

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2024

Present:

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

Others: Erik Bailey, Rosemary Audibert, Dan Copp, Brian Raulinaitis, Arjay West, Gidget Dolan-Dodge

Absent: Ken Tourangeau

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

BJ called the meeting to order at 6:05.

2. Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings

Lynda moved to approve the minutes of December 11, 2023, GiGi seconded and the motion was passed.

3. Review of Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes and Additions

No changes to the agenda were needed.

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

Rosemary said she made a new category in general department revenue for former ARPA money to be used for the water and light garage. At the annual village meeting there will have to be an article asking the voters to establish a reserve to put the money into.

BJ asked about the effect of the tax abatements the town Board of Abatement has been considering. Rosemary said the town can't abate village taxes.

5. Village Manager's Report and Action Items

Erik gave his report. Our WWTF Chief Operator, Dan Copp, has been recognized as the US EPA WWTF Operator of the Year for the state of Vermont. Dan always runs a great operation, and truly stepped up to the plate in response to the flood of 2023, coming through for Johnson in a big way.

The annual employee holiday party was a huge success. Feedback from several employees of both the town and village were very enthusiastic about the added activities. Erik thanked Gregory Tatro and the entire Jenna's Promise organization for the free use of their facility for the event.

Village offices will be closed in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Erik gave an update on the municipal building. An air scrubber is installed and operating. There is a noticeable difference already. There are two interested parties for the work. Hopefully a bid will be accepted and awarded on January 15 or, if not then, on February 6. Erik spoke with Dale Tatro. He believes it is in the best interest of employees to hire his crew (lower wage employees of his) to move the contents of the downstairs into storage containers during construction. At the time of moving we will sort the remaining contents into three categories: storage, throw away, restore. The new flooring may not be carpet. If it is, we will have to install a vapor barrier to prevent mold growth. Carpet does provide sound-dampening and safety benefits. We have been attempting to

contact a plumber to address the hot water heater. Erik is recommending replacement with an on-demand setup. The plan is to install a wall around the building with flood gates at the doorways.

GiGi said there are still garbage bags of documents downstairs. Are they going to be tossed? Erik said it depends what they are. GiGi asked who will go through them. Erik said people who know what they are doing and are wearing masks. GiGi said she doesn't feel comfortable having any employee do that. Erik said they can wear respirators.

BJ brought up a previous request to have Erik look into whether our insurance for the village green includes child molestation coverage. (*Brian Raulinaitis arrived at 6:23.*)

GiGi asked how staff will cover their regular jobs and also go through documents. Will Rosemary have to do most of it? Erik said Tom Galinat can also do a lot of the work because he spent two decades as a town clerk. GiGi asked, we don't have to worry about regular operations of the office while that operation is taking place? Erik said no.

6. *Fire Department Report and Action Items*

Erik read the fire department report submitted by fire chief Arjay West:

Johnson Fire Department Report

Dec. 21 – Dec. 28, 2023

JFD responded to 14 calls. 10 calls occurred during the daytime (6 am - 6 pm) and 4 calls occurred during the nighttime (6 pm - 6 am.) The average duration was: 69 minutes

Nature:

Those calls were: 1 – chimney fire, 2 – vehicle fires, 1 – debris fire, 1 – smoke condition, 2 – automatic alarms, 1 – CO alarm, 1 – odor investigation, 1 – vehicle crash, 2 – mutual aid (water rescue), 2 – other (roof rescue, station work detail flood related)

Staff:

The average number of firefighters that responded was: 12

Total hours of service was: 176

Other:

Don Blake Builders has completed station carpentry. We had one work detail to re-occupy the classroom and establish basic operations in our dispatch office. We intend to use our scheduled meetings in January as work details to continue “moving back in,” and set up replacement equipment/supplies as the orders come in. Some replacement items are still several months out for pending delivery.

We have taken delivery of the new UTV because pricing was based on a 2023 sale. The bed-mounted rescue skid unit has been ordered and is in the manufacturing process. We are continuing research on trailer, which has been delayed because that equipment is still displaced from flood reconstruction. Once it returns to the station we can evaluate available space and determine an appropriate operating layout.

We participated at the Johnson Jubilee with Rescue 1 decorated by holiday lights. Thank you to several of the firefighters who donated time to prepare the truck.

Budget planned for the 2024 Operations Budget has begun, intending to be ready for a January presentation.

The radio reprogramming to the new repeater equipment is scheduled for January 12th.

7. *Water/Wastewater Report and Action Items*

GiGi thanked Dan for taking her around today when he did facilities checking. She learned a lot.

Dan read his report:

Operational Status of Wastewater Plant and Callouts

- E-DMR and Wr-43 were submitted to the State
- Performed our permit required annual constituents testing. The plant produced great results.
- Manosh removed the blockage in the sewer line by the Railroad St Bridge. Their new concrete cutter worked great. They cut the blockage out and then jetted the line.
- On Friday Dec 15 we installed the flood gates as there was a flood watch for Sunday. On Monday the water started rising. It became evident that were probably going to flood again. We moved the tractor and trailer to the village garage. We pulled all of the SCADA computers, and electronics out of the temporary office trailer as that was most susceptible to the rising water. We ended with 3.5' of water in the office trailer. About 4' in the sludge room and 1.5' in the influent drywell. Nothing in those rooms were damaged. The rest of the plant stayed dry. As it turns out the sump pumps in those 2 pumps were never rewired in the temporary wiring of the plant. **THEY ARE NOW!!!** The Fire Dept hosed off the road and driveway. Huge shout out and thank you to them.
- We moved everything back into the plant while the trailer dried out. We have since moved everything back into the trailer due to the extremely loud transformers in the office at the plant. We are looking at possibly moving or installing new ones which would allow us to move back into the plant permanently and discontinue renting the office trailer.
- We hauled 41,000 gallons of sludge to Morrisville for processing.
- We had a state electrical inspection of the temporary wiring of the facility. No deficiencies were found.

Operational status of Water Plant and Callouts

- Monthly reports were submitted to the state.
- Coliform samples were negative
- Milton Cat replaced o rings on the water plant generator. It helped the starting issue but did not cure it. Upon further diagnosing the fuel pump is not operating properly. They have ordered one and will install it when it comes in.

- Pratt and Smith Electrical installed transfer switches to both pump houses at Katy Win. This was a requirement of our sanitary survey. We will have a power cord made up to use the villages generator to power both pump houses in case of an extended power outage.

Dan said water loss was 42%. Vermont Rural Water will be coming to try to help us determine where we are losing water. Erik said we are calling the experts because Dan's staff and the water and light staff have been out walking the lines and finding nothing. Dan said our water loss is usually around 20%. It started rising in September and was higher in October. BJ asked if it could be a leak in an abandoned house. Dan said it could be, or it could that meters damaged in the flood are reading low. Our sales are down. Erik noted that Vermont Rural Water provides services for free.

Dan asked if there was any thought of moving the trailer before the recent flooding. Dan said they thought of it and had the town crew helping with attempts to do it, but then the Bobcat died. BJ asked if we can think about that now. Dan said it is 100% insured as part of our rental agreement so he is not very concerned about it.

BJ asked if we are moving forward with efforts to relocate the WWTF. Erik said there is general agreement that it would be a good idea but the state needs to have a cost benefit analysis done. Dan said he hasn't talked to anyone from the state who thinks it is a good idea to keep it where it is. *(Dan left at 6:41. Arjay West and Gidget Dolan-Dodge arrived at 6:41.)*

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

Erik read the report submitted by Nate Brigham and Anne Crocket:

Electric Dept.

Truck/Pole accident 2146 Rt15E (old S.R. Millers) pole #612. A billing estimate has been started that reflects the time and material used on the pole replacement. Additional costs will be added to make the service repairs permanent.

Fixed outlets for Christmas lights and Main St. Bridge

Looking for the Boards thoughts of when they would like to have the Christmas Decorations removed

Had Altec come and change out leaking hoses on the auger of the Digger Tk

Moved equipment out of lower Building in preparation of the Flood

Installed new service at 695 100C

Received new Transformer and took a full inventory of them for the end of year. The hardware inventory is approximately 95% complete.

Completed monthly meter reading, high/low checks, substation check, and dig safes.

We continued to meet information requests from Perry, VLCT and FEMA along with attending a number of Zoom calls. Attended two Zoom meetings regarding new software. Neither vendor can meet all of the needs of the Village. My sense was that none of the members felt that the proposed systems were great. There should be a meeting with Southeast Data Cooperative still.

Completed the 2023 Electric Dept Inventory.

Water/Sewer

Assisted Sewer plant for Flood and after

Installed remote readers and head at the old Liquor Store

Fixed water meter at 77 RR St

Fixed water meter at 112 River Rd W

Assisted Manosh in the drilling out of the sewer line at the RR St Bridge

General Dept.

The S595 Bobcat is down for maintenance on the motor, they think it might be an oil Sensor

Assisted Town Crew after Flood

Plowing/sanding of sidewalks

Picked snow 1 time

Safety

No Safety meeting with NEPPA in Dec. Signed up for safety meetings for 2024

Lynda said the snowflakes usually stay up all winter. GiGi said the lights can be changed to white. She and Carri Ferrari can work on that. She will take the wreaths off the fire station tomorrow.

9. Review and Approve VOJ Fire Department 2024 Budget

Arjay said except for overages due to the flood the fire department was on track with the operations budget in 2023. He reviewed the proposed 2024 budget. The state minimum wage is going up and the fire department would like to be prepared to offer a \$400 stipend to a firefighter who volunteers a large amount of time to do a lot of IT work at the station. There is a proposed \$2K increase intended to cover a 50 cent increase in firefighter wages and the \$400 stipend. Firefighters currently get \$13.50 per hour and 6 officers get an additional 50 cents per hour. The minimum wage will increase to \$13.67. Historically they have tried to stay 50 cents above it. For 2024 they are planning to go to \$14.00/hr

BJ asked if there bonuses for crew in the winter. Arjay said no. Firefighters are paid for on call time and scheduled trainings and meetings. They get paid twice a year, in June and December. Their pay is just based on the time spent on call, including 1 hour for a scheduled drill or meeting. They typically train on the first 3 Thursdays of the month and have a business meeting on the last, so there are 4 payable scheduled events per month. Erik said the trainings always last more than an hour.

Arjay said the proposed budget has no change for insurance, a slight increase for office supplies, and a slight decrease for electricity. They increased the amount budgeted for heat by \$300 in order to have the heat a little higher. The amount budgeted for building supplies is down a little. This year they were over budget by about \$5K for vehicle maintenance. They increased the amount in the proposed budget but he doesn't think expenses will be as high as last year. The amount budgeted to fund the capital fund is staying the same. Communications went up slightly. They are anticipating putting the new repeater on line by the end of this week. They will have some rental and operating payments. The proposed budget is \$192,200, an increase of 2.89% or \$5400.

GiGi asked if what is budgeted for gear and accessories is compromising anyone's safety. Arjay said no.

Arjay said the fire department no longer gets a payment from the college. That was \$6K, down from \$12K. The village has some expense in ownership of the fire department. The department contracts with the towns of Johnson, Waterville and Belvidere and gets some revenue from billable calls. If the village contribution doesn't increase, the proposed budget would be a 4% increase to the towns. If the contributions from the village and the towns were all equal, each would have a 2.92% increase. If the village wanted a 3.5% increase for the towns then the village increase would be \$615. BJ said he likes the last option. Arjay said historically people have been comfortable with an increase in the 3-4% range. In 2019 the increase had to be just over 6%.

GiGi moved to approve the \$192,200 fire department budget as presented, with a 3.5% increase for each of the contract towns and a \$615 increase for the village, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.

BJ asked if we have programmable thermostats. Erik and Rosemary said we do in the municipal building. Arjay said the fire station does not have them. They have many heating zones.

10. Review Bid Results and Award Lower Storage Flood Repair Work

Erik said we had 2 bids submitted and 2 refusals to bid. (*Arjay and Gidget left at 7:08.*) Donald Blake bid \$15,937.60 for rehab of the lower storage building. Village Repair and Renovations bid \$37,500. Brian Raulinaitis of Village Repair and Renovations said when he went to look at the building it was the morning after the flood and there was no one on site who could help him. He showed himself around and padded his bid. He felt he didn't have a fair shot at this bid and he would like a fair shot at the next one. (*Brian left at 7:10.*)

Erik said he talked to Blake about mitigation work – raising the boiler. We want to do the mitigation work at the same time as the rehab work. He has been asking FEMA if they will approve funding for mitigation. The person he talked to most recently told him it was not

completely approved yet but is very likely to be approved. He feels it makes sense to approve having that work done at the same time as the rehab work even though the funding is not guaranteed.

GiGi moved to award the contract for lower storage building repair to Donald Blake Builders in the amount of \$15,937.60 for repairs and \$6,985 for mitigation, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.

11. Discuss Open Meeting Training

Erik said VLCT does new selectboard member training in mid March. He think it would be online or hybrid and would last 1-3 hours. BJ asked Erik to find out the dates.

12. Discuss Public Alert Steps and Possible Methods

BJ asked where Arjay is with siren testing. Erik said he thinks it is being worked out between Arjay and the emergency management team.

BJ asked about the possibility for alerts. Erik said it would cost us about \$5-6 per month to set up a Facebook page. He would not be comfortable with anyone using their own email account for it so his thought was to add a town email account for Facebook. GiGi said she feels more people have cellphones than use Facebook.

BJ said the Lamoille North school district has a system that allows anyone to sign up for alerts by text, call, email or all three. Erik said an easy way to do the same thing is through the state VT-Alert system. People can sign up to receive alerts for their own town or different towns. We could call and ask the watch officer to put out a message on VT-Alert. BJ said he was thinking about a system we could use for important information such as reminders about village meeting as well as emergencies. If we used a system like the one the school uses our manager would put out the messages. He wants to get a price on that type of system. Someone told him there is a radio station we could use. Lynda said that is WLVB.

13. Discuss Adding 2 New Flood Markers and Possible Grant Funding

BJ said during the last flood he and Ken were wondering if there was a way to add some new markers showing the water level in different places. Erik said it would be easy to make static gauges in-house with materials we have on hand. The USDA flood gauges are more complicated. It is a federal program that provides them. It would cost a lot to install a new gauge for the Gihon and we would have to build history over decades to know what is normal. Steve said he likes the idea of asking Nate's crew to use materials we have to make some markers. Others agreed that would be a good place to start. Lynda said it is helpful to keep an eye on Wolcott since flooding starts there. It was agreed to come back to this at the next meeting.

14. Discuss and Possibly Set FY2025 Non-Union Employee COLA Rate

Erik said the new board that will be in place after April doesn't have to do what this board votes to do, but the board could set the anticipated next cost of living pay increase based on the November 2023 12-month Northeast CPI-U, which is 2.5%.

BJ said he thinks we should make up for giving employees less than we originally said we would in the last pay increase. Instead of 2.5% he suggests 3.5%. Lynda said that doesn't make sense to her. She thinks we should just use 2.5%. GiGi said she thinks it is unappreciative of staff to give a 2.5% increase. Lynda said a lot of people in our community get no raise. Steve said he would like to see

more information on what 2.5% or 3.5% means for each employee and for the whole village. Lynda said we also need to consider health insurance costs.

GiGi asked how many non-union employees we have. BJ said Marla and part of Susan's, Lydia's and Rosemary's time.

Lynda asked if we would change the percentage employees pay for health insurance if there are high health insurance increases. BJ said Tom Galinat and Beth Foy had an idea he liked where we would put money towards healthcare costs and then get it back if employees do not use it. He is interested in seeing where Beth goes with that.

15. Other Business

BJ said VLCT has some helpful educational information on Open Meeting Law.

16. Adjourn

Lynda moved to adjourn at 7:46, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths