weeks. Troy met with Dale Tatro to discuss completing the last section of the sidewalk at the corner of School and Pearl Streets and doing repairs to the sidewalk in front of the municipal building. He got estimates for that work. He has been working to move forward with purchase of the new electric bucket truck. He continued working on an estimate for the 3-phase primary underground needed to serve the EV charging station at Jolley. He met with Greg Tatro's electrician to discuss a new 600 amp service for the Jenna's Promise coffee shop on Main Street. He ordered material to maintain the village's electrical stock. He worked with Morrisville Water & Light to coordinate the outage that will occur tonight to repair metering equipment on the transmission line just outside of the substation.

Will asked which truck hit the line. Troy said we are not sure but we think it was a Casella's truck.

Diane said she thinks the new sidewalks on Pearl Street and Clay Hill look very nice.

Troy said Dale Tatro gave a quote of \$875 for the one sidewalk section that needs to be finished. For the sidewalk that needs to be replaced in front of the municipal building he gave a quote of \$5800. The town previously had agreed to pay half that cost. Will said he spoke to Eric Osgood,

who said the selectboard wants to get that done and that the village and town had agreed to each pay 50%.

Troy said we are under budget on the sidewalk project and we budgeted \$5000 this year for other repairs. Will said if the town is paying half of the cost at the municipal building we will be well under what we budgeted. It was brought to his attention that seniors are having a hard time getting into the building because of the trip hazards so he thinks we should deal with that sidewalk as soon as possible.

**Steve moved and Ken seconded to approve repairing the sidewalk at the municipal building for a total cost of \$5800, of which the village will pay 50%, contingent on town approval. The motion was passed.**

**Steve moved to approve spending \$875 to repair one section of sidewalk on School Street, Diane seconded and the motion was passed.**

Ken asked when we expect to get the electric bucket truck. Troy said he would say in about a year.

Kyle asked if the village or the town is responsible for trimming around bridges and signs in the village. Troy said the town does anything related to the road and signs. Kyle said vegetation is growing up around the Railroad Street bridge, making it difficult to see when pulling out from River Road East. Will said he will call Eric about that. Kyle said she notices a lot of weeds growing up in various places.

***13. Treasurer's Report / Review and Approve Bills and Warrants / Budget Status / Action Items***

The board signed warrants.

***14. Sign Banner Policy***

Rosemary said she revised the policy and put the fees in. The board signed the policy.

***15. Public Events – Wastewater Plant***

Diane said when she and Steve visited the wastewater treatment plant Dan told them about some information that would help maintain the plant if people in the village knew how to do it. She thinks we should give the community that information. She thinks it would be really good to do it in person in a situation where people can ask questions and get to know what they can do to help maintain that plant. We could also incorporate information about recycling. She is not sure how to publicize it. She thinks it would be helpful to invite both landlords and renters of rental properties.

Steve said when we send out information with the water and sewer bills he doesn't think tenants ever see that. Diane said she doesn't think people read that information.

Ken asked what Diane is suggesting we tell people. Diane said there is information about different kinds of things going down the drain but it is more than just that. She also thinks recycling is very important. Who owns the recycling plant? Rosemary said it is run by Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District. The Town of Johnson owns it. Diane said we could work with them to get someone to come in and talk about what can be recycled and what can't be. We could have a public event that would also include Dan talking about what people can do to prevent problems at the sewer plant.

Rosemary said usually once a year we put a flyer in with bills asking people not to flush certain things. Kyle Nuse said she thinks flyers hit a certain demographic but when there is a one-on-one human connection people feel more connected and feel more responsibility. She could also see this being a good school program. Will ask, do you think anyone would show up other than the people who read memos and bills? Kyle said she thinks they might. She would go.

BJ asked, if someone called Dan and asked to see the wastewater treatment facility, would he show it to them? Rosemary said yes, they do tours quite often.

Steve suggested there could be a large sign at Tuesday Night Live. BJ said Tuesday Night Live would be a great place to hand out flyers. Diane said we want to make sure to target village residents because those are the ones that plant serves. Dan is a really good speaker and is interesting.

BJ said if Dan is willing to take people on a tour of the plant during his normal working hours if they call him, that is what he should be doing, rather than having to work after hours.

Ken suggested that everyone come up with ideas for the next meeting.

Diane said she thinks Dan would be willing to present the information at an event. Will said it is not part of his job so we can't tell him to do it. We can ask, but we have to be prepared to pay. Rosemary said he may need to get permission from his boss.

Will said the board can continue this discussion next month and Diane can fill the board in with any information she has gotten. He wouldn't mind having recycling included.

#### **16. Fire Department**

Diane said she enjoyed the tour of the fire department. The firefighters did a good job. Each spoke about different aspects of what the fire department does. They showed their technology and trucks. She heard during the tour that they always need volunteers. She thinks if they came to trustee meetings and talked about the training and what it takes to be a firefighter people would possibly learn something and possibly volunteer. If meetings are on GMATV that is another way to publicize the fire department and get volunteers to sign up. Johnson town and village along with Belvidere and Waterville give them close to \$200K. It would be nice for them to report on that. Arjay told her and Steve about how he keeps the budget. She thinks it is important for village and townspeople to know.

Will said all fire department expenses are in the monthly report. Diane said she knows that but she thinks it would be valuable to have someone who represents the fire department come in and talk to the board and advertise the need for volunteers, just like Dan talking about the wastewater treatment plant. If they want to be first on the agenda she would be okay with that.

Will said Dan and Troy are paid employees. It is part of their job to report. Arjay West is a volunteer. Diane said at one trustee meeting Meredith said firefighters were employees. Will said legally they are employees so that they are able to be on the village insurance. Diane said she doesn't see the harm in asking them to spend 5 minutes once a month talking about what they do. That does not seem to be a big ask. BJ said we should not force someone to come in on their own private time. Ken said he is sure if we asked Arjay to come in he would. Will said he spoke to



Arjay and Arjay said that if the board told him he had to come in he would find the time but he would prefer not to. Will is impressed with all the work he does and would not like to ask him to do one more thing. Diane said it wouldn't have to be Arjay. Will said if someone is going to speak for the fire department it should be the chief.

Kyle asked if Arjay can get paid to do it. Will said he would have to take time away from his other businesses in order to do it. He is against having him come in to report. He asked if Arjay would be willing to do a written report and Arjay said he could do that if the board gave him a format. Diane said she thinks that would take longer than him coming in to speak. Kyle said when you see and hear from someone in person there is a personal connection. It has long-lasting ripple effects.

Will said he will not support having firefighters come to meetings but he could support having Arjay and his officers put together a monthly report on trainings and calls. That would be something that could be done relatively easily. Diane said that doesn't seem like the same thing as being able to put a face to the job. Kyle said if someone is here in person people would also be able to ask questions.

Steve said he doesn't like the idea of requiring the firefighters to come to meetings. He does like them being accountable and thinks it would be nice if they gave us basic information. He has mixed feelings about asking them to do one more thing. Ken said he thinks it would be fine for the board to ask Arjay to come in one time but he doesn't think we should force firefighters to come. BJ said he is all right with asking for a report on how many people go to calls, etc if Arjay can do that during daytime hours and get paid for it. If he wants on his own to come and talk to the board now and then that is okay but he doesn't think we should force it on him.

Will suggested that a written report could include information on training for the month, number of calls, number of people on calls, and the time and nature of each call. Steve also suggested information on total roster numbers and what the needs are. Diane said hearing what the fire department does is different from reading from a piece of paper. Will said the consensus is that the board is going to ask RJ to do a monthly written report. Kyle said coming in person will only help the fire department. It will help inspire people and promote the department.

#### **17. *Green Mountain TV***

Diane said it would be nice to have GMATV videotape trustee board meetings. The selectboard does it. It doesn't cost anything.

Rosemary said they have not come back to selectboard meetings physically since the pandemic. They have been filming from Zoom.

Will asked, if they come to the next board meeting, can Rosemary ask them if they will videotape village trustee meetings? Rosemary said yes. The last she knew they did not have enough people to come around to all the meetings.

Will asked if anyone was opposed to having GMATV video meetings. No one was opposed.

#### **18. *VPPSA Representative***

Will said Meredith has said she is willing to continue serving as VPPSA representative. Meredith said there is a monthly meeting that usually lasts about 5 hours. Diane said that would add 5 hours

a month for Meredith. Meredith said she went to the most recent VPPSA meeting and that did not push her over 15 hours, but it might some months.

**Ken moved and Steve seconded to hire Meredith to be the village's VPPSA representative.**

Kyle asked, would that be until the village hires a new manager and then the new manager would take Meredith's spot? Will said yes.

**The motion was passed.**

**19. Other Business**

Ken said his ATV club has permission from Alan Manchester to use a spot on the Manchester property for a trailhead parking area. He would like to establish a trailhead parking area there to give the village the opportunity to see the whole effect of allowing ATVs in the village, whether good or bad. But he would like the opinions of the trustees before deciding whether to do it. He explained that a trailhead is a place where people park and start their trips. Last weekend seven firefighters from New York City came up to ride ATV trails and they parked in Eden and filled up at the Eden Mini Mart, spending \$250 to \$300 for fuel.

Steve said he doesn't understand how it benefits us to have people spending money at Maplefields. That is all Vallee's profits, not the village's. Will said it benefits us when people come in and see the town. They may come back and spend money. Diane said they can do that now.

Will said a trailhead is a meeting place for people who drive from a distance. Diane asked, everyone from everywhere will meet at Manchester's? They will wait until everyone shows up and then ride? Ken said no. Diane asked what they do after they get there. Ken said they park their cars, unload their ATVs and then ride.

Steve said he doesn't have an opinion. To him there is no difference between an ATV and a dirt bike, a Jeep or a lot of other vehicles. He won't be affected by it but some others might be.

Diane said her only complaint about ATVs is the noise. Why the noise? Ken said he can't control the noise. ATVs are no noisier than other things on Main Street. It is just a different noise. It is under any state level by 10%.

Kyle said a trailhead sounds like a meeting place. So there could be a lot of people riding together potentially. Ken said no, it is a place to park.

Will said he hasn't had an issue with ATV noise. BJ said he doesn't have a problem with it. He has had ATVs go by his house.

**20. Adjourn**

**Steve moved to adjourn at 8:28, Diane seconded and the motion was passed.**