

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

January 6, 2020 Selectboard Meeting

SB Attendance: Chair Seth Gardner, Gene Troia, Amy Willis, Carl Etnier and Casey Northrup; Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: Jon Jewett; Renée Carpenter (Friends of Coburn Pond); Paul Winters & Kate Bean (East Montpelier Recreation Board); Michael Duane (East Montpelier Moderator); Don Welch (East Montpelier Treasurer); Guthrie Perry (East Montpelier Road Foreman)

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

Additions to Agenda:

- **Appointment of New Municipal Project Manager for East Montpelier Sidewalk Project**
- **Consideration of Capital Reserve Fund Use for New Town Garage Grizzly (sand/gravel screen)**
- **Consideration of Options for Maturing General Fund and Cemetery Perpetual Care CDs**

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the December 16, 2019 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the December 16, 2019 minutes as amended. Made by Mr. Troia; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Conversation with Friends of Coburn Pond on Potential 2020 Town Meeting Warning Funding Article

Ms. Carpenter presented the board with a plan to seed fund, through a \$25,000 funding request article at 2020 Town Meeting, the growth of the Friends of Coburn Pond organization from a small grass roots group intent on protecting the pond to a more mature organization capable of managing the Coburn Pond recreation area should the Vermont Agency of Transportation decide to transfer the pond property to the town. The board asked for clarification on why the request was for exactly \$25,000. Ms. Carpenter explained that the \$25,000 figure ensured an Australian Ballot vote rather than a town meeting floor vote on the appropriation request, plus an influx of that level of town funding would impress upon outside funding organizations the seriousness of the town's support for Friends of Coburn Pond and development of a sustainable pond recreation facility.

The board decided to reflect on the request for the time being, with the intent to make a final decision on whether to include the request on the town meeting warning at its January 20, 2020 meeting. Board members reminded Ms. Carpenter that there is still time to submit a petitioned version of the request, with the signatures of 5% of the voter checklist, to the town clerk.

Discussion with Recreation Board on the Proposed Electric Service Installation at the Recreation Field

The Recreation Board is proposing to bring electric service to the recreation field. The new line would run underground from just south of the EMES bus loop exit to the recreation field shed. The total cost of the installation is anticipated to be approximately \$3,400. Electrician Jamie Laquerre is donating his services. The town road crew would handle laying the line. Mr. Winters and Ms. Bean explained that the availability of electric service would, among other things, enhance the Rec Board's ability to raise funds through concession sales while allowing regular use of the pitching machine and sound system. Currently the Rec Board cobbles together similar capability through the use of generators and propane grills.

The board was generally receptive to the concept, but decided to postpone any action until the Rec Board could investigate the possibility of installing a solar array at the recreation field.

Town Treasurer Report

Treasurer Welch presented a financial report for the first half of FY2020. The town remains in good shape with strong tax collection rates and solid reserve fund balances.

Consideration of Options for Maturing General Fund and Cemetery Perpetual Care CDs

The town has two certificates of deposit at Northfield Savings Bank, \$160,000 general fund and \$74,000 cemetery perpetual care, maturing on January 10, 2020. Treasurer Welch would like to place the funds in new 2-year cds at 1.75% interest at North Country Federal Credit Union. This is the best rate currently available and, given the likely downward direction in rates, Treasurer Welch recommends the 2-year timeframe despite the board's general reluctance to lock up funds for that long a period. Board members agreed with the logic and by consensus the board authorized the recommended shift to the NCFCU certificates of deposit.

Road Foreman Report**➤ Consideration of Purchase of 2019 John Deere Grader**

- RF Perry presented a proposal to replace the town's 2006 John Deere grader with a 2019 lightly used (86 hours) version. The cost, with a \$50,000 trade allowance, is \$301,500. The grader comes with a road surface compaction add-on that is expected to make road grading more effective and efficient. The new grader should be available for delivery by March. The town's capital plan anticipated a \$300,000 grader purchase in the near future – the expected remaining life is at negative two years and the funds are available to make this a cash purchase.
- **Motion: To accept the Nortrax Inc. \$301,500 quote for a 2019 John Deere grader, with the funds coming from the town's capital reserve fund.** Made by Mr. Troia; second by Mr. Northrup. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Capital Reserve Fund Use for New Town Garage Grizzly (sand/gravel screen)

RF Perry described the process through which he ordered a new grizzly (a heavy-duty screen for sand, gravel and rock), which will be fabricated locally by a Worcester company, for use at the

town garage. The current screen, which is decades old and in deplorable shape, is no longer able to withstand the constant use for screening winter sand. The new grizzly should be in place by mid-January. The issue is whether to pay for the equipment under the FY2020 highway budget or utilize the capital reserve fund. The new grizzly should last for twenty years or more and will cost around \$12,000, so it meets the generally accepted standard for a capital expenditure.

Motion: To authorize the use of the capital reserve fund for the purchase of the new grizzly. Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Mr. Troia. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on FY2021 Budget Development

➤ Highway Operations

- RF Perry submitted a mostly level-funded budget with two line increases: \$6,000 for winter salt; and, \$1,000 for uniforms. The town has added paved surfaces needing winter salt, including the park 'n ride facility and the recent paving of Carleton Boulevard and Pauls Square. The salt shed is currently operating at a low reserve level and, given the additional need and difficulty of procuring salt quickly, RF Perry would like the additional funding to build up the reserve. The \$1,000 uniform increase is designed to cover a \$250/crew member boot allowance to ensure that all crew members have proper footwear. Board members agreed with both increases.

The board continued development of the FY2021 budget. The Cemetery Committee submitted a \$23,500 budget for review. Unlike in prior years when the former town cemetery commission funding request would be a separate article on the town meeting warning, the new committee is funded directly through the general fund budget. The committee also submitted a request for authorization to purchase a zero-turn mower and associated trailer to replace a non-functional Cub Cadet riding mower. Board members agreed on the need for the new mower.

Motion: To authorize the purchase of a zero-turn mower and trailer at a total cost of up to \$10,000, with the funds coming from the town's capital reserve fund. Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Since this funding request was not warned, the decision to purchase the mower will be placed on the January 20, 2020 board agenda for further consideration and possible ratification.

The board decided to set the committee's budget figure at \$20,000 for FY2021, up from \$17,250 in FY2020. Offsetting cemetery revenues from plot purchases and burials coupled with less equipment maintenance needs and more efficient grounds care due to the new mower is expected to close the \$3,500 gap between the submitted budget and the general fund allocation.

Discussion on Emergency Services Provider Merger Options

The Town of Calais Selectboard has requested that East Montpelier consider the possibility of pursuing a merger of the East Montpelier Fire Department with the Woodbury Fire Department, which Calais also supports. Although the board is sympathetic to the costs Calais faces by supporting two fire departments, board members evinced little interest in taking the lead in what could be a very challenging scheme. The concept of some form of ambulance/emergency services regionalization, which is a significantly different proposition than the merger of two volunteer fire

services but involves similar issues, may be the subject of some activity at the state legislative level this year. The board will follow the issue closely.

Discussion on FY2021 Budget Development

➤ EMFD/Emergency Services Budget

- At the joint board meeting with the Calais Selectboard on December 16, 2019, the boards were supportive of the base operating budget requests presented by the East Montpelier Fire Department for the fire and ambulance services. The boards agreed to consider adding funding to the ambulance staffing lines to move rapidly toward full 24/7, 2-person paid ambulance staffing. The additional cost to reach full staffing is approximately \$150,000. The boards set the target timeframe to be three years, but the amount per year was still to be determined. The two discussed options were adding \$50,000 per year for three years or adding \$37,500 for the first two years and \$75,000 in the third. East Montpelier would be responsible for two-thirds of the chosen figure. Calais is expected make its decision at a January 9th special meeting. East Montpelier board members were comfortable with either choice and added the lower level (\$25,000) to the draft budget.

Work on the budget will continue at the January 20, 2020 board meeting.

Discussion on 2020 Town Meeting Warning

The board reviewed the revised draft warning. Three articles that generally appear on the warning will be removed: both the East Montpelier Signpost and East Montpelier Trails organizations feel their financial resources will enable them to maintain current operations without any FY2021 town appropriation; and, the Conservation Fund Advisory Committee is comfortable with the current level of the town's conservation fund.

Conversation turned to the article dealing with the proposed shift from elected constable positions to appointed, by the Selectboard, constable positions. Board members continue to support the general concept that an appointed constable position would be more in tune with the needs of the community. The concern, however, is that there has been a lot of change to the town's governmental structure over the past few years that have the appearance of consolidating power in the Selectboard and it might be a wiser course of action to delay further alterations. The board agreed to remove the article and expects to revisit the issue in advance of 2021 Town Meeting.

Work on the warning will continue at the January 20, 2020 board meeting.

Development of 2019 Selectboard Report for Annual Report

Board members provided some suggestions for TA Johnson to include in the draft report. The board will finalize the Selectboard Report at the January 20, 2020 board meeting.

Consideration of Avenu Proposal to Digitize Land Records from Current End Point in 2000 back to 1988

The town contracted for the installation and ongoing operation of a digital land records system back in 2013 (the 20/20 Perfect Vision system) with ACS Enterprise Solutions, which after a series of

mergers and splits is now known as Avenu Enterprise Solutions. At the time of the original installation the town arranged for all land records back to December 2000 (the limit of our existing digital index) to be included. The intent at the time was to continue working back in years, with the hope at some point to have the entire land record database available digitally. The proposed next step is to get the system back to the start of the card index in 1988. The estimate provided by Avenu is \$18,890.70 for 5,988 documents. Board members agreed that now was the time to take this first step backwards as the mandated state-set land record fees have increased, resulting in more funds available for record preservation.

Motion: To accept the Avenu quote for adding land records back to 1988 into the town's 20/20 Perfect Vision land records system. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Troia. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Application to the Vermont Emerald Ash Borer Management Grant Program

As part of its work managing the town's response to the Emerald Ash Borer threat, the Resilient Roads Committee has crafted an application for grant funding to help pay for a pilot project to remove targeted ash trees in the Gallison Hill Road area, both on the U-32 grounds (the parking lot area) and along the Gallison Hill, Schoolhouse, and Wheeler Roads rights-of-way. The project also involves selective insecticide treatment of prominent ash trees as well as some tree replacement on the U-32 campus. The grant program uses a 50/50 funding model, with maximum state funding of \$15,000 matched by a \$15,000 total town contribution made up of cash and in-kind services. There will be an informational forum followed by a town tree warden public hearing on the pilot project on January 13, 2020, 6:00 p.m. in Room 128/131 at U-32.

Motion: To authorize the submission of the Emerald Ash Borer Management Grant application to the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program. Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Appointment of New Municipal Project Manager for East Montpelier Sidewalk Project

Kevin Russell, who has been the municipal project manager (MPM) for the town's sidewalk project since 2014, has retired from the profession and formally resigned as our MPM. At this point in the project (construction bid invitation going out on January 8th; a construction inspection services consultant will soon be on board to handle the management of the actual construction; project should be closed out by September) there is little need for an outside consultant to handle the MPM role, but VTrans requires someone to be designated as the MPM. TA Johnson has had general oversight of the project as the owner's (the town's) representative from the project's inception and has been acting as the de facto MPM for most of 2019 as Mr. Russell decreased his involvement.

Motion: To designate TA Johnson as the Municipal Project Manager for the East Montpelier Village Sidewalk Project. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Troia. Passed unanimously.

Warrants

Board members signed the warrant.

Other Business

Town Administrator Report

- Update on East Montpelier Village Sidewalk Project:
 - On January 2, 2020 VTrans officially authorized the town to put the project out to bid, which is planned to occur on January 8, 2020.
 - The process for selection of a construction inspection services provider should commence within the next week. Two Selectboard members, Chair Gardner and Mr. Northrup, will participate in process.
- Update on Prospective Purchase of Old LaPerle Farm Property by Marc Fontaine:
 - The necessary boundary adjustment to add the farmhouse portion of the town-owned Old LaPerle Farm Property to the town-owned Hodgeman parcel is in process. There has been no official communication with Mr. Fontaine since the December 16, 2019 SB meeting.
- Meeting Schedule:
 - January 13, 2020 6:00 p.m. Public forum and hearing on EAB plan at U-32 Tree warden and Resilient Roads Committee
 - January 14, 2020 6:30 p.m. Board of Civil Authority meeting
 - January 20, 2020 6:30 p.m. Selectboard regular meeting
 - January 27, 2020 6:30 p.m. Tentative Selectboard special meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There have been no new applications since the December 16, 2019 SB meeting. There was a total of 65 applications in 2019.
- There is currently no scheduled DRB meeting.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: January 20, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting