

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2023

**Present:**

Trustees: GiGi Beach, Steve Hatfield, Lynda Hill, BJ Putvain, Ken Tourangeau

Others: Erik Bailey (via phone), Dan Copp, Aaron Calvin, Kathy Black, Alex Laws

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

**1. Call to Order**

Ken called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

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

GiGi said in the September 11 minutes she thinks her message about communication was lost. She was trying to encourage people to communicate more fluidly. Regarding the letter that went out to the grocers, it is an individual's right to send a letter to anyone they want, but the community would have been more inclusively represented if everyone who might have wanted to sign the letter had been included. Communication is an important topic. The trustees just got a letter from Kyle Nuse about a grant that she said the Studio Center, Laraway and Johnson Works were all involved with, but Johnson Works was never contacted about it.

**Steve moved to approve the minutes of August 14, August 29, September 11 and September 13, 2023, Lynda seconded and the motion was passed.**

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

The board signed all the warrants that had been presented for approval. One of the documents signed was for flood financing.

**4. Village Manager's Report and Action Items**

Erik read his report. The WWTF continues to churn out extremely high-quality effluent despite the many challenges operating it in this emergency mode. The Railroad St. bridge sewer crossing is complete and the staging is removed. The fire station repairs are moving along swiftly and the level of craftsmanship is outstanding. Village and town crews worked together to simplify the Legion Field yard hydrant system for more efficient use, especially for ice rink maintenance. The village crew repaired 4 bad sections of sidewalk on Railroad, School and Main Streets. Their level of craftsmanship was also excellent. The Tree Board trimmed the low hanging limbs that were obstructing sidewalk use.

We received grant-funded (not flood-related) professional water valve exercising, cleaning, condition assessment and mapping of 28 of our most crucial water main valves. We will apply for this grant again next year to get as many of the rest as possible.

We received flood-related grant funded sewer line cleaning and CCTV inspection of our lines impacted by flood waters. Inspection discovered a ¾ pipe blockage at the NE end of the Railroad St. bridge by a piece of concrete lodged there when the flood broke the line under the bridge. The destruction and removal of that blockage will be a FEMA category B eligible expense.

Using our 2020 QBS selection process, Erik hired Aldrich & Elliott Engineering to assess the structural damage and integrity of the WWTF control building. They are scheduling Engineering Ventures, their structural sub, to do the work.

Erik is sending Marla and Susan to APPA Public Utility Accounting Class at VSU Johnson all day tomorrow and Wednesday. Rosemary took this class the last time it was offered in 2019 and said it was well worth it.

The School Street covered bridge interior lights have been off for several years due to a shift that caused our wires to be “banjo-string” tight. The monthly average cost of the electricity for those lights was \$5. Erik instructed Nate to fix the tension issues without billing the town, install a meter bypass and replace the burnt-out incandescent lights with outdoor rated LED lights. The normal tariff for unmetered lights is \$35, but that can be adjusted by the board.

Ken asked Erik to hold off on this work until we hear back from the selectboard about the bridge lights. He said GiGi had asked why the lights weren’t on. Seven or eight years ago the town didn’t want to have the lights on so they could save money. Ken asked Erik if we could fix the light issue and he asked Beth Foy to ask the selectboard to pay for electricity.

GiGi said Johnson Works is willing to support any costs of this effort. Ken said he thinks the cost will be minimal. If the selectboard okays it we will move forward.

The state has opened Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP) grant funds to the smallest, most impacted municipalities. This provides free priority assistance especially in project management and grant writing. While it is currently unclear if villages are included in this program, Erik is looking for a motion to fully participate in the program so he can coordinate with LCPC and get to the front of the line for this first-come, first-served program if we are eligible.

The public hearing of our rate case had zero public comments. The Department of Public Service filed for discovery of several parameters. We submitted those items and are awaiting their response and determination.

Marla, Susan and Anne did a good job staying on top of things in Erik’s absence, despite a very understaffed office.

GiGi asked if there is anything the board can do to support the office while two staff members are out for training. She could make copies, answer the phone, etc. Ken said we can inform Anne and Susan that they can call GiGi if they need help.

**Lynda moved to fully participate in the Municipal Technical Assistance Program, GiGi seconded and the motion was passed.**

Erik said he estimates the rate case decision will be made in early November.

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

An item requested by GiGi related to a Johnson Works project to put decorative lights on Main Street was added to the agenda.

## **6. *Main Street Lights***

GiGi said Johnson Works wants to support cheering up Main Street. They met with Nate Brigham about having lit garland going up posts. Nate said that will work without a problem. They were also hoping to bring lights across Main Street but that probably won't work this year because the lights that used to go across the street were attached to private buildings and the property owners did not want connections to their properties anymore. GiGi is waiting to hear back from VTrans about the permit process and what is allowable. As long as it is okay with the board the village crew will be putting up lit garland when the snowflakes are put up.

Lynda asked if Johnson Works is doing that in conjunction with the Beautification Committee. GiGi said no, because the Beautification Committee is taxpayer funded.

Lynda asked if Johnson Works will have a Holiday Jubilee this year. GiGi said no, because there is no interest from businesses.

Lynda said the trustees in the past have always said no to garland up poles because of vandalism. It has been discussed many times.

GiGi said Nate said there used to be garland on the bridges. If it is okay with the board Johnson Works would like to have garland on each pole that has a snowflake and also on each side of the Route 15 and Pearl St. bridges. Ken said they will have to check with the state about the Route 15 bridge and check with the town about the Pearl St. bridge but he has no issue with what Johnson Works wants to do as long as there is no cost to taxpayers.

The consensus of the board was that Johnson Works can go ahead with the plans for decorative lights.

## **7. *Fire Department Report and Action Items***

Erik read the monthly report from the fire department.

## **8. *Water/Wastewater Report and Action Items***

Dan gave his report. The E-DMR and Wr-43 were submitted to the state. We assisted with flagging for the Vactor and camera work of the flooded sewer lines that the state had contracted. The village will be responsible for the cost of the grit disposal, which is a FEMA covered expense. They were here for 4 days. They found a blockage near the bridge on Railroad St. They did not have the equipment to clear the blockage. We were able to hire Manosh to do the job. He has to order a specialized piece of equipment to chisel it out. It should be completed within a couple of weeks. This is FEMA reimbursable due to the flooding and bridge crossing line breakage.

LCS was here several days working on the SCADA and alarm system. We are still waiting on an influent flow sensor so we can properly flow proportion our monthly required sampling. Dan has permission from the state to take hourly grab samples in the interim.

The emergency generator did not start when staff performed the weekly exercise. A technician found the batteries were no good. They have been replaced and it is operating properly.

A Milton Cat sales rep is coming next week to write up a proposal for both purchasing a mobile emergency generator and installing a permanent generator. He believes installing a permanent

generator will be the less expensive option but will give us quotes on both. Dan will size it big enough to be transferred to a new facility should that be the route we take.

We had a FEMA site assessment for the WWTF, Highland Heights pump station and the siphon. We had to point out everything in each facility that was damaged. We eventually got FEMA to write down that there is other damage that is unknown at this point. We have to have an engineer give us an estimate on repairing the building damage, which is getting worse every week. We also have to have a certified electrician give us an estimate on replacing all the affected wiring that was damaged. The cost for all the damage determines the amount we will get from FEMA.

Ken said he called Steve and BJ and got permission to sign an MOU with the Troy and Jay sewer plant. *(Kathy Black arrived at 6:34.)*

GiGi asked if Dan has figured out a way to heat the trailer he is using. Dan said there is a heat pump on it. He can add heaters if needed. Alliance started working on heat and hot water in the plant today.

Dan said every repair we have done to get the facility back up and running is considered a temporary repair, not a permanent repair. The FEMA estimates will be to repair the facility back to pre-flood conditions.

Coliform samples were negative. Lead and copper results were all well below the state's 90<sup>th</sup> percentile levels. We started removing old unused equipment from Katy Win pump house #1. We will be rehabbing the structure in the next month and scheduling to have emergency transfer switches installed on pump houses #1 and #2 per the sanitary survey requirements. We assisted with the valve exercising program that we received a grant from the state to perform. We were able to get roughly 1/3 of the valves and valve boxes cleaned and exercised. We will apply again next year to hopefully get the rest of the system done.

Water loss was 34%. Sales numbers also were the lowest Dan has ever seen by far. Marla is going to double check her numbers and see if there was any error. *(Alex Laws arrived at 6:37.)* It is possible that some meters affected by the flood may not be reading properly. *(Dan left at 6:39.)*

**9. *Electric/General Report and Action Items***

Erik read the electric/general report prepared by Nate Brigham:

Electric Dept.

Mutual aid to Hyde Park 10 hrs

Tree on the line at 543 Rt 15W – broken phase and neutral

399 West Settlement Rd. – Tree took down service line

Had an outage on Main St. and Railroad St. for a cross arm change out at 274 RR St.

Blown fuse on Wescom Rd. for 66 West Highland

Installed cover-up at 66 River Rd. East and 147 River Rd. West

Worked on street lights at fire station, Park St. and Jenna's Promise

823 Rt 15W line extension and 75 KVA transformer install

Meeting for energy audit for the village water and light garage

FEMA meetings

Worked on logging flood hours work by employees and equipment  
Completed monthly meter reading, high/low checks, substation check and Dig Safes

Water/Sewer

Sewer leak for 93 River Rd. West

Sewer line cleaning

Picked up leftover material from the sewer line under the Railroad St. bridge

Fixed water meters at 22, 32, and 64 Sinclair Road. Full of gravel.

Valve exercising on 28 valves.

General Dept.

Replaced parts of sidewalks on RR St., Main St. and School St.

Cleaning of Cold Spring for leaves in the water area

Doing inspections of the catch basins for cleaning

1 employee out for arm surgery 6-27 to present

Safety

Safety meeting with NEPPA on Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> was on substation components and safety. Work zone safety.

**10. Members of the Public**

News & Citizen reporter Aaron Calvin said he wanted to ask about the sunflowers incident. Ken said the sunflowers and the Beautification Committee have nothing to do with the village so he is not going to entertain any questions about the incident. Aaron said the resident who cut the sunflowers told the sheriff's department that he asked Ken and Ken said it was okay. Ken said that wasn't what he asked. He said Aaron should take any questions to the selectboard and the Beautification Committee.

**11. VT Studio Center Main Street Art Projects Proposal**

Kathy Black of the Vermont Studio Center said the Studio Center got an offer of funding from the Vermont Arts Council and the Vermont Community Foundation for a project. Funding was available to support communities affected by the floods. The Studio Center contacted people at the elementary school and the college and other organizations and posted on Front Porch Forum inviting people to participate in Zoom meetings. The group of people who participated came up with the idea to do a project to make banners similar to the banners in Underhill made by people in the town. The project would involve different groups. The banners would be put up around Johnson in celebration of our town and our resiliency coming out of the flood. Kathy shared a list of words of inspiration for the banners that the group came up with. The project has a budget of \$4K. That amount has been approved and is on its way. The money will sponsor up to 6 artists. VSC is asking if the village is interested in having banners hung on Main Street in a way and at a time that fits in with the village decoration schedule.

BJ asked how long they intend to have the banners up. Kathy said if people like them they could be put up every year, perhaps in spring or fall when the flags and Christmas lights are not up.

BJ said he likes the idea but has some hesitancy not knowing what will be on the banners.

Alex Laws said she has a studio at the Studio Center and lives in Johnson. She is helping out with this project. The list of words of inspiration was crowd sourced at the meetings on the project. What struck her driving through town after the flood was how much the community came together immediately after the flood. It seemed that we would want the banners to speak to strength, resilience, collaboration, education, etc. She is not sure how many banners there will be posts for or how many of the inspiration words can be used.

Kathy noted that not all the banners will be made by children. People from the college, Jenna's Promise and maybe the senior art group will also be involved. They want to give guidance to the people making the banners to make sure the intention is fulfilled. They counted 16 poles with banners.

Lynda asked, the banners will hang down from poles rather than going across the street? Kathy said yes.

Kathy said there are poles in front of the elementary school that don't currently have hardware on them. If the Studio Center has enough money to get hardware and put banners on those poles they want to know if the village will allow that.

GiGi asked if they are able to purchase the same type of materials used in Underhill so there will be longevity for the banners. Kathy said yes; they are researching materials.

GiGi said she noticed that members of Johnson Works are listed as being involved in the project. Kathy said just Liz Kauffman. GiGi said one Johnson Works member can't speak to the group's involvement. She feels Johnson Works would support the project; it just has to be brought to the membership. She suggested Johnson Works might be able to provide support such as purchasing additional hardware.

**Lynda moved to support the Johnson Pop Up Art Project proposed by the Vermont Studio Center and to allow banners to be put on poles on Main Street, School Street and Pearl Street.**

BJ said he wants to make sure banners don't get political. He suggested that the board give final approval before the banners go up.

Kathy said the banners will be made by groups working together. Alex said they are not envisioning that the banners will have words on them other than the town logo.

**Ken suggested the friendly amendment, which Lynda accepted, that the banners be brought to the trustee board for approval before they go up. BJ seconded and the motion was passed.**

Ken said he thinks Erik can approve the banners when they are done. (*Aaron, Kathy and Alex left at 6:56.*)

## ***12. Review and Possibly Act on Health Insurance Costs Update and Savings Proposal***

Erik said after hearing the concerns about inequities between those with and without families, he crunched numbers and found a solution that was the same for all who can get insured elsewhere,

yet sufficient for an employee with a family to justify moving to their spouse's more expensive, less coverage plan. This option will save the village even more than his original proposal. The option is based on 60% of the entire price of a 2-person BCBS Gold plan. This would provide a larger opt-out than those currently taking the 2-person opt out, yet the village savings incurred when even one family plan employee opts out will far outbalance that. Generally, a single person will usually not be eligible for opt out unless they are in the National Guard (due to the need to show coverage). He provided the board with a spreadsheet showing savings for this option. Instead of an 11.41% increase our increase would be 5.23%.

One issue is that the employee that he knows would take this opt-out has a spouse whose open enrollment period only lasts until November 15. If we don't choose this option before about November 8 we should not choose it for this year or it will cost us money because that employee won't be able to take the opt-out.

Ken said he feels this board can't make a decision on this tonight. Because it involves joint employees, both the selectboard and the trustees should agree. Information on this proposal has been forwarded to the selectboard. They are going to be talking about other options Beth Foy mentioned. The boards will have to make a decision together in a joint meeting.

The board agreed to propose November 3 and November 8 as possible joint meeting dates.

**13. Review and Action on Green Mountain Blasting Invoice**

Ken said during the work to clear the sewer line, sewage was blown into BJ's basement. He sent an invoice for \$98 to cover his costs for cleaning up, with a materials list and pictures. The incident was caused by the village because we were jetting the lines. The pressure was turned up because of the blockage.

**Steve moved to approve paying the invoice from Green Mountain Blasting for sewer cleanup, GiGi seconded and the motion was passed.**

**14. Discuss Ways to Improve Communication with Residents during Planned Utility Service Interruptions or Maintenance**

It was agreed to post notices of planned interruptions on Front Porch Forum and the town website.

BJ said when there is any outage either Marla or Erik or both should be in the office to receive phone calls. Ken agreed that barring any unforeseen circumstances one of them should be there.

**15. Discuss the Process to Bring Board Minutes from Draft to Final on the Website**

BJ said he would like board members or the chair to look at draft minutes before they go out to the public. Donna said it would be difficult to ensure she could always get them done long enough before the 5 day deadline to have time to send them out to board members for feedback. It would shorten the amount of time she had to work on them. Ken said if someone spots an error they can let Donna know and she will correct it.

BJ asked, if the board agrees on a change to the minutes, is the change made to the version posted on the website? Donna said yes.

**16. Other Business**

GiGi asked, if Johnson Works gets a permit from the state to put lights on the bridge, does she need to come to the trustee board for permission? Ken said no. The board has already agreed to having

lights on the Route 15 bridge. For the Pearl Street bridge, Johnson Works needs to ask the selectboard.

Erik said Ernie Pomerleau was on WCAX tonight saying that a prospective grocer is interested in the Sterling Market location and if that falls through he is committed to finding another grocer. Lynda said there are rumors that Shaw's is coming to that location, but she was told by someone with Shaw's that that is not the case.

***17. Adjourn***

**Lynda moved to adjourn, BJ seconded, the motion was passed and the meeting was adjourned at 7:28.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*