

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2021

**Present:**

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

Others: Rosemary Audibert, Dan Copp, Troy Dolan (via Zoom), Meredith Dolan (via Zoom), Arjay West, Marla Emery (via Zoom), Travis Hill (via 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 needed.

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

**Ken moved to approve the minutes of November 8, November 17 and November 24, 2021, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.**

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

**Ken moved to write off 11 uncollectible electrical accounts from 2017 totaling \$2,059.37, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.**

Rosemary said salary increases for village employees are usually the same as what is agreed on for shared town and village employees. **BJ moved to continue to contribute 90% of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Gold premium for employee health insurance and to give employees a 6% salary increase for the upcoming year, Ken seconded and the motion was passed.**

**Rosemary said employees are usually given \$100 holiday pay each. BJ moved to give each employee \$100 holiday pay, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.**

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

Dan gave his report. The E-DMR and WR-43 were submitted to the state. Work was done on the press. An emergency backup pump was installed at the River Road pump station. Branches were trimmed around the booster station. The snow blower was serviced and installed on the lawnmower. Two leaking valves were replaced. We are having issues with the one remaining original decanter VFD. It would take 6 months to get an identical replacement. Dan got a quote of \$2500-3000 for another one that will work. There were multiple alarms Saturday night due to high winds. Manosh is scheduled to clean the siphon bypass with a jetter. It is good to clean it in late fall; otherwise it tends to plug during the winter. The fire alarm system was serviced and reprogrammed to work with the new requirement to dial 802 for all in-state calls. Coliform results were negative. Water loss was 14%. (Dan left at 6:15. Troy joined the meeting via Zoom at 6:15.)

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

At approximately 8:00 PM on Saturday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, we started receiving reports of line blinks on the system due to the high winds. From then forward, the crew worked through the night until 10:00 AM Sunday, December 12<sup>th</sup>. We had outages on Clay Hill and Gould Hill and some other issues in East Johnson, which in total affected approximately 100 customers. The majority of the issues were caused by large trees falling over from outside of the ROW and tearing the lines off the poles. On November 26<sup>th</sup>, we received a call-out after hours for an outage at 13 Log Cabin Lane, which ended up being a problem on the customer's side of the service. On November 27<sup>th</sup>, we had an outage at the end of our system on West Settlement Road, which affected three customers due to heavy snow loading. Power was restored in approximately two hours. On November 28<sup>th</sup>, we had a report of a tree on the line on Route 15 West. The line had to be de-energized, the tree was removed, and power was restored within about 35 minutes.

We continued working with the electricians working on the Studio Center's Red Mill building to install a new 600 amp secondary service. The crew installed a 200 amp service that will serve the new Lamoille County Mental Health Building at 599 Lower Main West. The crew repaired the light on the Pearl Street Bridge. We also continued our in-house right-of-way cutting and monthly meter reading, high/low checks, and Dig Safes.

We repaired a water leak at the meter at 635 Railroad Street. Water service was turned off at the Skate Park, trailhead building, cemetery and Legion Field for the winter. All heaters were checked in the pump houses/meter houses. We worked with the State of Vermont to retire the sewer and water services at the house that was removed on Route 100C near the covered bridge. We responded to a no-water report at the Historical Society building and re-built the back-flow preventer to restore water service.

We began our winter sidewalk maintenance procedures, plowing, sanding, and picking up snow. The American flags were taken down and the winter banners and snowflakes were installed. The village green was cleaned up for winter and the two Christmas trees on village property were decorated.

The crew completed NEPPA's monthly safety class. This class covered overhead and underground troubleshooting. Rubber gloves and sleeves were changed out.

Troy continued working with the engineer from RSM Construction Group related to the EV chargers going in at the Jolley store. The engineer decided alter the scope of the project, which required Troy to adjust the estimate. Instead of having to dig across Wescom Road, they decided they would prefer a 3-phase aerial service to feed the charging stations. This increased the cost by approximately \$5,000. Troy also placed the order for the 300 KVA 3-phase pad mount transformer that will serve that location. The price for the transformer since September increased by \$2,000 and the lead time to receive it has been pushed back an additional 8 weeks, for a total delivery delay of 30-38 weeks.

In mid-November, we began having ignition issues with our small bucket truck that would cause the truck to stop running during operation of the aerial lift. Troy reached out to the

manufacturer of the lift and their technician at that time felt the issues were related to weak batteries in the truck causing a low voltage situation. After installing new batteries, the problem persisted, so Troy made arrangements to send the truck to St. Johnsbury CJR dealer. They determined the problem was a diesel engine regeneration issue that was caused by the catalytic converters being restricted.

Troy has been working with Ken Harvey's electrician and made arrangements to install the new electrical services at 599 Lower Main West and on Park Street. He was contacted by a local architectural engineer, David Ring, whose company is Shire Town Engineering. He read the article in the News & Citizen and asked if he could come and give an evaluation of the village garage. Troy met with him last week and they spent approximately an hour reviewing the known issues, not including the possibility of water under the slab. He pointed out multiple issues including poor roof condition. After looking at everything, he gave Troy a ballpark estimate of approximately \$500,000 to mitigate the mold issues and bring the building back to a safe, usable condition. This cost did not include any work that might need to be done to the slab or the site around the building. This information was provided free of charge.

The crew has been working on Troy's old office in the mill house building to clean it out and freshen it up to create a healthy environment for the crew to meet in.

Meredith and Troy have begun discussing a recent report that ISO-New England, the operator of the regional grid, may request all New England distribution utilities to shed load this winter if an energy shortage occurs. There is the potential for a severe natural gas shortage this winter if conditions are the same as the winter of 2013/2014, which saw a multi-day cold spell. In such a situation, there would not be enough fuel to keep natural gas generators operating and ISO-New England would be forced to implement their emergency procedures, which includes reducing load. There is a possibility that we would be forced to shut a portion of our system off and we are now trying to determine a plan if that request was made that would minimize the effect on our customers.

Diane asked if Troy could give an example of what would be done if we had to minimize our load. Troy said he and Meredith talked about shutting off commercial customers, but not residential customers. (*Arjay arrived at 6:24.*) We would shut some customers off for 4 or 5 hours, then turn their power back on and shut off power to some others. Will asked what percentage drop Troy thinks they will ask for. Troy said they have talked about us needing to shed 10%. Will asked if Troy has any information on who has supplemental power. Troy said he knows some businesses do, but a lot don't. Bigger customers are usually set up better to handle that kind of situation.

BJ asked if repairs to the bucket truck are scheduled. Troy said the work has been done and the crew is supposed to pick the truck up tomorrow.

Diane asked what businesses we would consider shutting down. Troy said he and Meredith are going to start figuring that out. Diane asked if we will give the businesses notice. Troy said his understanding is that if this happens we might only get 15 minutes notice. Steve

asked what the effect would be. Troy said some people's power would be shut off. They would completely lose power. Steve asked what percentage of our total power our streetlights use. Troy said it is very low. Ken suggested we should come up with a plan then send out a letter to businesses. Troy agreed. He said he is thinking we would shut down power to non-critical businesses, not businesses like Sterling Market. Ken suggested maybe we should check to see which businesses have backup power. Steve said this seems like another case for smart meters. Troy agreed that smart meters would make it easier to determine load.

Diane asked who will pay the \$5,000 increase cost for the RSM construction group. Troy said they will pay for that.

#### **7. Fire Department Budget**

Arjay handed out a proposed fire department budget for 2022. The fire department is proposing no change to labor expenses. On January 1 the state minimum wage will go to \$12.55. Currently the base rate for firefighters is \$12. RJ would like to increase the base rate to \$12.75. He thinks the budget can absorb that. Insurance premiums will be going down slightly. In the second half of this year the fire department saw an increase in costs for equipment. Vendors are telling us to be prepared for adjustments starting the first of the year. Arjay made inflationary adjustments for a number of items, in most cases about 15%. We are maintaining our contribution to the truck and small tools capital funds. Those plans have built in inflationary increases.

The total proposed budget is 186,153. That is a 3.33% increase over last year (\$6,027.) If the increase is divided evenly among the four municipalities served it would be a 3.5% increase – an increase of \$1,590 for the village, \$3,176 for the Town of Johnson, \$768 for Waterville and \$495 for Belvidere. If we wanted the increase for the village to be about 50% the increase for the towns there could be a 4% increase for the three towns and a 2% increase for the village. Then the village increase would be \$950, the Town of Johnson increase would be \$3,650, Waterville's increase would be \$878 and Belvidere's increase would be \$565. If we wanted the village to have zero increase, which has been the direction for the past 6 years, then there would be a 4.75% increase for each of the three towns. The Town of Johnson would have an increase of \$4,300. Arjay thinks any of those scenarios are reasonable. He thinks the 3.33% increase is more than responsible. He believes the fire department can maintain service with that budget.

#### **BJ moved and Diane seconded to approve a fire department budget of \$186,153.60 for 2022.**

Ken said the increase is below what he was expecting. He asked if that budget includes the raise Arjay asked for. Arjay said that budget should be able to withstand the proposed increased pay.

#### **The motion was passed.**

Will said historically the fire department has paid 50 cents over minimum wage. Arjay said last year it was reduced to 25 cents over minimum wage. Now he is proposing paying 20 cents over minimum wage. BJ asked if we have enough in the budget just approved to bring

it back to 50 cents over minimum wage. Arjay said he thinks so. He has always tried to project high for payroll. He thinks there is room to make a larger hourly increase without amending the budget number.

**BJ moved to increase base pay for firefighters to \$13.00 per hour, Diane seconded and the motion was passed with Will abstaining.**

Will said for a number of years the village has tried to maintain a zero increase in the village contribution to the fire department budget. The philosophy is that all village taxpayers are also town taxpayers so if there is an increase for the town but not for the village then the increase is evenly spread over all taxpayers.

**Ken moved and BJ seconded to have no increase in the village contribution to the fire department budget and a 4.7 5% increase for the towns of Johnson, Waterville and Belvidere for 2022.**

Diane asked who uses the most fire department services. Arjay said probably around 60% of the volume is within the Town of Johnson boundaries.

**The motion was passed.**

8. ***Water/Sewer Allocation for 405 Railroad Street***

Arjay said he is helping Greg and Dawn Tatro (1150 Foote Brook Road LLC) with an application for sewer and water for a former Parker & Stearns building. They want to have a coffee roasting facility in one of the buildings. The Department of Health has determined they will need a flow of 165 gallons per day. The flows that will be coming to wastewater treatment will be residential strength. The sewer capacity needed is 210 gallons per day. Rosemary said the applications have been received and all fees have been paid.

Will asked, that building does not have water now? Arjay said he doesn't believe so. A water service connection and sewer pump station have been installed.

Will brought up the question of whether this building should have a separate meter from the rest of the property. BJ asked if a different business will be operating the coffee roasting facility. Arjay said it is part of Jenna's Promise, as are the other buildings. BJ said in that case it makes sense to have a single meter. Will agreed that if Greg is just expanding on the same property one meter should be sufficient.

**BJ moved to give preliminary approval for a water allocation of 165 gallons per day and a sewer allocation of 210 gallons per day for 405 Railroad Street, Ken seconded and the motion was passed.**

9. ***Update to Village Revolving Loan Guidelines***

Meredith said she was contacted by the Lamoille County Planning Commission. They are updating the Hazard Mitigation Plan and they noticed that one of the mitigation actions listed in the old plan was updating our revolving load guidelines so that flood proofing would be an eligible use of the funds. (Arjay left at 7:10.) Meredith told them that we had not done that

but that she would bring it to the board. She can update the guidelines to add that as an eligible use.

Rosemary said the total amount in the revolving loan fund is about \$200,000. Meredith said the trustees have complete control over this pot of money. We have guidelines indicating the types of projects the funds can be used for. Projects that the village has loaned for since she has worked for the village include replacing a furnace and turning a property into a bed and breakfast. The guidelines are on the village website. There is a category of eligible uses around supporting businesses. We also gave a loan to a new deli business that was starting up. Diane asked if we charge the same interest rate for all. Rosemary said yes, prime minus 2%.

**Ken moved to update the village revolving loan guidelines to add flood proofing as an eligible use of loan funds, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.**

#### ***10. Village Garage Engineering Request for Bids***

Meredith reviewed the request for proposals she had created. It splits the project scope into two phases. The first would be to identify the source of the moisture and provide an itemized cost estimate for steps to eliminate the sources of moisture. She would also like to get a professional opinion about the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of doing the work outlined. If the results of phase one suggest it makes sense to move forward, then phase two would be to get a cost estimate and timeline to fully remediate the building and return it to a usable condition. The RFP asks for information about the contractors' experience, skills and references and a cost proposal for each of the tasks within each phase. RFPs usually provide information on how the proposals will be evaluated. She said we would evaluate based on completeness of the responses, firm and staff experience and cost. We will not be receiving sealed bids and will not make a selection just based on cost. She is suggesting a due date of January 5.

Board members agreed that the RFP looks good. Steve said his only concern is that we not scare people off with a timeline that falls during the holidays and would be ambitious even if not for that. Will said he doesn't want to eliminate people because of the timeline. Meredith said she wants phase two to be completed in time to submit grant applications in April. She thinks we could push the timeline out by 2 weeks and have proposals due January 20 if the board held a special meeting in late January. We could ask for phase one to be completed by March 1 and phase 2 to be completed by April 1. It was agreed to push the timeline out by 2 weeks as suggested.

Diane asked if the grant in April is the only one available. Meredith said it is the only one she is aware of at this point. Ken asked, that grant provides 75% of the cost? Meredith said she thinks it was 75% based on old census data. With the 2020 census data being released it may change.

#### ***11. Travis Hill Subdivision Request***

Meredith said Travis Hill had a property in Johnson with a home on it and he converted another building on the property into a rental unit. He came to us for water and sewer permits. He was going to have shared service lines. We have had issues in the past with those

so when we issued permits we included a condition that if he is ever going to subdivide the property he has to get permission from the village and explain how the shared line will work.

Travis said he hadn't planned on subdividing but costs for his project have gone up and he has to refinance. He was told that because there aren't comparables for this property in Johnson the only way he can get a loan is if he subdivides, so he is planning to subdivide the property but still hold the deed for both parcels.

Meredith said we had asked that if the property is subdivided Travis provide something in writing starting how maintenance and repair of the shared line will be handled. Travis prepared a draft easement deed that says the two property owners will equally share the cost of repairs. Meredith feels that covers the village's concerns.

**Diane moved to give Travis Hill permission to subdivide his property at 90 Clay Hill Road and the motion was seconded and passed.**

***12. Nadeau Well Update***

Meredith said she reached out to our state contact with the concept of converting the Nadeau well to an emergency well that would not be permitted or monitored and would be disconnected from our system. She asked if doing that would free the Nadeau property from the requirements of a source protection plan. The state contact indicated he thought that could work if we completely disconnected the well from our system. If we do that and we need to use the well we will have to issue a do not drink order. It would not be a great long-term backup but it would provide some water service. The contact said he needed to get official input from the source protection group with the state to confirm that the property would be freed from source protection requirements. If we do go down that road we still need to talk about whether we are comfortable having only that emergency well as a backup or if we want a backup well that is connected and monitored and could continue to provide the same level of service as the main well.

It was agreed that Meredith will get confirmation from the state that making the Nadeau well an emergency well would free the property from source protection plan requirements and then reach out to the Nadeaus.

Diane said she read that there are two previously used wells that have been abandoned. Why? Rosemary said those were surface water sources. The state says we can no longer use them. Will said they don't meet current state requirements.

***13. Powerhouse Site Visioning Exercise***

Meredith said after our last meeting where the board talked about future use for the powerhouse site she got an email from Kate Lalley at LCPC, who would like to start a broader visioning process for the site.

Diane said she went to a meeting where Kate did a presentation of different projects she has helped plan. Kate is really good at planning. Diane thinks we should invite her in and listen to what she might have to say. Meredith said Kate was on the team that worked on the area wide plan. She thinks Kate would be willing to meet with the board if the board wants that.

Will said his concern is money. If we have her do this work, does it put us in a better position to get funding? Meredith said often when going out for grants it is good to be able to show there has been a coordinated planning effort involving the public or stakeholders. Her concern is that this project has been put on the back burner and she does not want it to drag on too long while visioning is taking place. Her goal is to get a corrective action plan in place relatively quickly. If there are grants available to do more at the site it could be beneficial to have more of a planning process.

Will said he thought the consensus was to move forward with getting this off our to-do list. He thinks doing something more extensive there would be another project. Diane said she doesn't think it has to be a complicated project in order for it to be a pleasant place to pull off and view the river. She doesn't think Kate will be suggesting much beyond what we have talked about.

BJ asked if there is a fee for Kate's work. Diane said no; she is with LCPC.

Meredith said we need to define the expected use of the site in order to develop a corrective action plan. For instance, we need to know if there will just be a platform or if there will also be stairs down to the river. She thinks Kate is asking for a visioning process that may be months long to come up with ideas, present them and get feedback. Do we want to have a bigger visioning process or push forward with a very basic concept like what we previously talked about? She thinks if we are going to go with that basic concept we should put a vote on it on the agenda to give people an opportunity to weigh in.

Will said he would like to meet with Kate and see what she has in mind. He suggested maybe he could meet with her at the site and then he can figure out what to put on the agenda for the next meeting. Diane said the space belongs to the village and the town and it might be nice to put it out there for people to give us ideas. It was agreed that Diane and Will will plan to meet with Kate at the site.

**14. *New Host for Website Services***

This is on the agenda for the upcoming joint selectboard-trustee meeting. Rosemary said the person who was hosting the website has passed away.

**15. *Mask Mandate***

Rosemary said employees would like to have masks required for employees when they leave their desks but not when they are at their desks and to have masks recommended for members of the public who stay outside the office and required for those who come into the office.

**Will moved and BJ seconded to post at the municipal building that masks are strongly recommended for all those entering the building, to require masks for those entering the office space, to require masks for employees when moving about the office and to allow employees to remove masks while they are at their desks.**

Diane said she wishes we could recommend that people wear masks in all public places in the village. She thinks we should try to educate people and tell them the latest recommendations. She also thinks that if trustees wear masks at meetings in the municipal



building it shows people that we respect the new requirements for being safe. It would send a good message to people to mask up and be safe with each other. Steve said he is in favor of the motion but he doesn't see why we would not include people at meetings upstairs. Then he could come to the meetings. BJ said employees who work downstairs want this as a whole so we are giving them what they want.

**The motion was passed in a roll call vote with Steve, Diane, BJ and Will in favor and Ken opposed.**

Steve said it is his understanding that when he wears a mask it affords him a little protection but it is mostly to protect other people. It would be nice if other people showed that same courtesy to him.

**Diane moved that the trustees wear masks during board meetings, Steve seconded and the motion failed in a roll call vote with Diane and Steve in favor and Ken, BJ and Will opposed.**

Diane moved and Steve seconded that the trustees send out a recommendation to the public that masks be worn in public places including all businesses.

Ken said each business has the opportunity to require masks. He doesn't see any reason we should recommend masks. People hear that recommendation in many places already. Diane said she thinks if the trustees recommended it more people will wear masks. BJ said he thinks it is a good idea for people to wear masks if they feel comfortable with it but they also have the right not to. People have the right not to get vaccinated. He can't force them. Steve said we are not talking about forcing. We are talking about strongly recommending. BJ said if someone feels like they need or want a mask he feels they should wear one but he doesn't want to tell someone to wear one if they don't want to. Diane said we would be backing up businesses so it wouldn't just be the business asking. BJ said he has no problem signing something supporting people wearing masks when businesses ask for it. Ken said he doesn't see that we have the right to tell people how to deal with their health and body.

There was some discussion about the exact wording of Diane's motion. BJ said depending on the wording he might or might not support it. Diane withdrew her motion so she can think about the wording and bring a proposed motion to the next meeting.

***16. Adjourn***

**Ken moved to adjourn at 8:12 and the motion was seconded and passed.**