VILLAGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, September 16, 2025
(Approved as amended)

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

President Bell called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM on Tuesday, September 16, 2025.

Present: President Nate Bell and trustees Denise Bhirdo, Louise Howson, Chad Kodanko, Kurt Harff, Patrice Champeau, and Brigid White.

Staff: Village Administrator Julie Schmelzer, Finance Director/Treasurer Vlad Gannik, Utilities Director Megan Barnes, Parks & Streets Director Erik Linczmaier, and Admin Assistant Sarah Bertges

Others: Laurel Harff, Steve Sauter, Michelle Laurie, Dick Burress, Ken Church, Ben Kornowski, Mary Smythe, Ellie Soderberg-Guger, Don Knapp, Jill Gohdes Wiebe, "Adam's Phone", Karen Berndt and "iPhone"

2. Approve Agenda

A motion by Kodanko , second by Howson that the Agenda for the September 16, 2025, meeting of the Village Board of Trustees be approved as presented. Motion carried – All ayes.

3. Approve Meeting Minutes: August 19, 2025

Bhirdo noted that on page 3, line 30, the minutes needed correction regarding the remodeling options. She clarified that the committee had rejected remodeling in favor of a complete rebuild with a new foundation. She also pointed out that on page 4, line 40, the minutes should state that the board "accepted" rather than "acknowledged" the committee report.

Motion by Howson to approve the August 19, 2025, minutes as amended, second by Bhirdo. Motion carried – All ayes.

4. Comments, Correspondence and Concerns from the Public

- Laurel Harff addressed the Finance Committee's draft budget, noting that after a substantial tax increase in 2023, the board had promised not to raise taxes in 2024, but taxpayers received another substantial increase. She stated that the August 15 Finance Committee's draft budget included a tax reduction of only $0.20 per $1,000 of valuation, which was two-thirds less than last year's increase. She urged the committee to find ways to lower taxes.
- Steve Sauter addressed the Village Board regarding his property at 2414 Country Walk Drive. He explained that on July 20, he received a letter from the village about zoning compliance issues, and he had promptly removed six boats from the property. However, on the current date, he received a citation and fine of $452.50 claiming he had not complied with an August 7 certified letter that he said he never received. He verified with the postmaster that no certified letters were delivered to his box in August. Sauter explained that the remaining items on the property included a compressor for the freezer and a Bobcat used for operations. He provided copies of the correspondence and photographs showing weeds and goldenrod at the Village administration building, suggesting enforcement was inconsistent.
- Dick Burress addressed three issues: First, he congratulated the village on the new parks building, calling it magnificent, but suggested that the village missed an opportunity to consolidate the parks facility with the administration building as other municipalities have done.

Second, he reiterated his belief that the administration building should be located downtown. Third, he inquired about a drop-off site for wood debris from trees, which the board had previously discussed but not yet established.

- Chad Kodanko spoke as a community member, expressing frustration with the village's approach to code enforcement regarding weeds, calling the process "flawed"..

5. Presentations

a. Door County Economic Development Corporation Presentation; Michelle Lawrie, Director

Lawrie, Executive Director of Door County Economic Development Corporation (DCEDC), presented on the organization's activities and requested renewal of Sister Bay's financial support. She was accompanied by Tim Duquaine, DCEDC Board Chairman.

Lawrie outlined the corporation's mission to enhance Door County's well-being through services, initiatives, and policies that drive business growth and prosperity. She highlighted five pillars of DCEDC's 2026-2028 strategic plan: talent attraction and development, business advancement and advocacy, quality of life (addressing housing, broadband, and childcare challenges), entrepreneurial spirit, and communication and engagement.

Lawrie detailed DCEDC's work benefiting Sister Bay, including student engagement in local careers, business education and support, small business revolving loan programs with preference for trades and manufacturing, policy education for lawmakers, connectivity to state and federal funding opportunities, and quality of life initiatives including housing studies.

She noted that DCEDC helped secure a $225,000 grant (with a $25,000 DCEDC match) for the Small Business Facade and Property Improvement Program, which benefited multiple Sister Bay businesses. Lawrie requested financial support of approximately $3,700 based on the recommended $3.29 per capita funding model.

Board members discussed their previous support level of $5,000 per year and learned that DCEDC currently holds approximately $1,200 in restricted funding for Sister Bay from a previous housing initiative. Duquaine offered to appoint an ex officio member from Sister Bay to the DCEDC board, and Kodanko expressed interest in serving.

Schmelzer noted that DCEDC had been helpful with the comprehensive plan, contractor park discussions with Liberty Grove, and the facade grant program. The board discussed the value of renewing support in the 2027 budget, as it was too late to include it in the 2026 budget.

b. CIP Presentation; Finance Committee

The board reviewed the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) by year. 2026 Projects:

- Marina Bathrooms ($300,000 total across 2026-2027) - Construction to begin after the marina season in fall 2026.
- Highway 57 Trail ($240,000) - Approximately one mile from Highway 42 to Northwoods Drive.
- Community Center ($100,000) - First of five annual installments to support the ice rink warming house/community center project.
- Sewer/Water Extension ($110,000) - Extension to properties with special assessment financing options.

2027 Projects:

- Highway 42 Trail ($144,000) – Construction management for the trail section connecting Sister Bay with Ephraim.
- Playground Equipment ($100,000) - Bell suggested seeking community funding/donations as seed money.
- Pebble Beach Bathroom Engineering ($30,000) - For ADA-compliant bathrooms and addressing water runoff issues.
- Cold Storage Building Siding - Linczmaier confirmed plans to replace the deteriorating siding on the dry storage building.

2028-2030 Projects: The board briefly reviewed projects scheduled for 2028-2030, including Village Hall funding of $400,000 across 2028-2029, the completion of the Highway 42 Trail, continued playground equipment funding, and equipment replacements including a construction lift in 2030. Multiple trustees expressed concerns about the cost of the Highway 42 Trail, which was estimated at approximately $2.3 million, with Village funding of $460,000 for what Sauter described as "a short distance". Schmelzer explained that the elevated boardwalk design along the highway makes the project more expensive than typical trails.

The board requested the Finance Committee consider moving Village Hall funding earlier in the CIP timeline by swapping funding with other projects that could be pushed back.

6. Resolutions

a. Res. No. 2025 – 023; TAP 42 Grant Application; Highway 42

Schmelzer explained that this resolution is required to apply for the Transportation Alternatives Program grant due in October. The resolution acknowledges that the village will provide a 20% match for the project.

The board discussed the Highway 42 Trail route and design, with some trustees expressing concern about the project's cost and questioning whether Ephraim's plans for connecting trails had changed. Schmelzer confirmed that the trail plan keeps Sister Bay's portion on the same side of the highway as the proposed regional trail system, which hopefully will eventually connect to the Highway 57 trail.

Motion by Howson to approve Resolution No. 2025-023 for the TAP 42 Grant Application, second by White. Motion carried – All ayes.

b. Res. No. 2025 - 024; Supporting the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

Schmelzer explained the importance of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program to the village, noting it has funded numerous local projects including the Marketplace parking lot, wetlands work at the beach, and the purchase of Pebble Beach. The program is at risk of not being renewed.

Motion by Kodanko to approve Resolution No. 2025-024 supporting the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, second by Howson. Motion carried – All ayes.

7. Discussion/Action Items

a. Lease Agreement; Friends of the Ice Rink; Ice Rink

Schmelzer asked for a motion to reconsider and approve the new lease agreement with Friends of the Ice Rink to correct date inconsistencies from the previously approved agreement.

Motion by Bell, second by Howson. Motion carried – All ayes.

b. Contract; PSI; Soil Testing; 2313 Mill Rd.

Schmelzer explained the request for soil testing at the old parks maintenance facility site. She noted there were local accounts of the site having been used as a dump, though DNR records don't confirm this. Water issues on the property were also a concern, although there are no mapped wetlands. The testing would help determine the site's suitability for potential future development, including possibly the administration building.

It was questioned whether spending $6,000 on soil testing was appropriate when the property might need to be used to satisfy Knowles-Nelson grant requirements. It was clarified that multiple options exist to resolve the grant compliance issue, and the board was keeping options open.

Motion by White to approve the contract with PSI for soil testing at 2313 Mill Road, second by Bell. Motion carried – All ayes.

c. Accept Bid; Dumman Appraisal Group, LLC; Post Office Appraisal

Schmelzer explained that while $2,000 had been budgeted for a post office appraisal, the appraiser indicated it would cost $6,000 to meet all the requirements of the United States Postal Service. She noted that the appraisal was requested by the Parks, Property & Streets Committee to potentially negotiate a higher lease rate with the post office.

Several trustees expressed skepticism that the post office would agree to pay more regardless of what an appraisal showed. It was argued that without an appraisal, the village would never know how much it might be subsidizing the post office and would have no chance of securing a higher rate.

Motion by Bell to accept the bid from Dumman Appraisal Group for the post office appraisal. Motion failed for lack of a second.

d. Accept Bid; Dumman Appraisal Group, LLC; Encumbrance Appraisal

Schmelzer explained the Parks, Property & Streets Committee felt an appraisal of the Marketplace parking lot is needed to determine the value the village must replace elsewhere to address Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program compliance issues. She noted that Dumman is working with the DNR to determine the specific appraisal requirements but has provided a not-to-exceed price of $5,000.

Motion to by Kodanko to accept the bid from Dumman Appraisal Group for the encumbrance appraisal of the Marketplace parking lot at a cost not to exceed $5,000, second by White. Motion carried – All ayes.

e. Accept Bid; Lake Ledge Naturalist, LLC; Historic Signage; Waterfront Park

Schmelzer presented a proposal for two historic signs at the waterfront park at a cost of $25,000, to be funded from municipal reimbursement funds (tourism-related funds, not taxpayer dollars). The board discussed potential locations for the signs, with multiple trustees expressing concern about blocking water views.

Motion by Champeau to accept the bid from Lake Ledge Naturalist, LLC for historic signage at Waterfront Park at a cost of $25,000, second by Howson. Motion carried – All ayes.

f. Annual Administrator Evaluation

Schmelzer reported that in February the board requested the Personnel Committee to conduct the the previous year's administrator evaluation and share it with the board, but it had not been shared. She explained the evaluation from last year showed a score of 7.47 out of 9, which was higher than the previous year, and this year's evaluation used a different ranking, a revised 1-5 scale which she scored 4.37 out of 5. Schmelzer noted there is typically one bad evaluation, but all others were quite positive and overall she was very satisfied with the evaluations.

Bhirdo expressed a preference for the previous 1-9 scale as it provided more nuance in scoring. She also noted that only five trustees completed evaluations this year compared to all trustees last year, and suggested participation should be mandatory.

The board discussed the evaluation form design, with trustees suggesting improvements to allow more space for comments in future evaluations.

The evaluation form style was referred back to the Personnel Committee for consideration for the next evaluation period.

g. Liquor License Amendment; Alpaca Apparel
Schmelzer explained that Ben Kornowski from Alpaca to Apparel had requested an amendment to his liquor license to allow for package sales outside the building during certain events when a tent is permitted. Bhirdo cited the state statute governing Class A licenses, noting that they allow off-premise consumption and limited on-premise sampling (two 3-ounce beer samples, one 0.5-ounce spirits sample, or two 3-ounce wine samples per person).

Motion by Kodanko to approve the liquor license amendment for Alpaca to Apparel as presented, second by Champeau. Motion carried: Aye -6 (Howson, Bell, Champeau, Harff, White, Kodanko); Nay -1 (Bhirdo)

h. Committee Appointments
Bell presented three committee appointments:
- Jill Wiebe to Ad Hoc Green Tier
- Nate Bell to Technology Committee
- Brigid White to Personnel Committee

Motion by Kodanko to approve the committee appointments as presented, second by Howson. Motion carried – All ayes.

i. Monthly Financial Report & Appropriations
The board reviewed the monthly financial report and addressed questions regarding several expenditures, including computer services for the marina ($3,979.97), HeyGov meeting minutes software ($269.10 monthly), a soaker hose and sprinkler system for the Parks Department ($577), three connection fee refunds to Packerland Builders, and storage costs ($2,000).

Motion by Howson to approve the monthly appropriations in the amount of $329,511, second by Kodanko. Motion carried – All ayes.

8. Staff Reports
- Schmelzer reported that she has announced her retirement. She mentioned attending the Housing Partnership open house, where the village was thanked for providing land for the houses. She noted the Parks building open house was successful, and the Triangle public informational meeting had good engagement. She also mentioned the upcoming Highway 57 Trail public input meeting scheduled for Monday, and that the Parks Committee would be working on the Outdoor Recreation Plan.

- Linczmaier reported on Public Works activities and responded to questions about the Pebble Beach cameras and marina building project.
- The board received written reports from other departments.

9. Committee Reports (See Below Committee Listing)
Minutes shared in the meeting packet included:

- Finance Committee: August 15 & 25,2025
- Housing Committee: August 5, 2025
- Library Commission: August 11, 2025
- Personnel Committee: August 21, 2025
- Sewer and Water Utility Committee: September 9, 2025

The board reviewed committee minutes and noted errors the committees would need to address, including:
- Finance Committee minutes needed to credit Bhirdo for recommending cash payments rather than bonding for the Mill Road project
- Housing Committee minutes incorrectly stated that the Parks Committee's reasoning for not installing a fence around the stormwater pond was related to plants

Motion by Bhirdo to accept the committee reports, second by Howson. Motion carried – All ayes.

10. Matters to be Placed on a Future Agenda or Referred to a Committee, Official or Employee
The following items were suggested for future agendas:
- Funding for DCEDC
- Review of the process for issuing fines, including allowing adequate response time
- Discussion with State Representative Joel Kitchens regarding:
    - The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program
    - Short-term rental regulations for premier resort areas

11. Next Meeting
a. Schedule Budget Hearing
The board scheduled the budget hearing for Monday, November 17, 2025, at 5:30 PM.

b. Schedule CIP Hearing
The CIP hearing was scheduled to be held jointly with the budget hearing on Monday, November 17, 2025, at 5:30 PM.

c. Schedule Special Board Meeting
A special board meeting was scheduled for Thursday, September 18, 2025, at 11:00 AM to address the recruitment process for the next administrator.

12. Executive Session
a) Convene into Closed Session
At 9:48 PM a motion was made by Bell to convene into executive session pursuant to Wis. Stats. §19.85(1)(g) to confer with legal counsel for the governmental body who is rendering oral or legal advice concerning strategy to be adopted by the body with respect to litigation in which it is or is involved, second by White. A roll call vote was taken on the motion, and the members voted in the following fashion: Bhirdo – aye; Harff – aye; Howson – aye; Kodanko – aye; White – Aye; Bell – aye; Champeau – aye

It was noted that at 10:22 PM, Bell recused himself from further discussion and left the board meeting.

b) Reconvene into Open Session

At 10:39 P.M. the Board reconvened into open session. *A roll call vote was taken and the members voted in the following fashion: Bhirdo – aye; Harff – aye; Howson – aye; Kodanko – aye; White – Aye; Champeau – aye*

c) Motion or Action, as Appropriate

i Preserving Foundations (Anschutz)

Motion by Howson to file a summons and complaint with the court October 20th or shortly after regarding the Preserving Foundations case, second by Bhirdo. Motion carried: Aye -5 (Howson, Bhirdo, Champeau, Harff, White,); Nay -1 (Kodanko)

ii Bertram Communications

Motion by Howson to sever the relationship with Bertram Communications, second by Kodanko. Motion carried – All ayes.

13. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Howson, seconded by Kodanko. Motion carried – All ayes.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah Bertges, Administrative Assistant