

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD/VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2021

Present:

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham (via Zoom), Beth Foy, Eric Osgood, Eben Patch

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

Others: Brian Story

Absent: Nat Kinney, Steve Hatfield

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. Will called the trustees to order at 6:00.

No changes to the agenda were needed

2. *Compensation and Healthcare Contributions for Joint Employees*

Currently we pay 90% of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Gold plan. Employees are free to pick any plan they want. If the plan costs less than what we contribute they don't have to pay anything. If their plan costs more than what we contribute they pay more. The cost of the Gold plan went down this year. Brian said our rate of increase is usually based on the Consumer Price Index and the Social Security cost of living adjustment. This year CPI was 6.2% and the Social Security COLA was 5.9%. Beth said CPI nationwide is 6.2% but for New England it is 5.6% and for the northeast region of the U.S. it is 5.4%.

Brian shared a spreadsheet showing the impact of different percentage increases that could be given to shared employees and town employees. Eric said tonight we need to agree on rates for shared employees but it would be good if the boards could come to agreement on giving the same increases to all town and village employees. It has caused problems in the past if increases for town and village are not the same. Brian noted that increases for union employees are an entirely different discussion.

If we gave a 6.2% pay increase the increase in employees' take home pay would be 5.63%. Brian said he thinks the percent change is a little misleading because of the way the healthcare cost changed.

Eric asked if anyone has thoughts of doing anything other than continuing to cover 90% of the cost of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Gold plan. Will said from what he has seen in this county, having 90% of health insurance premiums covered by the employer seems like a good deal. He doesn't see any reason to change it.

Diane said VLCT has a report about what different communities are doing for salary increases and healthcare. Have we ever participated in that? Brian said yes, we participated this year so we have the current survey from VLCT on compensation. Diane said she called and they said they didn't have anything for us so they couldn't give it to her but she could buy it for \$100. Brian said the village may not have participated, but the town did. Will asked if the trustees could get a copy of the report. Brian said yes.

Brian said we looked recently at what some other towns are doing for compensation and benefits. Ninety percent of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Gold premium remains a good plan – not the best out there and not the worst. It is pretty much in the middle. A lot of places that offer less benefits for healthcare also offer other things we don't, like savings accounts to help pay premiums.

BJ moved to continue to make the employer healthcare contribution equal to 90% of the cost of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Gold plan premium, Ken seconded and the motion was passed.

Eben moved to continue to make the employer healthcare contribution equal to 90% of the cost of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Gold plan premium, Beth seconded and the motion was passed.

Eben asked to see the impact of a 5.5% increase – in between the CPI for the northeast region and the CPI for the New England Region. Will said the quality of work we get from our employees is wonderful. We have to balance that with the economy. The town is not flush with cash. He asked about the impact of 5.8%. He would be okay with 5.6%. He thinks 6.2% is beyond the reach of the community.

Diane asked what the increases have been the past few years. Brian and Eric said they have been basically the same as the cost of living increase, around 2% to 3%.

Beth said while she agrees with what Will said about the employees she is thinking about our cost and the cost to taxpayers. The cost difference between 6.2% and 5.5% is about \$2600. That is nothing ultimately. She has been wondering what next year will look like. Are we in a bubble inflation year? We don't know. She could support either increase. She feels like going forward we should align closer to either the northeast region or New England.

Eric said 6 months ago he would have had something different to say but right now the town is struggling trying to get employees. Vermont is one of a half dozen states where the number of jobs is more than twice the number of people available to fill them. It is very important to give employees a generous salary, maybe more than we would have 6 months ago, so we don't lose them. We already lost a highway employee who left for a \$5/hr raise.

Brian said if we are concerned that this is a bubble year we could increase the bonus for the year along with a smaller salary increase. Beth said she would rather not do that because bonuses are taxed differently so employees would not be taking home the same amount. Eric said he doesn't think this is a one year bubble. Workers have disappeared.

Eben said he would support a 6.2% increase. An increase a bit above the average CPI for the region will help with retention. The difference in salary is small compared to the total amount the town spends on salary.

Eric said he thinks we usually base the increase on the Social Security COLA. Will said if we give more than COLA this year and then next year we give the same as COLA, it will feel like

we are taking something away. He said he would support 6%. That is a tenth of a percent over the national COLA.

Beth moved to give shared employees a 6% salary increase effective January 1, 2022, Eben seconded and the motion was passed.

BJ moved to give shared employees a 6% salary increase effective January 1, 2022, Ken seconded and the motion was passed.

3. *Holiday Party for Municipal Employees*

Brian said in the past there has been a holiday party for current and former municipal employees and their families. This year, to reduce potential COVID exposure, the proposal is to have an employee-only party that is catered (because with fewer people attending, the burden of providing food is greater.) The cost is likely to be about \$600-700.

Eben, Beth and Eric each offered to make a personal contribution toward the cost to save the town from spending money on the party. As there will be no expense to the town or village, board members had no objection to the plan.

4. *Other Business*

It was agreed to schedule another joint meeting on December 15 at 6:00.

5. *Adjourn*

The selectboard and trustees both adjourned at 6:50.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths