

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD / VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD  
JOINT MEETING MINUTES  
VERMONT STATE UNIVERSITY – JOHNSON, THE 1867 ROOM, DEWEY HALL  
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2023

**Present:**

Selectboard members: Beth Foy, Duncan Hastings, Eben Patch, Shayne Spence, Mark Woodward  
Trustee board members: GiGi Beach, Steve Hatfield, Lynda Hill, BJ Putvain, Ken Tourangeau,  
Others: Tom Galinat (remote), Erik Bailey, Lydia Putvain, Jason Whitehill, Rosemary Audibert (remote), Susan Tinker (remote), Randall Szott (remote)

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

**1. Call to Order**

Ken and Beth called the meeting to order at 6:27.

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

No changes to the agenda were made.

**3. Public Comment**

No members of the public were present.

**4. Discussion and Action on Health Insurance Options and Opt-Out Amounts**

Ken said Erik submitted a proposal for a different buyout option that could save money. Beth said the selectboard is thinking that keeping the status quo for health insurance for this year might make the most sense. Eben said the board didn't have a lot of time to look into other options due to the flood and getting a new town administrator up to speed. He is comfortable with the status quo for this year. Ken said he talked to Beth and both felt there was not enough time to look at other options for this year. He asked if others would like to pursue the option Erik suggested. Lynda said she thinks we got into it too late. We need more time to research. Steve said he would like to pursue changing the opt-out percentage. It sounds like it would save us money and at least a couple of employees would take it.

Erik said when he proposed an opt-out payment of 50% of whatever tier the employee was eligible for, some had misgivings about people on a family plan getting a bigger opt-out. So he came up with a suggestion of an opt-out that would be the same for everyone and would still make sense for someone with a family plan. For each person on a family plan who takes the opt-out we would save \$16,509.

Beth said we already offer an opt-out amount. She doesn't think we should consider savings based on what plan we think someone is eligible for. She doesn't think we can legally think about it that way. If an employee is going to opt out anyway she doesn't see how it saves us money. Erik said he is the person who would be interested in the proposed opt-out. The current opt-out amount doesn't come close to covering the expenses for his wife's plan. Beth said she doesn't think we should offer something based on a specific person. Erik asked, does it make sense to offer something that is attractive to people on the most expensive plans as well as the least expensive ones? Beth said probably. She thinks it is best to think about it holistically and she thinks it is too late for that now. Shayne agreed that it is too late.

Ken said his other concern is with the collective bargaining agreements. If we made a change for non-union employees then we would have two different insurance policies until we could get the unions to agree to the change. Eben said the town's agreement has a provision that if health insurance costs increase by a large amount the union will reopen negotiations.

GiGi said she thinks staying with the status quo is probably the safest. It is not that she doesn't agree with Steve. She is just concerned with time. BJ agreed. He said this is a lot to figure out when we have so many other things going on.

Ken suggested the boards could work on health insurance changes for the next year, maybe in June. He said he and Beth have talked about having a joint schedule to ensure the boards get things done that need to get done.

**Eben moved and Duncan seconded to keep Rosemary's and Susan's health insurance benefits the same as they are now.**

**BJ moved and GiGi seconded to keep Rosemary's and Susan's health insurance benefits the same as they are now.**

Mark asked when the union contracts get negotiated. Erik said about 2 years from now for the village. Eben said the town's contract was for 3 years and it started January 1. Duncan said nothing prevents us making a request to renegotiate. Eben and Erik agreed. Ken said based on conversations with employees he feels the village employees' union will reopen negotiations and consider a change. Erik said he thinks the town and village union contracts are up at the same time.

Tom said he thinks there is a fundamental decision both boards need to make. Are benefits going to be viewed as a cash benefit or not? When the benefit is treated as a cash benefit it often creates resentment among staff because the benefit is affected by factors out of their control. In the past he has used an opt-out amount equal to the amount of the premium of the other plan the employee would be covered by. One approach treats the benefit like an addition to salary and the other treats it as a way to take care of employees and their families.

Beth said she thinks there are options out there that provide money from the town and also meet employees' health needs. Ken said he likes the HRA option. That seems beneficial for everyone, including the municipalities. Beth said if we are trying to make sure employees and families are covered, a buyout implies that they are already covered somewhere else.

**The trustee board motion was passed.**

**The selectboard motion was passed.**

***5. Employee Compensation Discussion and Possible Action***

Ken explained that the trustees set their employee compensation early because they needed fixed numbers for their electric rate case. They can't go below the 5% raise they voted on earlier in the year but they can go up. That won't affect their rate study.

Erik said he had sent out the minutes from the meeting last year where Eben's model of using the previous year's CPI as the percentage increase was discussed. Eben said the New England CPI number is almost impossible to find. The Northeast CPI is 6.4%. He believes that is a good number to go by. The bargaining unit percentage increase is based on a rolling average of CPI from November to November. He would like to keep things consistent. He proposes using the November to November period and using the Northeast figure, not the New England figure.

Duncan asked, 5% is a floor for the trustees? Ken said they set that increase with the intention that if the selectboard wanted to stay closer to what was already discussed the trustees could match the selectboard so there would be no interoffice conflict. He thinks 5% is a good raise. Beth said that is better than what most people get.

**Duncan moved and Shayne seconded to give Rosemary and Susan a 6.4% pay increase based on the 12-month rolling average of Northeast CPI ending November of last year.**

**BJ moved and GiGi seconded to give Rosemary and Susan a 6.4% pay increase based on the 12-month rolling average of Northeast CPI ending November of last year, with the expectation that next year's pay increase will also be based on the 12-month rolling average of Northeast CPI.**

**The selectboard motion was passed.**

**The trustee board motion was passed.**

**Mark moved and Shayne seconded to give non-union town employees a 6.4% pay increase.**

**BJ moved to give non-union village employees a 6.4% pay increase for 1 year instead of the 5% increase previously approved, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.**

**The selectboard motion was passed.**

**The trustee board motion was passed.**

**BJ moved and Lynda seconded to continue to give non-union village employees the health insurance benefits described in the personnel policy.**

**Duncan moved and Shayne seconded to continue to give non-union town employees the health insurance benefits described in the personnel policy.**

**The selectboard motion was passed.**

**The trustee board motion was passed.**

***6. Authorize Emergency Management Department to Meet and Update the Local Emergency Management Plan to Adjust for Lessons Learned during Flood 2023***

Eben said emergency management doesn't need authorization to work on the Local Emergency Management Plan. He emailed his board and none of them indicated they had an issue with it

being updated. The LEMP is adopted by the selectboard so they will have a say in whether any changes are adopted. He doesn't think a motion is needed.

**7. *Discuss EDA Grant Co-Application for the Johnson Industrial Park***

Beth said the town is applying for an EDA grant to help cover costs the Northern Border grant will not cover for infrastructure at the industrial park. The village needs to be a co-applicant because the village would assume ownership of the utility lines that will be put in. The village and town can have a formal agreement to satisfy EDA loan requirements. Village representatives will also need to sign some forms. All administrative work will be taken care of by the town. Ken said he spoke to Beth about this today. The village can gain infrastructure and sales and installation of utilities will not cost the village anything. Beth said the EDA will ask for confirmation that the village will have capacity to handle the utilities.

**Lynda moved that the Village of Johnson be a joint applicant with the Town of Johnson for the EDA grant for the industrial park, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.**

**BJ moved and Lynda seconded to authorize Ken or Erik to sign any paperwork necessary for the EDA grant application.**

GiGi asked about the timing for the work to start. Beth said the town is trying to submit the EDA grant application this month. Engineering studies have to be done before the work can start. If things move quickly next summer would be the earliest it could start. Beth and Duncan agreed that it is more likely that work will start in 2025. Erik said transformers should be ordered well ahead of when they will be needed because it will take a long time to get them.

**The motion was passed.**

Beth said the town is planning to put in fiber. There was discussion about whether the fiber would be in the utility right of way. Erik said the town's engineer should talk to the village about what is planned. Duncan said his personal expectation is that this might not be fully built out for 10 years.

Beth said the town will provide a draft agreement.

**8. *Other Business***

Ken said he asked Jason about the bent guard rail on the bridge. The village equipment can't get through.

Tom said working upstairs is hard on office staff. There has been discussion about reorganizing upstairs but it might be too much to ask employees to do that and then move back downstairs again. He suggested thinking about reopening with the expectation that employees can stay where they are without a total redesign.

He was also thinking about ways to build camaraderie. He suggested shutting down at noon once a quarter and having lunch for all town and village employees and board members. GiGi, Beth and Shayne all said they think that is a great idea.

Ken brought up the previously discussed idea of Rosemary setting holidays. BJ said the idea would be to make them the same for town and village. Eben said that will be a long conversation that should not happen tonight.

**Lynda moved and BJ seconded to give each employee a \$100 holiday bonus.**

**Shayne moved and Duncan seconded to give each employee a \$100 holiday bonus.**

**The trustee board motion was passed.**

**The selectboard motion was passed.**

**Lynda moved and BJ seconded to split the cost of a holiday party for board members and employees with the town, with the total cost not to exceed \$750.**

**Mark moved and Duncan seconded to split the cost of a holiday party for board members and employees with the village, with the total cost not to exceed \$750.**

**The selectboard motion was passed.**

**The trustee board motion was passed.**

Mark said after the holiday we can consider Tom's idea of a lunch for employees. Beth said she fully supports the idea. She will contribute money personally. She thinks we should provide lunch quarterly. There was discussion about possible locations. Beth said Erik and Tom can plan it.

Eben said he is not supportive of Rosemary setting holidays. He thinks if town and village are going to be consistent there need to be adjustments to the joint personnel policy rather than leaving it up to a single person. In the future the town clerk/treasurer and the village clerk/treasurer may not be the same person. Lynda asked if the two boards can discuss the holiday schedule before the next village holiday. Beth said she doesn't want to promise anything but the request is noted.

9. ***Adjourn***

Both boards adjourned at 7:43.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*