

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

February 17, 2020 Selectboard Meeting

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

Public Attendance: Mary Stone, Nona Estrin, Richard Brock, Madeleine Mongan (East Montpelier Trails, Inc.); Julie Potter (Planning Commission & CVRPC); Kimberly Jessup (State Representative); Jon Jewett

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Additions to Agenda: None

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the February 3, 2020 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the February 3, 2020 minutes as presented. Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Conversation with East Montpelier Trails, Inc.

Ms. Stone gave a brief background on East Montpelier Trails, Inc. (EMTI): The non-profit, independent entity, formed in 1992 by a group of East Montpelierites with a shared vision of community trails, manages and maintains a trails network of roughly 18 miles, with a couple of those miles still in the development stage. The trails system is located on, for the most part, easements acquired by the Vermont Land Trust as part of the conservation of a number of large agricultural properties throughout town. Both the town, through the conservation fund, and EMTI, which has a small endowment, have contributed funds for these easements. The trails provide a vital recreational outlet for townspeople and tourists alike, whether they be walkers, bicyclists, skiers, snowshoers, or horse riders.

EMTI finds itself at a crossroads – the network has matured from creation into the management/maintenance phase and the original core EMTI group has simply aged. Although the group has tried to bring in younger members, the ongoing demands of life for the younger set do not fit well with the trails management responsibilities. There's no trouble finding volunteers to participate in weekend projects and act as trail stewards, but filling the leadership roles has proven a challenge. The other concern is with insurance: the group is currently uninsured, both for personal liability and volunteer injury; procuring insurance is both expensive and requires joining an association that has expectations for its membership that EMTI might not be able to meet.

EMTI has hopes that the long-term solution for its issues would involve the development of a regional trails association, but for now it would like to pursue some sort of arrangement with the town. The concept is for the town to either fully absorb EMTI, in essence turning it into a town trails committee, or for the organization to remain independent but pass the trails management and maintenance responsibilities to the town. A significant concern is the likelihood that either arrangement will result in town employee involvement, a potentially significant new expense for the town. Another issue is how the town's insurance through VLCT works with a trails system. There are also questions as to how control of the trails is actually held from a legal perspective and how that control might be passed to the town.

EMTI and the SB will meet to continue the discussion after both groups have had some time to research the various issues involved.

Conversation with Julie Potter, PC Chair & CVRPC Representative

Ms. Potter provided a general update on the activities at the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, starting off with the fact she's no longer the chair of the executive board, but remains on the board as first past chair. CVRPC recently said goodbye to its veteran transportation planner, Dan Currier, who moved on to a position with VTrans. For the time being CVRPC will attempt to cover his duties with in-house personnel. CVRPC is ramping up its community outreach efforts, holding roundtables and workshops for transportation, planning & zoning, emergency management and energy-related topics.

A prime focus now is a two-pronged effort to update the Central VT Regional Plan. First up will be a couple of updates to the existing plan to eliminate the regional housing implementation plan element and amend the future land use map to align with Montpelier's growth center boundary. CVRPC is also starting the development process for a new, likely in 2024, regional plan.

Ms. Potter shifted to EM Planning Commission activities, highlighting recent accomplishments such as gaining state village center designation for North Montpelier and providing feedback on the concept of creating an East Montpelier Conservation Commission. She also provided an update on the zoning regulations revision project. The effort has bogged down over the past year as the PC is struggling to nail down the boundaries and basic standards for the proposed zoning districts throughout town. Despite some calls for splitting the effort into smaller, more manageable components, the PC remains committed to doing a full-scale revision, including district realignment and a comprehensive update of the regulatory language. The short-term focus is to complete the district boundary work before losing the services of Brandy Saxton, the consultant hired under a pair of municipal planning grants, the last of which is set to expire at the end of May 2020.

Conversation with State Representative Kimberly Jessup

Representative Jessup and the board engaged in a lively discussion on a variety of topics facing the legislature this year, including Act 250 reform, development of a regulatory framework for a commercial cannabis marketplace, a Brattleboro charter provision to allow 16 & 17-year-olds to vote in local elections, and regulating as an agricultural activity the use of food residuals for compost foraging by poultry.

Ms. Jessup will provide an update on the legislative session to the community at 2020 Town Meeting.

Presentation of EM Village Sidewalk Project Contractor Recommendation

The town received 4 bids, ranging from \$572,000 to \$649,000, to serve as the general contractor for the EM Village sidewalk project. The town's design engineering firm, Dubois & King, has conducted the post-bid analysis and determined that the low bid, as revised, from J.P. Sicard, conforms to the bid requirements. This result has been transmitted to the Agency of Transportation for review and approval. Once the approval is granted, the town can issue an award letter and contract to the selected contractor.

The revised J. P. Sicard bid, at \$567,033, is about \$5,000 above the 110% construction bid estimate level. This result is higher than desired, but within the range covered by the \$806,000 grant (the grant is actually for \$936,000, but the other \$130,000 was utilized for an already-constructed cross-US Rte. 2 culvert replacement) assuming there are no significant cost overruns. Installation of the sidewalk is scheduled for the upcoming construction season, with a outside end date of September 15, 2020.

Motion: To authorize TA Johnson to issue the award letter and contract for construction of the EM Village sidewalk project to J. P. Sicard, Inc., contingent on receipt of authorization from the VT Agency of Transportation. Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Town Application for Boundary Adjustment Between Town-owned LaPerle Farm & Hodgeman Parcels

The plat for the boundary adjustment designed to separate the LaPerle Farmhouse site from the remainder of the Old LaPerle Farm property is now complete, enabling the submission of an application for the necessary town zoning permit authorizing the reconfiguration of town-owned properties. The 3.04-acre LaPerle Farmhouse parcel will be added to the 3.0-acre Hodgeman parcel, leaving a 45.48-acre remainder lot for possible sale to Marc Fontaine.

Motion: To authorize Chair Gardner to sign the boundary adjustment zoning permit application and to authorize the submission of the permit application. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Northrup. Passed unanimously.

Work Session for 2020 Town Forum & Meeting

Board members focused on how to present the paragraph in the Selectboard's report in the 2019 Annual Report that describes the effort to enable full 24/7, two-person, per diem professional staffing for the ambulance service within 3 years. The budgetary implications are significant, with the ambulance service tax impact likely to reach 9 cents (\$90/\$100,000 of assessed value; 13% of the municipal tax rate; this does not include the cost of fire service, around 4.5 cents, or the ESF bond, around 3.5 cents) by FY2023. The FY2021 budget for the three elements is

\$424,190. This is projected to rise to \$513,588 for FY2023. Board members intend to develop some visual depictions of the situation in advance of town forum.

Warrants

Board members signed the warrant.

Other Business

Town Administrator Report

- The town has received a \$15,000 grant from the VT Urban and Community Forestry Program. This is a 50/50 grant (so there is a \$15,000 local match, which can include in-kind services) designed to fund the Resilient Roads Committee's pilot ash tree management project in the Gallison Hill Road area.
- Phoenix Mitchell, founder of The Hitching Post Vermont organization, is pursuing potential options for locating a hitching post in EM Village near Dudley's Store.
- Meeting Schedule:
 - February 29, 2020 9:30 a.m. Town Forum at EMES
 - March 2, 2020 6:30 p.m. Selectboard regular meeting
 - March 3, 2020 9:30 a.m. Town Meeting at EMES

Zoning Administrator Report

- There have been no permit applications in 2020.
- The next DRB meeting is expected to be held on March 10, 2020. There are no applications as yet, but one is anticipated in advance of the February 20, 2020 deadline.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: March 2, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting