

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2025

Present:

Trustees: Steve Hatfield, Will Jennison, BJ Putvain, Ken Tourangeau, Darrell Wescom

Others: Erik Bailey, Rosemary Audibert, Arjay West, Dan Copp, Adrienne Parker, Michael Stanley, Lynda Hill, Diane Lehouiller

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call to Order*

Ken called the meeting to order at 6:01.

2. *The Pledge of Allegiance*

The Pledge was recited.

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

Erik asked the board to sign the SCRIP Tier 1 loan agreement package from VBB.

4. *Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings*

Will moved to approve the minutes of January 13, 2025, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.

5. *Public Comment*

No members of the public wished to comment.

6. *Sculptor Presentation for Main Street Pedestals*

Adrienne Parker handed out sketches of sculptures the Beautification Committee would like to put on the Main Street pedestals. They want to seek a Vermont Arts Council Arts Project Grant for the project. If they do not get that, they will seek other grants. Michael Stanley, the sculptor, said the theme of the sculptures is growth. They would be painted. He would loan them for 2 years for \$5K. He uses outdoor rated paint. He would be in charge of doing any touch-ups if needed but he doesn't think there would be a problem in 2 years.

Adrienne asked about the possibility of taking down the sculpture that is on one of the pedestals now. Ken said there are other pedestals so maybe we should leave that one there.

Will asked if the village needs to co-sign the grant application. Michael said he thinks a letter of support would be helpful.

Darrell asked, if the village wants to leave the sculptures up after 2 years, would there be a fee?

Michael said if the village wanted to keep them up maybe there could be another 2 year loan for \$5K more.

Michael said he thinks the town needs to think about insurance. In cities he has worked with before, the sculptures fell under insurance they had. He is thinking about the possibility of someone vandalizing a statue or hitting it with a car. Darrell asked, if a statue were hit, would we owe him? Michael said he thinks the value of the piece would have to be covered. He is not sure how insurance works in Johnson. Erik said almost all Vermont municipalities have the same insurer. Ken said with the other sculpture we asked for the village to be released of liability. He is not sure if we should accept liability for new sculptures. Michael said he would be happy to sign a waiver of liability.

Will moved and Darrell seconded to accept the four sculptures presented by Michael Stanley to go onto 4 pedestals in the village for 2 years, to send a letter of support for the Vermont Arts Council Arts Project Grant application and to approve the Beautification Committee applying for the grant, with the understanding that Michael Stanley will sign a liability waiver for the sculptures while they are up.

Darrell asked if Michael will be look for the village to set the sculptures on the pedestals. Michael said they are very light. He thinks he can do it himself.

The motion was passed.

The board and Michael agreed that the 2 year loan period will be from the date of installation.

7. ***Beautification Committee Request for Plant Hangers on Light Poles***

Adrienne said the Beautification Committee wants to ask about the possibility of hanging planters on street light posts. Before getting permission to hang them they wanted to have an idea of how they could water them. They bought a battery operated water sprayer that they can also use in other parts of the village. Rosemary suggested that they get approval for buying it but they had already had her buy it, so Adrienne is asking for approval now. Rosemary said it was paid for out of the town beautification fund but the committee wanted to take it out of village funds.

Adrienne said the sprayer has a big tank and wheels and committee members can roll it around to spray plants. She has talked to a couple of business owners and they have said they really want hanging baskets and are willing to donate money for them.

Ken said most of the posts have outriggers already so there will be no added expense except water.

Darrell asked why the committee wants to move the expenditure from the town beautification fund to the village. Adrienne said they feel they would use the sprayer more in the village than in the town.

Ken said we budget \$500 yearly for beautification. Adrienne said the sprayer cost around \$250.

Will moved to authorize spending up to \$250 for a water sprayer for the Beautification Committee, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.

Adrienne said the committee doesn't know yet how many baskets they will want to hang. Ken asked her to check with Erik so he can approve how much weight will be hung on the posts.

Adrienne said businesses will pay for the whole project.

Will moved to allow the Beautification Committee to hang flowers on lamp posts in the village after checking with Erik as to size and number of baskets per pole, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.

Adrienne asked if there is an amount of village funds the committee needs approval to spend. Ken said the committee needs permission from the board for any spending. Adrienne said the town doesn't require the committee to get approval to spend within the committee budget, but that is not the case with the village? Ken said that is right. Adrienne asked, even a small purchase like spending \$10 or \$20 on flowers requires approval? Will said his thought is that Adrienne should give Erik a call and he

can say yes or no. If the committee disagrees with his decision they can come to the board. Adrienne asked, if she wants to buy \$20 worth of flowers she has to ask Erik? Board members said yes. Erik suggested she should email him for permission.

Will moved that the Beautification Committee be required to get authorization from Erik to spend any of the remaining \$250 budgeted for beautification in 2025 and the motion was seconded and passed.

8. *Treasurer's Report: Bills & Warrants, Budget Status Report, Action Items*

Rosemary passed out a budget status report for the end of last year. She said she thinks the only thing missing is depreciation for water and sewer. The town will go to tax sale sometime after May and the village will probably piggyback with them. There are new rules for tax sales. We have to wait at least a year since the last bill was due before we can sell a property.

9. *Village Manager's Report and Any Action Items*

Erik read his report:

The Electric rate case that we started last spring Finally became official late last week for 10.895%, the full amount applied for. While this is good news, the fact that they sat on it long enough to miss the billing for January usage is disappointing. We are reading meters a week early, starting tomorrow, to help defray the effect of their delay.

The winter edition of the *Village News* went out with the electric billing cycle last week, it is included in this meeting packet.

The W&L garage project is churning forward. We have weekly meetings on it, and it remains on schedule. We reviewed their design package and provided comments which affected changes in the plan. Most notably, they had 3-phase power coming into the facility, and heat pumps for that voltage. The nearest 3-phase is at the bridge and would cost \$100K to bring in, so they changed to 240v vs 208v heaters. We are currently on schedule to go out to bid for construction on February 20th.

Budget work dominates my time currently. The water & wastewater budgets are prepared for your review tonight, and the General & Electric budgets are next.

As mentioned in a previous meeting, the Water Treatment Facility standby generator is an old, out of production, no longer supported model, that has major repair and maintenance issues. Simple parts that should cost \$100 cost over \$3000 due to it being unsupported. This generator has around \$3500 of immediate needs work, and another \$6000 of really should get done soon work just to get it working OK. Late last year, I applied for a Small System Capacity and Resiliency Program (SCRIP) Tier 2 grant for the entire amount to replace that old diesel generator with a new propane fired model. We were contacted last week to say that we were a winner of this competitive grant program! This is incredible news. Discussing it with Dan Copp, he believes he can limp the current generator along without any of the repairs long enough to source and install the new model. I expect an early fall project finish. As always with grants, this will require multiple bureaucratic hoops to be jumped through to make this happen. I'm sure I'll be bringing you many financial agreements to sign in the near future.

Ken and I have been requested to attend the February 18th selectboard meeting to update them on the WWTF relocation progress and hopefully secure their sign-off on selling us their ½ of this building at assessed value should the grant financing allow us to move the WWTF.

The HVAC estimate for the municipal building is attached. It is \$51,383.22. The town is looking for the village commitment to half of the bill. The cost of this has been accounted for in the draft budgets.

Will moved to pay up to \$25,691.61 to replace the broken air conditioning in the municipal building, Darrell seconded and the motion was passed.

There was discussion about the grant for replacing the diesel generator.

Darrell asked what kind of heat the new garage will have. Erik said the office and break room spaces will have mini splits. Ken said there will be infrared hanging lamps and electric baseboard heat in the garage.

10. *Water/Wastewater Report and Any 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 48,000 gallons of sludge to Morrisville for processing for the month of January
- Performed annual service on the SBR and sludge blowers. Ordered more blower oil.
- Took some pictures around the plant and emailed them to BJ for the new website
- Fixed a broken water line connector in the SBR
- Ordered a new alum pump and fittings. The second pump failed due to flood damage.
- Many days of snow removal and clean up at the plant and pump stations.
- We have a bad float at E Johnson pump station. We ordered a new one and as soon as the weather permits, we will install it.
- Met with Eric to go over budgets for Water and Wastewater

Operational status of Water Plant and Callouts

- Monthly reports were submitted to the state.
- Coliform samples were negative
- Rotated the pumps at Katy Win pump house #2
- Replaced a faulty hour meter at the Clay Hill Booster Station.
- Someone sprayed graffiti on the Clay Hill Booster Station. We were able to get it to come off the front metal door but not off the wooden siding. As soon as temps are above freezing we will put a coat of paint over it and then repaint it in the spring.
- Water loss is 16%. That includes the unmetered loss at the ice rink.

11. *Electric/General Report and Any Action Items*

Erik read the report submitted by Nate Brigham:

Electric Dept. –

Shipping containers arrived crews are prepping to start the move

Metal dumpster arrived for scrap metal

11 School St installed new 400 amp service for VSC

Billed out for new service at 11 School St.

Billed out for ½ of the tree removal at 114 School St.

Little bucket is ready to sell

Met with engineers on new garage

Matt started his Apprenticeship at NEPPA

Completed Inventory

Working on reports for the State

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

Water/Sewer -

Turned off/on water at 236 Katywin Rd

Frozen water at 144 LMW.

Frozen water at 198 Katywin Rd.

Frozen water 147 Park St., left off in pump house

Frozen water at 42 Upper French Hill Rd., left off

Frozen water at 11 LMW no damage

Completed Inventory

General Dept. –

Picked up snow, pushed back banks

Relaced U joint on 2500 pick up

Raised and changed out flags

Sand/Salt and plowing of Sidewalks

Safety –

NEPPA safety meeting was on Feb 5th – confined space

12. Fire Department Report and Any Action Items

Erik read the report submitted by Fire Chief Arjay West:

Johnson Fire Department Report

Dec. 27, 2024 – Jan. 30, 2025

JFD responded to 11 calls. 8 calls occurred during the daytime (6 am - 6 pm) and 3 calls occurred during the nighttime (6 pm - 6 am.) The average duration was: 64 minutes

Nature:

Those calls were: 1 – vehicle crash, 3 – medical assists, 3 – automatic alarm, 1 –CO alarm, 2 – odor investigation, and 1 – other (possible Haz-Mat/Fire Hazard)

Staff:

The average number of firefighters that responded was: 10

Total hours of service was: 99

Other:

Budget planning for 2025 is completed. In cooperation with the Village Manager, 2024 service contracts with the Town of Johnson, Town of Waterville, and Town of Belvidere have been prepared and sent.

Through volunteer work details, members have constructed and installed a new drying rack for hoses and specialty ropes, improving safety within our apparatus bays.

Steve asked if Erik has contact information for the person from the college who was going to come and give us reports. We haven't gotten any reports. Erik said the only thing he has heard is that they were asking the town and village what they needed to do to put up new and improved welcome signs for the college.

Ken said they stopped giving their \$6K contribution two or three years ago. There are a lot of calls every month at the college. In the past we billed them for any non-emergency calls like car alarms. He would like to start billing them again for those calls.

Lynda Hill asked what we get calls from the college for. Ken and Will said typically car alarms or security alarms. Lynda asked why their campus security doesn't respond. Will said when there is an alarm it is set up so the Johnson Fire Department gets toned out. When that happens, an officer calls their security to see if it requires a response. There is not a great amount of time involved. They were there today for a building alarm that needed a response.

Diane Lehouiller asked how much money we are talking about. Ken said we lost the \$6K they used to give us for fire service.

Will suggested reaching out to let them know we are thinking of billing for calls and trying to find out if they would pay a bill if we sent it to them. Erik suggested deciding what kinds of calls we would want to bill and looking at the last 2 years of call history to see if it is even worth pursuing.

Ken said if we are doing calculations we have to start by considering that we are \$6K in the hole. Erik said that is one way of looking at it, but the college would say that this is the only town that had that contribution for fire service. Lynda asked how long it has been since they paid the \$6K. Erik said they last paid at the end of 2022.

13. LCPC Board of Directors Update

Lynda said LCPC approved the municipal plans for Cambridge and Johnson last week. They are panicking about their loss of grant money. There is a lot of money they are now not sure they will get, including the Northern Vermont Economic Development grant and Brownfields grant. On April 10 they will be having a joint meeting at the tech center with trustees and selectboards from multiple municipalities. Ken asked if there will be a remote option. Lynda said yes. She said all their FEMA grants are up in the air. They talked about a video made by Richard Pearson of Hyde Park about the Green River Reservoir and suggested watching it.

Lynda asked if the village has heard anything about FEMA funding. Eric said the President rescinded the order that stopped grants. Right now everything is going forward. Lynda asked what would happen if FEMA buyouts were put on hold. What would happen to the houses and to taxes? Ken said the owners are responsible for taxes until the properties are bought. Will said they can't get the grant until their taxes are current. If a property is damaged it will be reassessed at a lower value. Lynda asked about the health effects of houses sitting full of mold. What if they sit there for 5 years? BJ said we can get them condemned. Ken said they don't get the buyout until the building is demolished. Will said a property owner whose house is beyond repair can stop paying taxes and the property will go for tax sale. Lynda asked if the new owner can then go for a FEMA buyout. Will said no, they can't.

14. Website/Email Update

BJ said directions have been sent out about how to redo passwords. There are 3 employees who do work for both the town and village and it was thought more efficient to keep town email addresses for them while also giving them generic village email addresses. Tax@villageofjohnson.com will go to Lydia, clerk@villageofjohnson.com will go to Rosemary and customerservice@villageofjohnson.com will go to Marla. All will be active as of 8:00 Thursday morning. The information part of the website is almost done. He hopes to start on the design in March. After that they can start working on forms, etc. He will come to the board and get suggestions. He hopes the new site can be active in May.

15. Presentation and Possible Adoption of 2025 Water and Wastewater Budgets

Erik reviewed some 2025 budget highlights. Total employee compensation is down \$83,023.03 from 2024 due to a staff cut and a change from a first class lineman to an early apprentice. Health insurance contributions are down \$9735.26 due to staff and contract changes. Dental is down \$942.62 for the same reasons.

Worker's comp is 72% higher than it should be due to the "experience mod" because of repetitive injuries by a former employee. Those injuries rotate off the billing 3 years after the claim, so one should be gone by the next budget and the other in 2027. Those injuries are costing us over \$18K this year alone.

The 2023 flood left our utilities with fewer users to pay for increasing costs. While we are seeing growth in both commercial and residential areas, those projects are still developing and are not helping with rates yet.

With the proposed rate increases for water and wastewater, residential users will see \$10 to \$16 dollar per month increases. Incremental annual increases have to happen as costs go up. Increases of 2-4% should happen regularly or we will get behind the curve.

Erik reviewed the proposed water budget. He suggests a 19% water rate increase.

He proposes taking \$1500 from the capital reserve fund to finish the Katy Win pump house project. What has been done there so far has come in well under budget.

Distribution system labor was high last year because of many water breaks and the labor associated with meeting the new pavement level due to the Main Street paving. It should not be as high in 2025.

Outside testing costs will be up because there is testing that has to be done every 3 years and testing that has to be done every 9 years and both will be due.

The bottom line for the water budget is revenue of \$31.

He reviewed the wastewater budget. He proposes a 14% rate increase.

Ken suggested comparing our connection fees to other towns' fees.

Will questioned the amount Erik budgeted to go into capital reserve (\$62,500.) Is there a reason for that number? Erik said it is a percentage of the budget he thought was appropriate to try to build reserves.

Erik said if we put only \$20K into capital reserve we would need only a 5% wastewater rate increase. After some discussion the board agreed to that.

Will moved to approve a wastewater budget of \$793,359 with a wastewater rate increase not to exceed 5% and a water budget of \$303,106 with a water rate increase not to exceed 19%, Darrell seconded and the motion was passed with BJ opposed.

The rate increases will be effective in the April bills.

16. Members of the Public

Diane Lehouiller said she read the minutes from last month and she wants to ask the board not to send the \$1700 bill to the volunteer who was maintaining the ice rink. Ken said the bill went to the town. If they reject it the water and light commissioner was directed to pass it on to the volunteer. Diane asked if the village can please not do that if the town does not pay it. Volunteers are really important for this town. Ken agreed that volunteers are important to the town and village. This board was fully in support of the skating rink. But what happened could have been very serious if there had been a fire. Water pressure in the area was very minimal. The incident used half our reserve. And drinking water could have been contaminated. The volunteer was previously instructed not to use the hydrant. Diane said she thought he was trained to do it. Ken said he sent minutes to the selectboard chair and vice chair showing that he was told not to use the hydrant, although he had previously been given

permission to do it by a former board. Diane said he must have thought he had permission to use the hydrant. As a volunteer he should not be billed. Will suggested going to the town and asking them to pay the bill. Ken said we can see where this goes, but he doesn't foresee the board taking any different action.

17. Other Business

BJ said he would like to list all past village trustees as well as all active ones on the trustee page on the website. Board members agreed that is a good idea.

18. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:32.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths