

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD/TRUSTEE BOARD JOINT MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2018

**Present:**

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Nat Kinney, Kyle Nuse, Eric Osgood

Village Trustees: Scott Meyer, Walter Pomroy, Gordon Smith, Bob Sweetser

Others: David Williams (moderator), Brian Story, Meredith Birkett, Rosemary Audibert, Dale Graver (VC3), Michael Psaros (DominionTech), Dave Boera (Tech Group), Sheriff Roger Marcoux, Mike Stengel (LCSD), Bill Morley (LCSD), Chris Watson (LCSD), Nathan Wolfe (LCSD), Peter Hughes (LCSD), Jason Harris (LCSD), Jim Rose, Peter Moynihan, one other community member

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

**1. *Call to Order***

Moderator David Williams called the meeting to order at 6:00.

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

No changes were suggested.

**3. *Review and Selection of IT Services Proposals***

Brian said the current IT administrator is retiring and we need to find a new IT service provider. We were interested in finding a more comprehensive solution – a managed service provider with a wider range of services. There is associated higher cost. He distributed the RFP that was sent out and his summary of each proposal. (*Nat arrived at 6:06.*) The representatives from each company were invited to describe what they offer.

Dale Graver said VC3 is a managed service provider. They are focused on proactive and preventive services rather than just being reactive and fixing disasters. One thing that sets them apart is that they exclusively work with municipalities. They have 200 small and medium towns and cities as clients. They have a lot of familiarity and experience with what municipalities do. They have been doing this for about 20 years. They are focused on small and medium solutions for small and medium municipalities. They have a lot of different technology solutions. They have 104 engineers in different categories so they can draw on multiple people and types of expertise. They also include a virtual IT director – a high level director to help with strategy, someone the client can go to with technical questions. They have VLCT as a client. They have 3 or 4 clients in Vermont. They are relatively new to Vermont. They have engineers based in Montpelier. They have two general categories of service – premise-based and cloud-based. Premise-based means they manage the technology we have now. It includes monitoring and alerting for all devices. They provide proactive as well as reactive services. They have a round-the-clock help desk with VC3 engineers. They charge a flat fee per month, no matter how many issues there are. That makes it easy to budget. With the cloud solution we get everything included in the premise-based option and in addition all the PC's, servers, storage, etc. are provided by VC3. They are VC3's assets. The municipality pays a flat fee instead of making capital purchases. All backups and disaster recovery are included in the fee. (*Kyle arrived at 6:12.*) All the software is also included. It is a shift from a capital intensive model to a service intensive model.

Walter said the village computer systems related to utilities are not very modern. What is their experience with systems like that?

Dale said a lot of municipalities have the same problems. Many use the same software for utilities, finance, etc. If Johnson wanted to go to automated meter reading they could suggest towns to talk to about what worked for them.

Walter said there are potential security issues with a system customers can log into to check their usage. Dale said there are measures that can be taken to address security.

Walter said his biggest issue in picking an IT person is how to keep people from hacking the electric department. Dale said there are lots of software and tools that can be helpful but internal staff training is as important as buying firewalls, etc. Some feel a cloud-based model is easier to secure. If all data is in an encrypted data center there are barriers to security issues. It is not true anymore that cloud-based systems are less secure.

Gordy said his concern is for the water, sewer, and electric utilities. He asked about VC3's experience with utilities. Dale said many towns have water, sewer, and electric utilities. Their IT infrastructure and SCADA systems are usually outside of the town's other IT systems. The SCADA vendors usually own them. VC3 can support those systems if we want them to.

Michael Psaros said DominionTech is located in Williston. They have a 13 person firm with 9 engineers. They work with some town departments such as fire or police departments. They are big on security. One thing they offer is someone who can sit down with the client once a year to develop a business plan and a 5-year budget. They can come up with a plan for replacing equipment that keeps the budget flat and keeps equipment updated. All IT companies provide monitoring. One thing they do differently is give the client their own network administrator – a senior level engineer who will come about once a quarter and spend a whole day here. They are very proactive. They have a help desk waiting for calls in Williston. The client doesn't need to submit a ticket. An engineer will come on site if needed. Remote and on-site support is all included in their platform for a flat rate. The only thing not included in the flat rate is large projects such as a new server or moving the system to the cloud. For those, they work with the client and their budget.

Scott asked how help requests are managed and tracked without tickets. Michael said they make the tickets so the client doesn't have to waste time on it. If the problem needs to be escalated they send an email so the client can track it. They support all technology – phone systems, printers, NEMRC software, etc. They will call support for NEMRC, phones, the internet service provider, etc. so the client doesn't have to.

Scott said he noticed there is a 2 hour callback time. Michael said that is for after hours emergencies. They give their engineers bonuses for quicker callbacks but they guarantee a callback within 2 hours. You can always get a live person when you call. They have an after hours answering service that pages an engineer. Scott asked what their regular hours are. Michael said 7:30 to 5:00.

Nat asked how many clients and municipalities they have. Michael said on this platform they have over 80 clients. They probably work with 6 or 7 different towns, mostly with individual departments such as the police or fire department. They do smaller projects for other towns. They are not the cheapest provider. A lot of towns just want to take the least expensive option.

Dave Boera said the Tech Group has been in business for about 26 years. They have about 26 towns and villages as clients. They have dealt with NEMRC and with towns the whole time they have been in business. They have good knowledge of utility departments. They service both small towns and big towns like Montpelier and South Burlington. They do managed services for about 7 towns. Probably at least a third of their staff have worked for the company for 20 years. They like to think of themselves as long term relationship builders. (*Jim Rose arrived at 6:29.*) They have a managed services approach – proactive vs. reactive. They have a tech vault built around layers and security. They understand the town environment.

Eric asked Brian, Meredith and Rosemary to name one issue they have with our current IT support that they would want a new IT services provider to do a better job with. Meredith said her top issue would be quick response, addressing issues in a timely fashion. Brian agreed.

Dave Boera said all these plans will help with that. His company provides a whole support team. They want to be an extension of our office. Michael Psaros agreed. Dale Graver said spending more time on proactive, preventive services using industry based standards prevents disruptions.

Walter asked what training and support for staff is provided. Is it part of the package? What if we add new software?

Dave Boera said Tech Group is available as many times as we want. If we need them to come in for a specific campaign they can. The biggest issue is user awareness and human nature. They would include any training like that.

Dale Graver said employees should only need to be trained when new technology is introduced or there is a new employee. He is assuming all three companies would provide training in those situations. VC3 does. They go through a one-time on-boarding process with new clients.

Michael Psaros said DominionTech does on-boarding. They come in and meet everyone and give each person their own number to call. They send out emails and information on how to get the best service. If something big is going to be launched it is planned ahead of time. They can provide training on something new if it is wanted. It is part of their platform to come in as many times as we want. Clients call them and ask how to use Excel and they help.

Scott said other proposals had a stepped response but he didn't see that on DominionTech's proposal. Michael said the client makes the call on how quickly the issue needs to be

addressed. DominionTech doesn't decide what level the issue is. The client gets the same engineer from start to finish no matter what you call about. (*Dale, Michael and Dave left at 6:39.*)

#### **4. *Merger Study Planning and Timeline***

Meredith said she and Brian had each put together some ideas, which had been included in the board packets. Their goal for tonight is to start a conversation about what an RFP would look like and about the timeline for getting it out. She and Brian had somewhat different concepts about the RFP. Meredith's is more general and Brian has some very specific questions. She is not sure she knows the right questions to ask to determine the benefits and drawbacks of a merger. Her idea was that we would tell consultants what we want and ask them to suggest to us how they would study that issue. We would ask for a review of current conditions and to identify benefits or negative impacts of a merger. We would ask them to talk about their experience and propose a methodology, timeline and cost. She was not as detailed in terms of what to ask them to analyze as Brian. Her idea is to ask the experts to tell us how they would answer the questions we want addressed. One important thing to discuss tonight is the cost. The village article specified a maximum expenditure of \$4K (or 50% of the cost if that is less.) She put into her draft RFP a statement that proposals with a cost exceeding \$8K will not be accepted. If the town is open to spending more than \$4K maybe we should remove that. She also included that proposals with costs below \$8K would be scored higher.

Brian said his thought process was pretty similar to Meredith's. He thought about 3 areas to be assessed – current conditions, what it would look like if we merged and what would be different if we didn't merge. He got into more detail on what each phase would entail. He tried to break down all the different things we have to look at – departments, services, employees, inventories, land, buildings, finances, and administrative options.

Eric said it sounds like the two drafts used a similar thought process and just need wordsmithing.

Brian said he and Meredith have not had a lot of time to work on it together. Meredith said her idea was not to give such a detailed list of questions for them to answer that they answer only those and not things that based on their experience would be more helpful.

Walter said he somewhat favors Meredith's more general approach. Maybe we could ask for an efficiency study that would look at ideas up to and including a merger. Maybe we would not merge but would get good ideas to make both town and village better. He would prefer not to say the end goal is to merge or not merge but to identify how to make the two entities more efficient, up to and including a merger. The report might say a merger doesn't make sense but something else does. He feels we will probably get something out of this – maybe not a full merger but something to make us better

Nat said that makes sense but he doesn't know that that is the mandate we got from the voters. The way the article was put together it called for us to study this particular issue, not do an efficiency study.

Gordy said he doesn't want to see conflicts of interest. He doesn't want to have LCPC involved because people who work there were pushing for this study. He thinks all information going to the consultant should go through Meredith and Brian. He is not just interested in dollars; he is more interested in quality of service. He thinks we should concentrate on quality of service.

David Williams asked what this agenda item was designed to elicit. Brian said more than anything it is just to let the boards know where we stand on this. He and Meredith have not progressed too far yet. They broadly agree and need to work out the details. (*Roger Marcoux and 6 LSCD officers arrived at 6:49.*)

Meredith asked if there is a timeline goal for getting the RFP out.

Walter said another round of Municipal Planning Grants is coming in the fall. He would love to be able to apply for a grant for this. That is the timeline he would like to work on. He doesn't know if we can have proposals back by then.

Brian said LCPC will not be involved in doing the study. He does not think that would be appropriate. But he would like them to help us write a Municipal Planning Grant application. Gordy agreed that would be appropriate.

Mike said he doesn't know if putting a cap on cost would help us. He thinks we might get a better deal if we don't give a cap. Meredith said she addressed that by saying we would give the proposal a higher score if it is under the cap. Mike said he thinks we should not mention cost.

Scott suggested incorporating what the village and town voted for – not to exceed \$4K each. That is already public information.

Eric said there was a difference between the two articles. The village article had a \$4K cap. The town article had no cap. And the village has to come to the voters with the RFP before they put it out. That was not a condition of the town. If the price came in at \$9K the selectboard could decide to contribute more than 50%.

Scott said the town and village had similar articles on their warnings but a village resident amended the village article at the annual meeting.

Meredith said if the town is willing to go over \$4K she agrees on taking out the cost cap.

## **5. *Law Enforcement Policies and Practices***

Sheriff Roger Marcoux and 6 officers introduced themselves.

Eric said this agenda item is to share concerns. The boards are hearing concerns from constituents about speeding and having more enforcement. Both boards keep expressing concerns to Roger about the level of speeding in this community. It looks like more warnings than tickets have been issued. That has been a concern of board members and community

members. When a radar speed detector was put in front of his house at the bottom of Clay Hill, near the School Street intersection, two vehicles were clocked going 90 mph there.

Scott said he also lives on Clay Hill. He showed the sheriff and the officers a photo of skid marks on Clay Hill from a garbage truck that locked up its brakes when the driver saw a speed trap. The skid marks are about 165 feet long. The driver did not get a ticket.

Deputy Harris said he was the one there that day. When he is pulled over it is not always because he is running radar. If that was something he had witnessed he definitely would have made a stop. He can't recall what he was doing at the time.

Another officer said it is difficult to measure compliance. When people see an officer by the side of the road, even if they are not running radar people slow down or put their seatbelts on. It is difficult to measure that effect.

Scott said around the state there are areas where you don't go over the speed limit for fear of getting a ticket. Some people in the village feel frustration that that tone is not set for Johnson. We are trying to become a walkable, bikeable town. It is nerve racking now to walk or bike. He thinks everyone is frustrated that the behavior continues.

Roger said from January 1 to May 30 his officers were here about 40% of their time. They had 12 stops on Clay Hill, 7 on College Hill, 56 on Lower Main, 14 on Railroad Street, 44 on Route 100C, and 84 on Route 15 east or west of the village. There were 300 stops total. One of the officers said during that same time period the total number of tickets was 95 and the number of warnings was 190. The number of residents who got warnings or tickets was 73.

Roger said revenues continue to be a problem statewide. They wrote tickets that should have brought in \$3300 in local revenue but received less than \$800 dollars. Local ordinances are not dependably revenue-generating. He doesn't do quotas. His officers have discretion on writing tickets. He thinks maybe he can bring in additional patrol.

Scott said he recommends more enforcement during rush hour (4:30 to 5:30 pm) on Clay Hill. One of the officers said usually during that time period there is one officer on duty and Hyde Park and Wolcott also request enforcement during that time.

A resident who lives at the bottom of Clay Hill said he usually sees people driving at an excessive speed during the first 2 or 3 weeks after college starts up and during rush hour. There usually seem to be 3 or 4 particular cars that are a problem. On occasion kids try to drift around the Pearl St./School St. corner. He thinks the worst time for speeding on Clay Hill is around 3:00 to 5:00 pm and during the first 3 weeks of the school year.

Walter said he knows the contract is with the town but he is hearing an increase in frustration. He is hearing about Railroad Street. We have a lot of pedestrians and bicyclists going to the rail trail. Railroad Street is a problem spot. He is thinking we need to up our game. The question is how. He feels we have to get more aggressive. He wants this to be a town with a reputation for ticketing speeders. Having a walkable, bikeable community is

important to us. How do we take this to the next level to get tougher enforcement? He wants us to be working on that. Do we hire more deputies? Do we bring in the state to do extra patrols?

Roger said he is willing to take a look at his budget and see if he can bring in a person within the budget at times when the town feels that would be most effective.

Corporal Wolfe said he agrees there is a problem with speeding. Officers can write more tickets. That is easy. But it is difficult to have a presence in the entire community. If they spend more time in the village they will get more complaints from people on back roads who never see cruisers.

Nat said he disagrees with Walter on one thing. He doesn't want Johnson to have a reputation for giving out tickets like Plymouth. There are difficulties with being too tough. Towns with zero tolerance can be too tough.

Bob said he walks on School Street with his granddaughter and often sees the same person speeding there. He won't learn with a warning. An officer said he may not learn anything with a ticket, either.

Jim Rose said maybe there is an opportunity to look at it a different way. Maybe LCSD can provide data supporting an application for grant money to implement traffic calming. There are other options besides enforcement.

Kyle asked if there are speed machines that take pictures. Roger said LCSD has started working with all 3 contract towns to put in permanent radar speed signs like the one going into Stowe. They have some deterrent effect. He doesn't know of any place in the state handing out tickets from license plates. Essex had a problem and they gave citizens radar guns. The chief would write letters to people whose plates were seen speeding. This was 10 or 12 years ago. It was a program that involved everyone in the community to help show that people are watching.

Kyle said as someone who lives and has a business and small children in the village, being a pedestrian often feels like a matter of life and death. On Main Street and Railroad Street every month we see in the reports that someone going 11 to 20 mph over the speed limit got a warning vs. a ticket. She asked for insight into the decision about giving a warning vs. a ticket.

An officer said a lot has to do with the person's past driving history. He asks about why the person was speeding, whether they know what the speed limit is and how fast they think they were going. He is more likely to give a ticket to someone who says they have no idea how fast they were going, they weren't paying attention and they have no idea what the speed limit is.

Eric said part of our job is to help LCSD. He asked what LCSD's concerns are and what issues we can help with to help them do a better job.

One officer said providing a license plate number with a complaint, even a partial plate number, is helpful. Even if they can't write a ticket based on that, with college kids they can call their parents. He has done that.

Roger suggested that if people have complaints they should be directed to call LCSD. It will be helpful if LCSD can get a dedicated deputy for a limited time to do traffic enforcement.

An officer said it would be helpful if Brian could record descriptions of problem vehicles when complaints come in. They can talk to Brian at least once a week and get that information.

Roger said getting that information doesn't necessarily mean they will be able to write tickets. A better plan is see where the problem areas are and get a deputy there.

Mike said he does not advocate for more traffic tickets. He thinks the officers should have discretion about whether to issue tickets.

Roger said this discussion has caused LCSD to focus on more consistency. He feels we should talk about the marijuana festival at some point. (*Roger and the officers left at 7:33.*)

#### **6. Village Charter Discussion**

Walter said the village has come to the conclusion that they really need a village charter. As they work on that there are questions they are going to address such as whether to appoint a treasurer. They want the town to be going along with the village. They will be looking at other things like the sewer department being limited by the village boundaries, the ten cents on the grand list, etc. At some point they will bring the town in and discuss some of these things. Maybe the town can be thinking about it and throw in suggestions. Maybe the town would want to modify the village charter and have a town charter. The village will also consider whether to have a formal manager. The charter has to be approved by the voters and the legislature so it will be a long process. Some of the things they will look at also affect the town. He doesn't know how the town wants to be involved. Perhaps the town could have member on the charter committee.

Nat asked if there will be minutes of the charter committee's meetings. Walter said yes; they will be under open meeting law.

Gordy said the trustees will also be looking for village residents to be on the committee. Walter said Scott had suggested having 12 committee members like the form based code committee.

#### **7. Old Mill House Facility Use Request**

Jim Rose said he and his wife own Lamoille Valley Bike Tours. They have had a lot of success at Old Mill Park. They set up for the day there near the trailhead. During a soccer tournament last year they were asked to operate for the day on the green space to the left of the mill house building. It worked well that day and they thought maybe they could explore using that spot again. He knows the town and village are interested in getting the mill building to be a more active place. He has been involved in some of the meetings about

development. He and his wife want to be involved in any efforts to highlight the trail. The space outside the building may work better as a place for them to set up and if it becomes available they would be interested in renting space inside. Johnson is a tourist destination. From the previous year to last year the number of people renting bikes to ride to or from Johnson increased from about 100 to 300. Jim wants to use Old Mill Park on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. He showed on a photo the spot next to the old mill building that he was thinking of using in addition.

Scott said as long as public parking isn't hampered Jim's request has his full support.

Meredith said she talked with the public works foreman. He had some concerns about the lawn being torn up. She asked if Jim thinks his use would damage the lawn. Jim said he doesn't see it having much impact, but he can monitor it and talk to the village employees about any concerns and how they want him to manage the impact. Brian had mentioned to him that on Friday afternoon the area could be busy with town or village equipment. Maybe he could put a cone out. He can at least communicate with guests that that is not an area to congregate.

Eric said the building is used for the food shelf on Tuesday and Friday morning. Jim would have to be conscious of the traffic coming in for that.

Nat said he thinks this is a terrific business for Johnson. He would like to help the business out.

Walter moved that the trustees sign a facility use agreement allowing Lamoille Valley Bike Tours to operate on the green space next to the parking lot of the old mill building and Scott seconded. David said no action was warned on the agenda. But there could be a resolution. Walter said he would turn his motion into a resolution.

It was the consensus of the selectboard that the facility use agreement requested by Lamoille Valley Bike Tours should be approved.

Walter said he would like the town and village crews to clean up the old culverts, pallets, piles of stone, etc. near the cold storage building to make the area nicer. He suggests that both boards to ask their crews to spend a morning cleaning the area. He said another suggestion is to think about moving the fence around the garage area to provide more space for parking.

Nat said he thinks that whole area near the park entrance needs to be looked at.

Walter said there was a potential plan for river access in that area. The bank has recently eroded in a way that could facilitate that. We could fix it to provide access.

**8. *Jointly Owned Building Maintenance Review***

Eric said this item is on the agenda to make sure the trustees and selectboard are on the same page with continuing work on the municipal building and with the mill house building work.

Walter said we were going to get a professional evaluation of the mill house. He doesn't know where that ended up.

Brian said we had one person look at it and not submit a bid. He is trying to work something out with that person. They met briefly today.

Eric asked, if we get a quote do the trustees want to do the work on the mill house this year?

Meredith said the village has some money budgeted for the mill house in addition to the municipal building. She and Brian have talked to the contractor about continuing the work started last year on the municipal building.

Mike said he thinks we should look into selling the mill house. Gordy said his concern is with the food shelf, the Boy Scouts and the electric department.

Both boards agreed they are interested in moving forward with work on the mill house and the municipal building.

**9. *Expenses Related to January 2018 Flooding***

Eric said there was a major ice event this past winter. The town had its budget reduced by \$30K and town meeting. The selectboard has made significant cuts to the budget for the year starting July 1. In addition to that, on town meeting day the selectboard estimated the town would have \$151K cash on hand and they committed to reducing the amount to be raised by taxes by \$138K using that cash on hand. But there was an accounting mistake. The amount for the Holcomb House principal (about \$50K) was never added in. So the town is in trouble with the current budget. There is no ability for municipalities to carry a deficit beyond the current year. (*Jim Rose left at 7:59.*) If the town ends the year with a deficit they will have to make additional cuts in next year's budget. The town had something less than \$20K in its emergency management fund. The bill from Tatro was about \$28K. The selectboard is asking the village to waive the fire department charge of a little over \$2K from the flood situation because of the situation the town is in now.

Gordy said he sympathizes with the town's position. But village residents pay town taxes and village taxes. If the village agrees to waive the charge that means asking village residents to pay twice. If the fire department had not provided flagging on Route 15 the town would have had a cost from another agency. He doesn't feel the town should pay for this.

Scott said at the village annual meeting there was concern from some about double taxation – paying both town and village taxes. Village residents asked why they should pay twice for the merger study. This seems similar. Village residents would pay twice.

Mike said many people in town do not live in the village and they pay their taxes. The whole flood response was in the village. The town paid about \$28K wholly for the village and not for the rest of the town. He doesn't think it is too unreasonable to ask for the fire department fee to be waived for the town. The trustees should consider that the town footed the bill for the whole thing. Taxes from people outside the village helped pay for flood mitigation in the village.

Walter said when the Codding Hollow bridge washed out he didn't complain that he had to help pay for the bridge as a town resident. This is going the opposite direction. As a town resident he will pay his fair share but he should not pay twice. Wherever an issue happens he feels the cost should be shared by all town residents equally.

Mike said FEMA paid for the Codding Hollow bridge. Eric agreed. The town had to front the money using the emergency management fund but they recovered most of the cost from FEMA. The difference is that this situation was never declared an emergency so none of the cost is being reimbursed from FEMA. The \$28K is just for the Tatro bill but there are other bills also so the total cost of the ice jam flooding is approaching \$30K. It is over \$30K with the fire department bill. The selectboard recognizes that it is a town responsibility to deal with emergencies. But the town had to make cuts to the budget and found a significant adding mistake and those things happened after the event. The selectboard is just asking if the trustees could waive the fire department charge of a little over \$2K. The town's emergency fund is depleted and there will not be any money in next year's budget to put anything back in. It will be depleted for a few years. If we had an emergency event the town would have to borrow money.

Gordy asked what it would do for the fire department budget if the village agreed to waive the fee. Meredith said we didn't budget specifically for this. We budgeted for a certain amount of labor and we won't know until the end of the year whether labor goes over budget for the year due to the flooding event.

Gordy said the facilities person from Northern Vermont University met with the trustees. He is asking the village to do more to help the college. The Lyndon Fire Department receives nothing from the college, while the Johnson Fire Department gets a donation. The trustees fear we will lose that \$6K donation and have to pass that expense on to the towns of Johnson, Belvidere and Waterville.

Walter said if the village collects the money from the town they will be able to bill less next year. The town pays close to 70% of the fire department budget. If they waive the fee now it will come back to the town in terms of what the town pays next year.

Eric said next year at least the board could put it in the budget.

Mike said in 2016 the fire department was about \$7K short and took it out of the sidewalk fund, which is probably part of the ten cents on the grand list. Did the trustees ever put that back? If not that should be considered the town's share of this expense.

Gordy said that year the village spent \$50K over than the ten cents on the grand list on things like sidewalks. This past year they spent \$111K on streets, sidewalks, sanding and so forth.

Scott asked, if the village delays the bill, will that affect the fire department in a negative way and will it help the town? Eric said if we delay it beyond June 30 it won't affect the deficit for this year, but either way we will have to make \$2K in cuts, either because of more deficit

or because we will have more expense next year. Meredith said as long as it is paid by December 31 it doesn't matter to the village. Nat said it does give us more flexibility.

Scott's recommendation would be just to delay the bill. The trustees can talk and maybe find the money in the fire department budget.

Walter said by waiving payment of the bill by the town we would be asking Waterville and Belvidere to pay for Johnson's issues. But he agrees the town can wait until July to pay.

#### **10. Economic Development Discussion**

Meredith said at the last trustee board meeting there was a request to run through current vacant properties and business changes at this meeting. Brian said this winter and spring Johnson faced quite a few closings. We have vacancies at the corner of 100C and Route 15 where Bustin' Belly was and in the Royce Building where Wicked Wings was. On Railroad Street the Manchester Lumber Mill is no longer operational but the Manchesters are using the property a little. They are interested in hearing about potential projects for the property. Parker & Stearns will hold an auction soon for the rest of its inventory and possibly the property. The Landmark Tavern closed. And Dr. Paul Rogers will retire. Gordy said there is a steel building for sale between the Landmark Tavern and the antique store.

Brian said he has talked to a couple of interested parties. There is interest in coming to Johnson. (*Peter Moynihan arrived at 8:17.*) But our properties are very expensive. That is a huge hurdle for starting a new business. Right now it is keeping people out. We met with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development last week and talked about some grant programs. They were very interested in the Manchester and Parker & Stearns sites and they liked the ideas from the Brownfields study.

Walter asked where the town is with the Jewett property. Brian said the town has an application out for a grant to build a road and put in infrastructure. He doesn't think it will materialize this year. The selectboard is not interested in paying for it out of pocket.

Walter said the property behind the Jewett property just sold. He suggested maybe the town should talk to the new owners. Brian said he was not aware it sold. Gordy said the person who bought it is doing some clearing. He said he might be subdividing it into lots.

Brian said the current plan for a road for the Jewett property is not a through road but the town could explore new plans that might also serve the adjoining property.

Eric said the town has a tax stabilization plan. If someone wants to come to a vacant site the town can give them a small break on their tax, but just the municipal tax, not the school tax. Does the village have that ability? Can the village offer any other incentives like reduced utility rates?

Walter said mostly what the village can offer is the community loan fund. They also tax based on the grand list so if the town cuts the grand list the village follows along. Eric said a property on a tax stabilization plan is still on the grand list for the same amount. The town just cuts a percentage of their tax liability.

Nat said the town loan fund will be helpful. Eric agreed. The town will have a loan fund and will have to start loaning money.

Gordy said the owner of the building where Bustin' Belly was has had a few inquiries

Meredith said she attended a conference over a month ago on local and regional marketing. Someone there talked about economic development marketing the state is getting involved in. There are state websites where we could submit content. At a Johnson Works meeting, Kyle suggested putting together appealing information on our loan funds and available properties – maybe not specific properties, but types of sites. She thinks the state would be open to posting a nice looking PDF like that on their website.

Walter said when we lost the grocery store we decided working on replacing it should be a priority. We seem to be taking a big step backwards. Should we tell Brian and Meredith to prioritize this more?

Eric said he feels it is concerning losing not only a business but also an employer, with nothing coming in to replace it. The focus for the town is on the industrial park and trying to get that going. It would be hard to take on another initiative on individual sites, but maybe the town would work with the village if the village proposed something.

Nat said we have to start getting the town loan fund ready to loan or we will lose the money. That has to be a priority of Brian's.

Meredith said it is important that the town and village jointly have this conversation. She doesn't want her and Brian to duplicate efforts. They need to make sure they are evenly and efficiently dividing the tasks they are doing. Knowing that the industrial park and the loan fund are the biggest issues for the town, she can work on other issues.

#### ***11. Review and Selection of IT Services Proposals (continued)***

Brian suggested discussion of the IT services proposals. Meredith said she has past experience with the Tech Group. They provided wonderful support. She believes they were the cheapest per month.

Brian said he would want to spend a little time with whichever company the boards were interested in, giving them more specifics and having them visit the electric and sewer departments, not just the office.

Walter suggested calling references. The Tech Group was the one that caught his attention but he was intrigued by the company that offered all the equipment.

Meredith said her concern about having the company own the equipment is what would happen if we decided not to continue with them. Then suddenly we would have to spend a one-time lump sum to make purchases.

Brian agreed that that arrangement would not be something we could easily back out of. He said another option would be to look for a replacement on the scale of what Larry provided. That would cost considerably less.

Eric pointed out there were concerns about Larry's availability. All these companies seemed very competent. He thinks we would be happy with any of them. Brian agreed they all seem good. Eric said he wouldn't recommend going back to a one man show.

Walter suggested perhaps we could work with whatever provider the college, the school, or Laraway uses.

Meredith said DominionTech does not offer website assistance but said they could give us the name of someone to assist with that. She thinks the others could offer WordPress assistance.

Brian said he would pick one of those two. The VC3 proposal that doesn't include hardware but has unlimited in-person or remote tech support is \$500 more than the Tech Group's proposal. But the Tech Group charges a per hour rate for on-site assistance during business hours.

Eric asked how much we had Larry on site per month. Rosemary said some months not at all. Some months it was heavy.

Brian said the Tech Group charges \$125 per hour for on-site assistance during business hours and during other hours there are other rates up to \$250 per hour. But they would be able to do almost everything remotely. If we used more than 4 hours per month of on-site assistance at their lowest rate we would be better off going with VC3, but he thinks it would be unusual to need more than 4 hours.

Nat said Meredith's personal experience with the Tech Group speaks to him.

Walter suggested that Brian and Meredith investigate the Tech Group and decide whether or not to recommend using them. The other board members agreed.

## ***12. Adjourn***

**Walter moved that the trustees adjourn at 8:37 and the motion was seconded and passed.**

The selectboard adjourned at 8:27.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*