

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 2026

Present:

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

Others: Erik Bailey, Ashley Isabell

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call to Order*

Ken called the meeting to order at 6:01.

2. *Pledge of Allegiance*

The Pledge was recited.

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

No changes to the agenda were needed.

4. *Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings*

Will moved to approve the minutes of July 13, 2026, Ellis seconded and the motion was passed.

5. *Treasurer's Report and Action Items*

Ashley said electric department sales for the first 7 months of the year were 54.68% of budget, water sales were 54.47% of budget, and wastewater sales were 51.5% of budget.

Ashley said Union Bank increased our interest rate effective July 27. She closed our TD Bank checking account because it had minimal activity and moved the funds over to Union.

Ashley said our 2024 audit is still in the financial review period. She expects it to be completed by the end of next week. For the 2025 audit, the auditors have opened up the online portal and she has been working on gathering the documents we need to submit. She has gotten help from Rosemary. Her goal is have all the documents uploaded by the time we get the completed 2024 audit report.

Will asked for more information about what help Rosemary is providing. Ashley said there are a lot of detailed items. It is helpful to have Rosemary double check and make sure she is not missing something. She is learning about how Rosemary filed and stored things.

Ashley said staff are also working on gathering documentation for audits of FEMA grants. There is a meeting on August 19 with the Department of Public Service where that documentation will be reviewed.

Ashley said the electric department loan documents are ready for signature. The board is supposed to sign the documents at a documented meeting. BJ asked, nothing has changed from what the board voted on previously? Ashley said nothing has changed. Board members signed the documents.

Ashley said tomorrow she will start the process for the fire department loan. The total amount needed is \$375,762. The original motion was to loan up to 90% of the amount in the revolving loan fund at an interest rate of 1%, but Ashley would like to increase the interest rate to 2.5%.

Arjay West is okay with that. It still falls within the fire department budget. Ken said the board would need to vote to change the interest rate. He believes the rate agreed upon was 1.5%. Ashley read the motion from the minutes of July 13. It did not include an interest rate. Will said he thinks the board discussed an interest rate of 1%.

Will moved to set an interest rate of 1.5% for the loan to the fire department from the village revolving loan fund to purchase a new fire engine. The motion was seconded and passed.

BJ asked about the tax bills showing town taxes. Darrell said the tax rate shown on his bill was different from the one the trustees voted to approve.

Ashley said the board approved a tax rate of 19 cents. The tax rate for 2026 was the same as the tax rate for 2025. Because of the way the property tax system is set up in NEMRC, the town and village need to do their property taxes at the same time. There are conflicting reports on how it has been done in the past. NEMRC had to have their back-end programmers go in and set our rates for us to generate the village bills, since the town did theirs earlier than we were prepared to do ours. When the town did theirs, that locked our village rate in. We were lucky that the rate was the same for 2026 as for 2025. Otherwise it would have required a lot more time and effort.

As far as how we handle it next year, one option is to be more prepared to set our tax rate at the same time as the town. But the hurdle is that the town sets their tax rate and prints their bills before the village has time to meet and approve a tax rate. Another option is to ask our assessor if he would be willing to have two different grand lists to manage for the same properties. That would be a lot of extra work for him. A third option is to ask NEMRC if they can split our grand list after the town does their taxes. That creates extra work for them and we would have to pay for it. Rosemary said that in the past she asked NEMRC to unfreeze the village grand list so she could set the village rate, but Ashley was told by someone at NEMRC that that is not a feature that is offered. So Ashley doesn't have a clear answer about what was done in the past. She is going to focus on what we can do moving forward.

Ashley said the rate printed on the tax bill is what it is because of a hiccup they ran into when she was working with NEMRC. They were in the process of testing out a new program for property tax billing. The way our village taxes are set up is unique in Vermont. Everywhere else where there is a village and a town, the village is a district in the town and the taxes are printed on the same tax bill. Having a separate village tax is unique. Staff didn't catch that NEMRC totaled up multiple tax rates on the bills. As long as a resident's home value stayed the same, their property taxes for 2026 are the same as their taxes in 2025. Only one person has come in to question her about the bill and we have had a lot of payments so far.

Darrell asked when we have to have our tax rate set. Ashley said we can't set it until after June 30, because that is when we get the final grand list from the assessor. Our first meeting after that this year was July 13, but before that the selectboard met and the town put out their tax bills. BJ asked if we can ask the town to wait for us. Ashley said that is the request she would like to make. Ken asked Ashley to work with the town to come up with a plan and then present it to the trustees.

Will asked how much we need to borrow for the fire truck in addition to using the revolving loan fund. Ashley said \$98,436.61.

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

Erik said the new water and light garage is being moved into. The general contractor and architect are working to address all water issues and have made significant progress. Board members asked what the water issues are. Erik said water leaking in and humidity.

Erik said Alec Jones called to ask if we are still a "go" for the ribbon cutting on August 19 and if we have a budget for refreshments. Ken said he feels a ribbon cutting is a waste of time and there should be no refreshments. BJ and Will said they like the idea of refreshments and think it should be up to Erik to decide whether to get refreshments using available funds. BJ and Ellis both said they will plan to attend the ribbon cutting.

Erik said FEMA still has us in the Environmental and Health Review process for the WWTF project.

Ashley and Erik had their final office position interviews today and will be forwarding the resumes and score sheets of the finalists in the next day or two for board interviews next Wednesday.

Darrell said the board voted to hire someone to help Marla answer phones, but the job posting he saw included qualifications and duties that he doesn't think pertain to what Marla does. He thought what we were talking about was not someone to help Ashley or Erik, just to help Marla and take care of the front desk. Erik said the job description was approved by the board at a meeting. BJ said he did not vote to approve it. Erik said the position is mostly to help Marla. Ken said it is to help with the entire office, not just Marla. We went from having 4 bodies in the office to having 2 bodies. For the job description, we need to put down all possible duties so the person doesn't say what we ask them to do isn't in their job description. BJ said including more duties leads to increased hours and pay. It can lead to the person working full time.

Will asked how much of Erik's work Erik expects the new employee to do. Erik said very little. Darrell said it should be none. Ashley said she plans to have the person entering accounts payable, which takes about an hour a week, and doing Facebook and website updates. Those 3 items have always been on the list. BJ said adding skills makes the pay higher and makes it more likely the position will end up being full time with benefits. Ken said the board already voted on the job description so he is ending the conversation.

Erik said the water and light crew responded to a water main break yesterday at the corner of School St. and College Hill. It was at the prior break from a couple of years ago. The stainless repair band failed at a weld. This is very rare. It is the first time Erik, Nate or Dan has seen one of those fail. Only a few customers were shut off and water was back on by noon. The coliform samples were brought to the lab early this morning and we expect to lift the boil notice for the affected customers tomorrow by lunch. Neither school was on the boil notice.

Erik will be off this Friday for a doctor's appointment.

7. *Water/Wastewater Report and Action Items*

Erik read the report submitted by Dan Copp:

Operational Status of Wastewater Plant and Callouts

- E-DMR's and Wr-43's were submitted to the State
- Had a VOSHA inspection of both the wastewater and water plant. Waiting for final report. A few minor things at the wastewater plant. A faulty switch plate etc.... Found the eyewash at the water plant was not producing enough water. The mixing valve heater had failed. We have ordered a new one and will install it when it arrives
- Annual permit required proficiency testing was performed.
- Annual permit required constituent testing was performed
- We hauled 72,000 gallons of sludge to Morrisville for processing in July
- Mowed and trimmed all plants and pump stations
- Installed flood gates on 7/14 in anticipation of possible flooding

Operational status of Water Plant and Callouts

- Monthly reports were submitted to the state.
- Coliform samples were negative
- Seeded and mulched at the water plant from the generator install
- Installed a new pressure switch that had failed in Meter House #1 at Katy Winn
- Installed a new check valve in Meter House #2 at Katy Winn
- Check valve on the dehumidifier at the water plant cracked and was leaking. Ordered a new one and will install it once it arrives.
- Plugged in the portable dehumidifier until the new check valve arrives
- Sold 6 loads of water -30,000 gallons to Wright Farm via tanker truck

Erik said he will send out the water loss percentage when it comes in the next day or two. Last month's water loss was 7%.

8. *Electric/General Report and Action Items*

Erik read the report submitted by Nate Brigham:

Electric Dept. –

Hyde Park mutual aid – 20 ½hrs double time

Morrisville W&L mutual aid – 5 ½hrs

Transmission Line out on 7/16 and 7/21 was due to trees over by LUHS

Tree on the line in the gulf 7/16 no outages

Installed new service at 1150 Sinclair Rd and billed out

Installed new service for bandstand and billed out

Solar panels installed at 665 Railroad St

Straighten pole and installed new service at 849 Rt 15W

Removed electric meters at 35 Railroad St for buy out

Completed true-ups for the New Library site and 1299 Clay Hill Rd

Undercoating of the trucks has started

Tree on the line at 1627 Clay Hill Rd, 3 customers out for 20 min

Removed cover-up at 52 Clay Hill Rd and 738 100C

Removed tree off Neutral on Plot Rd

Fixed street light at 796 Rocky Rd

Had interviews for new apprentice

Moving into shop!

Completed monthly meter reading, high/low checks, substation check, and dig safes

Water/Sewer -

Repaired curb stop at the Talc office in order to have a plumber fix a leak in the basement

Sewer blockage at 118 Lower Main West, due to tree roots

Trying to find infiltration into the sewer line system

General Dept. -

Continuing the move back into the new shop

Fixed US flags on Main St

Picked up garbage/checked Cold Spring/ checked catch basins

Safety -

Attended NEPPA safety meetings: 8/5 Transformer review & Connections

Nate attended Leadership Training through VLR

Jeff started CDL class in Milton

Darrell said it seems like the crew is trying to find infiltration monthly. Are they ever going to find it? Erik said they may need to rent a camera. Darrell asked how much time is wasted each month trying to find infiltration. Erik said it may be that they haven't been able to spend much time on it and that may be why they haven't found it.

Nate had submitted a spreadsheet showing mileage/hours and maintenance on the equipment. Darrell asked why it took so long to start the spreadsheet that it didn't show the first month of the year. Erik said one reason is that Nate is new to working with Excel. Darrell said he would have taken handwritten data. Will agreed with Darrell that it is disappointing that it took so long to get this tracking started. He suggested Erik could relay that message. Ken said it is up to the manager to make sure tracking happens on a timely basis.

9. Fire Department Report and Action Items

Erik read the report submitted by Chief Arjay West:

Johnson Fire Department Report

June 26 – July 30, 2026

Calls:

JFD responded to 10 calls.

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

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

The average duration was: 72 minutes

Nature:

Those calls were: 5 – automatic alarms, 1 – vehicle fire, and 4 – other (2 – traffic hazard: tree on utility lines blocking roadway, 1 – mutual aid: water rescue, and 1 – assist VSP Fire Investigation)

Staff:

The average number of firefighters that responded was: 9

Total hours of service were: 90

Other:

We participated in Waterville Old Home Day with apparatus in their community parade.

We had participation in July 4th parades for two neighboring Towns.

The new Fire Engine build inspection was completed and found in very good order. The truck will be moved to Descorcie Emergency Products in St. Albans in the near future for the remainder of upfitting and tool mounting. Delivery remains on track in Johnson for the end of August or early September.

10. Other Business

Ken said the food shelf wants to be able to use the room in the mill house that we were using for storage. Do we want to let them take over that room? Darrell said he would agree that they can use it with the understanding that we can use it if we need to.

Ken asked when we are going to stop funding the food shelf. When the heat goes out, they call him. Why are they calling our crew to take care of the building they are using for free? He is starting to have serious issues with this. They are scared we are going to get rid of the building. At the recent selectboard meeting, they listed other towns they serve. Why aren't these other towns contributing? Can we say the village will not perform any maintenance? If the town wants to do it, they can do it. The food shelf wouldn't even tell us a homeless person was out back plugged into the power for the building. We should no longer pay for power. The food

shelf can take care of their own heat or water problems or broken windows. They are supporting other towns and the other towns are not contributing.

Erik asked if this board can condemn the building. BJ said we can't. Ken said we can say we no longer want it used except by the town and village. Erik suggested saying the village has no interest in using it or paying for any aspect of it.

Will said he would like to know what we have spent on that building in, say, the last 3 years. Ken said it would be hard to find out how many hours Nate has spent getting called for the heat being out in the mill house. The town has never once sent anyone to deal with that. Will said we can find out how much we have spent for water, sewer, and electricity. We can ask Nate roughly how often there are issues and get a ballpark estimate of his time. He wants that information before addressing removing the food shelf from the building.

Ken said if they can fund raise to buy food, they should be able to fund raise for a building to put the food in. Will said the trustees are representing the voters and he thinks it would be hard to find voters who didn't want to support the food shelf. But it is our duty to let them know how much it is costing us to have this benefit for the county. He can't make a decision until he knows how much we are spending. That will make a big difference to him.

Darrell said he really wants to hear the numbers. He would like to look into why we are not billing the town for half of Nate's time dealing with issues at the mill house. If our employees get called out we should bill out half the cost. Will said he doesn't disagree. Darrell said we need the food shelf. It provides a very important service. But upkeep and maintenance of the building should be shared 50-50 with the town if it is a jointly owned building.

Will asked if the board wants to see if the town is interested in donating the building to the food shelf. Ken said to do that, we would have subdivide or have a lease. Will suggested we could do a 99-year lease. Ken said he thinks we will find that the food shelf will say they don't have money for heat, maintenance, etc. Will suggested seeing whether the town is interested in looking into what it would take to give or lease the building to the food shelf.

Ken said the village owns property on West Settlement Road. He would like to dispose of that. Erik said it is a small parcel. Ken said it is outside the village limits and has no use for water, power or sewer. Ashley said the property tax bill for that property shows it is .29 acres.

Ken asked if we pay taxes on the snowmobile club building on Upper French Hill. Ashley said no. She said there are 4 village properties that get tax bills from the town – the property on West Settlement Road, two properties on Reservoir Road, and the utility.

Ken suggested we could approach a neighboring landowner and ask if they want to acquire the village land.

The board agreed that Erik and Ashley should get more information on these properties. Will suggested asking a realtor for ballpark value estimates.

Ken said the snowmobile club's building is technically ours. He suggested we could approach them about purchasing the property the building is on. They don't pay taxes on it because they are a non-profit.

11. Discussion Regarding the new Act 145 Taxation Schedule Regarding Utility Poles and Lines

Erik said the legislature passed Act 145 last year. It changed how utility poles are taxed. This is a statewide issue that everyone is figuring out. A lawyer suggested that it would probably be in the interest of VPPSA to pay for a lawyer to look into this for all the VPPSA utilities. Erik is trying to find out if the tax bill we got is the entire tax bill for the poles, or just our part of it. Most of our poles are shared 50-50 with Consolidated. Erik is trying to get it so Consolidated gets billed and then comes to us to get our half. They owe us money anyway.

Ashley said the amount the assessor says we owe is on an errors and omissions certificate that needs to be approved by the selectboard. Ashley sent John Sutherland an email asking if we can have more time before they accept the errors and omissions certificate. As soon as they accept it, we will be liable for the tax amount. Even if we try to bill Consolidated for part of it, the property is listed under our utility name and that cannot be adjusted at this point. Ken said the selectboard tabled a decision on approving the errors and omissions certificate. He thinks they will approve it and then we will get an \$80K tax bill.

12. Executive Session

BJ moved to go into executive session as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to conduct interviews for an open lineman position, with Erik invited to remain, Will seconded and the motion was passed at 7:14.

The board came out of executive session after interviewing the first candidate at 8:00 and re-entered executive session to interview the second candidate.

The board came out of executive session at 8:41.

Ellis moved to hire Lucas Dolan as the new apprentice Lineworker Class 6, with his starting wage at \$29.90 per hour, full-time permanent, Will seconded and the motion was passed.

13. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:43.