

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2019

**Present:**

Trustees: Brian Raulinaitis, Gordon Smith, Bob Sweetser (by phone), Phil Wilson

Others: Rosemary Audibert, Dan Copp, Anne Lacey, Chris Parker, Etta Parker, Arjay West, Jefferson Tolman, Meghan Rodier

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

**1. *Call to Order***

Gordy called the meeting to order at 6:05.

**2. *Changes, Additions to Proposed Agenda***

Phil added discussion about Efficiency Vermont's targeted communities program. Gordy added discussion of an email from Kyle Nuse to Meredith.

**3. *Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings***

**Phil moved to approve the minutes of November 12 and December 2, 2019, Brian seconded and the motion was passed.**

**4. *Treasurer's Report / Approve Bills and Warrants / Budget Status Report / Action Items***

Rosemary said Waterville paid their third installment for the fire contract. Belvidere and the Town of Johnson are fully paid for the year and the college paid their donation.

Rosemary said Gary Smith asked for a tax abatement on the building that had a fire November 1st. There are two months for which the building should not be taxed but the land and water and sewer connections should be taxed. Rosemary's recommendation is an abatement of \$31.24. **Brian moved to abate 2 months of village taxes on Gary Smith's house, reducing his taxes by \$31.24, Phil seconded and the motion was passed.**

Rosemary asked if the board wants to provide the same amount of holiday pay as last year, which is \$100. **Brian moved to keep holiday pay for village employees at \$100, Phil seconded and the motion was passed.**

Rosemary said we need to start replacing some computers at the office. The total cost will be about \$9,500. That includes upgrading licenses, 2 laptops and 7 desktops. So the village share, including labor, would probably be about \$5,000. The board agreed the money could come out of the 2020 budget. **Phil moved to authorize Meredith to purchase necessary new office computers after January 1, 2020, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.**

**5. *Application for Water/Sewer Bill Adjustment for 58 Lower Main***

Anne Lacey said she had water leaking from an outdoor spigot and there was also a valve leaking on her water heater. Both problems have been fixed.

Gordy said Meredith recommended adjusting her water bill for November 25, 2019 to \$49.09 and her sewer bill to \$121.71. The board discussed whether those numbers were correct based on the policy stating that the adjusted amount should be the average of the last three months. Phil said the three-month average for sewer is \$106.12. **Phil moved to adjust Anne Lacey's November 2019**

**sewer bill to the three-month average of \$106.12 and her water bill to the three-month average of \$49.09. The motion was seconded and passed.**

**6. Application for Revolving Loan**

Chris Parker said he and his wife are requesting a loan from the community improvement revolving loan fund. Their building needs renovations, including a new roof. He feels the project fits under #2 in the list of highest priorities for loan funds: improvements to owner occupied and commercial buildings to: correct code, address structural and safety issues, improve energy efficiency, reduce fuel consumption, and improve the value and appearance of the building. His building is a pivotal building in the community. He has always tried to maintain its appearance because the look of Main Street is important. The estimate he received for the roof is \$38,000. If his loan is approved it will be part of a package of loans to provide funds to execute all of the repairs needed. He does not think he will replace the roof with a new slate roof. Etta Parker said the estimate to put in a slate roof would be \$50,000 and it would probably have to be repaired again in another 10 years. Chris said he is requesting a loan of \$30,000.

Gordy said that is the highest amount we have loaned in the past. Chris is requesting a 10-year loan. In the past we have done one or two loans for 10 years. The interest rate we usually give is prime minus 2%. Rosemary said right now prime is 4.75% so the interest rate would be 2.75%.

Brian said as a neighbor he would be willing to look at the quotes and ensure that they are reasonable.

Gordy brought up the Efficiency Vermont project in the community starting the first of the year that might be able to provide some savings for this project. Phil said starting in January Efficiency Vermont is doing a targeted program in Johnson. They talked about giving small businesses and nonprofits higher efficiency rebates. The only part of this project he sees that fits into their program is the new furnace. If the Parkers got a furnace that met their rebate requirements they could get a 20% rebate. Efficiency Vermont will also do some free energy audits. We don't have all the details on the program yet.

**Bob moved to approve a village revolving loan for Chris and Etta Parker for repairs to 2 Lower Main Street West, including a roof replacement, furnace replacement and painting, in the amount of \$30,000 for a term of 10 years at an interest rate of 2.75%, Brian seconded and the motion was passed.**

**7. Review and Approval of 2020 Fire Department Budget and Review of the 2020 Fire Services Contract with the Town of Johnson**

Arjay West showed the board the proposed 2020 budget for the fire department. It includes an increase of about \$2,100 for the capital truck plan adjustments that were made in September. The small tools plan stays in effect with no changes, just the \$600 inflationary increase.

Arjay would like the board to consider a 50 cent raise for on-call pay. Minimum wage is supposed to go up by \$0.18 to \$10.96 on January 1. Historically the fire department has always tried to start firefighters' pay at \$0.50 above minimum wage. Last year we did not do that because of the expenses of some ongoing projects. Currently pay is \$11 an hour.

Arjay increased the amount budgeted for labor by \$1,200, bringing that up to \$38,000. He made some slight adjustments to building heat, a slight reduction in vehicle maintenance, and a slight

increase in communications equipment, gear and accessories. He is asking for a 2.55% increase to the budget. His suggestion would be to fund that by increasing each of the three contract towns' cost by 3.33% and because this is the first year that we have applied our new capital truck plan he would also suggest that the village participate in this year's adjustment by an increase of 1%.

Gordy said the fire department is village owned and village residents pay village and town taxes. He doesn't think we should charge ourselves to operate. Could we take away the increase for the village? Arjay said if there is no increase for the village then each of the contract towns would need an increase of 3.7%. That would mean a total increase of \$3,145 for the Town of Johnson, an increase of \$760 for Waterville and an increase of \$490 for Belvidere. If all four entities had equal increases everyone would see a 2.7% increase.

Gordy said he got an email from Meredith this afternoon saying that she and Arjay had heard from Brian Story that the town's attorney apparently has quite a few changes they want to implement in the fire services contract. Gordy thinks it was inconsiderate to send that information today when there is a meeting tonight and Arjay has not had a chance to review it. Arjay said one request is for us to figure out how to make the billing cycle start July 1. If we had a contract that started January 2020 and went through July 2021 there would be a fair amount of risk on our side because some projections might change. He feels the price for fire service is not negotiable. Gordy agreed the price is not negotiable. He said the selectboard can invite Arjay to come to a meeting so they can ask questions about the budget.

Brian said if the towns' increase goes to 3.7% that means everyone in the village is paying 3.7% just like the others.

**Phil moved to approve a 2020 fire department budget with total expenses of \$177,435 as presented by Chief West with the increase to be paid for by a 3.7% increase for each of the contract towns and a 0% increase for the village, Brian seconded and the motion was passed in a roll call vote with Gordy abstaining and everyone else voting in favor.**

**8. Water/Wastewater Report and Action Items**

Dan said the generator at the wastewater treatment facility failed. We are renting an emergency backup generator at a cost of \$4,000 per month. We looked at repair versus replacement. The biggest issue with replacement is that we cannot put a new generator where the old one is. That one is grandfathered but it no longer meets code. That significantly increases the cost of a replacement. Quotes for replacement range from \$45,000 to \$49,000. Dan, Gordy and Meredith weighed the options and decided to go with repair, which will cost about \$12,000 plus probably two month's worth of generator rental.

Phil asked, where the generator is now is not subject to inundation when the plant floods? Dan said it is not.

**Brian moved to authorized Dan Copp to move forward with repair of the wastewater treatment facility generator at a cost not to exceed \$12,000, seconded by Bob. The motion was passed.**

Dan said all wastewater samples met state requirements. On November 1st we could not safely sample effluent due to the flood. That will go down as a missed sample but there was adequate

reasoning behind it as far as the state is concerned. We started weekly testing of all the high wet well floats and alarms at all the pump stations. That is something that had not been done. The sludge grinder and control panel is operational now, but the control panel isn't being recognized from the belt press. It appears that new wiring is needed between the two. That will be rolled into the insurance claim. We have sealed the area in the sludge room that water was infiltrating from. With those repairs the sump should be able to keep up with infiltration in the future. We are also going to plumb in a manually valved bypass from the sludge room. The sump pump pumps to the sludge holding tanks. In a flood situation we will be able to send the excess water outside instead. That will probably cost a couple of hundred dollars but will save in the long run. Pratt Electrical installed disconnects for both decanters. We optimized the belt press a little better. Right now we process every couple of weeks. With decanting more water we are getting a thicker sludge on the belt press and getting a dryer cake at the end so we think we will be able to switch to processing every three weeks. That will save on trucking costs and reduce wear and tear on the belt press.

There were no callouts for the water system. All coliform samples were negative. We got the PFA test results for the Osgood and Nadeau Wells. They were both negative. We also tested for 13 other PFAs and those also came back negative. The cost was \$900 to test both wells but from now on we will only need to do that sampling once every three years. All the yearly testing for water has been done except for one coliform test. Water loss was 6%.

Utility Partners regional vice-president Jefferson Tolman said he had stopped by in case board members had any questions about Utility Partners. He thanked the board for the support it provides.

Gordy said Dan has identified for the village some things that need repair. Dan said he is coming to the conclusion after looking at prices that we will probably rehab the existing belt press rather than get a new one. He communicated with Scott about the noise issue with the transformers and will probably talk to the board about that at the next meeting.

Gordy thanked Jefferson for absorbing the cost of overtime during the flood. Jefferson said it is bad business to nickel-and-dime.

Brian asked where Utility Partners is based. Jefferson said their parent company is out of Quebec City. They originated in Georgia and have expanded to other areas. They would eventually like to expand to every state in the country. but their growth is slow and calculated because if they grow too big too fast they can't support the projects that have helped them get where they are today.

Gordy said he likes the resources of personnel and equipment that Utility Partners can provide. Dan agreed that that has been handy. It is helpful to be able to swap labor back and forth.

Dan said the Monday after the flood a siphon was plugged and the Johnson fire department was at a structure fire. So we got Morrisville Water and Light to come and jet the siphon for us. In the past there was friction between Morrisville Water and Light and previous village employees. But that friction is no longer there. They charged us \$115 to jet the siphon. That working relationship will be nice.

Jefferson said any time the board has a question or wants him here he will do everything in his power to get here. If the board ever felt that they wanted to get the Utility Partners contract on the village's budget year perhaps there could be a modified contract next time that would allow that if it is easier for budgeting purposes.

**9. Foreman Report and Action Items**

Troy said there was a car-pole accident on Route 15 on November 22. The pole needed to be replaced. Seventy-five customers were without power for three hours while the pole was changed out. A few days later the transformer on the new pole failed and had to be replaced. On November 25 a tractor-trailer pulled service lines off poles on Foote Brook road. Repairs took about an hour. The village crew as well as the contractor have been working on rights-of-way in multiple locations during the past month and by the end of this week probably will have things in good shape. A secondary service was upgraded at 125 Railroad Street. Jeff and Chan completed their third year of NEPPA training with averages in the mid 90s. They are now 3rd Class B. They have one year left of NEPPA school. The crew completed meter reading, high/low readings, Dig Safes and disconnect/reconnects. The crew installed winter banners and holiday lights and decorated trees. They have started with winter sidewalk and parking area maintenance.

There was a callout for water last week. We shut off the curb stop until a repair to a valve in a cellar could be done. This month's NEPPA safety training was on chainsaw safety.

Troy created an invoice for the car-pole accident. There was around \$4,000 worth of damage. Arjay will be including his cost in the estimate. Troy has reached out to a few dealerships to start pricing for the new Bobcat we will be getting. He is getting a quote on trading in the old one.

Troy said we used to get uniforms from a company called G&K Services. They were bought out by another company and since the buyout the quality of their clothing has been poor. They launder our clothes and replace them if they have tears. We were in a three-year contract and our contract has expired. They have approached Troy multiple times to renew the contract but he has been reluctant. They have shown him some updated clothing but the items he has seen so far are poor quality compared to what we were getting in the past. The FR rating is correct but the material is very thin. Right now we are paying about \$13,000 a year for that service. Troy is looking into a company called Tyndale that would allow us to establish accounts for each employee and employees could go online and order their clothes. It would cost about \$2,000 a year to get everyone outfitted initially and after that it would cost about \$1,500 per year. It would save us quite a bit of money. Employees would need to wash their own clothes. Brian asked if the clothes are better quality. Troy said yes.

Gordy asked how the crew is set for heavy jackets. Troy said the current company only provides button-up shirts and pants. We buy other things out of our safety budget. Employees all have heavy jackets already. They will be replaced as they wear out.

Troy said he wants to look at another pair of pants the current company says they can provide before deciding whether he wants to renew the contract. He will come back to the board in January with a recommendation.

Troy said the furnace at the shop has had some issues with running poorly over the past couple of months. It stopped running at one point. The distributor was able to get it to fire again so it will at

least run now but the heat exchanger has a crack. That can cause carbon monoxide to get into the building. The fire department came over and did testing and found that there is currently not an issue with carbon monoxide. But the crack will get bigger. The furnace is 20 plus years old. It runs on waste oil. In the past we were able to get quite a bit of waste oil to offset the cost of heating. Currently we only get 200 or 250 gallons of waste oil a year from the town. The furnace is designed to burn waste oil, not fuel oil. It is not efficient for use with fuel oil. Troy reached out to County Plumbing and Heating. They service the rest of our furnaces. They came last week and recommended a furnace that has multiple heating stages that they feel is the most efficient way to heat our style of building. A ballpark cost for it is \$16,000. They are putting together bids for two different furnaces which they will send to Troy and Troy can forward them to Gordy.

Phil said Efficiency Vermont is going to offer about \$4,000 in a non-matching grant that could be used for upgrades in municipal buildings. But we might not want to use that in a building we don't own with the town. Rosemary said technically this building is owned with the town. Troy said he would like to move forward as soon as possible once he gets a quote. He wants to see how long it would take for the better furnace to pay for itself.

Gordy asked where the money for the furnace will come from. The general department owns half the property and the electric department pays rent. Rosemary said the town is also looking at replacing a furnace in the building used by town employees. Gordy suggested that maybe there could be an agreement that the town would take care of the building they use and the village would take care of the building we use.

**Bob moved to authorize Troy to move forward with replacing the furnace at the water and light garage for an amount not to exceed \$20,000 and the motion was seconded and passed.**

Gordy suggested that we should let the selectboard know about this as a courtesy. He suggested sending emails to Brian and Eric about what we are doing. Bob said we ought to suggest to them that each municipality take care of its own building. Rosemary said the cost the town got for the furnace they plan to replace is much more than the cost Troy got.

Troy said he was questioned by a business owner about what our practices are as far as picking up snow off Main Street. The current practice is that when there is 6 inches or more of snow, within a day or two after that village employees push all the snow from the sidewalk out into the parking lanes and very early in the morning, when there is no traffic and no businesses are open, the snow is blown with a snowblower into trucks and dumped near the municipal building. Every time we do that it costs about \$2,000 for fuel, labor, etc. We get \$60,000 from the town for the ten cents on the grand list but Troy understands that it usually cost us about \$130,000. In the past, before he was in charge, village employees would move snow when there was only 3 inches. But he can't justify that cost. We do clean out the handicapped areas. In other areas such as Morrisville business owners clear their areas right to the curb so their clients can get into the building. It is not the responsibility of the village. We have done it as a way to help the village out financially as far as bringing in business. But he doesn't feel we can justify doing it every time it snows. In deciding when to do it he considers criteria such as whether the snow is likely to melt soon, whether more snow is coming soon or whether very cold weather is coming that might lead to power outages.

Gordy said he got a phone call from a different business owner also asking about snow removal. Phil said where he comes from there is a city ordinance giving property owners 48 hours to clear their own sidewalks. Troy asked if Rosemary knows if we have anything like that in place. Rosemary said she hasn't heard of anything making property owners responsible.

Troy asked if the board feels we should continue with the current practice. The board agreed that the current practice seems reasonable.

Troy said some new state highway employees have been driving through the village at a higher speed and throwing snow onto the sidewalk when they plow. We talked with them and hopefully they will change their practices.

Troy said the water and light crew has reached out to the IBEW Local 300 Union. They plan on organizing and signing union cards. They had a 100% unanimous vote. They want to do this because of the uncertainty of the merger and the way some town employees are currently being treated. They feel they wouldn't want to work under that management so they decided to organize. There are only two utilities in the area that aren't unionized right now - Johnson and Hyde Park. As a utility we are more likely to get mutual aid if we reach out to other utilities that are unionized.

Gordy said he has been on both the union side and the management side. What he learned is that although a lot of people think a union is only for the employees it is for both employees and employers. Both parties know what is expected of the other. A union helps ensure equal pay for equal work. Troy said when you have a contract in place you know exactly what you are going to be paid.

Brian asked if it looks like pay will stay the same after unionizing. Troy said employees will begin negotiating. Our contract will be in line with others in the area.

Gordy said the village has three options. One is for the employer to agree that the bargaining union is appropriate and voluntarily recognize it as an exclusive bargaining representative, accepting that the vote that our employees took not was coerced or threatened. Another option is for us to ask them to take a second vote. The third option involves the possibility of another union representing them.

**Bob moved to recognize the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 300 as the exclusive bargaining representative of the Johnson Water and Light lineworkers whose names are Troy Dolan, Nate Brigham, Paul Stankiewicz, Jeff Parsons and Chan Bullard and to send notification of such to the Vermont Labor Relations Board, Brian seconded and the motion was passed.**

**10. Review and Approval of Village Center Expansion Application**

Meghan Rodier said the regional planning commission made the adjustments to the village center map that were suggested by the trustees. They included the Route 100C portion up to the bed and breakfast and made all the other business-related changes that the trustees pointed out. In the application she tried to build a case for why the village center should be extended to St John's Street. She talked about the community center at the St. John church and the potential health center and mentioned the bed and breakfast. She also mentioned that there is a recommendation in the town and village plan to expand the boundary where it makes sense to promote revitalization.

The board talked about passing on information to Chris and Etta Parker about tax credits available through the village center designation.

Meghan said the application includes a list of revitalization projects from the past 5 years. She wants to know if there is anything missing that should be added. It was agreed to add the upcoming sidewalk improvements at the intersection of School Street and Pearl Street, Greg Tatro's work on the Barrows building, improvements the Studio Center has made to their buildings, and the water asset management plan.

**Brian moved to approve the application for an extension of the village center designation to include properties on St. John's Street and Route 100C and to submit it to the State of Vermont Downtown Board for consideration, Phil seconded and the motion was passed.** The board signed the associated resolution and Gordy signed the cover letter. Meghan said there are two other letters from the village that need to be signed – one notifying the regional planning commission of the application and one notifying the Lamoille Economic Development Corporation. Gordy said our town planning commission should be notified. Meghan said she will email Brian Story and planning commission chair David Butler.

Meghan said she will send the application in this month so that it can be reviewed at the Downtown Board meeting on January 27 at 1:00 pm. Meredith will plan on going but it might be a good idea for a trustee to go as well. Phil offered to go and the board agreed to that. Meghan said she usually attends as well.

Meghan said the folks at the Agency of Commerce and Community Development are saying that the village might want to look at a different program for Railroad Street - the Neighborhood Designation program. Meghan has also heard that the governor has proposed a housing bill that if it is passed would allow some of the tax credit benefits to be extended to neighborhoods adjacent to designated village centers.

***11. Application for Water Bill Adjustment for 60 St. John's Street***

The property owner at 60 St. Johns Street requested a water bill adjustment due to a running toilet that has been fixed. The tenant did not inform the landlord of the problem. The water did go into the sewer so the adjustment will just be to the water bill.

**Phil moved to adjust the water bill for 60 St. John St. to the three-month average beginning in July, which is \$43.72, Brian seconded and the motion was passed.**

***12. Trail Development Act 250 Follow-Up***

Gordy said Meredith contacted the Act 250 coordinator about trails on the former talc mill parcel and she got a call back today saying that the former talc mill parcel is subject to Act 250 because of an old Act 250 permit related to the talc mill operations even though those activities have ended. A permit lives with the land and the Act 250 coordinator indicated that trail development represents a material change to the permit conditions. Phil said the reason we could put in trails at Journey's End and not trigger Act 250 was because there was not an Act 250 permit for the property already, but there is for this property and that is the difference.

Gordy said he talked to Meredith about this today. If we want to move forward with trails we can pursue an amendment to the Act 250 permit. Phil asked if they gave any sense of whether that

would be easy to accomplish. Gordy said he is not sure. He would have to ask Meredith if she got any insight. Phil said he thinks we should have Meredith get a rough estimate of how much work it would be to pursue an amendment to the Act 250 permit and then we could choose whether to do it or not. The board agreed to that. Gordy said he will send Brian Story and Eric an email tomorrow informing them of what Meredith learned.

**13. *Recap of 12/2/19 Joint Meeting***

Phil said he thinks it would be great if we could develop pay charts for our remaining employees and put more rigor into hiring, evaluation and advancement. He thinks it would be good to formalize something even if it would only apply to one person. The nice thing about the agreement to separate employees and no longer have joint employees is that now we have until the next fiscal year to talk about things like healthcare.

Gordy said he thinks the meeting was too short for the amount that was on the agenda. We should have had only compensation and maybe discussion about joint employees.

**14. *Efficiency Vermont Targeted Communities Program***

Phil said he went to a presentation last week that LCPC put on in Hyde Park about utility rebates and energy audits for homes. They invited all the local utilities so he went to talk about our rebates. There was one person there from Johnson. There was someone there from Efficiency Vermont that he talked to about the targeted communities program. It is for the whole town of Johnson, even those who are customers of utilities other than the village utility. They will provide \$4,000 to do energy improvements on a municipal building. Perhaps that could be used for the old mill house. They also said there would be 20% incentives for businesses and nonprofits and they should be able to give some free energy audits. Normally they charge \$300 or \$400 for an audit.

**15. *Letter from Kyle Nuse***

Gordy said Kyle Nuse had emailed Meredith and said that some money given for the Jubilee was not spent. She asked if there is a way to get a tent to use for events and possibly one or two heaters. Meredith said the purchase needs to be done before the end of the year if we are going to do it and it would need trustee approval. Kyle was going to meet with Johnson Works tomorrow and then let Meredith and Gordon know their thoughts. Gordy said they would have to answer the question of where to store the tent. Bob said he is more in favor of just renting it. Brian said he wonders if we need a tent for anything other than the Jubilee.

Gordy said another thing Johnson Works is going to discuss tomorrow is the question of who sets up some small snowman decorations and where they are stored. Troy said the snowmen went in front of businesses. Someone from the Studio Center initially painted them and they were stored in the village's building, where they were in the way. They had not been used for some time but last year Johnson Works decided they wanted to use them so we pulled them out and they were repainted. Troy's understanding was that someone from Johnson Works was going to be responsible for picking them up and storing them. But they did not get picked up and eventually the town ended up picking them up and storing them. We were asked to put them out but as far as he understood it we were done with our involvement with them. The village just put them out one time to help out.

Gordy said Kyle thanked the village for the new Christmas decorations and the work that the village crew does on the sidewalks.

***16. Executive Session for a Personnel Matter***

**Phil moved to go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(3) with all the trustees and Rosemary remaining, Brian seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 9:00.** The board came out of executive session at 9:15.

***17. Adjourn***

**It was moved and seconded to adjourn at 9:15 and the motion was passed.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*

UNAPPROVED