

Selectboard 2014 Town Report

The biggest news of 2014 is that East Montpelier is now a charter town and, as a result, we will shift from an elected to an appointed town treasurer. Following the dictates of the charter, we formed a committee to recommend a capable candidate to replace outgoing elected treasurer Don Welch. To no one's surprise, once it was clear that he was willing to accept the post, the committee recommended Don. We are pleased to appoint Don to the position effective 2015 Town Meeting Day.

In December we updated the town's dog ordinance, originally adopted in 2003 and amended in 2010. Residents came to us with concerns about a group of dogs that was exhibiting very disturbing behavior. Some of the dogs' actions were ticketable offenses under the old ordinance, but the residents wanted the town to have a wider array of enforcement tools. The primary change expands the range of situations in which the state's "vicious dog" hearing process can be applied to include circumstances like a dog attacking other pets or behaving aggressively towards humans without actually biting them. We declined to expand the circumstances under which the town can order a dog to be euthanized, beyond those in state statute and hence out of town control. We also did not change the rule, in effect since 2003, that a dog off its owner's premises must be either on leash, off leash under verbal or non-verbal control of the owner, in a vehicle, on someone else's premises with their permission, or hunting.

Road Foreman Mike Garand and his crew, Ken Lorden, Frank Campbell, and Craig Seadeek, continue to make our roads the envy of our neighbors. In August we took advantage of a VTrans structures grant to repair the large culvert that funnels Bennett Brook under Dodge Road. Thanks to an unexpected VTrans paving grant, we were able to complete our recent all-roads repaving effort one year early. First up, Gallison Hill Road was given a shim and standard overlay, followed by Quaker and Vincent Flats Roads receiving a desperately-needed shim and thick overlay. No new paving is anticipated during 2015. In September, we replaced our smallest truck, the 2007 International Lo-Pro with another 6-wheeler, a 2015 International 7400. The next challenge, likely to play out over the next three years, will be timing the planned staggered replacement of the two 2008 International 10-wheelers in the most cost effective manner.

In other road news, we successfully petitioned the state to reclassify the 4.7-mile stretch of road from US Rte. 2 in East Montpelier Village to County Road along Quaker, Vincent Flats, Dodge, Lyle Young, and Templeton Roads as a Class 2 highway. This reclassification reflects the importance and heavy use of this roadway and does not require any change to the existing roads. The benefits to the town include an additional \$14,000 in state aid plus eligibility for the state paving and engineering studies grant program. On another front, we continued to pare down the number of Class 4 highways in town. These are roads for which we receive no state aid, but still have some degree of maintenance responsibility. The overgrown northern stretch of Foster Road, from the old Foster farmhouse to Chickering Road, has been reclassified as a Legal Trail, remaining open for public recreational use. Two dead end driveways along Sodom Pond Road were discontinued, with ownership reverting to the landowners.

The East Montpelier Village infrastructure projects continue to make slow, but steady, progress. The Park 'n Ride facility planned for the WEC storage garage lot has a completed design and is currently in the right-of-way process. The sidewalk & shoulder enhancement project along the US Rte. 2/VT Rte. 14 corridor is now under the guidance of Local Project Manager Kevin Russell and is currently under design. Finally, the VTrans Village Bridge replacement and Rte. 2/Rte. 14 intersection project is also in the right-of-way process. Completion dates are always a challenge, but we're projecting 2016 for the Park 'n Ride, 2017 for the sidewalks, and 2018 for the bridge project.

In 2013 the Planning Commission created the Capital Improvement Committee and charged it with creating a viable capital plan and, more importantly, a process for maintaining that plan's viability over time. In late 2014 this superb committee, chaired by Gene Troia, presented the first iteration of the East Montpelier Capital Plan supported by a detailed planning budget. This plan will be a living document, with annual adjustments and updates to ensure it meets the needs of the town as the years pass. We're excited to have an effective capital planning process in place that will assist us in managing capital costs and the resultant tax implications. As part of this new capital plan process, we are requesting that voters support a new, properly conceived capital reserve fund to replace our existing, but legally suspect, capital reserve fund.

The FY2016 budget is a study in the frustrations of municipal financial management. We're presenting a total budget, including voted articles, which calls for decreased spending of \$65,662 (3.0%) and reflects a projected non-tax revenue increase of \$17,093 (4.77%). Despite these positive numbers, the budget calls for a net tax increase of \$67,245 (4.07%; 2 cents on the projected tax rate). This disappointing result is due to the fact we no longer have an available fund balance. For the past few years we have used the town's fund balance to buffer the tax rate as we increased expenditures to cover the Emergency Services Facility bond and the repaving program. At Town Meeting last year, understanding that the fund balance would eventually be used up, voters wisely supported the Selectboard request to put the remaining fund balance, which turned out to be \$237,645, into a contingency/rainy day reserve fund. In one stroke, this fiscally responsible move eliminated any available fund balance for use in conjunction with the FY2016 budget. We grappled with various options to both move forward with the new capital plan process while holding the line on tax increases, finally determining that an increase of 2 cents on the tax rate was the optimal target. We are well aware that any tax rate increase right now is painful, but the town is currently in excellent fiscal shape and we believe that this budget is the right choice for ensuring that we remain in that position.

As always, we offer heartfelt thanks to the town employees, school employees, elected officials and volunteers whose work makes East Montpelier such a vibrant and caring community. Special thanks this year to Chief Ty Rolland and the entire squad of our wonderful East Montpelier Volunteer Fire Department as we all celebrate 50 years of EMFD service to our town and the greater East Montpelier region.

Seth Gardner, Chairperson
Casey Northrup, Vice-chairperson
Carl Etnier
Steve Sparrow
Kim Swasey