

Selectboard 2015 Town Report

It's been a calm, eye-of-the-hurricane year for your Selectboard. For the most part we've been moving forward with long-standing plans, highlighted by the fortuitous purchase of a highly desired parcel in East Montpelier Village, adoption of major zoning amendments which add river corridor protection to our regulatory scheme, and the smooth integration of a town-appointed (as opposed to elected) treasurer into our governance structure.

East Montpelier Village remains a center of attention. The three infrastructure projects we've been involved with over the past five years continue to show progress. The Park 'n Ride facility should go out for bid this spring with construction commencing by late summer. The town now owns the WEC garage lot where the facility will be built and all necessary rights-of-way have been secured. The sidewalk & shoulder enhancement project planned for the US Rte. 2/VT Rte. 14 corridor is nearing the end of the preliminary design stage, is in the midst of the right-of-way process, and is on track for construction in 2017. The VTrans Village Bridge replacement and Rte. 2/Rte. 14 intersection project has successfully passed through the right-of-way process and is set to start utility and drainage work this summer with an eye toward bridge completion no later than 2018.

The purchase at auction of the 48-acre Winston/Silberberg property, located at the northeast end of the village, gives the town flexibility for the future. We're in the process of developing options for the use of the land, which include potential uses such as senior housing, recreation trails, town office space, and commercial space. In conjunction with this effort, the Planning Commission will be developing a master plan for East Montpelier Village, thanks to a recently-received state Municipal Planning Grant. The intent is to build on the past decade's work of our Village Committee as we move forward with the revitalization of the village area.

After a long, tortuous winter last year, Road Foreman Mike Garand and his crew, Ken Lorden, Frank Campbell, and Craig Seadeek, were more than happy to have an extended stretch of stable weather which allowed them to focus on small upgrades to a variety of roads. Numerous culverts were replaced, ditches cleared and stone-lined, and roadside brush cut back, as the team strives to keep our roads in top shape. One highlight was a grant-funded ditching job just south of Mallory Brook on Center Road which should significantly decrease erosion and road damage from storms. Although there will be no paving jobs in 2016, you can expect to see some major culvert operations, including the replacement of an oft-damaged culvert on Murray Road just north of the Montpelier border. Muddy Brook Road should also see some action as we work to shore up the slumping southbound lane in time for the expected traffic increases due to the Village Bridge replacement.

One issue the board grappled with in 2015 and will continue to work on in 2016 is the need to find balance between road improvement efforts and overall safety for all users of our roads. Smooth surfaces with good sight lines afford the best opportunity for safe passage for all travelers. These good conditions, however, create the potential for faster speeds. As a community, we need to recognize that the bicyclist riding to work, the child walking to her friend's house, the horse rider, the dog walker, the jogger, and even the nordic rollerskier have as much right to use our roads as the passenger car and farm truck. We don't want, and really can't afford, wide roads, endless sidewalks, or constant police speed enforcement. Please help us achieve the dual goals of great roads and safe travel for all. Manage your vehicle speed not just for the road conditions, but also for the road users.

Town Meeting Day will give us the opportunity to discuss two issues of vital importance for our town's future. The Recreation Board, created by town vote at 1966 Town Meeting, may be in need of

a new governance structure. After 50 years as a town committee, the Rec Board is requesting that it be disbanded and its responsibilities contracted to a new non-profit entity. This move would eliminate the mandate to move the Rec Board's finances under town management and provide the board with the flexibility necessary to work with other communities to create strong programs for our children. The second issue revolves around our Conservation Fund. After 25 years of amazing success in conserving East Montpelier properties, the town is at a crossroads. The fund is depleted and needs augmentation in order to continue serving as the source of local funds for conservation projects. The Selectboard is asking voters to approve an appropriation of \$10,000 for the Conservation Fund. At the same time, the board would like to open discussion on exactly what the town wants from its conservation program. We've now permanently conserved, through development rights purchases, around 3,500 acres (some 17% of our land area). Is it time to change direction?

The FY2017 budget reflects our long-running effort to manage town expenditures to avoid large swings in the tax rate. The general fund budget is up 6%, but that growth is partially offset by the use of \$75,000 of our available fund balance, resulting in a net sub-3% growth in the town tax rate. We're now in Year 2 of the town's revived capital planning system. The Capital Improvement Committee's detailed schematic of major town expenditures for the foreseeable future calls for an ongoing annual appropriation to the Capital Reserve Fund of \$414,817. Well over half of the general fund's increase for FY2017 is due to the desire of the board to fully fund the plan to ensure that the resources are available when needed.

Once again, 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. We lost one of our wonderful volunteers this year, Betsy Catlin. We were privileged to benefit from her rare combination of knowledge and fire for too brief a time. Our hearts go out to Mark, Charlie, and all her family.

Seth Gardner, Chairperson
Casey Northrup, Vice-chairperson
Carl Etnier
Kim Swasey
Gene Troia