

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

December 5, 2016 Meeting

SB Attendance: Chair Seth Gardner, Kim Swasey, Gene Troia, and Carl Etnier (at 7:00 p.m.); Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Calais SB Attendance: Chair Denise Wheeler, Scott Bassage, and Rose Pelchuck

Public Attendance: Delinquent Tax Collector Karen Gramer; Treasurer Don Welch; Toni May

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

Additions to Agenda:

- **Proposal to Resuscitate the Dormant East Montpelier Energy Committee**
- **Road Foreman Report by TA Johnson**

Public Comment: None

Delinquent Tax Collector Report: Karen Gramer

- **Update on Delinquent Taxes:**
 - The latest numbers on delinquent tax outstanding:
 - As of December 1, 2016 there remains \$101,066.01 in past taxes owed on 33 properties; this is right in line with previous years
 - As of December 1, 2015 there was \$98,922.61 owed and on December 1, 2014 there was \$102,153.73 still outstanding
- **Update on Caldwell Tax Sale:**
 - Jack & Marcia Pauly purchased the Caldwell property on County Road at the December 1, 2015 tax sale. Mr. Caldwell had one year to redeem the property, but has not done so. The property will now be formally transferred to the Paulys.
- **Discussion on Potential Laundry Tax Sale:**
 - Ms. Gramer explained that the town-forced probate action to process the Laundry estate is moving forward. The tax sale remains on hold until the probate case is resolved.
- **Potential Change in Collection Policy:**
 - After a review of the Calais delinquent tax collection methodology, Ms. Gramer is considering adopting a harder line on delinquencies; in essence, there would be a firm deadline established, after which a tax sale process would be commenced; the board looked forward to seeing the updated policy
- **Potential Plan to Deal with Low Value Tax Sales:**
 - A long-term issue with low value delinquent accounts is that the statutory attorney payment for the tax sale process (15% of the delinquency) is too low to be of interest to attorneys; Ms. Gramer would like to work with Attorney Jim Barlow, the former senior attorney at VLCT now in private practice, to get an estimate on what it would cost the town in additional legal fees to clear the low value accounts; the board was supportive of this effort

Ms. Gramer will report back to the board on the development of the new collection policy and the results of her discussions with Attorney Barlow at the board's January 16, 2017 meeting.

Special Joint Meeting with Town of Calais Selectboard: Discussion of the FY2018 Ambulance & Emergency Services Budget Request by the East Montpelier Fire Department

At the annual budget presentation on December 1st, EMFD made the following funding request to the towns:

Service	Calais		East Montpelier		Total	
	FY2018 Request	% Increase over FY17	FY2018 Request	% Increase over FY17	FY2018 Request	% Increase over FY17
Fire	\$ 53,346.67	1.6%	\$106,693.33	1.6%	\$160,040.00	1.6%
Ambulance	\$ 72,668.43	12.3%	\$145,336.86	12.3%	\$218,005.29	12.3%
Total	\$126,015.10	7.5%	\$252,030.19	7.5%	\$378,045.29	7.5%

Total EMFD FY2018 ambulance budget of \$265,650 includes a contracted Plainfield payment of \$47,645 for a total combined services budget of \$425,690, up 7.0% from FY2017.

At the December 1st meeting EMFD explained that although the FY18 ambulance service budget including a significant salary line increase to allow greater flexibility in staffing, the amount requested still left EMFD heavily reliant on a very limited number of trained and available volunteer staff. EMFD asked that the boards consider scenarios for adding additional paid staff to the ambulance budget to reduce the reliance on these volunteers. TA Johnson developed two additional ambulance service budgets (Scenario 1 is the original):

	Calais		East Montpelier		Total	
	FY2018 Request	% Increase over FY17	FY2018 Request	% Increase over FY17	FY2018 Request	% Increase over FY17
Fire	\$ 53,346.67	1.6%	\$106,693.33	1.6%	\$160,040.00	1.6%
Ambulance:						
Scenario 1	\$ 72,668.43	12.3%	\$145,336.86	12.3%	\$218,005.29	12.3%
Scenario 2	\$ 84,901.76	31.2%	\$169,803.53	31.2%	\$254,705.29	31.2%
Scenario 3	\$ 91,401.76	41.3%	\$182,803.53	41.3%	\$274,205.29	41.3%
Totals:						
Scenario 1	\$126,015.10	7.5%	\$252,030.19	7.5%	\$378,045.29	7.5%
Scenario 2	\$138,248.43	18.0%	\$276,496.86	18.0%	\$414,745.29	18.0%
Scenario 3	\$144,748.43	23.5%	\$289,496.86	23.5%	\$434,245.29	23.5%

Board members were very supportive of the concept of reducing reliance on volunteer staffing for the ambulance service, but also very concerned about the cost. Even accepting the highest cost scenario, volunteers would still be needed for many of the evening, night, and weekend shifts. Given the

extremely limited number of volunteers available and the extraordinary burdens placed on those few dedicated volunteers, the long-term viability of the EMFD ambulance service seems in question.

EMFD is also requesting authorization to use the EMFD Capital Reserve Fund to purchase two fire and emergency service vehicles in FY2018:

- Replacement of Engine 2 with a new pumper at a cost of \$466,000, to be financed over a period of 10 years
- Replacement of Rescue 2 with a used heavy rescue vehicle at a cost of \$150,000, to be purchased outright

The EMFD Capital Reserve and Contingency Funds are funded from the net proceeds of the ambulance service based on a formula detailed in the service agreement between the towns and EMFD. The Contingency Fund is for use at the discretion of EMFD, but the Capital Reserve Fund use requires board approval. The boards were generally supportive of the replacement of the two vehicles, although the need to purchase both in FY2018 was questioned, as was the need for the \$466,000 version of a new pumper. EMFD's FY2017-FY2027 capital plan, based on assumptions of net ambulance service revenue, makes the case that the vehicles are affordable as proposed.

Board members decided to combine the discussions on the budget and vehicle purchase in an effort to find a way to enable, at least for the short term, an acceptable staffing model while not completely derailing the plan for vehicle replacement. The boards would like EMFD to develop a proposal that uses a portion of the gross ambulance service revenues to cover ambulance staffing coupled with an altered vehicle proposal to reflect the revenue allocation change. Currently, items like ambulance billing, paramedic transfer costs, and defibrillator payments come out of the revenue stream prior to the determination of net ambulance proceeds. The boards are proposing that some staffing costs be treated in the same manner. This will clearly decrease the funds available for the EMFD Capital Reserve Fund, so the capital plan will need adjustment, likely leading to the postponement of one of the vehicle purchases.

The boards also want to begin an open and frank conversation on the long-term emergency service options for the communities.

The boards will continue this discussion as part of the Calais Selectboard's regular meeting on December 12th. TA Johnson will work with EMFD to develop the new proposal for the FY2018 service budget and capital fund use.

Preliminary Discussion on FY2018 Budget Development

The board reviewed the preliminary FY2018 budget. Development of the budget will continue during upcoming board meetings with an expected final budget adoption at the January 16, 2017 meeting.

Preliminary Discussion on 2017 Town Meeting Warning Development

The board reviewed the preliminary 2017 Town Meeting Warning. This early draft includes two potential charter amendment articles, one that deals with a merger of East Montpelier Fire District #1 with the town and the other that covers an expansion of appointed officers including town clerk and delinquent tax collector. The warning will likely be finalized at a special board meeting on January 30, 2017.

Appointments

Motion: To reappoint Bruce Johnson as the East Montpelier Zoning Administrator for a term ending December 7, 2017. Made by Ms. Swasey; second by Mr. Troia. Passed unanimously.

Motion: To reappoint Gene Troia as the East Montpelier Acting Zoning Administrator for a term ending December 31, 2017. Made by Ms. Swasey; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed 3-0 (Mr. Troia abstained).

Proposal to Resuscitate the Dormant East Montpelier Energy Committee

Mr. Etnier requested the board recreate the EM Energy Committee with the primary intent to have the committee take a leading role in the town's Act 174 planning process.

Motion: To appoint Lindy Biggs, Carl Etnier, and Cort Richardson to open-ended terms on the East Montpelier Energy Committee, to authorize them to embark on Act 174 energy planning for the town, in dialogue with the Planning Commission, and to authorize expenditures for all appropriate training for such work. Made by Mr. Troia; second by Ms. Swasey. Passed 3-0 (Mr. Etnier abstained).

Road Foreman Report by TA Johnson

TA Johnson presented two requests from Road Foreman Garand:

The oldest truck in the town's fleet, the 2008 International 10-wheeler, has broken down during both of the recent storms. RF Garand is once again requesting permission to purchase a sander for the town's pickup to expand his flexibility when one of the big trucks is offline. Board members declined to authorize the purchase based on a variety of concerns centered on the excessive wear-and-tear the sander would cause to the town's relatively small ¾ ton pickup.

RF Garand also wanted confirmation that the 2008 truck will be replaced in 2017 and he should be researching options. The board affirmed that the current intent is to purchase a new 10-wheeler in 2017.

Warrants

Members reviewed and signed the two warrants.

Minutes

The Chair presented the minutes of the November 21, 2016 Selectboard meeting for consideration.

Motion: To approve the November 21, 2016 Selectboard meeting minutes as presented. Made by Mr. Troia; second by Ms. Swasey. Passed unanimously.

The Chair presented the minutes of the December 1, 2016 Selectboard meeting for consideration.

Motion: To approve the December 1, 2016 Selectboard meeting minutes as presented.

Made by Mr. Troia; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Other Business

Town Administrator Report:

- Concept of Making East Montpelier a Sanctuary Town:
 - A resident asked that the town investigate adopting a policy of sanctuary protection for undocumented immigrants; since the town has little official interaction in the prosecution of such immigrants, sanctuary town status would be mostly symbolic
 - Board members discussed placing the question on the 2017 Town Meeting Warning; another option would be for the board to adopt a sanctuary policy in advance of President-elect Trump's threat to cut all federal funds to sanctuary communities on his first day in office, January 20, 2017
 - Mr. Etnier will research the options and report back to the board
- Update on Park 'n Ride Facility:
 - The town has received the necessary VTrans access permit, so we're clear to finalize the design plans; the intent is to get the project out to bid in January/February 2017
 - A variety of trees on the site have been flagged for removal; this needs to be done by March 31st and is the town's responsibility
- Meeting Schedule:
 - December 16th 5:00 pm Town Volunteer Appreciation Party
 - December 19th 6:00 pm Selectboard regular meeting; hearing on fire district merger
 - January 2nd 6:00 pm Selectboard regular meeting; hearing on fire district merger
 - January 16th 6:00 pm At ESF: SB regular meeting; hearing on charter amendments
 - January 30th 6:30 pm Selectboard special meeting; final budget/warning approvals

Zoning Administrator Report:

- No permit applications since the last board meeting
- No DRB meeting is currently scheduled

Personnel Matters

Board members discussed the status of the search for candidates for the road foreman position. The board will continue to advertise for prospects in anticipation of Road Foreman Garand's retirement in summer 2017.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Troia. Passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: December 19, 2016 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting