

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2026

Present:

Trustees: Will Jennison, Ellis O’Hear, BJ Putvain, Ken Tourangeau, Darrell Wescom

Others: Erik Bailey, Rosemary Audibert, Cynthia Hennard, Diane Lehouiller, Laurel Persico, Marla Emery, Mark Woodward, Jon Gregg, 3 other people

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Ken called the meeting to order at 6:01.

2. The Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge was recited.

3. Review of Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes and Additions

Ken moved the WWFT FEMA item to be last on the agenda and added an equipment question for Darrell and an “odds and ends” item for BJ.

4. Administer Oath to Newly Elected Trustees

Rosemary administered the oath of office to Will and BJ.

5. Election of Chair & Vice Chair

Darrell moved to elect Ken Tourangeau as chair, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.

Will moved to elect BJ Putvain as vice chair, Darrell seconded and the motion was passed.

6. Appointment of Water & Light Commissioner

Will moved to appoint Erik Bailey as Water & Light Commissioner, Ellis seconded and the motion was passed.

7. Appoint/Re-Appoint 2 Emergency Operations Coordinators 1 & 2

Will moved to re-appoint Ken Tourangeau as Emergency Operations Coordinator 1 and BJ Putvain as Emergency Operations Coordinator 2, Darrell seconded and the motion was passed.

8. Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings

Ken asked to have it added to the April 7 minutes that he had corrected his misstatement that the PUC (rather than the VPPSA advisor) said our finances supported a rate decrease.

Will moved to approve the minutes of March 9, March 13, and April 7, 2026 with the change to the April 7 minutes requested by Ken and the motion was seconded and passed.

9. Treasurer’s Report: Bills and Warrants, Budget Status Report, Any Action Items

Rosemary handed out a budget status report through the end of March. She said we will send a reminder to Waterville to pay the first installment for the fire contract. General salaries are at 24% of budget. That is fairly close considering how much snow we had. Electric department sales were at 31% of budget for the first 3 months. Water and sewer sales for the first 3 months were both close to 27% of budget.

Rosemary said the tax attorney will not combine the town and village dollar amounts. Someone has to have at least \$1500 worth of delinquent taxes to go to tax sale, according to state policy. No one owes that much in village taxes. Ken asked, not combining the town and village amounts is the attorney’s policy? Rosemary said she thinks so. The attorney can only charge the

taxpayer up to 15% of the tax owed. The village would be liable for the rest of the attorney's fee, which would be much more than 15% of the taxes owed. Does the board want the attorney to at least send a threatening notice to the people with delinquent taxes?

Will asked if we have any other recourse to collect delinquent taxes. Rosemary said we could probably take people to small claims court. There are fees for that too.

Darrell asked, if the town takes the property in a tax sale, do we not get the village taxes that were owed? Erik asked, won't there be a lien on the property for village taxes? Will said lienholders need to be notified before a tax sale because they have the option of paying the back taxes. Once lienholders are notified and the property goes to tax sale, all liens are void.

Ken asked Rosemary to get a quote for sending threatening letters.

Will asked when the town will have a tax sale. Rosemary said probably sometime this summer.

Erik said it is probably worth getting a legal opinion on whether the village can send a letter saying the property could be subject to tax sale.

The board agreed to schedule a special meeting on April 27.

10. *Members of the Public*

No members of the public wished to comment.

11. *Village Manager's Report and Action Items*

Erik said the new Water & Light garage looks awesome. Currently they are painting the interior. The building is plumbed and over 90% wired. They should be working on the punch list items by the end of the month.

Ken suggested changing the start time of the April 27 meeting to 5:30 so the board can do a walk-through of the new garage building. The board agreed to that. The rest of the meeting will be at the municipal building starting at 6:00. Ken said it would be nice if Nate was present for the walk-through.

Erik said Jeff is scheduled to take his CDL written exam tomorrow. Erik will schedule him for class immediately after he has his permit back.

Rosemary and Erik will be conducting an initial interview Monday for a village treasurer candidate. If the person becomes a finalist Erik will schedule an interview with the board.

Erik discussed 3 wastewater charge exception requests that need to be signed. The sewer bill for each is to be reduced to the average bill for the last 3 months.

Will moved to reduce the sewer bill for 146 Railroad Street by \$702 and the motion was seconded and passed.

Will moved to reduce the sewer bill for 69 Katy Win Road by \$2,790.54, Darrell seconded and the motion was passed.

Will moved to reduce the sewer bill for 54 Park Street, Lot 9 by \$2,177.34, Darrell seconded and the motion was passed.

Darrell asked where Jeff is taking his class. Erik said at Pro Driver Training in Milton. He thinks it can be done in about 40 hours. He will probably spend about one day a week on it. Darrell asked how much it will cost. Erik said it should be just under \$3K.

Will asked how many applicants there have been for the village treasurer position. Erik said one so far. The person has an impressive resume. Ken said the applicant is living with his nephew and will be his future niece. He will recuse himself from asking questions if she comes before the board.

12. Water/Wastewater Report and Action Items

Erik read the report submitted by Dan Copp. E-DMR's and Wr-43's were submitted to the State. We hauled 64 thousand gallons of sludge to Morrisville for processing in January. Monthly Composite testing was completed. Manosh completed scheduled Grit channel cleaning. We are having to do this twice as often this spring due to infiltration in the system. Wastewater staff are working with the village crew to narrow down the cause and location. All seems good with the syphon. We will schedule a cleaning in April. Tim and Luke topped off the fuel in the generator at the wastewater plant. This is the first time we have had to put fuel in it since it was swapped out in 2025. The crew put flood gates in through the month as needed or as suggested by Erik or the board. There were no flooding events. Tim and Luke have been taking continuing ed classes required for ongoing water and wastewater credits. We have a frozen or plugged alum line for the main control building to the SBR tanks. We have been working to thaw or unplug it and have been dosing tanks manually for the time being to maintain permit limits. The boiler for heat at the plant went down on March 24. Alliance Mechanical determined it was the mother board on the unit. A new one was installed and fixed the problem. It is yet to be determined whether this will be covered under warranty. The boiler was new in the fall of 2023.

Monthly water plant reports were submitted to the state. Coliform samples were negative. Tim and Luke assisted the village crew with a water leak on Main St. Coliform samples were taken. Boil water notices were handed out. Lift boil water notices were handed out when the samples came back clean. Water loss was 8% for February.

Darrell asked if we treat our diesel for a slime that grows in it if it sits too long. Erik said he can check.

13. Electric/General Report and Action Items

Erik read the report submitted by Nate Brigham. For the electric department, it listed mutual aid to Hyde Park, small power outages, substation tests, various equipment installations, limbs on lines, removal of electric service/meter, meeting attendances, monthly meter reading, high/low checks, substation check and Dig Safes. For the water department, it listed equipment repairs, meter installation and removal, syphon cleaning, and trying to find infiltration into the sewer line system. For the general department, it listed cleaning and painting snow plows, removing Christmas lights and plowing and sanding as needed. The crew attended two NEPPA safety meetings. Nat was signed up for leadership training through VLR.

14. Fire Department Report and Action Items

Erik read the report submitted by Chief Arjay West:

Johnson Fire Department Report
Feb. 27 – Mar. 26, 2026

Calls:

JFD responded to 9 calls.

5 calls occurred during the daytime (6 am – 6 pm)

4 calls occurred during the nighttime (6 pm – 6 am)

The average duration was: 75 minutes

Nature:

Those calls were: 2 – automatic alarms, 5 - vehicle crashes, 1 – medical assist, and 1 – mutual aid (water/wilderness rescue)

Staff:

The average number of firefighters that responded was: 10

Total hours of service was: 105

Other:

Johnson hosted and instructed the Ropes, Knots, and Hand Tools class module of the Lamoille County 45 hour Basic Fire School. Thank you to everyone that helped set up and instruct the class.

15. Discuss Next Steps on the Electric Department Bond

Ken said we can do the bond through VPSSA. He feels the board owes the voters another meeting to explain the need for the bond and another chance to vote on it He spoke to Erik about what could possibly be cut from the budget. Ken suggested removing hired contractors for line clearing. Erik said \$30K was budgeted for that. Ken said he would think we could get away with not hiring outside contractors for line clearing for a year and doing as much in house as we can.

Darrell said he still thinks we should have a discussion about why the bond is needed. Will agreed. He thinks we need another meeting for people to get their questions answered and it needs to be an evening meeting.

Will asked if we are really in a good enough position that we can lay off contracting for line cutting. He doesn't want to get behind or pay twice as much next year. Ken said we don't usually use the whole amount budgeted anyway. We only use contractors in high traffic areas. Erik said the only drawback to cutting this is that it is one of the things the PUC will look at for a rate increase. Will said before making a decision he would want information from Nate about whether we have areas where line clearing is critical and whether we have more work than the crew can do.

Ken said he knows Darrell had thoughts about potential savings on trucks. Darrell said he feels if the truck we were going to replace only has 30,000 miles on it we can postpone replacing it. Ken said we already signed a purchase and sales agreement and the truck is ordered.

Ken said he knows Darrell also questions whether we need 2 dump trucks that we use 5 days a year. Darrell said he has concerns that we may have equipment we don't need. If we have a

truck we don't need, can we sell it? Ken asked which department or departments own the dump trucks we collect snow with. Rosemary said the general department probably owns the majority.

Ken said we have never used the complete budget for line clearing in his time on the board. Darrell said he thinks Nate can give us a fair assessment of where we can go with clearing.

Ken said he told Erik he would like to hear about the numbers in the budget that tallied up to the amount we are asking to borrow. He would like to see the numbers for the previous year to find out if Erik made a mistake in preparing that year's budget. He would like to know why power usage was different from what was anticipated.

Rosemary said if there is another vote, it needs to be warned 30 days ahead of time. If the board wants to bond for more than 5 years, the vote needs to be by Australian ballot. There has to be an information meeting within 10 days of the vote. The board can have more than one information meeting. It was discussed that before the vote can be warned we need to know the dollar amount and the term of the bond.

It was agreed to discuss this on April 27 and again at the meeting on May 11. On May 11, the board will decide when the vote and the information meeting will be and sign the warning.

A community member asked what the village needs the \$400K for. Is the village behind on bills? Ken said not yet. The community member asked if the village has the money to pay its bills. Ken said it does not have enough. She asked if it is just the electric department that does not have enough. Ken said yes. It is because we need a rate increase. We are looking into whether errors in budgeting caused us to get behind. There are many factors that are out of the board's control when it comes to the electric department. We will have more definitive answers later. She asked, when the budget is developed, you look at what was spent last year? Ken said yes. She asked what was different this year. Ken said it is hard to predict what will happen. Will said the third week in January there were issues with the power supply. We have bought into a natural gas generator to help curb costs, but costs still rose above what our margin was. That was an increase in cost we couldn't predict. We have to pay for that power, but what we had to pay was far above the rates we are allowed to charge. We are not allowed to spike electric bills because our costs are higher.

Will said we will have available for the public a line by line comparison of estimated and actual costs for 2024 and 2025 and projections for this year.

Laurel Persico asked what the timeline is for the rate increase. Ken said we haven't applied yet. We are about to. We have to get our finances in order before we apply. Erik said it usually takes 6-8 months to get a decision after we apply.

Jon Gregg asked what the village will do in the meantime since the bond was voted down. Ken said we will move as fast as we can. If we need to, we can take out a short-term line of credit. Jon asked if there can be a revote on May 11. Board members said no; that is too soon.

Mark Woodward said he thinks it would be helpful get information on the website before the information meeting, as soon as it is available.

Will said it became evident that the information wasn't complete. The board wants to make sure the information available to the public is clear, concise and up to date.

Ken asked the trustees each to email Erik with any thoughts or questions about budget information they want. Will said he thinks we need all expenditures and income for 2024 and 2025 and what is predicted for 2026.

Diane Lehouiller asked how the electric car was purchased. Ken said with a grant. Erik said it was a \$50K grant that covered the entire cost, including registration. The minimum grant amount was \$50K so the car needed to cost that much. Will said the board asked about getting a less deluxe car but Erik explained it would not qualify for the grant.

There was a question about what the car is used for. Ken said office staff use it to go trainings, etc. and Erik uses it to commute with per his contract.

Ken asked if there is anything specific members of public want to see at the information meeting. Laurel Persico said our electric department is struggling. Wholesale power costs are out of control. Hyde Park has similar issues, but worse. Has there been any conversation about combining utilities? Ken and Will said no. Ken said this board has never once had that conversation. Laurel asked if the conversation should be had. Ken said he doesn't think so. Vermont Electric Co-op is bigger than VOJ electric, and their power costs more. That is his reasoning. Erik said VEC rates are significantly higher than ours.

Laurel said our rates have been too low for too long. That is why we are in this situation. Ken said since he has been chair we have asked for a rate increase every year. But we may not get an increase when we ask for it. We have gotten several rate increases since he has been chair. Erik said prior to him being here, there were no rate increases for 16 years. Ken said the world is in a different state now. There is a volatile electric market and green energy is unaffordable. Will and Ken said we have to pay people more for solar power than what we should pay because the state tells us we have to. Electric utilities are overly regulated. He suggests that people complain to their legislators.

Cindy Hennard said at the annual meeting she asked about the \$300K loan in 2024. She wants to know what its remaining term is and what it was used for. Erik said we used about half that amount for a bucket truck. We asked for \$300K and we got a great deal on a second hand truck. We didn't use the whole \$300K. We are making payments on the loan. Cindy said it would be good to know how much we still owe and how much of the term is left.

Cindy said she saw that municipal electric departments can request a 2% increase per year without having to go through the whole approval process. She wonders why we haven't tried that. Ken said because we need more of an increase than that. Erik said that shortens the process somewhat but there is still a process. Will said it may go through with less red tape but it gets us nowhere near what we need. Cindy said if they denied the last increase we requested, then we could go with a 2% increase. Ken said they have not denied us an increase. We asked an advisor at VPPSA to look into a rate case and he said we would probably get a 2.5% decrease. That person is no longer with VPPSA. He thinks he made a mistake. We needed a rate increase

last year. The year before we applied for a 12% increase and got less than 10%. They usually don't give us what we ask for.

Darrell asked, we never get the increase we ask for? Erik said so far we have gotten less than requested every time. He has seen other requests that didn't get cut but it's rare.

Cindy said two of our major ones power purchase contracts will end in 2027. How will the village calculate the 2027 budget with that change? In the report she saw, it sounded like the village would be getting some advice about that when it gets closer to the end of the contracts. Ken said VPPSA will decide who to buy from. We can't choose to buy from the suppliers with the cheapest rates. We are forced to buy a certain amount of renewable energy. They don't tell us until the end what our power costs will be. It's a guessing game.

Cindy asked if we need to change when we do our budget based on when we will get information. Will said we have to run on a calendar year.

Mark Woodward asked if the wording for the ballot vote will be changed. Ken said yes. Mark said after the original wording was set, then Erik explained that the money may all be used to cover capital expenses. Erik said there is only about \$180K in capital expense it can be put towards.

Cindy asked if the village will have enough support for budgeting with a brand new clerk and treasurer. It sounds very complicated. Can the new person call Rosemary and get mentoring? Darrell said the hope is that the new person will work with Rosemary for a month. Ken said having a new treasurer has been his biggest fear.

Will thanked members of the public for coming to the meeting. Darrell asked them please to come back.

16. Discussion on Village Treasurer Position and Village Admin Clerk Position

Ken said he feels we need to hire more than a treasurer because we are losing two more people we partially use. The town has decided they want to separate everything.

Will asked what the current town/village breakdown is. Erik said Lydia, Susan and Rosemary are all 40% village. Marla is 80% village. Ken said his understanding is that Marla doesn't work at the window much. Will asked if the town is taking Lydia and Susan to work 100% for the town. Ken said that is his understanding. Will asked if Marla is okay with working for the village 100% of the time. Marla said yes. Ken said he understands that Susan doesn't do much for the village. Rosemary said Susan and Lydia do the daily cash out every day for village and town. It takes two people to do that. Ken said that is his reason for thinking we need another person.

Will said just looking at the number of hours it appears that we will have enough hours with Marla and the new village treasurer working 100% for the village. Ken questioned whether there will be anyone who has time to work the window, do clerical work for Erik, etc. And we will have a new person taking over a 40 year veteran's job. Rosemary asked if the board wants the new treasurer working at the window. BJ said he could see having additional help for 15-20 hours per week, but he can't understand hiring someone else for 32 or 40 hours.

Marla said she is pretty sure it will be difficult to staff the village office with people sometimes out for appointments or vacation. She currently has only one week out of each month when she can go on vacation and still make the billing process work. If there is an additional person helping only 20 hours a week, she thinks the village will be looking to fill more than two positions. When Lydia had the flu and was out for almost a week, Marla was very busy covering the window, handling dog licenses, etc. Ken said she would not be doing that anymore, because the town would take care of it. Marla said she has a lot of reports to do and she spends a lot of time with customers, setting up payment plans, etc. She doesn't think she will be able to handle it if there is a third person only 20 hours a week. She rarely takes breaks. It is sometimes hard to take lunch.

BJ said if we add another person we are going to be adding another \$50K to \$70K to the budget. It seems nuts to him to spend \$50-70K for someone to go to the window a few times a day. Darrell asked, how would we pick the hours a part-time person would come in? We never know when a customer will walk through the door.

Ken said there is going to be a lot of work connected with the upgrade at the sewer plant. Rosemary agreed that will be a lot of work. BJ said he thinks we can wait and see if it is working with two people. He doesn't want to jump the gun. Ken said the new treasurer will have a lot to grasp. Will said a new person coming in will have a lower pay rate than long-term employees because they will be new.

Darrell asked what the new person would do. Erik said they would post meeting notices. They would assist both Marla and the treasurer.

Marla said we have three software conversions to do this summer to get AMI up and running. If we are not careful with the software transition, mistakes can happen. Imagine the cost of having to redo billing. She is loaded with work now. Even if an assistant is the one to answer phone calls initially, calls will get transferred to her.

Ken suggested that Erik make a list of duties. Will suggested that Rosemary and Marla help with that. Will said he supports having a third person, but we have to be sure we can pay them. Ken said the list of duties needs to include hours needed for each task. BJ said he wants to know how much we are saving due to people leaving, how much we are spending on the treasurer and how much there is left over for someone else.

Ken said if Erik and Rosemary feel good about the person they interview for the treasurer position the board should interview the person on April 27.

Will said he would like Rosemary to tell the board how much she would charge for providing help after she retires.

Darrell asked how much training will be needed for a third person. Will said he thinks the board will have that information on April 27 once we know what the job duties will need to be.

Marla suggested thinking about cross-training and backup. She said we need people in the office who can back each other up. If she was not here, who would even know where to start with her job? If village and town employees are completely separate, the town won't help. Ken said no business operates like that. We have to hope for the best and do some cross training when the new person is up to speed. Will said he thinks Marla's question has merit but the reality is that it will take time. Once people are up to speed he would hope we could do some cross training in house. Rosemary said all employees should be trained together on the new software. Marla said she doesn't think we will be able to stop using NEMRC because we won't be able to bring over a lot of history to the new software and we can't afford to lose that.

17. Discussion on Joint Meeting Topics and Possible Dates

Topics suggested for a joint meeting with the selectboard were possible subdivision and sale of jointly owned land, how the office will be arranged, and the end of the barter system for salt.

Ken asked what the board wants to do about the clock tower. He doesn't believe it has leaked since the flood. Will said if it isn't leaking we shouldn't fix it.

18. Equipment Question

Darrell said he thinks it would be a good idea to have Nate report on hours of usage and mileage on equipment so we can see what we are and are not using. Will suggested a monthly report showing hours and miles for each piece of equipment. Others agreed to that.

19. Odds and Ends

BJ said Doug Molde told him the town approved painting a walking path in front of the former Parker & Stearns property – just paint, not a physical sidewalk. They haven't asked Greg Tatro yet. Ken said the village has no right of way there.

BJ shared information on vendors and prices for banners. The board chose the vendor and banner they preferred. The cost is \$135 per banner.

Erik showed a brochure he created that explains the banner program and has an application page. It was agreed to add "or other evidence of service" on the form, in case some people don't have the specific documentation listed. Will asked if we are limiting this to those who were in service during a war. Erik said the documentation the form asks for is for anyone who was active in the military. Board members agreed the application is good. Will said we should put it on the website and on Front Porch Forum.

BJ said he noticed this week our agenda wasn't on Front Porch Forum. We have to make sure it is on Front Porch Forum, Facebook and the website. Erik said he thought he posted it. He doesn't have an explanation for why it didn't happen.

BJ asked if we can start sending out newsletters again. He got lots of good feedback about them. Erik said sometimes there are other things that need to be included with the bills so there isn't room for a newsletter.

BJ said he thinks any inquiries from reporters should be directed to the chair. The board agreed that any reporter inquiries should be directed to Ken or BJ or responded to with a statement from the board that Erik can release.

20. Executive Session - Contract

BJ moved to enter executive session as allowed under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1) because the board of trustees has made a specific finding that premature general public knowledge regarding a contract would clearly place the village at a substantial disadvantage, with Erik invited to remain, Will seconded and the motion was passed at 8:33.

The board exited executive session at 8:45.

Will moved to decline the FEMA 428 Fixed Price offer and instead rebuild the wastewater treatment facility at its current location doing a straight PA project with Codes & Standards and hazard mitigation. BJ seconded and the motion was passed.

The trustees signed the 428 declination letter.

21. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:48.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

UNAPPROVED