

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD/VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2020

All participation via Zoom teleconferencing except as noted.

Present:

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Nat Kinney, Doug Molde, Kyle Nuse, Eric Osgood (in person)

Village Trustees: Scott Meyer, Gordon Smith (in person), Bob Sweetser (by phone), Phil Wilson

Others: Brian Story (in person), Meredith Birkett, Rosemary Audibert, Lisa Crews, 9 other community members

Meeting videotaped by Green Mountain Access Television. GMATV info: <https://greenmountainaccess.tv/>; PO Box 581, Hyde Park, 05655; info@greenmountainaccess.tv or 802-851-1592

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Eric called the selectboard to order at 5:04. Gordy called the village trustees to order at 5:05.

2. COVID-19 Response Update

Eric said there is now a COVID-19 case within Lamoille County. The core group met today and information was sent out to board members about items they are following up on.

Gordy said under the incident command system his jurisdiction is fire and EMS. Chief Arjay West has a protocol in place. Depending on the type of call they get, the officer will decide what vehicles and how many people go. NEMS has a protocol in place to try to limit exposure. They have PPE and are trying to stockpile more.

Eric said tomorrow at 5:00 he and Gordy will set up a townwide live broadcast using Zoom to go over all that has been done to date, what is being looked at and what is being followed up on, similar to what they did last Friday. They expect by late today everyone in town will know there is a positive case in the county. They want to get out ahead of it as far as messaging. A week ago their main goal was to get action items set up. They have done most of those and are still following up on some. They want to make sure employee and community mental health and morale are good. The longer this goes on, the more anxiety and concern there is likely to be in the community. They are trying to keep ahead of it, keep people informed and give them an opportunity to ask questions.

Gordy said he and Eric want to make sure people in the community know that all board members and staff are in the loop and all working together and making plans and will do the best they can for the citizens.

Eric said what we have seen in other communities is that they are not reporting out the town for COVID-19 cases, so he would expect we would not necessarily know if it is from Johnson or another town. We should assume it might be from Johnson. People in Johnson will be affected eventually.

Scott mentioned that the Health Department updates the county incident map every day at 1:00.

Gordy said as of now the trustees are hoping to have the annual village meeting the first week of June. They will make a decision as they get closer to the date. Both boards will have to work out how to sign orders. He and Eric will be working on that. Three board members need to sign invoices so they can be paid.

Eric said when the selectboard has its regular meeting it will be only to deal with must-dos. He will ask the board to consider having some people attend using Zoom rather than coming in person. Maybe 3 people can come to the meeting and 2 could keep out. Teleconferencing is a good method if we have to have an emergency meeting. That way we don't have to expose each other. But for a regular meeting where we have to sign orders, it might make sense to have at least 3 people there. We would probably encourage members of the public who are able to tune in using Zoom or maintain a distance.

Scott said his protocol is to sign paperwork, then wash his hands and to wash his hands again before leaving the building. As long as we stay at least 6 feet apart and wash hands we should do fairly well.

Scott asked Brian and Meredith if they can keep the boards abreast of how supplies such as disinfectant or toilet paper are holding up. Brian said we are well stocked. We may run out at some point but we are currently in pretty good shape. Staff have a few bottles of 10 to 1 water and bleach solution and are spraying down door handles and common surfaces pretty regularly with that. The office is closed to the public. When there are visitors we are directing them to come in through the back door because the bathroom is right there and they only handle one door before they can wash their hands and proceed into the rest of the space. Staff are washing keyboards, work surfaces and common areas a couple of times a day.

Gordy asked Meredith if there is anything people should know about utilities. Meredith said she sent out some utility-related specifics to the trustees but this group doesn't need to get into those details. She has been in contact with the Department of Public Service. She thinks we are covering all the big items. Troy has created a rotating schedule where there is just one employee on site during a normal work day with discretion to bring in more employees if they are needed.

Eric said the town is also limiting the number of employees coming in. He asked how the recent power outage went. Did the village have to call in the full crew? Meredith said during the high winds on Friday there was an outage caused by a large pine tree coming down from outside our right of way. Four of 5 crew members came in. One was out of town. Employees tried their best to maintain social distancing. They took separate vehicles to the site and tried to keep their distance as best they could. They wiped down the trucks when they returned to the shop. On Saturday a tree fell on a line on Clark Street. Three crew members reported. The whole crew was not needed. She heard that went well. Out in the field it is challenging when dealing with power lines. Employees still have to follow best practices. To the extent they

can stay apart from each other they do. She thinks it is going well. In terms of outage response it shouldn't be different from normal. The staff of our after hours dispatch contractor are able to do their work remotely. Eric said he hopes we have done a good job of getting the word out that we are operating with reduced staffing levels. Hopefully people have the expectation that it may take a little longer to deal with an electric outage and roads may not be plowed as quickly. Gordy said the village still has 2 employees on call after work hours. After hours response shouldn't be different from before this. Meredith agreed. There are 2 people on call at one time and if there is a bigger outage or more people are needed, more can be called in, but 2 are required to be available. We always have the option to reach out to other utilities for assistance if needed. Gordy said Troy has good relationships with Stowe, Hyde Park and Morrisville.

Kyle asked how things are going with volunteers. Are people filling out forms and being distributed to appropriate organizations? Brian said we have been getting some forms. He is still working with Capstone, United Way and other groups to put people to work. The last time he spoke to Meals on Wheels they were in pretty good shape and not seeking more volunteers.

Nat said he reached out to Capstone and United Way. United Way is collecting volunteer info. Meals on Wheels has policies in place to protect volunteers and recipients. They have really done a great job with policies to make sure people are kept safe. He would be comfortable referring people to them. They don't need volunteers now but they expect they will soon. He feels good about sending people there. United Way and Capstone are still trying to work out policies and he would rather not send people to them yet.

Nat said Roger Marcoux says his staffing is okay. He has reserve officers that can't do patrol. They don't have a lot to do now, so he has some capacity to help if people know of older people who need a check-in.

Eric said we have seen evidence that people are checking on their neighbors. We should encourage people to call up neighbors who are elderly or have health risks to see how they are doing and if they need someone to pick up supplies for them. Brian said anyone doing that should read and follow the guidelines on our website and the Department of Health website for community volunteers.

Scott said a few days ago he was making phone calls to the state and Eric was calling his contacts in Vermont Emergency Management, pushing hard to get a fact sheet on safety for volunteers and those they are trying to help. They Health Department got it out and it is on our web page. Every time there is a post on Front Porch Forum where people are offering to volunteer, we should remind them that document is on our town webpage and they should follow it. He would prefer to see volunteers go through a good organization than do it on their own.

Kyle asked if we have an update on how our food shelf is doing as far as supply and managing people. Scott said we did work out a written policy with the food shelf. They have

a nice policy in place. Today he was at Sterling Market and he saw that the food shelf donation box was full.

Kyle said she is wondering what both village and town are thinking about in terms of collecting property taxes – how we will stay afloat but also support people in the community who are not having income coming in. Eric said the selectboard will have to take that up at the next meeting. The last tax payment is due May 10. If payments are late there is a late fee plus interest. We need to find out if we have the authority to waive late fees. Gordy said he will ask Meredith to put this on the agenda for the trustees and research the same question. Brian said we should investigate it, but he doesn't think we can defer beyond June 30. Eric asked if Rosemary would agree. She said yes. She said some people haven't paid anything at all for the whole year. Brian said it is not unusual for some to wait until the fourth payment is due.

Eric said our revolving loan fund may be helpful for businesses. Brian said that is a good use of our loan fund. Small businesses that need money to keep going are strongly encouraged to apply. We can also look at payments on outstanding loans.

Eric said it will be helpful for Kyle to get the message out to Johnson Works when we get answers about help for businesses. Kyle agreed. She has been watching closely what the state is offering. So far there are loan opportunities and not much else.

Doug said he thinks the town needs to look at whether we actually roll out the new appraisal. He thinks that is a tremendous amount of work and we should figure out the pluses and minuses. Eric said when we roll out the reappraisal there will be an opportunity for everyone to appeal their taxes. Appeals mean a room full of people and site visits. That goes against social distancing. If there is a way we can roll it back for a year there might be a benefit, but there might be ramifications. We have to get answers.

Doug said he thinks it is short-sighted to focus on needing to sign orders in person. In the legal area they are working on remote notaries, how to sign wills remotely, etc. Eric said he believes board members could come in individually to sign orders. Rosemary said the board can vote to authorize one selectboard member to sign them. Phil said digital signatures are legal signatures. He signs everything digitally at work. Adobe offers digital signature options. They are legal in the US. Nat said until we figure that out we might want to vote for one board member to sign as Rosemary mentioned. Brian said we can check into what we have to use for accepting digital signatures on documents.

Eric asked if anyone wanted to add anything to the tracking sheet. Doug said he doesn't know if this is on it. There are people who are at risk who need someone to deliver groceries to their doorstep. He has a neighbor who has offered to do that for him. He thinks that will be a giant need – people who don't need prepared meals from Meals on Wheels, but need provisions. Scott said he thinks Meals on Wheels has that in their protocol. Nat agreed. They leave things on the front step and don't go inside the house.

Kyle asked, are we as a town able to make decisions in terms of mandating shelter in place or do we have to wait for the state to make the call? Scott said he would wait for the people with expertise to make that call. He would feel uncomfortable leaping ahead of what they are going to be recommending. He has full faith in the team operating out of the health operations center. Nat said it sounds like a statewide shelter in place order is hours away, based on what he heard from Phil Scott this afternoon. Eric said he thinks we could make an order like that if there was an imminent threat in our area, but without expertise he would never feel comfortable ordering something like that. Gordy agreed. We should let it come from the state.

Scott said we added to our list earlier today the question of how shelter in place would impact our town. It depends what the limitations are and who are considered essential employees. We need to be as patient as we can to see what the order looks like. He has a relative in the bay area under shelter in place who is free to go and get groceries. He thinks people there are able to walk out for fresh air. We are in a good spot in Johnson. In a rural community we don't necessarily have to hide in our houses. We can walk in the forest and probably not bump into people. He thinks if there is a shelter in place order it could be a mental health hit for people who might be freaked out and wonder if they should go to a state that doesn't have that order. Eric said if a shelter in place order does come from the governor he hopes Zoom technology will help us so people won't feel like they are cut off. We can have meetings like this and keep people connected.

3. *Adjourn*

Gordy moved to adjourn the village trustee board meeting at 5:49, Scott seconded and the motion was passed.

Nat moved to adjourn the selectboard meeting at 5:49, Kyle seconded and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths