

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
ELECTRONIC MEETING VIA ZOOM AND PHONE CALL-IN
MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021

Present:

Trustees: Steve Hatfield, Will Jennison, Scott Meyer, Athena Park, BJ Putvain

Others: Meredith Dolan, Rosemary Audibert, Arjay West, Brian Miller, Mike Dunham, A. Nadeau, Nadeau, Jasmine Yuris, Beth Foy, Cal Stanton, Bobbi Rooney, Colby, Jessyca, Ken Tourangeau, Kyle Nuse, Mark French, Marla Emery, Susan Tinker, Jay, Jackie Stanton, Eric Osgood, Howard Romero, Diane Lehouiller, Casey Romero, Darlene, Nat Kinney, Pam Aupperlee, Rick Aupperlee, Sophia Berard, Margo Warden, Chris, Brian Story, Carolyn Smith, Paul McClure II, Lynda Hill, Andrea, Dedra Dolan, Heather Dunbar, Doug Collins, Rob Rodriguez, Tina Bidwell, Anne Mullings, Alyx West, Veronica Charette, Kim Dunkley, Alan Lehouiller, J. Davis, Joie Lehouillier, Diana Osborn, Eric Hutchins, Darrell Wescom, Greg Tatro

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call to Order*

Scott called the meeting to order at 6:02.

2. *Changes, Additions to Proposed Agenda*

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. *Village Staff & Trustee Responses to Questions Surrounding BLM Flag & Related Issues*

Meredith said Brian Miller will be the moderator for the meeting. Trustees and staff introduced themselves. Meredith said she went through the recording from the December 14 meeting and did her best to create a list of questions that she, the trustees and other staff will provide answers to. Moderator Brian Miller introduced himself and explained the procedures for the meeting.

Kyle Nuse said she was hoping Meredith or Brian could make it clear why this meeting came about, that it is a cure for the Open Meeting Law violation that happened last year and that it is to get specific questions answered. Meredith said she doesn't agree with that phrasing. The cure was the offer at the December 14 meeting to allow people to speak who were not able to speak at a previous meeting and for the board to ratify the decisions made at that previous meeting. This meeting is something the board did not have to do but voted to do at the request of the public. It is not part of the cure for the Open Meeting Law complaint. Scott agreed. The cure was done legally at the following meeting. This community meeting is to get questions answered.

Meredith said the first question she got from the recording was: How did Bob Hoag get involved? Who reached out to him regarding putting a Black Lives Matter flag on his property and who wanted a special meeting to discuss that idea? Meredith said her understanding is that Bob Hoag called Scott or Gordy. No staff or board members reached out to him. Gordy called Bob back and then discussed the idea with a few other people, including some people who thought his idea might be a good compromise. He brought it to Meredith's attention and they decided to schedule a special meeting to discuss it.

Another question was: Who is the supervisor of the fire department and the fire chief? Meredith said the firefighters work under the chief and the chief reports to the board of trustees.

Another question was: Did anyone talk to Jena and offer her support? Meredith said she responded to her by email and she knows Gordy spoke to her by phone. That is her only knowledge of outreach to Jena after she reported her discussion with Will and her decision to resign. Athena said she regrets not reaching out to Jena. That was a mistake on her part. She was in the process of moving at the time but she should have reached out. It was her responsibility as a trustee.

Another question was: Can we discuss Will bullying Jena? Meredith said she was advised that commenting on this topic would be outside the scope of her position with the village so she will let Scott offer comments. Scott said the board had a fairly lengthy discussion on this. Scott thought Will explained himself fairly well. We have all had difficult conversations with a lot of people. Will gave his view of how he had a correspondence with Jena. Scott noted that he did not see in Jena's correspondence with Meredith or Gordy the word "bullying." Brian Miller suggested it would be appropriate for Will to summarize what happened if he wants to. Will said the conversation he had was with Jena. Only he and Jena were there. They had been friends for years. Neither she nor her husband reached out to him after the conversation. He has no reason to think she felt anything about the conversation was out of the normal. It's not a public issue. Brian said he understands that some of the words used in the questions were from the question askers. Meredith agreed.

Another question was: Is this the first time the fire department has bullied the board/the community? Meredith said every interaction she has had with the fire department has been respectful and professional. She has never felt bullied or threatened by the fire department. Chief West brought his concerns about firefighter availability, department readiness and public safety to the attention of Meredith and the board, which is his duty to do as the fire chief. She believes that was appropriate given his role in protecting public safety.

Scott said, working as a trustee, he has never been bullied by any members of the fire department or by the fire department as a department.

Athena said she has never felt threatened by the fire department and even if she did that would not have been reason for her to change her vote. She did change her vote even though she was disappointed and upset by the content of the letter from the fire department. She didn't find it to have an accurate representation of what she views Black Lives Matter to be. She was disappointed with the letter and didn't agree with a lot of the contents. But she changed her vote because her priority was to raise the flag as soon as possible and move on to other issues. She foresaw gridlock if the board kept trying to raise the flag in this location. She really wanted it up and the town would still have to approve it. She didn't feel the selectboard would approve it. She thinks it looks great where it is. Meredith and Scott did a lot of work to make it look fantastic. She wishes there was more gratitude for that.

BJ said he wasn't on the board at the time but he has watched the Zoom meetings. He understood what was in the letter. He is in EMS and they stay out of politics. He understood and agreed with the letter from the standpoint of being a first responder.

Steve Hatfield said personally he is really in favor of Black Lives Matter flags and signs. He has one in his yard. But he is not sure if it is the best thing for the fire department right now. When we drive through Johnson we don't see any lines of the village and town and so he thinks if this was

going to get decided it should have been by a bigger group in a bigger meeting. For the time being he is happy with the flag where it is. It is not super visible there. He likes the idea Eric Hutchins put forward of a banner at the town hall or a flag over in the park. He does think there is a political aspect to that flag. That is how changes happen. To get human rights you have to pass laws. You can't deny it is political. There are some other flags he wouldn't want to see there. That is why he is content to leave it as it is.

Another question was: When is the board going to address being threatened by the fire department? Meredith said she never felt the fire department threatened her or the board. Scott said he never felt threatened by the fire department or persuaded to do something he didn't want to do. He is not sure why that question was asked.

Another question was: Does the board care about the concerns of the public, especially the concerns about Will being appointed to Jena's seat? Scott said the board's monthly Zoom meetings are usually populated by the same people, but it a dozen people don't represent the 3000 people in Johnson. There are other people who talk to him outside meetings. He listens to everyone. Does he care about the community? Absolutely. The thing he has been pushing on this is community buy-in. When we start forcing exactly what we want on a community, it gets divisive. He would rather build a bridge and get everyone on board than throw up walls. It's all about the community, even people we do not necessarily agree with. There are people we can learn from and maybe we can teach them some things. He has personally been feeling down and miserable with some of the comments the board has been getting. The last part of that question was targeting Will. He knew Gordy was getting ready to get off the board because it was becoming too stressful. He thought he could shoulder that burden but he is unable to, so he is leaving as well. We have new trustees and a complicated future in the village and nobody to help Meredith through that process. The only person stepping up to fill the vacancy was Will. He understands how the village works. He has been a trustee in the past. That is why Will had Scott's support, knowing that there would be a brand new board with no experience.

Athena said the first part of this question upset her. She cares a lot. That is why she became a trustee. She has never felt as at home anywhere else as she does here. She had her own concerns about Will being appointed. Before the appointment she sent about half a dozen messages trying to get someone to apply who was maybe younger and not a man. She didn't want to be the only young woman on the board. But Steve and Will were the only two that stepped up.

BJ said he is new. All he knows of Will is what he has seen from past meeting recordings and meetings with him. He feels he is an asset because of his knowledge. He can tell Will cares. He sees him as a major asset going forward.

Steve said he wasn't there in the meeting between Will and Jena. There are some things about it on appearance that he had some concerns about it but he wasn't there. Now he thinks we just have to move forward. He has seen Will do nothing but care for this village. He serves on the fire department. That counts a lot with him. He is putting his life at risk. And people are not knocking down the door to do this job. We will have one vacancy. Maybe we can invite Jena to give it another try. He is ready to work with Will and move on.

Meredith said there is one last topic she wanted to raise because it has been brought up a few times over the last 6 months and she never got an opportunity to address it. It has been suggested multiple times that the timing of the fire department's letter to her about their concerns about the Black Lives Matter flag going up at the municipal building was somehow suspect. There was an implication that she or Gordy were working behind the scenes with the fire department to have the letter written. She had no discussions with the fire chief or any member of the fire department prior to the day she got that letter from Arjay, when she talked to him by phone before he sent it.

Athena said she really cares about racial justice a lot. She has been fighting for it since she was a child. She knows she is not perfect. She has bias and white privilege to unpack. She was hoping we could get the flag up and move on to bigger things, like bias training for employees and policies to address systemic racism in society.

Brian Miller shared a few things for people to think about before speaking and then the discussion was opened up to the public.

4. *Public Comment/Questions Surrounding BLM Flag & Related Issues*

Jackie Stanton thanked Meredith for clarifying the timing questions related to the fire department letter. Those concerns were raised, not by the public, but by three former village trustees who had concerns about the letter. There has been a misconception that there was a request to fly a Black Lives Matter flag at the fire department facility. That is not true. The request was to fly a flag at the town hall, also known as the municipal building and the trustees understood that because the agenda item in July was titled Request to Fly Black Lives Matter Flag at the Municipal Building. There is been so much fallout and confusion and hard feelings from that misconception. She is unsure why the fire department felt so targeted and fearful and that other agencies wouldn't work with them. She would like to hear where all that came from. She asked who the fire department reports to and who their supervisor is because no member of the fire department has ever attended a meeting and spoken about the letter. If the board of trustees supervises of the fire department, why didn't the trustees answer these questions and advocate for their employees and clear things up?

Scott said there was no misconception about the request. The request was to fly the flag on the flagpole owned by the village. When that went to the selectboard they gave it to the trustees and the fire department commented on it. It was clearly stated in the minutes. As far as having the fire department show up to these meetings, one reason the trustees asked for a moderator was to have a safe place for everyone to come. A lot of people didn't want the moderator but when we got the moderator the fire department showed up.

Cal Stanton said he had the same impression as Kyle, that this was the cure for the meeting where the public didn't get to speak. The original intent and request was to fly a Black Lives Matter flag at the municipal building. The group that made the request was informed that it was a village issue because those flagpoles are on village property. With regard to the Black Lives Matter flag, to him that ship has sailed. There is a Black Lives Matter flag on the green. What struck him was how immediate Arjay's letter was. It was never about the fire department but it became that. It became apparent through this process what a big seat at the table the fire department has. He witnessed the trustees twisting themselves into knots to appease the fire department. A lot of things in the fire department letter probably need to be addressed. Several board members at the time basically said that the letter needed to be unpacked. That was coupled with Jena's letter, which he would hope

Meredith might share. He doesn't feel citizens should be demonized for questioning this. When local government is influenced the way he has witnessed it, that is something to be questioned. What became apparent to him was how much control the fire department has, to the point where the flag was going up and down Route 15 and to Bob Hoag's property. How did Bob Hoag even know?

Rick Aupperlee asked if Brian Miller had read the letter from the fire department and Jena's letter. Brian said he read the fire department letter but not Jena's. He was not provided that. Rick said that is important context. The public wasn't provided that letter for over 2 months. Jena wrote on August 11 asking the board for help dealing with the matter of someone who came unannounced and knocked at her door and had a conversation around the Black Lives Matter flag and her vote, saying she had disrespected the fire department. Meredith should probably read the letter.

Brian asked Rick to share the letter. Rick said he can't. Rick said his question is why the trustees did not come forward with this letter in a timely manner. Members of the public asked why Jena was resigning. It is clear from the letter why she resigned. She got no support. He said at a meeting in September that he had concerns about Will being appointed to the board because Will was the person referred to in Jena's letter. The letter is a public record document and should have been part of the conversation. He did not disrespect Will's service to the community or his experience. It was his manner that Rick was concerned with.

Scott said the email was sent to the trustees and Meredith and there was no notation that it should be forwarded for public consumption. If Jena wanted it out there, she would have put it out there. He considered it a personnel issue and didn't discuss it. It was Jena's letter. That was why it was not released. He was trying to respect her privacy. He didn't have permission from her to share the letter.

Meredith said she never received a request from any member of the public who is at this meeting for a copy of the letter. If she had, she would have provided it, because it is part of the public record. She got a request from a reporter and she provided the letter to the reporter.

Doug Collins said he doesn't think that Black Lives Matter flag belongs on a public flagpole. It can be displayed in someone's yard.

Kyle asked Arjay how the request to fly a Black Lives Matter flag on a municipal flag pole got translated in his mind to a fire department facility. And who was he afraid of when he said that he and many of his employees would walk if the Black Lives Matter flag went up and when he said in his letter that organizations such as EMT and police would stop working with the fire department and family and friends would be put in peril? Who was he afraid of and why?

Will said he thought all questions were to be directed to the chair, who can redirect them if he wishes. Brian Miller said that is correct. Scott said if Arjay would like to respond to the questions he can.

Arjay West said his first knowledge of this topic came out of the June 15 selectboard meeting. The discussion explicitly described the monument and flag poles. He had a clear understanding that it pertained to the fire department's flag poles. The fire department has always wanted to be neutral.

They don't want controversy. They don't want to engage. Political groups, scouting groups, nonprofits, etc. have requested in the past that the fire department fly some banners or flags or symbols and they have always respectfully said no. They want to be neutral. At the end of the conversation in the selectboard minutes a person said that he intended to bring this request to the trustees. Arjay thought it was clear that the request would come to the trustees. And there was a lot of concern among the firefighters. He received enough comments that it reached the point where he thought this topic could impact the ability to respond to calls, so he reached out to Meredith as his supervisor and provided her with a letter trying to share those concerns. It was not sent forcefully, harassing or bullying. That was never the intent. He has always had a good working relationship with the board. He reported that he thought the flag would compromise the fire department's ability to respond.

Kim Dunkley said she wanted to support all the people who wanted the flag up at the village flag pole. She understood that there was strife. In Jericho a Black Lives Matter sign was smashed with paint bombs. That made her understand that because it has been politicized it is a symbol that isn't bringing our community forward together. She was hoping there would be empathy from all the people who know that Black lives matter to find a different way to go forward. She is happy to have the Racial Justice Committee working towards that. She is still hoping people can put themselves in other people's shoes to try to understand and help everybody move forward together.

Greg Tatro said he wants to acknowledge the board members. It is a thankless job. They work hard to try to do the best they can. He wants to acknowledge Gordy Smith, who he thinks was on the board for well over 30 years. He thinks between that and the fire department he gave almost 50 years of his life to this town. He thinks the way Gordy was treated upset a lot of people. This whole thing shouldn't have been handled the way it has been. We should have been working together and been respectful of each other. That goes for both sides. He thinks having the flag at the village green is a good compromise. Scott is another person who has given up a lot of his life for the community. The way the board members have been treated is unbelievable. It is discouraging for our town. Arjay has given up 30 years of his life to be in the fire department and be chief and work for this community for basically nothing. Greg does believe people of color have been oppressed. They haven't had the same opportunities and they have been looked down on in society. There is no question about that. But this should have been handled in a way that we could all work together. It alienated people. Johnson is not a racist town. Some of us probably are that don't realize we are, but it is not as bad as what we are trying to make it out to be. He appreciates what each board member does.

Ken Tourangeau said he has lived in Johnson for almost 30 years. Johnson is one of the most diverse towns in Lamoille County, with the Studio Center and the college. There are definitely racists in this town but something that involves community land should never have been decided on by the board or a small group of people who come to a meeting. It should have been decided by a vote of the residents. It isn't just about the village. It affects the whole town. We all need our fire department. The firefighters do miraculous work for our town and they are being called racists. This needs to stop. The flag is up. There is no need for banners or anything else. We are not a racist town. He doesn't think anyone here can tell of a racist action that has happened, at least publicly. We need to move on. There are bigger issues, like infrastructure. Let's move on and fix the village.

Lynda Hill said nobody called the fire department racist. Ken said they have. Lynda disagreed. She said looking at the people who are participating in this meeting, at least half of them are long time volunteers in this town. Scott said something earlier about how a dozen people don't represent Johnson. That may be, but where are the other people? When issues come up they need to come to meetings. The flag thing got blown way out of proportion. We have the flag up now and it's a done deal. She appreciates Arjay speaking. She wishes he had come to a meeting months ago. The way he spoke tonight was entirely different than the tone of his letter. She thinks people would have been more understanding if someone had spoken directly about the issue and if we had had this conversation a long time ago.

Anne Mullings said she has had to keep her mouth shut due to employment issues but she is retiring in May because she can't take it anymore. This has gotten out of hand. There are people who don't want to compromise, who are bullies. There is the inclusivity statement saying that everyone is welcome but the only ones who are welcome are the ones that agree with their views. A lot of people need to get jobs so they can start worrying about themselves and not everyone else in town. Kyle should be ashamed of herself for being president of Johnson Works and telling people to boycott a business in this town. She is ashamed of all the people she feels are bullies.

Diane Lehouiller said none of the issues members of the public went to the trustees with were personal. It was always about the Black Lives Matter flag and it ended up being about Open Meeting Law, which the trustee board violated and citizens tried to get corrected. No one spoke in the manner she just heard at any of those meetings. People wanted to hear from the other side and from the fire department. She doesn't know why people think that they think the fire department members are racist. It's not true. They wanted people to come and discuss what they were talking about. But the bottom line is that Open Meeting Law was violated several times. Citizens wanted answers to questions and didn't get them. That makes you suspicious and makes rumors. She doesn't know where Anne is getting what she just said. She sounded really angry. She doesn't think there is anyone she attended trustee meetings with that really was angry. People were disappointed and asked questions. She doesn't know where everyone is getting that they would call people racist. If you don't want a Black Lives Matter flag flown, come and talk about it. That was what they wanted, but that didn't happen. Open Meeting Law was violated and that was a big part of the problem, along with the tone of the fire department letter. They aren't opposed to the fire department. They appreciate everything they do. She appreciates the trustees too.

Scott said during town meeting comments are taken from town residents and those from outside the town have to be approved to speak. When the village trustees were convened to talk about village business they wrongly assumed that village residents were the ones who could make comments and ask questions. It was not like they maliciously decided not to let people speak. They corrected the mistake at the next meeting and let everyone speak and they are doing that now. There is some disagreement with the legal opinion that people outside the voting community need to be allowed to speak but the Secretary of State's office was clear that it was a misstep and the board fixed it. It wasn't like the board was trying to cut people off because they didn't want to hear them. They were trying to keep it to village residents.

Pam Aupperlee said she wanted to point out that village residents weren't allowed to speak at that meeting in October either. She is proud to live in a community where Black Lives Matter issues are being discussed. This is a humanitarian issue and we are all implicated when we allow others to be

mistreated. Hopelessness is the enemy of justice. She believes the world was on the brink of hopelessness when George Floyd's murder hit the airwaves. People could have given up then but they rose up around the world to keep hope alive. The request to fly a Black Lives Matter flag at the municipal building – not the fire department – was an olive branch to show that Johnson cares and that people are safe here. All lives can only matter if Black lives matter and matter is the minimum. Some questions have been misrepresented as attacks. Going forward, can questions be common ground and can they be answered? Arjay answered some questions tonight that community members have asked for months. It helped to get those answers. She is upset that someone was allowed to call names at this meeting. She thought this was a safe place. That saddens her.

Mark French said he agrees with Greg Tatro 100%. He agrees with Anne. A lot of time has been wasted by the selectboard and trustees on things that do not affect running of the town and village. Pointing all these fingers is ridiculous. So much time has been wasted on both boards. He feels a Black Lives Matter flag should not be on any public property. There are a lot of flags out there. You can't say yes to one and no to others.

Margo Warden said she wanted to amplify Pam's words. She would also like to address the concern that people feel that some people were called racist. That is difficult to hear. Most people here know her and know her family. It is difficult to think, could I be racist? She has had important conversations with her sons. It has been difficult to challenge her beliefs and some of her actions and thoughts. When she asked herself if some of her acts, thoughts or beliefs could be seen as racist, the answer was yes. She is grateful to her sons, her community, and her friends who in very courageous ways can point things out for the purpose of growth, understanding and improvement. It is hard to think of oneself as a racist. To say she is not a racist is not enough. She believes she needs to speak clearly and loudly and consistently that she is an anti-racist. She is committed to doing the work to continue to learn about self, family, history and this community. It is difficult to be at a place where who you are as a person is questioned. It is easier when we do this together.

Bobbi Rooney said she has owned a salon in Johnson for 22 years. She doesn't consider herself a racist. She is more than happy to accommodate anyone, though she admits she doesn't do a good job of cutting the hair of people of color. She feels this issue started quite some time ago when she got a set of minutes of a meeting that was taking place on the side and was brought to the selectboard and town administration. She thinks it was brought to light at the October 15, 2019 selectboard meeting. The group was speaking directly about Republican bigots, white supremacy and white male privilege. When she called people out on those minutes a couple of days later a new link to completely different minutes was put out to the administration and a third set of minutes was discussed at the selectboard meeting. She agrees with Greg Tatro and Mark French. She is more than willing and all the people she knows are more than willing to accommodate any person of color at any time in any way. She thanks the fire department and trustees for having to go through this.

BJ said he doesn't agree that the fire department has control over the trustees. We have our own minds and make our own votes. He votes what he thinks. Whether the fire department letter has a negative tone is up to the reader. He took it as very professional. He believes the flag pole is the fire department's. The confusion was on the part of the people who put in the request to put up the flag, not on the part of the fire department.

Eric Osgood noted that he is president of the village but he has no role in this meeting. He was a member of the fire department for a decade and is currently selectboard chair. He knows this is a difficult meeting. Emotions are high on both sides. He has a tremendous amount of respect for the fire department and for the trustees. In his role as chair and in Gordy's role as chair of the trustees, they have had disagreements, but he always respected Gordy because he was doing what he felt was best for the village. He is a little concerned that the word "bullying" has been thrown all over, maybe too loosely. He is concerned that we have a board whose only member who was there a year ago is going to finish next month. We will have a board where every member has less than a year under their belt. Will is the only one with any experience on that board. The trustee board has a lot of important work to do. They are responsible for water and light. He hopes after this meeting maybe the trustees can go to work and do the things they were elected to do and not be dealing with distractions. After everyone airs their feelings maybe we can move forward.

Anne Mullings said she went to a selectboard meeting where Black Lives Matter was being discussed and she said her feeling was that the inclusivity statement wasn't needed and that a lot of people felt it was pushed down their throats. Someone told her she didn't understand. But she does understand. She has been married to a Black man for the last 17 years. She definitely knows racism. She has seen it firsthand every day for the last 17 years. She has been called racist many times in the last year but if she were racist would she be married to a Black man? She doesn't see in color. She knows she has offended a lot of people but people have offended her and she doesn't take back anything she said.

Sophia Berard said she agrees with a lot of what has been said. This has all gotten so convoluted. Everything has been lost in translation. A lot of feelings have been hurt unintentionally. A lot of people have heard things they wanted to hear or thought were being said. She doesn't think the discussion around Black Lives Matter is a distraction. She agrees that the town and village have a lot of work to do on how to keep the town going but it is important that we are still having this conversation. It does further some semblance of humanity and compassion for people. She thinks it is important that we see color and validate and honor every color rather ignore it or pretend it doesn't exist. She appreciates Arjay speaking and she appreciates the fire department. She appreciates the trustees and the selectboard. She thinks Black Lives Matter is an important issue and we will probably still be talking about it for many months to come.

Jackie said Arjay said he initially called his supervisor, Meredith. She thought it was clarified that the trustees are his supervisors. Is that true? Meredith said yes. She does not have any hiring or firing or discipline authority; that is up to the board.

Jackie said it needs to be communicated to Arjay and the rest of the fire department and maybe the trustees that they act in a supervisory role to the fire department. There is obviously some confusion. She still has questions about the letter, the board and their lack of supervising and lack of advocating for their employees when their employees had put forth a letter that in her opinion was very reactionary. There were some things in the letter that concerned members of the public and former trustees. Arjay talked about other agencies not working with him – hazmat, the police, EMS. Her question is, where did this come from? Were there conversations with these partner emergency service providers? Or was this thrown out not based on anything real and meaningful? The letter said the firemen feared for themselves and their families. It was over the top. She felt it

should be addressed. She doesn't feel that has been adequately addressed tonight by Arjay or the trustees. She also wants to clarify that there was never any request for any flag to be flown at the fire department facility. She has yet to hear that acknowledged. The request was to fly it at the town hall. If the property the flag poles are on happens to be village property, that is village property. There is no such thing as fire department property. The trustee board is the fire department's supervisor, not Meredith. She hopes we can clear that up tonight.

Scott said the request was made to fly the flag on those flag poles. That is how he saw it. There is no other flagpole to fly it on at that facility without installing one. Jackie said it's not a fire department facility. Scott said as far as supervising the fire department, he is a bit taken aback by the comment because Arjay does come to the trustees for the workings of the fire department. If Arjay wants to comment on his letter he can feel free.

Arjay said he doesn't have a lot more to comment on. It is obvious how divided everyone is over this issue. Those are some of the concerns he was trying to communicate to Meredith. The fire department is ready to move forward. They wish this community to get stronger and they wish to serve. They want to remain neutral, open and able to respond to anyone who calls without any other opinion or thought process.

Scott said his read on the fire department letter wasn't entirely clear. He doesn't necessarily agree with everything. What he did agree with is the ability of the fire department to function without coming out of that neutral zone. We do not see Agency of Agriculture vehicles with migrant justice stickers on their bumpers or Fish and Wildlife vehicles with Sierra Club stickers. They advocate for nothing but the science they are doing and the rules and policy they are trying to convey. We don't see federal vehicles with bumper stickers advocating for good social change. When the fire department brought that up it made sense to him.

Darrell Wescom said whether the flagpole is on village property, the fire department felt it was something they didn't want to be included in. That is their house. It is controlled by the village but they do the work there. If they didn't want any part of the flag being anywhere near their building, then so be it. If they want to stay neutral, let's leave it be neutral.

Eric Hutchins said he is new to this discussion. He is a member of Racial Justice Committee on the town side. One reason he joined that group was because he saw where this was going. As a social studies teacher at the high school he knows there is a diversity of opinions on these matters. He thinks it is a shame if it divides our town. There's not both sides to this issue, there is one side and that is doing what is best for our town. There are different opinions about how to do what is best for our town. One job we have is to make our town welcoming and inclusive to all people – visitors, tourists, people who want to start businesses here, and people who want to move here. Some people believe in equality – just treating everyone equally. That is the way he grew up. We have 400 years of bad racism in this country. Some people think we need to address that, we need to not just be equal, but do more than that to send a positive message that this is an open and welcoming town. There is debate about that. That is a good debate. That we are having this conversation is a good thing. That there is a diversity of opinions is a good thing. If we all listen to each other, we might change each other's minds a little bit. We have a great system for dealing with diversity of opinion – democracy. It's worked for about 250 years. There are many municipalities and states that put out messages about political ideas that welcome people. He thinks

we should be open to listening to everybody. It is important to recognize that we are all on the same side. There are good things that can come from this. These conversations are hard. They can get heated, but they are helpful. We can listen and learn and probably can come to common ground and make the community welcoming.

Diana Osborn quoted Desmond Tutu on neutrality: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." She respects the fire department. She is a first responder herself. But she thinks it is important that we don't just settle for neutral. She thinks there is a time and a place to step up for what is right. She appreciates the people who have been brave enough to take the side of the oppressed.

Lynda Hill thanked Diana and Eric for their comments. Years ago she was on the school board when they were having discussions about whether to move the elementary school out of the village and out of town. The town was divided and it was not pretty but they came together and figured it out. Now we have this and we are sort of getting it settled, finally. But we have a decision to make about merging the town and village. People should not sit in the background and complain. Everyone needs to show up to be part of the merger discussion.

Rick Aupperlee said he is also on the Racial Justice Committee and he is in contact with the town and village administrators. On the bottom of any correspondence he has it states that any response or reply to this message may be subject to the Vermont Public Records Act. The Vermont Public Records Act defines a public record or public document as any written or recorded information regardless of physical form or characteristics. Therefore he feels Jena's letter does fall under the category of public records. As someone who was part of the group who brought the original request regarding the Black Lives Matter flag, the request was never discussed in the context of raising the flag at the municipal building. The trustees discussed putting flags up and down Main Street. At another meeting the original proposal was voted on and passed. But he believes about five different solutions were offered by the trustees. He wants Scott to own that he is part of the process that created the situation. All the solutions came from the trustees, not from the people who made the original request.

BJ said residents came wanting the flag up. They got what they wanted. To him the problem is solved and we should be going on to other things.

Greg Tatro said he is glad we had this conversation. He thanked Margo for her passionate words. He thinks that struck a tone with everyone. She knows what it is like because she has sons who are people of color. It seems like it is time for this community to heal. We have to stop bringing up the past, work together, shake each other's hand in the store. Maybe people from the Racial Justice Committee and the fire department can get together to work through this. We have to listen to each other, then it will get better. Tonight is a good start but he doesn't think this is the end. We have to move forward. Everyone just wants to be heard. He doesn't know why we can't just put it behind us, work on a solution and bring our community back together. He is not saying we should ignore Black Lives Matter but if we are going to get this solved and move ahead we have to talk and listen to each other. He hopes we can do that. Nothing would be better than if we all respected each other. Listening is huge.

Jackie said she wanted to reiterate that Margo said she is a racist. That was her message. She had racist thoughts and actions. Jackie is all for getting together and speaking. That is why she has been attending meetings. A lot of people in the room tonight haven't been present for these conversations. They are welcome to come to Racial Justice Committee, village trustee or selectboard meetings. Coming in late in the game with speeches is frustrating to those who have been here. She commends those who have been here in the trenches. She looks forward to continuing these conversations. She hopes the boards will encourage people to come to meetings and speak or put their thoughts in writing to be read for them. That is the Democratic process. Public meetings are set up for a reason. It works best when everyone participates publicly. She asks that people please continue to participate.

5. *Harvey Water/Sewer Bill Adjustment*

Meredith said Martha Harvey submitted a request for an excess usage adjustment. There was a leak at one of the mobile homes in the Harvey Mobile Home Park. It happened in January and she forgot to put it on the March agenda. Repairs have been made. The home has not been occupied for several months. The leak was associated with winterization of the mobile home that was not done effectively. Water did not go through the sewer. She recommends adjusting the bill in accordance with the village policy. Will moved to adjust the sewer bill for 155 Park Street Lot 32 to the highest bill from the last 12 months, \$27.10, and to adjust the water bill to the average of the last three months, \$61.50, Athena seconded and the motion was passed.

6. *Town Request for Village Donation towards Electric Service at Trailhead*

Meredith said the town is working on upgrades to the trailhead building at Old Mill Park. The town received a donation from a private family to work towards that. The town is trying to stretch its funds as much as possible. They requested the village contribute to some degree with bringing electric service to that building. Troy completed an estimate for that work. He spoke with Howard Romero who is taking the lead on that project. Howard indicated a desire to take off from a different pole so the materials cost could be a little higher than what Troy estimated but based on the way he originally designed it the projected cost for materials and labor is about \$4,400. The town crew is donating some of their time to do landscaping and site work and the village got a request to make some donation. We had a very difficult budget year. We are projecting a sizable deficit for the electric department, primarily due to NVU having less usage. We need to keep that in mind as well as fairness to ratepayers. Scott reminded her that Old Mill Park is the site of some environmental mitigation efforts done in the past and we may want to discuss that issue.

Scott said it has a clay cap that was put on for public health and environmental reasons when the property was transferred to the town. He thinks the contamination of concern was arsenic and petroleum products. There may be others. We have to work with the state before digging holes. He would prefer to have the state give us a green light before we do anything there. He doesn't want the village liable for anything we are doing. If we have to break the earth there are also concerns for village staff potentially being exposed. There is an OSHA regulation that states that employees need certain training for different levels of exposure. The training is extremely expensive. He would be more comfortable if the state gave us the green light and said that work done there will not impact the past mitigation and not put the crew, the public or the environment at risk. The last time we dug in there we found petroleum and the work was not stopped when it should have been stopped. He doesn't want to see that happen again.

Will said those are valid points but he thinks the first issue is whether the board will authorize expenditures for the electric department, which currently doesn't have a balanced budget. Are we

okay with a donation from a department that will have to ask for an increase and when we do it will show up that we made a donation? Is that fair to our ratepayers? Scott said that makes sense. He has never gone through a rate increase before. He doesn't know what the Public Service Board asks. If we ask for a rate increase but we have given a donation, he doesn't know how that will affect the decision.

Athena asked if GoFundMe is a viable option. Meredith said it is not a village project so she is not sure the village would be the right entity to do a GoFundMe.

Meredith said if the village doesn't make a donation she believes the project will still happen with the town paying for it, so permissions from the state will still need to be sorted out. She said Troy did the estimate the same way he would for any customer. It includes a 25% restocking fee for materials to recover our administrative costs. Restocking does take staff time but it is not cash out of our pocket. The restocking fee is \$540. Not charging the restocking fee would be one thing we could offer to show support for the project.

Brian Story said approval from the state for this project is underway. Act 250 and Department of Transportation right of way permits are in progress. Before any shovels go in the ground the town will have an environmental assessment on the project. The state has been pretty optimistic about it. He would encourage the village to consider contributing in some way even if it isn't possible to contribute the whole project cost. Maybe the town could pay for materials and the village could donate labor. The project is going forward regardless. If the village does not give anything it will just reduce the money available for finishing touches, artwork, etc. that the town wants to be part of the project.

Howard Romero said he is quite sure the project is outside of the clay cap. The soil there hasn't been disturbed for 100 years. If the village could make available a hole digger when needed, that would be helpful.

Meredith said the board can choose to donate any amount from zero to \$4,400. The materials are the most tangible actual cost. We didn't budget for those and it will cost actual cash out of hand to replace them if we use them. That cost is harder to absorb than labor.

The board discussed the wording of a possible motion. Will made and withdrew two motions during the discussion. Meredith suggested donating labor rather than materials because materials are the most real expense. The labor would be done during normal business hours at our normal rates, which we have budgeted for. It would mean employees were doing that and not something else but it would not cost more than what we have budgeted.

Will moved and Steve seconded to provide materials necessary to bring electric service to the new town welcome center building as presented by Meredith tonight at actual cost and to provide the necessary labor from the electric department at no cost.

Scott said if we provide materials at cost it still shows up that we are donating cash we don't have. He would want to make sure the village general department reimburses the village electric department to get that off the books. Is that something that can happen fairly easily? Meredith said employees will just record hours on their timesheets to the electric department. That is already

budgeted time and is not a new cost. She doesn't think that would cause trouble in a rate case. Scott said we should reimburse material costs from village funds. Meredith said we are charging the town for the materials.

Meredith said we want to be clear that we are not setting a precedent that we will do this all the time. We don't want to give the impression that this will always be possible.

Eric Osgood said hopefully building this welcome center will be win-win. A donor has given the town \$40K to do this project. Hopefully the welcome center will direct people into the village to spend money and time. There has been talk that if power is provided to this location then it will be an easier leap to get power to light the ball fields. That would be a direct benefit to the village because it would be another customer.

Scott asked if Troy knows about the potential to add lighting to the ball fields. Would we need a bigger transformer, etc. for that? Meredith said she doesn't know if Troy has been asked whether what is being planned for this project is sufficient to also do lighting for the ball fields.

Scott asked what the town is kicking in for this project. Brian Story said the town is contributing some of his time for permitting and the town crew is going to provide some fill and reshaping for the land and clear some trees out of the right of way.

Kyle said she wants to echo what Eric said about this being a real win-win situation for the town, village, businesses and residents. She thinks it will be awesome when it is done. Wouldn't the electric department earn some of this donation back through increased use of electricity? She doesn't know who pays the electric bill for the welcome center but she assumes the town would pay the village. Meredith said the village will definitely earn some money back. The building will be metered and the town will be charged. It will take some years, but there will be money coming back.

Meredith said there is an annual fee the state charges for any crossing of the rail trail. We want to be clear that the village is not taking on that cost. Howard said Troy's estimate was based on a plan that was going to require getting an easement from a neighbor. He looked at the site and suggested having electricity go to the welcome center from a different pole alongside the old mill building. With that plan, the wires will go over the rail trail but an argument could possibly be made that we are still in our right of way so Doug Molde is going to see if we can get the fee to the state waived.

7. *Adjourn*

Will move to adjourn, Steve seconded, the motion was passed and the meeting was adjourned at 8:49.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths