JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2026

Present: Selectboard members: Ellis O'Hear, BJ Putvain, Darrell Wescom
Others: Erik Bailey, Ashley Isabell, Rob Rodriguez, Kim Dunkley, Scott Meyer, Charles Flaum, Marla Emery
Absent: Ken Tourangeau

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. ***Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance***
   BJ called the meeting to order at 7:00. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
2. ***Review of Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes and Additions***
   BJ added items related to union negotiations and the personnel policy. Ellis added discussion of the posts around the Main Street trees.
3. ***Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings***
   BJ noted a correction that needed to be made to the minutes. **Will moved to approve the minutes as amended, Ellis seconded and the motion was passed.**
4. ***VAST Club to Discuss the Property Their Shed is On***
   Rob Rodriguez, president of Sterling Snow Riders, said he had been asked to come to this meeting to discuss his club's shed on French Hill. Erik said the village parcel the shed is on wasn't among the properties the realtor valued because we don't pay taxes on it. It is a 0.2 acre parcel. We are looking at the possibility of selling it to the snowmobile club.

   Ellis said the building that was previously on the site caved in and Sterling Snow Riders cleaned up the site and rebuilt on the same foundation. They paid for everything.

   Will asked if Sterling Snow Riders is interested in owning the property the building sits on. Rob said yes. *(Charles Flaum arrived at 7:05.)* Rob said the driveway to the building is actually on the jointly owned town/village property. He couldn't find an easement in the records. If his club bought it, they would need an easement. Will said we need to check with the town to make sure they are okay with an easement.

   Erik said Ken had texted that he would like to see a price of $10-15K for the property. Rob said the parcel map online shows a property value of $24K. He was assuming the price would be less than that.

   Darrell asked who owns the building. Others said the club does. There was a village building that collapsed and the club rebuilt it. Ellis said we have done a lease with the club. Rob said he thinks the club has leased it since 2003.

   Will suggested that rather than coming up with a lump sum all at once, perhaps the club could pay the purchase price in payments over time. The village would basically own the mortgage. Rob said they could come up with $10K or $15K. If it is more than that, they might need to make payments. Will suggested the money could be paid in 2 or 3 payments if that would work better for the club.

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Darrell asked about having a survey done. He asked if Rob cares about having the lines marked. Rob said he thinks the club is only interested in having a right of way so they can get there.

Will moved and Darrell seconded to sell the 0.2 acre village property to Sterling Snow Riders for $15,000, contingent upon the town agreeing to sign an easement for the club's driveway. Will said we can decide on payment details at the next meeting. **The motion was passed.**

Will moved to grant a right of way for the Sterling Snow Riders driveway on the village portion of the jointly owned town and village property, Darrell seconded and the motion was passed. *(Rob left at 7;14.)*

5. ***Treasurer's Report***

Ashley said electric department sales are 70.8% of budget, water sales are 80.98% of budget and wastewater sales are 77.05% of budget. The general department has collected 96.68% of taxes due. Erik said we are 75% of the way through the year.

Will asked if electric department sales are under budget due to reduced sales or due to reduced payments. Ashley said it is not due to reduced payments. These numbers reflect what was billed, not what was paid.

Ashley said all our audits are now up to date and they have been sent to Vermont DPS. We received a $6K credit with RHR because there was a federal compliance component of the 2025 audit that we did not qualify for. So instead of us paying a retainer to be on their list for the 2026 audit, they will use that credit to secure our spot.

Ashley said the AMI conversion has been a massive project for office staff. Electric billing was completed out of El Dorado for the first time for the October billing (except for solar.) We hope to start billing solar accounts with El Dorado in December. All electric accounts got a paper copy of the bill in the mail. Those were sent October 18. Part of the reason for the delay is that there were a few more hurdles to jump than anticipated with the conversion. People who have given us their email addresses got emails on October 19 with instructions on how to pay online. It is optional to pay online. Processing fees remain the same: 2.95% for credit cards and $1.50 for e-checks.

Darrell asked, if we are trying to make things easier, why are we still charging residents for paying online when it means we don't have to stuff and mail an envelope or pay postage? Ashley said the processing fee is not collected by the village. It is the fee we are charged. *(Kim Dunkley and Scott Meyer arrived at 7:20.)* Ashley said we did not necessarily change the billing software to make things easier on people. We were required to switch software for the smart meters. Our previous software didn't support the smart meters.

Darrell asked how many people in the office are working on the conversion. Has the person we hired to help Marla learned along with Marla, or is Marla the only person who can do this? Ashley said Marla is the leader of the conversion project. Marla has been training Lauren on how to do customer interactions that were previously on Marla's plate. Lauren is also learning

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about setting up new accounts in the new billing software and in NEMRC. Ashley has been helping out with the conversion. *(Marla arrived at 7:22.)*

Darrell said he wants to make sure Marla could go on vacation and others could handle the work. Ashley said Marla was on vacation last week. She doesn't think we would have gotten through the billing cycle if we had not had Lauren.

Darrell said when he called and asked Lauren something, she didn't know the answer. Ashley said Lauren won't give an answer if she is not 100% positive she has the right information. She will check with Ashley or Marla. She wants to make sure she is not giving out wrong information. BJ said she should know the basics, like when bills are due. Ashley said she heard her answering that question today a few times. She and Marla can't think of everything they need to tell her before it comes up, but when something she doesn't know comes up, they tell her about it.

BJ asked when El Dorado will be learned. Ashley said the plan is to start processing solar accounts with El Dorado in December and to do the conversion for water in February. We are taking our time with the software conversion because we have other work to do and conversion can often be one person's full time job. Marla has done a great job working on the conversion, training Lauren and also doing her regular work. Ashley thinks we can say we are fully on board with El Dorado once all the smart meters are installed and running. We may begin installing them in April.

Erik said El Dorado has to be mostly online before we install 5 or 10 test meters. We will go through a cycle or two working out the bugs with the test meters before we install more.

Marla talked about how much work the software conversion required.

Darrell said he is wondering when Marla will not have to be stressed out and working extra hours. We hired another person to help her. Marla said Lauren started at the worst time for training her, just as the software conversion was starting, when Marla had a lot of data verification to do. Marla had to do her job and train a new employee. Darrell said if Marla needs more help, Ashley and Erik are available. Marla said she hasn't even trained Ashley fully, because Ashley still needs to spend time training with Rosemary. Marla said it would have been much better if we had hired Lauren 2 months earlier.

Will asked if Marla sees an end to the difficulties. Marla said she does, but what she was put through this last month was very hard. Will thanked Marla for being a dedicated employee.

Will asked if there a timeline for when the test meters will be put in. Erik said we have to put solar accounts into El Dorado first.

Ashley and Marla talked about working with Michelle from Creative Technologies and the difficulty of finding time to meet with her due to our small staff and the time difference. (Michelle is in California.) BJ asked if there is anyone else we could bring in for Marla to ask questions to. Ashley said it was helpful to go to Barton and learn about how they are using El Dorado, but for our specific billing, Michelle is the only person to ask.

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The board agreed that for now staff do not need to do weekly reports.

Kim Dunkley said it seems to her that the village manager should have figured out the timing for the conversion so it was not so difficult. Erik said we chose to go toward the end of the process among the VPPSA utilities. We let others be the guinea pigs. The first ones to do the conversion had even more troubles and we learned from their mistakes.

BJ asked if we sent anything out to the public saying bills would be 14 days late. Ashley said no. They had intentions to do it, but with the time crunch it did not happen. Darrell said a notice could have been put on social media. That would have taken 5 minutes. Marla said she had a plan to send an email to email customers, but it was a matter of putting what was most important first. She didn't have more than 40 hours to work. Darrell said someone else could have done that. Ashley said they kept thinking they were close to being able to send out bills, but then they would find another issue. BJ said there is an internal issue if we did not let people know their bills would be late. It would take 3 minutes to send out an email. Anyone could have done it.

BJ asked if people have to pay by November 4. Ashley said under state rules people have 30 days to pay after bills are sent out. BJ asked if we put anything out letting people know they have 30 days to pay. Marla said we won't send disconnect notices. BJ said we don't put out enough information to the public on social media. Ashley said she is not good at posting on social media. She suggested maybe BJ could mentor Lauren on that. BJ said he can help Lauren learn how to post on social media. Will suggested that Erik put a notice on the website tomorrow letting people know they have longer to pay their bills due to the late billing.

Scott Meyer said Meredith Dolan used to post information about outages, etc. so office staff didn't have to.

Ashley said we are in the very early stages of getting a solar rate case done. She has had correspondence with Steve from VPPSA. We have a kickoff meeting November 2. Ashley, Erik, Steve and one of Steve's coworkers will be there.

Ashley got her certificate for the public utility accounting course, Tomorrow and Wednesday she has the electric work order and fixed assets accounting course and next week and the week after that are the advanced public utility accounting courses and her accounting class requirements will be fulfilled. The classes are going well. She has learned about some things we could be doing a little better. For instance, we could split out office time accounting into different categories, which would give us additional detail that would make our rate cases stronger.

BJ said we should have a standard operating procedure from start to finish for cash management. It should have been in place before Ashley started, but it wasn't. Ashley said she has been working on it, but it is not all done. BJ asked if she can have it done by the end of the year. Ashley said yes.

BJ said he noticed that Marla had been doing one money-related task that Susan used to do. Is there any way to take that off her duties? Ashley said she is now doing it.

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6. Discuss How to Conduct Sale of 48 Acre Property on Reservoir Road

Scott Meyer said there is a buyer interested in the village land on Reservoir Road that would keep the land open for public use – the Green Mountain Club. If they owned the property, hunting and fishing would still be allowed there. He would like the board to keep that in mind. Long Trail hikers who come into Johnson usually use village businesses. Erik and Scott said the Green Mountain Club wants to reroute the Long Trail. Erik said they already have a deeded right of way for a trail on that property.

Will said he feels that property is not that important for hunting access and the trail access is deeded, so that would continue.

Erik said 2 adjoining property owners, as well as GMC, expressed interest in buying the property. At least one adjoiner does not currently post their land.

Kim asked if the reservoir is on that property. Will said the old reservoir we can't use is on it. Kim said if there is a transfer of ownership, she feels it is important to have a covenant allowing the village to use the reservoir if it is needed in an emergency.

Charles Flaum said he supports GMC acquiring the land. He represents Discover Johnson, a 501(c)(3). GMC is talking about redirecting the Long Trail and that will bring some business into town.

Will said he doesn't see the benefit of selling the land to GMC if it doesn't change the course of the trail. Scott said GMC feels ownership is different from just having a right of way.

7. Village Manager's Report and Any Action Items

Erik read his report. The new Water & Light garage is all done except for final close-out documentation. We will finish under budget, with all hard costs paid for with grant funds from multiple sources.

With assistance from Vermont Emergency Management, Erik finished and published the RFP for WWTF construction engineering. The RFP for the FEMA Disaster Recovery Consultant should go out this week or early next week. The construction RFP for the utility pole project will go out this week or early next week.

The Positive Pay system was started 2 days after the September trustee board meeting.

Erik and the town administrator sorted through the boxes of records that had been in the flood. A good percentage of village boxes showed no mold and all but one that did have mold were unnecessary old records that got thrown out. Erik sealed the single box of needed records that shows mold and we will deal with it at a later date.

We received a 100% grant to produce a wastewater system asset management plan. That process has begun.

The 50% BGS grant application for clock tower repairs was filed late last month.

Erik finished the draft village personnel policy and forwarded it to the board for review.

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Erik will be out this Thursday and Friday.

BJ asked what is going on with the buzzer purchase. He heard we shot it down, then approved it. Erik said he thinks the selectboard shot it down, then approved it. He agreed to it.

8. Water/Wastewater Report and Any Action Items

Erik read the report submitted by Dan Copp. E-DMR's and Wr-43's were submitted to the state. Monthly composite sampling was completed. We hauled 48,000 gallons of sludge to Morrisville for processing in September. We mowed and trimmed all plants and pump stations. Manosh did yearly jetting and vactor work on sewer lines and lift stations. We found an issue at the East Johnson lift station – a blown capacitor for pump 2. Check valve and pump rails are also bad. We got a quote for a complete station overhaul as well as for necessary immediate repairs.

Monthly water reports were submitted to the state. Coliform samples were negative. The phase converter is not working due to water damage from the leaking check valves. It will need complete replacement. A portable dehumidifier is running until phase converter replacement. We sold one load of 5,000 gallons to Wright Farm. Luke brush hogged the field at the water plant. We ordered and installed a new battery for the Mission unit at the reservoir. Lead and copper sampling was completed. We got a quote for gutter at the water plant above the new transfer switch for the generator. Water loss will be calculated tomorrow and Erik will email it to the trustees.

9. Electric/General Report and Any Action Items

Erik read the report submitted by Nate Brigham. There was an outage affecting one customer due to a bad neutral in a meter socket. The crew removed a service, removed a cover up, installed a cover up, trimmed meter sockets, cut out power lines at one address, provided mutual aid to Hyde Park, brush hogged some power lines, worked on street lights, cut a right of way, organized the shop, installed a back rack and radio in the Chevy, had trucks undercoated, got a quote to fix an air leak in the boom of the big bucket truck, made phone calls regarding needed parts and a recall, completed monthly meter reading, high/low checks, substation check and Dig Safes. Chan and Mark attended a DCU tech class. Nate attended an AMI meeting.

The crew fixed a water leak, oversaw capping of water and sewer lines at one address and marked out water and sewer lines for capping at another, jetted sewer mains and sewer pumping stations, prepped blacktop for patching and paved at several locations. AOT picked up water to wash bridges. At this time there is no sign of infiltration into the sewer main. We need an extreme rain event to do any investigations.

The crew is continuing the move back into the new garage. Nate and Erik fixed the time in the clock tower. We got a Conex box and put 18-20 yards of salt into it. The crew fixed the flagpole on the Village Green, fixed the sand shed, cleaned catch basins, cleaned the 2500 for trade-in, picked up the Chevy, scheduled lettering and wire up for the new 2500, removed a broken flag from Main Street, cut brush around sidewalks, picked up garbage, checked the Cold Spring, and checked catch basins. Nate attended a meeting for the clock tower grant.

The crew attended NEPPA safety meetings on CPR/first aid and AED and completed the virtual course portion. We talked to Morrisville Water & Light about scheduling safety meetings through NEPPA. Jeff is attending a CDL class in Milton.

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10. Fire Department Report and Any Action Items

Erik read the report submitted by Chief Arjay West. JFD responded to 8 calls, 3 in the daytime ad 5 at night. Average duration was 57 minutes. There were 4 fire alarms, 2 vehicle crashes, 1 medical assist and 1 mutual aid for a structure fire. The average number of firefighters that responded was 9. Total hours of service were 61.

The fire department participated in a mass casualty incident tabletop drill sponsored by Newport Ambulance Service, Northern Division (Johnson.)

The new attack engine has been placed into service. It features additional compartment space and tool mounting, along with easier access to hoses and ladders. The driver's station has improved visibility and additional mirrors, increasing safe operations.

11. Electric/General Report Discussion

Darrell said we put new front tires and undercoating on the 2016 dump truck, but it only had 8 miles put on it in 2 months. He feels if it needs any more repairs we should consider how necessary it is. Ellis and Erik said it is used more in the winter. Erik said the crew uses it for snow pickup and when chipping. BJ said he wonders if we could add high walls to the other truck so it could be used the same way. Erik said he will pose the question to Nate of why he needs two trucks.

12. Discuss Holiday Lighting

Erik said probably 60% of the bulbs in the snowflake decorations are burnt out. A lot of the other lights are missing. Nate would like to get lights on garland to wrap the poles because regular string lights that are not on garland cause corrosion on the poles.

Will asked if the bulbs are replaceable. Erik said yes, but they are not cheap.

Will said he would like to see an estimate of the cost of replacing bulbs and a price for LED rope lights. Rope lights inside a plastic tube would prevent corrosion.

BJ said he thinks modern snowflake decorations with LEDs would probably be cheaper than replacing bulbs on the existing snowflakes. He would like to get the cost for new ones to compare to the cost of bulbs. He agreed to get snowflake prices.

13. Discussion of Commercial Pre-Employment Background Check Firm Options

BJ said he had sent Erik information on companies that do background checks. He thinks we should do background checks on all new employees. The cost is under $100.

BJ moved to do background checks on the 2 newest village employees and to do background checks on new employees from this point on. The motion was not seconded.

Darrell moved to do criminal background and driver history checks on future new employees as a matter of policy, Will seconded and the motion was passed.

14. Discuss How to Conduct Sale of 48 Acre Property on Reservoir Road

Erik said there was interest in purchasing the Reservoir Road property from Arjay and Daryl West, Green Mountain Club and Deb Ravenelle and C. Rob Maynard. The board agreed to go into executive session at the end of the meeting to discuss the process of getting bids for the property.

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15. Social Media

BJ said he will go over social media updates with Lauren. The village website needs some updates to reflect current employees.

16. Posts around Main Street Trees

Ellis asked where the issue of the posts around the Main Street trees stands. He doesn't see anything happening. BJ asked if we had a time frame for action on that. Erik said he doesn't think so. He thinks we just asked the tree board to bring us their plan. It was agreed that Erik should reach out to the tree board and let them know that they need to present a solution by the next trustee board meeting or we will remove the posts.

17. Discuss Office Closures and Window Hours

Ashley said the office has not been closed since the last trustee meeting.

18. Union Negotiations

BJ said he reached out to the union representative 2 or 3 times and got no response.

19. Personnel Policy

BJ said he saw some new things in the draft personnel policy that he would like to discuss. Should that be done in open session or executive session? Erik said policy can be discussed in open session. BJ said we should put it on a future agenda.

20. Executive Session – Contract Negotiations

Will moved to find that premature general public knowledge regarding contract negotiations would clearly place the village at a substantial disadvantage because the board of trustees risk exposing our range of acceptable terms, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.

Will moved to enter executive session as allowed under 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(1) to discuss contract negotiations, BJ seconded and the motion was passed at 8:55.

The board came out of executive session at 9:15.

Will moved that contingent on the village attorney's approval the village will auction the 48± acre property on Reservoir Road to the interested adjoining property owners at a date determined by the Village Manager with the auction to have a $100K reserve. Darrell seconded and the motion was passed.

Will moved to accept the H20 Innovation 5-year contract rate increase proposal, Darrell seconded and the motion was passed.

21. Executive Session – Employee Evaluation

Will moved to enter executive session as allowed under 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(3) to evaluate an employee, Ellis seconded and the motion was passed at 9:17.

The board came out of executive session at 9:29 with no action taken.

22. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:29.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

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