

Selectboard 2016 Town Report

2016 seemed to be a year of fevered upheaval at all levels of government. The real challenge will be to gently channel this energy in 2017 toward positive changes for the benefit of our community. 2016 saw us struggle with our land conservation program, long a shining light, but by the end of the year we had come together to resolve the immediate concerns while formulating a plan to craft a conservation program that fits the needs of the town for years to come. 2016 also saw us struggle with the vagaries of the standard Vermont statutory municipal government scheme as we sadly accepted the resignation of long-time Town Clerk Terri Conti and faced a dissolution request from East Montpelier Fire District #1, with its volunteers worn out from years of fruitless negotiation to procure the Crystal Springs Water System. With the invaluable assistance of the Charter Committee, we're recommending amendments to the town governmental charter that will eliminate the fire district and allow the appointment of the clerk along with the current and delinquent tax collectors, enabling the town to ensure the provision of both quality and cost-effective governmental services.

East Montpelier Village continues to be the main focal point for town planning efforts. The Planning Commission is mid-way through the process of developing a master plan for the village area. The Old LaPerle Farm Property Committee, formed last May, is making great progress in evaluating the various development constraints, such as wastewater capacity, while at the same time evaluating possible uses on the 48-acre parcel, including a variety of senior and multi-generational housing options.

The three East Montpelier Village infrastructure projects we've been following for the past six years are finally starting to show signs of real progress. The 100% grant funded Park 'n Ride facility should go out for bid early this spring with construction commencing by early summer. An exciting addition to the facility will be a multi-use path that will run along the border of the now-town owned WEC garage lot and LaPerle Farm properties, connecting the park 'n ride to the village sidewalk system. The VTrans Village Bridge replacement and Rte. 2/Rte. 14 intersection project is in the early stages of construction, with utilities and drainage work well underway. Actual bridge and road work should commence this summer with project completion currently scheduled for 2018. Our sidewalk & shoulder enhancement project planned for the US Rte. 2/VT Rte. 14 corridor is moving forward in fits and starts as we try to thread the needle between completion of a complex design & right-of-way process and the start of the roadwork portion of the VTrans intersection project. Sidewalk construction is possible in late 2017, but it's conceivable that the project will be delayed for some time to avoid interference with the VTrans project.

Another year, another set of major drainage improvements to our roads, this time along North Street, Jacobs Road, and Horn of the Moon Road. Road Foreman Mike Garand and his crew, Ken Lorden, Frank Campbell, and Craig Seadeek, continue to upgrade (which does not mean widen, or otherwise imply a desire to enable increased speeds; please recall last year's rough roads discussion) our gravel roads in anticipation of the state mandated local roads permit and associated road maintenance expectations coming our way over the next few years. This is all in the name of decreasing the erosion potential of our roads in an era of increasingly severe storms while also limiting the sediment and pollutant load on our rivers and streams emanating from our roads.

In other highway department news, we completed the renovation of the old wing of the Templeton Road Fire Station to allow the heated storage of the town's grader and excavator. With the greatly appreciated cooperation of both EMFD and the Town of Calais, we were able to repurpose an underutilized town building at minimal cost. In September the town received delivery of a new Mack 10-wheeler truck to replace one of our two 2008 International 10-wheelers. We will likely purchase

another Mack in 2017 to complete the current round of truck replacements. Another highlight was a reworking of our traffic ordinance to line up the ordinance with our road signage, add a parking ticket hearing process, and implement a speed limit decrease through the East Montpelier Center area. Despite our intentions, there were no major road projects in 2016, which should lead to a number of such projects in 2017, including the grant-funded replacements of the large culvert on Murray Road just north of the Montpelier border and the vastly undersized culvert mid-way along Quaker Road. Other potential grant funded projects in 2017 are a shoring up of the slumping southbound lane on Muddy Brook Road along with a repaving and drainage upgrade effort planned for the stretch of County Road from Horn of the Moon Road to the Calais border.

The budget for FY2018 continues the board's effort to provide the necessary services without unduly burdening the taxpayer. The general fund budget is up 0.7%, despite significant increases for health insurance costs and the ambulance service, and overall expenditures, including projected appropriations for all voted articles, are up a total of 1%. This coupled with the use of \$75,000 of our available fund balance and, unfortunately, a projected minimal rise in the grand list, results in a net 1.2% increase in the town tax rate. In Year 3 of the town's revived capital planning system we're starting to see the real benefits of the Capital Improvement Committee's effort to plan for capital expenditures. We will be buying a new truck and paying for the town portions of a number of grant supported highway projects out of the Capital Reserve Fund with no obvious effect on the budget and, hence, the tax rate. This stabilization effect on the tax rate was the prime selling point for the adoption of a capital plan and the associated annual budget line appropriation to the Capital Reserve Fund.

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. We welcome CJ Flynn, our new town clerk, who started right in the midst of, and then successfully piloted the town through, the presidential election. Special thanks to Terri Conti for her fourteen years of dedicated service to the town, the last ten as town clerk. Her care, concern, and kindness towards all townspeople will be missed.

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