

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2024

Present:

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

Others: Erik Bailey, Dan Copp, Alec Jones, Meghan Rodier, Alberto Della Torre

Absent: Lynda Hill

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Ken called the meeting to order at 5:57.

2. Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings

Steve moved to approve the minutes of February 28, 2024 as printed, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.

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

GiGi asked to discuss several topics.

4. Trustee Issues and Concerns

GiGi said she got an email pointing out that some minutes were not posted within 5 days of the meeting as required by statute. She asked if Donna is too overwhelmed with meetings. Donna said in general, no, but this is a busy time of year. There can be various reasons for minutes to be posted late. She suggested GiGi could tell the person who sent the email that we try to post minutes within 5 days and will try to do better.

GiGi said she got a question on the clerk and treasurer job descriptions. Ken said they are the same as the state requirements for clerk and treasurer. GiGi said the village pays taxes to the town and the village was charged interest for having overdue taxes. She would think we would have a calendar to keep that from happening. We need to understand what needs to be done daily, weekly and monthly. Ken said we just had a flood. We do not have the funds we normally have to pay bills. As far as he is concerned it is a funding issue. BJ noted that it seems unexpected that the same person is both collecting and paying and did not pay on time. Ken said he doesn't agree with being charged interest, but if it is waived for us the town would have to waive it for everyone.

GiGi said at town meeting no instructions were given on how to fill out the paper ballots correctly. She doesn't want that to happen at the village annual meeting. Ken said he will pay attention and make sure instructions are given if there is a paper ballot vote.

5. Village Manager's Report and Action Items

Erik read his report:

More & more Money heading our way!!

Financial recovery of the Village from the flood has been keeping me up at night for quite a while. I'm finally seeing enough good news to be content.

While not yet official, it is just a matter of time that the FEMA reimbursement percentage will be 90% Federal, and between 7.8 and 8% State, leaving us 2 to 2.2% of costs!

Even more exciting news in in the State Budget Adjustment Act (BAA). The countless hours giving legislative tours seems to be paying off! Johnson Village is one of 4 municipalities getting over \$800,000 in Local Economic Impact Grants. Ours totals \$825K. This money has no conditions attached to it other than it would be a poor choice to use it for FEMA reimbursable expenses, as that use would reduce FEMA awards. Many other locations will get smaller grants, including Johnson Town that is in line for \$20K.

We are also one of 4 communities getting a 70% advance of our estimated total ERAF payments. ERAF is the state portion of the FEMA reimbursement. The remaining 30% (or whatever is left) will be paid on final closeout. Our advance looks to be around \$1.54M. Being state vs. federal dollars, there are no investment restrictions, so we are allowed to make interest on this money.

The above two programs mean about a 2.36-million-dollar cash infusion that should make our journey through recovery fairly comfortable. Both of these programs should be sending checks by the end of April. Rosemary and I will strategize how best to manage this money and bring our findings back to you next month.

The Municipal Climate Recovery Fund 0% loan to refinance our 1-year note is being voted on by the Bond Bank tomorrow, and a loan agreement is expected to be issued late this week for a closing on the 26th. *[Board members signed the loan agreement during the meeting.]*

I became aware of a BGS MERP Community Capacity Mini-grant being available for a maximum of \$4000. This is a non-competitive grant, so if you apply, it's a sure thing. I sent the info to Tori at LCPC and inquired if we could use it to help finance the Phase 1 Environmental Assessment for the W&L garage. She researched it and found out that was indeed an eligible expense because it assists a MERP project! We are applying and she will manage the grant.

Last, but certainly not least!

On Friday, the Federal FY24 Minibus Appropriations Bill passed. This included the \$824,000.00 CDS Grant to upgrade the Water & Light Garage! It is now real money. I've notified USDA RD and LCPC, and we will be getting our plan together to move forward on this project.

And an add to the water & light report; the large skidsteer came back from Champlain Valley Equipment on Friday with a brand new motor with upgraded cam bearings.

Ken asked if they have decided whether the skidsteer work is covered under warranty. Erik said they haven't officially said yet. Ken said we need to push for that.

Ken thanked Erik for all the efforts he put in during the flood. He is proud we hired him and that he will continue to help the village get strong again.

6. Fire Department Report and Action Items

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

Johnson Fire Department Report

Jan. 25 – Feb. 29, 2024

JFD responded to 7 calls. 5 calls occurred during the daytime (6 am - 6 pm) and 2 calls occurred during the nighttime (6 pm - 6 am.) The average duration was: 90 minutes

Nature:

Those calls were: 1 – carbon monoxide alarm, 3 – automatic alarms, 1 – vehicle crash, 1 – wilderness rescue), 1 – other (station work detail flood related)

Staff:

The average number of firefighters that responded was: 12
Total hours of service was: 71

Other:

In conjunction with our UTV committee, we have determined the requirements for a suitable trailer, and related lettering/emergency lighting. Current pricing and availability has been collected. There is an anticipated 4-6 week lead time, and we are pursuing completion of this project.

GiGi said she watched firefighters carrying boats down Railroad Street during the flood, but someone who works in a business downtown said they don't understand why during the flood the fire department had everything parked on the hill and weren't doing anything. Were some vehicles parked on the hill? Ken said some vehicles were staged on top of Gould Hill, away from the river.

Ken said Arjay reports that the fire department has used the new repeater on a couple of calls and it greatly increased their capability.

7. Water/Wastewater Report and Action Items

Dan read his report.

Operational Status of Wastewater Plant and Callouts

- E-DMR and Wr-43 were submitted to the State
- We hauled 40,000 gallons of sludge to Morrisville for processing.
- Submitted State Tier 2 Community Right To Know Hazardous Chemical report for the Wastewater and water treatment facilities
- Gave an in depth tour to the VCLT's insurance adjuster for damages sustained to the Wastewater plant, River Road PS and the Syphon from the flood.
- Gould's started on the lighting upgrade at the plant. The grant money was reserved and our temporary lighting was poor to say the least. Replaced flourescents with LED and motion sensor switches throughout the facility.

- Performed our permit required Annual constituents monitoring testing for our effluent.
- Met with Don Martin to get quotes on mitigation of Highland Heights and the Syphon.
- Replaced the antenna on the high river float as we are getting constant communication failure alarms
- Had an alarm at the syphon. The main channel was partially plugged and was flowing to the bypass channel. Had Manosh come down and jet both channels, and we reset the alarm floats.
- Alliance finally got the Modine heaters in stock and started to install them. This is the last piece to the heating and hot water system to be replaced. Pratt Electric rewired the thermostats

Operational status of Water Plant and Callouts

- Monthly reports were submitted to the state.
- Coliform samples were negative
- Replaced a leaking ball valve on the chlorine analyzer
- The service connection that had a leak on upper main street was fixed by the homeowner. Since that repair and the one on Gould Hill our water use is down significantly.
- Water loss was 41%

Ken asked when the plant started back up after the flood. Dan said August 9.

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

Erik read the water and light report submitted by Nate Brigham:

Electric Dept.

Installed new service to 66 Lower Main West Barn apts.

Fixed street lights on Mack Mudgett Dr. and School St.

Completed pole attachment inventory

Working on street light inventory

Had the Line trucks and equipment tested

TSI performed oil sampling on the substation transformers

Moved equipment and materials in Lower Storage now that the construction is Complete

Working on the Regulator for JHR solar it appears to be the control panel is burnt up

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

Water/Sewer

Found a water leak at 240 Lower Main East, on customer side. Worked with the Contractor to get it fixed

Syphon chamber was party plugged worked with H2O and Monash jet the line

Delivered water meter set up to the plumbers at 66 Lower Main West Barn Apts

71 Mack Mudgett Dr. had the sewer plugged up , was on the customers side

General Dept.

The S595 Bobcat is still down due to a problem with the motor, working to get Bobcat to fix it under warranty

Helped the Town Clerks office by bringing ballots, tabulator, and ballot boxes to the School for Town Meeting

Hung the Banners that VSC made

Did maintenance on S450 Bobcat

Plowing/sanding of sidewalks

Safety

Safety meeting with NEPPA in Feb. was on Chain saw/Chipper safety

Paul finished his 1st aid training

Erik noted that the S595 Bobcat is no longer down.

9. Sidewalk Scoping Study Project Kick-Off

Alec Jones of the Lamoille County Planning Commission said the village was awarded a bicycle and pedestrian grant from VTrans. It sounds like the village might be interested in hiring LCPC for management of the project. He is hoping the board can decide which process to use. The village can use a traditional RFP process to go out to bid. VTrans also allows an At-the-Ready process under which a selection committee would review at least 3 RFQs from a list of consultants provided by VTrans. The committee would select one and the village would negotiate a contract.

Erik suggested a selection committee of himself, Ken, Alec. **Steve moved that Erik, Ken and Alec Jones be on the committee to review RFQs from consultants for the sidewalk scoping study. The motion was seconded and passed.**

Alec said VTrans needs to approve him to be project manager. He doesn't anticipate that being a problem. Once VTrans gives that approval he will draw up a contract between LCPC and the village. LCPC's contracts are usually around 5% of the grant amount. Then we can start looking at contractors. He can distribute the VTrans list of contractors to Erik.

GiGi asked if we are hoping this can happen in spring and summer. Alec said it took Cambridge about 3 weeks between selecting a consultant and drawing up a contract. This is only scoping so it will be a relatively quick process.

Ken moved to authorize Erik to sign the project commitment form for the sidewalk scoping study, GiGi seconded and the motion was passed.

Ken asked how likely Alec thinks it is that VTrans will let us extend the sidewalk to Jolley. Alec said part of this process is that the consultant the village chooses has to follow VTrans rules. They will only propose ideas that fit within those rules.

GiGi said it is dangerous for people to walk on the road. When snow is on the road they can't even stay near the guardrail. Ken said he thinks we would also ask the selectboard to request that the state make the speed limit 25 mph until the Laraway School. Alec said he thinks we would tell the consultant we want things like that included in the design. Erik pointed out that the scoping study opens us up to be eligible for grants for construction.

10. 2024 Village Downtown Designation Renewal and Possible Expansion

Meghan Rodier from LCPC said the village needs to apply to renew the designated village center boundary. This is also an opportunity to propose new extensions. She showed a map with some proposed extensions. The village would have to do a site visit with Richard Amore of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. Meghan could help coordinate that. We have to make a case for these extensions. Local businesses, nonprofits and income-producing properties are eligible for tax credits if they are in a designated village center. She met with the town Planning Commission and spoke to Erik about possible extensions and now she wants to run it by the trustees. Railroad Street is one possible addition. The last time she helped the village renew we got an extension that includes the Jenna's Promise area. That was added in 2019. A village center needs to have a civic or commercial anchor and has to be walkable.

GiGi said she thinks it is important for the designated village center to extend to the food shelf. Erik said he suggested expanding it to include the new apartments planned on River Road East and West. Ken suggested having the designated area go further down 100C than on the map Meghan showed.

GiGi said she was going to apply for a grant Pat Ripley was offering last spring and she had an awful experience because she had to get permission from the selectboard. To get grants, who would people in the village center go to? Ken said he thinks the selectboard would still have purview. Being in the village center would just open people up to more grants. Meghan said the available tax credits go directly to the business owner. There are grant opportunities that being in a village center gives you priority for. Who people have to go to for the grants depends on the grant.

Meghan said the Planning Commission suggested including the part of the college. She doesn't know if the state will go for it. GiGi suggested including Old Mill Park. Ken suggested expanding as far as the house on 100C that used to be a restaurant, near the intersection with Sinclair Road. Steve said he thinks either the whole college campus or none of it should be included.

Meghan said she can make modifications to the proposed area as discussed tonight. The next step is a site visit. She can reach out to Richard Amore. Board members are welcome to come to the site visit. The idea is to have the site visit in April. Then in May she would come back with a full application for the trustee board to approve. If the application is submitted by the end of May, it will be reviewed in June and renewed before the July 1 deadline.

Ken asked if it would help us to have the Jolley area included. Erik said he thought it might help. Meghan said part of the application is a list of revitalization projects. We can include that the village wants to extend sidewalk to Jolley.

11. Possible Approval of Draft General Dept. 2024 Budget and Suggested Tax Rate Increase

Erik said the proposed general department budget is a 2.87% increase. Ken said a 3% increase would be approximately \$40 dollars per household. This will be a little less.

Erik reviewed the proposed budget. Office salaries are down a little because some of the amount was moved from general to other departments. Last year we budgeted \$5K for legal expense and used \$1600. For 2024 he kept it at \$5K. The amount budgeted for the Beautification Committee is now \$500.

GiGi asked why we are funding the Beautification Committee when they didn't use what was budgeted last year. Ken said we just moved it from last year. Prior boards agreed to give them \$500 because a lot of what they do is in the village. Erik said we have to approve what they do with the money. GiGi said she would like the Beautification Committee to do more at the municipal building. Ken suggested that Erik contact the Beautification Committee and see if they have any plans for projects at the municipal building and suggest that might be good place for them to spend the \$500.

Ken said last year the Tree Board came and asked the village for funding. The selectboard took away from some committees and they were short some funding. Ken felt it made sense because the trees they care for are mostly in the village.

GiGi asked what we are doing with the \$3K budgeted for parades and celebrations. Erik said the amount in that line was increased for the celebration planned for Rosemary this summer. Ken said he suggested the increase. That line also includes funding for the Jubilee.

Erik said he budgeted more for building maintenance. We will need to replace the boiler. Ken said the clock tower needs work.

GiGi said mortar is falling out around the flagpole. Is that in the fire station's budget or ours? Ken said that is the fire department's responsibility.

Erik said we didn't use all of what was budgeted for heat last year so he reduced the amount. Sidewalk maintenance is down a little.

BJ asked about why mowing was over budget last year. Erik said he is still waiting for an explanation on that. He increased the 2024 amount to match what we spent in 2023.

Erik said he budgeted less for snow removal because we already know we have spent less than usual since January.

Ken suggested it would be a good idea to use money from the sidewalk reserve fund to pay for the crew to work on sidewalks. He thinks the board would be happy to have them fix a few small places like last year. GiGi mentioned a spot outside JP's Promising Goods where there is a height difference between asphalt and sidewalk.

Steve moved to approve a 2024 general fund budget of \$442,514, GiGi seconded and the motion was passed.

12. Other Business

GiGi asked when work on the village garage starts. Erik said the first thing we need to do is the environmental assessment. The \$4K mini-grant will pay for that. Ken said he thinks we had originally designated ARPA funds for that study.

Ken said he talked to Eben Patch about what repairs should be done to the municipal building this year. He and BJ are still looking at Erik's contract. He will check with Rosemary and Erik about the article for a merger plan on the annual meeting warning. Since the similar article on the town meeting warning failed he thinks there could be a floor vote to remove it.

13. Adjourn

Steve moved to adjourn at 7:29 and the motion was seconded and passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths