

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2020

Present:

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

Others: Meredith Dolan, Rosemary Audibert, Troy Dolan, Brian Monaghan (by phone)

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call to Order*

Gordy called the meeting to order at 9:58.

2. *Changes, Additions to Proposed Agenda*

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. *Modifications of Village Operations During COVID-19 Pandemic*

Scott said he thinks the trustees should make a motion mirroring the selectboard's motion regarding sick time for employees. Meredith said we have employees who have on call pay as well.

Meredith said there will be modified schedules for office staff to limit the number of people here. We are trying to keep the office open regular hours so people will get a response if they call but the office will be closed to the public. The biggest challenge will be people trying to make payments. We will want to put out information about how to do that.

Rosemary asked if we want to reimburse customers for credit card fees by means of a credit to their account. Meredith said normally there is 3.5% fee for using a credit card. Rosemary said reimbursing all the fees would probably cost several hundred dollars. Meredith said she thinks it would be a goodwill gesture. **Scott moved to waive fees for credit cards while the office is closed and the motion was seconded and passed.**

Meredith said other utilities are dispatching their crews from home and not having everyone coming in. Meter reading will be done next Monday and Tuesday. Shut-offs and reads will need to be done and if there is more snow, sidewalk maintenance will be needed. Employees will be doing that work as they normally would. But having employees sit in the garage does not make sense.

Troy said he would like to keep his crew as healthy as possible. He thinks it will be hard to get mutual aid if this really develops.

Gordy said all Vermont Electric Coop employees are coming in as usual, but their office is closed. He thinks at minimum we should have an on-call crew. Troy said he thinks it would be good to have one employee here and that employee can call in a second if needed.

Gordy suggested having one person per vehicle. Troy said they have already talked about each employee being in their own vehicle.

Scott moved to have one employee at a time coming to work with the others on call when it is not necessary to have more than one person here, with the foreman having the discretion to determine when more employees are needed. Troy said his intention is to have someone who is on call working here. The two people who are on call can determine between themselves who comes in that day. **Bob seconded and the motion was passed.**

Meredith said the Department of Public Service has reached out through the commissioner inquiring if utilities will be waiving disconnections at least for a month. GMP will not be disconnecting people or going to collections until April 30. She thinks it makes sense to do the same. People will be having reduced income and we don't want our staff going to people's doors and leaving notices for them. Scott asked if this would also be for water. Meredith said her recommendation is to do it for all utilities. We would still do disconnections if someone moved out.

Scott moved to waive disconnections for lack of payment for electric, water and sewer service through April 30, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.

Rosemary asked, we don't even send out notices? Meredith said that is her recommendation. Susan made a good point, that people who aren't paying their bills are going to have a big problem. They are going to owe more. We may have more payment plans until people get caught up.

Meredith said she was not planning on proactively announcing we are suspending disconnections but she thinks once the Department of Public Service hears all utilities are doing it there will be a public notice. Scott suggested communicating that if people are having trouble paying their bill they should please call the office. Gordy asked Meredith to let people know that village staff will be at a minimum but if there is any emergency we will be available. Meredith said she will put information on the town website, Front Porch Forum and Facebook. She also thinks she could do a brief newsletter that highlights these issues and talks about rescheduling the annual meeting. Gordy asked, when Meredith does a notification, can she send it to the committee that met yesterday? Meredith said yes, she will do that before it goes out.

Meredith said after the meeting today Rosemary will sit down with staff and figure out a modified schedule.

Scott moved that any employee feeling flu-like symptoms or having a household member with flu-like symptoms be able to take paid sick time without depleting their CTO bank until the end of April, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.

Scott moved to authorize Meredith, Troy and Rosemary to create work schedules to meet the needs of the village while mitigating the risk of virus spreading and, should that require restricted hours beyond an employee's control, to compensate the employee for 40 hours per week plus on-call pay, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.

Scott said he thinks Meredith and Troy should definitely have the ability to send people home if they look ill. He thinks that is within their rights as supervisors. Meredith and Troy agreed.

Gordy said when employees are home they should follow CDC guidelines and go out only when necessary. Scott agreed. He sent out information this morning about potential exposures to people who are positive or caring for family members who are showing signs and symptoms. OSHA has protocol saying employees need to be notified. Without sharing names we should notify employees if someone tested positive.

4. *Bobcat Replacement – Option to Purchase*

Meredith said this agenda item would not be cause to have an emergency board meeting but since the board is meeting and this relates to the topic at hand she put it on the agenda. Troy got quotes for the Bobcat replacement. If we are not going to have an approved general department budget in April, do we want the electric department to make the purchase, to be reimbursed later, or do we want to put it on hold?

Troy said he reached out to 3 different manufacturers. The Kubota he looked at would not serve our needs.

5. *Postponement of 2020 Annual Village Meeting*

Brian Monaghan joined the meeting by phone at 10:24. Meredith had asked him about postponing the 2020 annual village meeting and how it relates to our bylaws. He said he looked at statute. It says we have to hold the annual meeting on the date set forth in the bylaws. In the village bylaws it says the meeting will be held annually on the first Tuesday in April but it also says it may be adjourned to another date. The board would need to open up the village meeting on that date and then whoever was there could move to adjourn to another date.

Meredith said there is another sentence that says that if the meeting doesn't happen then it can happen at another time. The school gym was not available on the first Tuesday in April so the trustees had a vote on town meeting day to have the annual meeting on the first Wednesday in April. Wednesday, April 8 is the date that was warned. Schools are closed until April 6 as of right now. We couldn't warn a meeting on April 7 and give 30 days' notice. Maybe we were wrong to rely on that sentence in the charter, but we did.

Brian said he is not particularly worried about the meeting being on April 8, particularly in the current circumstances. He asked if 3 trustees could meet on that date and adjourn to another date. Meredith said we can do that. It may be outside at the school if the school is not open.

Brian said he thinks that is what is best. Another way to do it would be to announce that the trustees have made a decision to call off the village meeting and hold it on another date. He thinks the board could do that. It is unlikely that anyone would complain the trustees were not complying with the bylaws. He thinks that would be fine, but it is not as risk free.

At Meredith's request, Brian read the relevant section of the bylaws. Meredith suggested we could say that because of the statewide and national emergency we will not have the annual meeting on the normal date and will warn a meeting in the future to do that business. She

thinks that is cleaner. Brian and board members agreed that would be fine. Meredith said she thinks what we will put out publicly is that the meeting won't happen in the first week of April and we are anticipating having it sometime in June and will officially warn it in the future.

Gordy said there will probably be questions from public about whether the two people up for re-election still hold their offices until they are replaced. Brian said he will argue that they do hold their seats until the election. The bylaws allow for the board to do this. There is the possibility of abuse. There could be a board of trustees that doesn't want to let people vote. It is a slippery slope. But given the circumstances, what is the worst case scenario? If someone reaches out to the court system for a determination, he thinks it is unlikely that a court will overturn the village's decision given the current circumstances. The whole court system is on judicial emergency and he doesn't think they would even get to a ruling until after the scheduled meeting.

Meredith said hopefully during the 2-month delay there won't be contested votes where those 2 trustee board members are swing votes, and in that case there won't be a real impact.

Gordy said there was a question during the annual meeting about whether the people who had just been elected that day should immediately replace the people who were not re-elected. The answer we got was that a newly-elected person is not a trustee until they are sworn in at the next trustee board meeting. Rosemary said the election is not certified yet by the time the annual meeting starts. Brian Monaghan agreed that the newly-elected trustees should not take over the night of the annual meeting. (*Brian Monaghan left the meeting.*)

6. *Bobcat Replacement – Option to Purchase (continued)*

Troy said the Kubota wouldn't work with the equipment we have. Bobcat and John Deere have machines that would suit our needs. The 2018 Bobcat and 2019 John Deere are comparable, but the Bobcat is marked down because there is only one left. It would be \$12K less than the John Deere and \$6K less than what we budgeted.

Scott asked, we have money in the reserve fund, right? Rosemary said we have money in the capital equipment fund.

Troy said our cost for the Bobcat is \$24,403. It will be covered for 7 years under warranty.

Gordy asked if we will have money enough to cover general fund expenses if the budget is not approved until June. Rosemary said tax bills will probably be delayed anyway because of the new appraisal. Gordy asked if we can write a check for the Bobcat and not interfere with operations. Rosemary said she thinks it will be fine as long as there are no unforeseen expenses.

Scott said he would rather buy now to save the \$12K.

Brian asked how long the Bobcat offer is good for. He is not sure if it is smart to buy now. Troy said these offers are usually good for about 45 days. They only have one of this model left. They have pretty competitive prices now because in August the 2020's will come out. Brian asked if this Bobcat is new. Troy said yes; it has about 10 hours on it. The regular price

is \$60,989. They are giving us \$15K for our trade-in and discounting the price by \$21,586, so our out of pocket cost would be \$24,403. Brian said it is a tough call. He wants to think about it for a minute.

Gordy asked, if we buy this and then need money, could we borrow from our revolving loan fund? Rosemary said yes; there is almost \$200K in there.

Gordy said he is not sure how much we need for the general department. Meredith said it is pretty minimal. Rosemary said we have already paid our quarterly property insurance bill. There is nothing else due until July.

Meredith said 30 or 40% of the \$24K cost will be paid by the electric department and the balance will be paid by the general department, so the amount coming out of general department funds will be less than \$20K.

Phil said he doesn't think the deal will go away. People are not buying at this time of year. Bob said he would be a little gun-shy about buying, but would be all right with it if everyone feels we can manage it and cover emergency costs.

Troy said the dealer said he would hold the Bobcat for a couple of days until Troy got back to him. Meredith said the purchase will most likely end up over budget if we do not buy this one. Troy said the John Deere cost is over budget by \$6K.

Scott asked if Bobcat has the same restrictions as John Deere regarding maintenance. Troy said both allow us to do basic maintenance. Every manufacturer right now has a link so they can monitor your equipment. It allows them to see how we are using the equipment.

Rosemary said the only thing she could think of that would cause a financial problem would be if a fire truck had a major breakdown. Gordy said that could happen with or without the virus outbreak.

Gordy said he will go along with the rest of the board on making the purchase, even though he was against it when he came in. Bob said he feels the same.

Gordy asked if the old Bobcat is holding up all right. Troy said it is, but he would like to see it go sooner rather than later. It is getting close to the time when the drive belt often fails.

Brian said he would be in favor of moving forward with the purchase if it is that much under budget.

Bob moved to purchase the 2018 Bobcat at the price quoted to Troy, Brian seconded and the motion was passed.

7. *Postponement of 2020 Annual Village Meeting (continued)*

Scott moved to cancel the annual village meeting previously warned for April 8, 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak and plan to hold the annual meeting in the first week of

June, pending the COVID-19 situation, with the warning to be posted once the date is known, Bob seconded and the motion was passed.

8. *Other Business*

Meredith said she and Brian Story will independently send their comments on the merger study report to Kent Gardner because they are trying not to be in the office at the same time. They will copy each other. The revised version of the report will be shared with both boards before it is disseminated.

Meredith said she thinks the trustee board will need a meeting next month to take care of bills. She will try to keep it short and encourage people to participate remotely rather than coming in person.

Scott said the selectboard approved declaring a town emergency. There is an ICS structure that has been built. Eric is emergency management director. Gordy is next in line and after him is Nat. Brian Story is the public information officer. If he is unable Meredith fills that role. Rosemary is the finance person. We have developed a situation report and a list of tasks we are trying to go through to make sure everything is tracked. Gordy said the core group will meet every Monday for now. Eric is sending out information from the state EOC to the core group.

Scott said all town-sponsored committee meetings and programs are suspended. He doesn't know if the village has anything like that. Rosemary said the only group that has access to the upstairs is AA. Scott said his advice was that any public meeting should be held upstairs to leave the office staff in seclusion downstairs. He got a comment from a member of the public that our employees are getting a good deal, being guaranteed pay for 40 hours. We are following the guidelines of the health department and CDC. Rosemary said employees are not getting paid vacations. Meredith said all the recommendations are to limit contact and work from home if possible. Whenever she needs to be here, she will, but she will be at home whenever she can be.

Gordy asked if there will be a quarterly newsletter. Meredith said she thinks there will be time to do one for the April bills. She can talk about the annual meeting, services, and billing.

Scott said he has been pushing hard for people to get valid information from the Department of Health. There is bad information on the internet.

9. *Adjourn*

It was moved and seconded to adjourn at 11:04 and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths