

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD/VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2021

Present:

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Beth Foy, Nat Kinney, Eric Osgood, Eben Patch

Village Trustees: Steve Hatfield (via Zoom), Diane Lehouiller (via Zoom), Will Jennison, BJ Putvain, Ken Tourangeau

Others: Brian Story, C.J. Manchester, David Curtis (The Tech Group), Steve Loyer (The Tech Group), Doug Molde

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call to Order / Review of Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes and Additions*

Eric called the selectboard to order at 6:00. Mike added merger discussion to the agenda. Eric added Brownfields discussion.

Will called the trustees to order at 6:00.

2. *Technical Services Contract Renewal with The Tech Group*

Brian said The Tech Group has provided IT services for the town and village for several years. We have been really satisfied. They have done a good job responding to our needs, taking care of day to operations, making sure things are up to date, bringing on new computers, etc. This year their contract is up for renewal. It is not our recommendation to go out for bid because nothing has really changed. They won the last bid process and renewing is allowed under the procurement policy.

Will asked how long the last contract was for. Brian said 3 years. Beth said the previous contract is dated September 1, 2018. The initial term is 3 years and it says it automatically renews for each subsequent year unless either party gives 60 days prior written notice. Brian said before this contract was up he and David Curtis talked about The Tech Group giving a presentation and discussing possibly adding services to the contract. They agreed to continue the contract for 30 days to allow time for this presentation. We have not rolled the contract over into another year.

Mike said he finds it troubling that it was a 3-year contract and now we are discussing it after it expired. It seems like lately everything is at the eleventh hour. He thinks this should have been talked about long before now.

Eric said even though it is a contract for 3 years we have to ratify it each year because we can't force a future selectboard to do something. Or it may be renewed automatically unless we give them notice.

Will asked if there is any reason not to keep the current contract. David said he didn't add much to the new proposal as far as services but there is an increase in their rates. The increased rate is in the middle between what was in place and what they are charging new customers. They added a commitment to come on-site once a year to sit down and have a strategy meeting with Brian, Susan, Rosemary and whoever wants to be involved, creating a road map to make sure the network stays up to date and answering any questions. There has been a push lately to adopt

a better antivirus. That is part of the cybersecurity assessment VLCT put out. New software would go onto the servers to protect them. That is not a big ticket item. The cost increase is mainly just an increase in the cost of doing business. The current package includes remote help desk support. The town and village can stick with that or, if the cost increase is too much, he quoted the same services without that help desk so the town and village would be billed for each call on an as-needed basis. If the annual visit and help desk are removed, the price is lower than what Johnson is paying now.

BJ asked how much we would typically spend on help desk services. Beth said the hourly help desk rate is \$130. Brian said we typically get 5 hours or less per month of help desk services for routine issues. But in any given year we could have an issue that might take the better part of a week to resolve. David Curtis said last year 50.5 hours were put under the contract. The contracted help desk service covers what is in place already. If we want to add something new, that is a separate billable project. The 50.5 hours were for resolving issues with equipment that was currently in place.

Will said we really don't have other options. He sees no reason not to accept the 1371.50 per month program.

Mike said he thought the old contract would be printed. He would like to know what the services we had last year cost and how much it would cost this year for the same services.

David said the cost is based on equipment count. Last year we had one server and 15 PCs. He is seeing 16 PCs now. One may be removed so the price point would go down. Last year the cost was \$43 per PC and in the proposed new contract it is \$55 per PC. The market rate for that same type of service is more in the \$75 range. They took a step up but didn't want to go too high for legacy clients. He thinks there is one system that may be one we can pull. Brian said he thinks the sixteenth PC is the one we are using for Zoom.

Brian pointed out where in the proposal the old and new costs are outlined. Mike said the proposal is \$60/month more. Brian agreed it is about that much. David said the new contract includes some added services – Microsoft 365 management and anti-virus.

Eric asked how protected we are against ransomware. David said protection requires a layered approach. There is a desktop layer, a user layer, a server layer and a frontline layer. Anti-virus protection is needed for all devices, for the PCs, the server and the gateway/firewall. The cybersecurity assessment found some holes based on Brian's answers. He asked for the proposal to include what is needed to address those holes. Certain security measures are needed to get the lowest rates for cyber insurance policy riders. Johnson has a business-class firewall in place. They will make sure we have a next generation antivirus in place that will detect and respond to new variants and viruses. It is a little more money to put that service in place. It is not on our network now. Johnson has one that used to be considered next generation but is not now.

Another thing mentioned in the cybersecurity assessment is DNS protection for portable computers that might be taken offsite. If they access the internet from another location they wouldn't have the same protection services available at the office. DNS services could be put in

place to make sure some things such as porn or gambling sites are not accessible. That is not part of their proposed package.

Another concern mentioned is Johnson's backup solution. The Tech Group included a proposal to more fully take over management of our backups. There would be on-site and off-site copies. There is also a disaster recovery feature available. In case something happened at the office Johnson's systems could be temporarily accessible from the cloud.

Beth said it is important that we do backups. Backups are no good if you can't restore them quickly. NEMRC has backups but that just means we have backed up data. We wouldn't be able to restore quickly and the kind of backup we do is just files. It is hard to restore.

David said if you back up by copying files and folders you are just replicating over what you currently have. If you got a major virus you might not be able to restore. Part of their proposal would be to have off-site copies saved for at least a month and on-site copies for at least a year.

Beth asked if the backup image is a daily image. David said it is saved every 2 hours. Once the seed image is in place they make incremental changes every 2 hours 24/7/365. That data is encrypted in transit. Beth asked if it is in the cloud. David said the replications go through the cloud. The data is stored in Vermont. Beth asked, you take hourly images and store each one for 30 days and use one of those as the monthly restore? David said there is a base image and everything else is incremental changes.

Mike asked for clarification on the old and new costs. The old contract was \$770 month, which is \$9240 per year. Brian said The Tech Group took over managing our email addresses instead of Comcast. That meant an increased bill for The Tech Group and a decreased bill from Comcast. David said he doesn't know if there is an addendum in place for that added service. It may just be documented in email correspondence. Microsoft licensing added about \$200/month but that replaced a cost from Comcast. The cost was just transferred from one vendor to another, with some cost savings.

Will asked where our current data storage is. Brian said Rosemary manages it. There is a copy in the vault and a copy at Rosemary's home. We do daily backups that go to the vault and they go home more like once a month.

David said that backup is data only. The difference with image-based backup is that it includes the operating system install and customizations and applications. When the system is restored it goes back to a snapshot of the last restore point.

Steve Loyer said backups are only as good as restorability and unless we are testing backups it is questionable whether they are even restorable. Brian said we are not testing.

Brian said he recommends we get the data restoration platform for improved backup. He doesn't think disaster recovery is necessary.

Beth said the difference between old and new contracts is \$420/month, including the additional machine and email management and antivirus protection that are not in the old contract. Brian

said the antivirus protection from The Tech Group is something we would switch to from our existing antivirus.

Nat said VLCT is telling us 30% of all cyber related events are found to be human error – phishing, etc. – and they recommend regular formalized training. Is that anything The Tech Group does? David said that is something they can provide. They did not quote that in their proposal. Licensing is on a monthly basis. Part of the process is running 8 campaigns that would give employees data to respond to like a false email to see who clicks on it. It costs about \$4 per user per month. Nat asked what a user is. David said a user is one email address. We wouldn't have to do it for all email addresses. We could pick which ones to include.

Beth said she is comfortable with the proposal of \$1371 for Remote Care Managed Services and she is supportive of also paying for the Vermont Cloud Data Restoration Platform. She really thinks we should do that. She is not sure about the Tech Care Secure Support Services. She is not sure how that is different from the other things listed. Eben said he is comfortable with the proposal of \$1371 for Remote Care Managed Services. The restoration platform is not a bad idea but it adds cost. Beth said she fears we can't restore from what we have or we are way behind on backups. Mike said he is not happy to spend that kind of money.

Ken asked if we test our backups. Brian said no, but we could. (*Doug Molde arrived at 6:57.*)

Nat said it is a cost but it is money well spent. Any crash or ransomware will be a huge cost to us.

David said he understands that the secure care package is pushing the envelope. Our email is in the cloud so it is not on our server. Microsoft 365 is not a backup utility. It wouldn't restore if our email addresses got hacked and we lost any data. It can't restore emails lost by accident or deliberate action. The Tech Group can provide a cloud to cloud backup utility that can be selective. It could be for just a couple of users with critical emails. It is \$3 per user per month.

Eric said the selectboard is in consensus on agreeing to managed services for \$1371 and adding the restoration platform for \$195.

Steve said he is not knowledgeable on this. He will go with the consensus of the selectboard. He feels we need the protection. Diane said she agrees with Nat. She thinks this is something we need and money well spent. Do we have cybersecurity insurance? Brian said no. VLCT is in the process of spinning that off as a separate part of insurance. We will be required to get it in the future.

Will said he wanted to acknowledge Mike's comment about having to do this at the last minute with no options. He is not happy being in this position, but the trustees support paying \$1371.50 for Remote Care Managed Services and also paying for the remote cloud restoration platform.

Beth moved to authorize the selectboard chair to sign a 3-year contract with The Tech Group including Remote Care Managed Services for \$1371.50 per month, the Vermont Cloud Restoration Data Platform for \$195 per month and \$780 for cloud data restoration

onboarding. The motion was seconded and passed with Nat, Beth and Eric in favor and Mike and Eben opposed.

BJ moved to authorize the trustee board chair to sign a 3-year contract with The Tech Group including Remote Care Managed Services for \$1371.50 per month, the Vermont Cloud Restoration Data Platform for \$195 per month and \$780 for cloud data restoration onboarding. Steve seconded and the motion was passed in a roll call vote with Steve, Diane and BJ in favor and Ken and Will opposed.

3. *Improperly Permitted Stormwater System at Manchester Mill*

Eric said there used to be a fairly simple town/village agreement that any light to light drainage structure was the town's and anything that drained into a stormwater collection structure or into the river was the village's. The culverts in question are not something the village or town had recognized. A sinkhole developed on River Road East and the town had to repair it and open the road back up. There are other culverts in the area besides the one that caused the problem. A concern was that others were in poor shape as well.

C.J. Manchester said this one failed at least 20 years ago. The Manchesters told the town and village about it. The town said it was a village problem and the village said it was a town problem. The Manchesters repaired it at the edge of the traveled portion and it was fine until now. He doesn't think the issue with this one means the others will imminently fail. They were put in before the Manchesters bought the property. The culvert that failed originally was a daylight to daylight culvert. As the Manchesters built up the area they put in fill and catch basins. That was in the late 60's or early 70's.

Will said the village can't take on infrastructure the village didn't install. The village didn't install this catch basin. Beth said she thinks both town and village crews should have someone go down and look at the situation and talk about what to do. Eric said we have to set the policy on this. Will said it is nothing the village added to their infrastructure. If something is done on private property he doesn't think the village should take ownership of it. He can send Troy down to lend his expertise regarding the danger of collapse but he doesn't think the village should be fiscally responsible for the infrastructure.

BJ asked who put it in. C.J. said he has no idea. The culverts across the road all existed when the Manchesters acquired the property. They changed some from daylight to catch basins, but the one that failed was either town or village property.

Will said if it was originally a daylight culvert it would have been the town's. Eric said we should probably return it to daylight. C.J. said that would be difficult because the ground has been built up.

Eric asked, there are 4 or 5 more culverts that cross the road? C.J. said the village line is in the middle of their property. There are probably 3 in the village that would be on their property. One is right on the edge of their property. Eric asked, they are all the same age and all the same situation – built up with catch basins? C.J. said yes.

Mike suggested the town could assume all the sidewalks and catch basins and do away with the ten cents on the grand list. Nat said he is willing to discuss that but not to agree to it tonight. Eric said the legislature would need to approve it.

Nat asked if we could put a swale on the side of the road. Brian said it would be very deep. C.J. said there is cement and pavement. It could be done on the river side but there would still be a big gully in his parking lot.

Eric asked if there is a catch basin on the river side. C.J. said there used to be. That catch basin was still okay but Hugh took it out and said if C.J. would pay for it he would reinstall it. That catch basin is there because if water runs over the bank it washes it out. There is a catch basin and two runs of culvert left at the site by the town crew.

Will suggested sending out the town and village foremen to look at the situation and report back to the boards. Diane said she likes Mike's idea of the town taking over the infrastructure. She thinks it would stop people from arguing over who owned it. She does agree we should send someone out. Eric said the foremen will come back with an inventory of what is there. Will agreed that we want to find out what is there. Eric said they should draw up a map of the site. Beth said they should also suggest what could and couldn't work.

C.J. said it is September 20 and the catch basin should be put back in before freeze-up. Will suggested that the town have its crew do that. Brian said he doesn't think the town should do that unless there is an agreement that the catch basin wouldn't be the town's responsibility. C.J. said the catch basin is on his property so he doesn't think it would be the town's responsibility. But Hugh took it out so he thinks the town might put it back. Eric said we may want to check with VLCT. If it is not within our right of way he is not sure we should be working there. C.J. said in that case the town shouldn't have let Hugh tear it out.

Will said he will talk to Troy. Brian said he will talk to Jason.

4. *Brownfields Discussion*

Eric said Doug Molde was part of a Brownfields study committee that looked at the talc mill site and the Parker & Stearns and Manchester properties. There is major potential for redevelopment of that whole area. Prior selectboard and trustee boards supported the endeavor but it fizzled out because money sources dried up.

Doug said LCPC wants to start up a Brownfields advisory committee that would make recommendations to the LCPC board about Brownfields expenditures. The state has money appropriated for Brownfields. The village sponsored an area-wide Brownfields study that resulted in a plan that included the area from Bob Hoag's buildings to the end of Railroad Street. He was the town representative on the group for that study. Brian was the backup. Meredith appeared on behalf of the village. We have a large Brownfield. If the town and village want to do an economic development project we need to get started with community input and planning on what we might want to do with what is currently the food shelf building. That area is a prime recreation development area with its proximity to the rail trail.

Doug said he is interested in serving on the Brownfields committee, but not if the town and village are not willing to put time into figuring out what they want to do. Unless we have shovel

ready projects at some point we won't be able to tap into available funds. Johnson should have a representative on the committee and should pick up the area-wide Brownfields study and figure out what to start with.

Will asked what the focus is for the money available now. Recreation? Doug said Melanie Riddle sent a letter to Brian that says funding was allocated by the legislature to characterize and clean up Brownfields sites. Doug recommends that our community get into the queue so at some point we will be able to step forward and say we would like money for a phase 1 evaluation. The community needs to be involved. It would be worthwhile to him to get involved if the community were involved.

Nat suggested that a first step could be looking at the study. Some in the room haven't seen it and others haven't seen it for a few years. Brian said he can send it out to everyone. Nat said the boards should discuss it after reading it.

Diane said she thinks this is very important for the village and town. She is glad we are going to be looking into it and hopefully moving forward.

Brian said the state is adding some money to federal money for Brownfields so there is more available than in the past.

5. ***Merger Discussion***

Mike said 6-7 months ago the town and village voters gave elected officials the charge to enter into discussion on merging the town and village. Nothing has been done to his knowledge. He understands the village is having problems with its manager and time is tight but he does not want to go before the voters in March and have someone ask the board what they have done with the vote. An overwhelming majority of constituents wanted us to talk about it. The boards need to form a committee or do something. Whether or not board members want to merge or not is immaterial. The people have decided they want us to look into this whether we like it or not. It is our duty as elected officials.

Will said he agrees with everything Mike said. Eric asked when he thinks the village would be ready. Will said he is thinking the first part of January. He wants to have the trustee board up to speed. We will not necessarily come to a solution before March but we can start conversations and meet once the various pieces have been investigated.

Mike said we are going to have to have someone walk us through this process. Hopefully it won't cost us an arm and a leg. He doesn't want to see Johnson go through the agony Essex went through over the last 20 years. He is not looking to spend more money than we have to but he wants to get a good product. He was not too happy with the product we had last time. He was hoping we would have a good enough product for people to understand the situation and have a vote last year. We need a consultant and a study done that everyone can understand and then the voters can take a vote.

Will said he thinks we should start with the report. He agrees it is not great. We should take the information we can get out of it and see what other information we need.

Nat said he agrees with that. He thinks we shouldn't just jump to a consultant. There are things we could do without a consultant. There are other town/village structures we can look at. Has there been anyone who has merged in the last 30 years. We can study that.

Eric said where we will need help is on how to do it. Will said if the voters say to merge that will cost money. Eric said we presented them with a report and overwhelmingly they said we should go forward and discuss a merger. Now we need to develop a plan on how we would merge and present it to the voters and they can give a yea or nay. Will said he thinks the recommendation was to continue communications between the boards. He doesn't interpret the vote as a vote to merge but as a vote to continue communication. Each member has to come up with their opinion and present that to the public. We need to make sure everyone who votes has the option to get both boards' opinions on what we recommend.

Nat said the town is ready to go on this. Can we meet earlier than January? Brian said he would caution about meeting in January. The town's budget is due at the end of January and we typically meet a lot that month. Eric said in February the village will be doing their budget.

Nat said it will be helpful to the town when the village has a village manager. Right now things like the website are all falling on town staff even though they are joint town/village things.

Will said his board will be ready in January. Maybe after that we can break up into committees. Beth suggested that if there are trustees who are willing to give their time to start thinking about what our first meetings will look like and read through the report we could get working groups together before January. Will said the trustees can discuss that at their next meeting. Maybe some people would be willing to be on an advance team.

Mike said he is not talking about a full blown consultant but we will probably need someone to tighten things up for us.

Mike said he would like to clarify that he objected to the IT contract because he believes we violated our own procurement policy we approved the other night. We should have had two bids.

6. Adjourn

The selectboard and trustees both adjourned at 7:53.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths