

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

March 16, 2020 Selectboard Meeting

SB Attendance: Chair Seth Gardner, Jon Jewett, Amy Willis and Carl Etnier (arrived 7:20 p.m.); Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: Lt. David White & Sgt. Charles Winn (VT State Police); Town Health Officer Ginny Burley

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m.

Additions to Agenda:

- **Personnel Matters: Town Clerk Leave Bonus for Holiday & Weekend Election Work [Potential Executive Session]**
- **Deletion of Item: State Police Community Advisory Board Report**

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the March 2, 2020 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the March 2, 2020 minutes as presented. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Discussion with Vermont State Police

Lt. White and Sgt. Winn provided a brief synopsis on VSP activities in East Montpelier. The background actions leading to a major drug bust centered at a Fair Road location last fall was made possible by the town's contract with VSP, which allows troopers to focus on town issues rather than having to try to fit things in between calls. Staffing remains tight due to military guard/reserve responsibilities, exacerbated now by Covid-19 concerns.

- **Consideration of Contract Renewal for VSP Services**
 - Due to staffing issues VSP has utilized less than a third of the 40 hours/month time allotment under the current contract. Both the Selectboard and the VSP want to continue the contract, but agree that until there is an increase in staffing availability, the monthly hours should be decreased. The proposed contract cuts the time allotment in half, down to 20 hours/month, while increasing the average hourly fee by 5.7%, to \$75.69/hour.
 - **Motion: To approve the contract for VSP services as presented.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.
 - Chair Gardner signed the contract.

Town Treasurer Report: Don Welch, Town Treasurer

TA Johnson presented the budget status report prepared by Treasurer Welch. The town remains on budget, with no significant changes in revenue or expenditure expectations since Treasurer Welch's last report in January.

Consideration of Draft 2020 Town Meeting Minutes

Board members reviewed and lightly edited the draft town meeting minutes prepared by Town Clerk Rosie Laquerre.

Motion: To approve the March 3, 2020 Town Meeting minutes as amended. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on Town Management in Light of Covid-19: Town Health Officer Ginny Burley

Ms. Burley provided an update on the Covid-19 situation and explained that she and Town Service Officer Rachael Grossman will serve as the facilitators for matching volunteers willing to help with those that need assistance.

After reviewing the governor's emergency declaration and actions taken by other central Vermont communities, board members and Ms. Burley discussed what might be appropriate actions by the town to meet the dueling needs of protecting employees and the community while enabling necessary services to continue. In the end the board decided to hew closely to the order issued by the Calais Selectboard on March 14, 2020.

By motion made by Mr. Etnier, seconded by Ms. Willis, and passed unanimously, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, for the health and safety of town residents and the community at large the East Montpelier Selectboard orders the following:

- **As of March 17, 2020 the town office building will be closed to the public until further notice;**
- **The town office staff will continue to maintain the normal office schedule, will provide services to the public by email, telephone and, as warranted on a very limited basis, in person, and will allow limited, one-at-a-time access to the land records by appointment only;**
- **The town office building will remain locked at all times;**
- **The road crew will continue to provide necessary services while limiting contact with the public;**
- **All non-essential town committee/commission/board meetings and events are canceled until further notice;**
- **The Selectboard will meet as necessary and will provide options for remote participation at all meetings;**
- **All non-essential town business travel is cancelled;**
- **Staff traveling from CDC Level 3 Travel Health Notice Countries (presently Iran, South Korea, China, and most of Europe) will require 14 days at home symptom free before returning to work; and,**

- **Employees are not allowed to come to work with a fever or any other flu-like symptoms.**

The Selectboard advises staff, town officials, and town residents to follow steps to avoid spreading contagious diseases, including to:

- **Maintain 5-6 feet of distance between people;**
- **Refrain from shaking hands;**
- **Regularly wash hands or use hand sanitizer;**
- **Limit fact-to-face meetings and conduct business over the phone or by email whenever possible; and,**
- **Regularly sanitize commonly touched surfaces (doorknobs, telephones, counters, etc.).**

In addition, the board supports work-at-home options for staff when possible along with responsible leave flexibility for staff.

The board will continue to update governance continuity plans as necessary. Continuity-of-operations plans require “three deep” staffing in positions, a challenge for all towns. The board decided to add some depth to vital positions.

Motion: To appoint Selectboard Vice-chair Etnier as the 2nd Emergency Management Director, Jon Boucher as the 2nd Emergency Management Coordinator, and Rachael Grossman as the 2nd Town Health Officer. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on Creation of Conservation Commission

At 2020 Town Meeting voters authorized the creation of an East Montpelier Conservation Commission. The next step will be for the Selectboard to develop the structure for the commission and solicit interested volunteers. Due to the decision to ban non-essential committee activities, board members agreed to table this item with the intent to take it up later this year.

Discussion on East Montpelier Hosting Autonomous Vehicle Testing by VTrans

The Vermont Agency of Transportation is scouting for locations to conduct on-road autonomous vehicle testing and would like to hear from towns that might be willing to host testing. By consensus board members agreed to notify VTrans that the town has interest, pending more information on program specifics.

Consideration of Resolution in Support of Community Transit Week 2020

Green Mountain Transit, other central Vermont transit providers, and transportation advocates are holding a week-long awareness event, May 2 – 8, aiming to expand the awareness of transit options in the region. Although there is uncertainty about the event due to Covid-19, board members want to show support for the concept.

Motion: To adopt the resolution in support of the May 2-8, 2020 Community Transit Week as presented on the condition that the Covid-19 situation at that time makes holding the event acceptable. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

2020 Selectboard Organization

Mr. Etnier, as senior board member after Chair Gardner, assumed control of the meeting and called for nominations for the chair position. Ms. Willis nominated Mr. Gardner. There were no other nominations.

Mr. Etnier called for a vote. Mr. Gardner was elected chair unanimously and resumed control of the meeting.

Chair Gardner called for nominations for the vice-chair position. Mr. Jewett nominated Mr. Etnier. There were no other nominations.

Chair Gardner called for a vote. Mr. Etnier was elected vice-chair unanimously.

Chair Gardner opened discussion on the issue of assigning individual board members to review and approve payroll warrants, payroll vendor warrants, and occasional special warrants. The reason for assigning this duty is that warrants of this nature are for time sensitive payments that do not conform to the schedule of the board's regular meetings. The records of these orders are made available to board members in both hard copy and digital form.

Motion: To designate authorization authority under 24 V.S.A. §1623(1) to Chair Gardner and, in his absence, to Vice-chair Etnier for the following:

1. Regular payroll warrants;
2. Regular payroll vendor warrants; and,
3. Special warrants for standard expenditures under the town-approved budget and reserve fund expenditures authorized by the Selectboard when such warrants are necessary due to required payment timing.

Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

2020 Selectboard Rules of Transaction

The board reviewed the draft 2020 rules, which are essentially identical to the current 2019 version. No changes were proposed.

Motion: To adopt the 2020 Selectboard Rules of Transaction as presented. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

2020 Town Meeting Review

Board members were pleased with the results of town meeting. Along with the creation of the conservation commission, other aspects that will warrant additional work include determining the timing of future town forums along with potential revisions to the property tax payment methodologies and tax penalty levels.

Appointments:

- **Consideration of Paul Eley to Fill Planning Commission Vacancy**
 - The Planning Commission conducted a search and is recommending Paul Eley be appointed to fill the vacancy caused by the recent resignation of Jean Vissering.
 - **Motion: To appoint Paul Eley to a seat on the Planning Commission through Town Meeting Day 2021.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.
- **Consideration of Annual Appointments to Committees/Boards/Positions [Potential Executive Session]**
 - Board members reviewed the standard slate of March appointments, most of which are reappointments. The slot on the Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) held by former Selectboard member Gene Troia was offered to Mr. Jewett, but he declined based on his understanding that Mr. Troia would be willing to remain on the committee as an at-large member.
 - **Motion: To approve the slate of 2020 appointments, with Mr. Troia remaining on the CIC and Chair Gardner authorized to complete the board representation forms for CVSWMD and CVFiber.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Personnel Matters: Town Clerk Leave Bonus for Holiday & Weekend Election Work [Potential Executive Session]

The board decided to provide additional leave time to Town Clerk Laquerre in appreciation for her willingness to put in the long hours necessary during the town meeting election period.

Motion: To provide Town Clerk Laquerre with 30 hours of sick leave in compensation for her recent weekend, evening, and holiday workload. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Warrants

Board members signed the warrant.

Other Business

Mr. Etnier asked that the board revisit the list of issues needing attention under the “Town Management in Light of Covid-19” agenda item. The board inadvertently passed over the request from Town Clerk Laquerre to temporarily waive the penalty for licensing dogs after April 1, 2020. Mr. Etnier, as town animal control officer, would like to see the penalty waived given the importance of the annual licensure both for proof of rabies vaccination and for ease of recognizing & returning lost dogs.

Motion: To waive the dog registration late fee through April 15, 2020. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Town Administrator Report

- The proposed sale of the town-owned Old LaPerle Farm property to Marc Fontaine continues to move forward. The town attorney is preparing a deed in anticipation of the transaction. Mr. Fontaine is currently investigating the necessary permits for a potential multi-unit residential development.
- Meeting Schedule:
 - March 30, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard “special” meeting
 - April 9, 2020 7:00 pm EMFD budget review & update at ESF
 - April 13, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard “special” meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There has been 1 new application since the March 2nd SB meeting. There have been a total of 4 zoning permit applications in 2020.
- There is no DRB meeting currently scheduled.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: March 30, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting