

## **Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard**

### **May 18, 2020 Selectboard Meeting**

**This meeting was conducted remotely using the Zoom conferencing platform. Participation options were provided to the public.**

**SB Attendance:** Vice-chair Carl Etnier, Jon Jewett, Amy Willis and Casey Northrup; Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

**Public Attendance:** Jack Zeilenga (Recreation Board); Tom Fisher (CVFiber Board)

Vice-chair Etnier called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

**Additions to Agenda: None**

#### **Minutes:**

Vice-chair Etnier presented the draft minutes of the May 4, 2020 board meeting.

**Motion: To approve the May 4, 2020 minutes as presented.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Northrup. Passed unanimously.

**Public Comment: None**

#### **Consideration of Changes to Recreation Board's Policies & Procedures to Incorporate Youth Board Member: Recreation Board Chair Jack Zeilenga**

Mr. Zeilenga presented an updated policies & procedures document to reflect the addition of a permanent youth member slot. This is in keeping with the plan developed last spring by the Selectboard and Recreation Board to do a trial run with a youth member for a year and, if successful, make the concept permanent. The Recreation Board was very pleased with youth member Owen Myka-Smith's participation over the past year and recommends continuation of the youth member position. The Selectboard tweaked the document's wording slightly, but made no changes to the overall intent.

**Motion: To approve the updated Recreation Board Policies & Procedures making the non-voting youth member position a permanent part of the board membership.** Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

#### **Appointments:**

- **Recreation Board Youth Member: Claire Obeldobel**
  - Mr. Zeilenga explained that the Recreation Board is recommending Claire Obeldobel to fill the youth member slot for the upcoming year. Ms. Obeldobel, an East Montpelier resident, will be a senior at U-32 for the 2020/21 school year.

- **Motion: To appoint Claire Obeldobel as the Recreation Board's youth member for the term June 1, 2020 to May 31, 2021.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

**Consideration of Support Letter for CVFiber Application to Northern Borders Regional Commission Grant Program: EM Representative to CVFiber Board Tom Fisher**

Mr. Fisher described the ongoing effort by CVFiber, the 18-town communications union district of which East Montpelier is a part, to bring in the necessary funding to establish a pilot project to provide broadband internet service to an underserved area in central Vermont. CVFiber recently completed a feasibility study and is in the midst of developing a business plan to effectuate its mission. The next step will be actually providing service to a segment of the district, either in the form of a fixed wireless network, the easier-to-connect, less expensive option, or moving directly to development of a high-speed fiber network, the preferred long-term solution. Funding from the Northern Borders Regional Commission grant program would go a long way toward making the initial service installation possible, leading to a broad outreach effort by CVFiber board members to garner letters of support from central Vermont municipalities, schools and businesses.

**Motion: To authorize Chair Gardner to sign the letter of support for CVFiber's application to the Northern Borders Regional Commission grant program.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Northrup. Passed unanimously.

**Discussion on Property Tax Collection**

➤ **Delinquent Tax Report**

- May 15<sup>th</sup> was the deadline for Tax Year 2019/20 tax payments. The delinquent tax warrant to be prepared by Town Treasurer Welch later in the week will show \$259,068 remaining unpaid at the deadline, compared to \$183,043 last year, \$152,000 in 2018 and \$168,607 in 2017. The current status as of May 18<sup>th</sup> is \$236,456 outstanding principal for Tax Year 2019/20.
- The total delinquency for all years, including interest and fees accumulated prior to May 15<sup>th</sup>, as of May 15<sup>th</sup> was \$294,439. If the town applies all standard interest and penalty fees it would be \$318,003. In 2019 it was \$243,280, including all interest and fees; in 2018 it was \$229,590; in 2017 it was \$243,623.
- Although the 2019/20 tax year property tax collection rate lagged behind that of recent years, the end result is still well within the margin of acceptability. The town will be able to make the required June 1<sup>st</sup> payment to the school district without affecting town operations.

➤ **Discussion on 2020 Delinquent Tax Fees & Collection Policy**

- On May 14, 2020 Governor Scott signed S.344, the bill recently passed by the Vermont Legislature that gives local governing bodies limited, temporary authority to alter town-voted property tax protocols as necessary due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Selectboard had lobbied local legislators for this short-term power to provide some accommodations for property owners who were struggling to meet tax obligations due to the Covid-19-driven economic downturn.
- Tax Collector Welch and Delinquent Tax Collector Johnson developed a relaxed penalty and interest scheme that Mr. Johnson presented to the board:

- Waive the 1% monthly interest charge on all delinquencies that would otherwise be applied on May 16, 2020.
- Reinstitute the standard 1% monthly interest charge on June 16, 2020.
- Delay the imposition of the 8% penalty on all new delinquencies and reintroduce the penalty in the following manner:
  - 1% on unpaid 19/20 tax year principal balances on June 16, 2020;
  - An additional 2% on July 16, 2020; and,
  - The remaining 5% on August 16, 2020.
- Delay any tax sale proceedings until after August 16, 2020.
- Board members discussed the merits of proposed scheme and decided that it provided a reasonable balance between compassion and fiscal responsibility. The board reviewed the current Delinquent Tax Collection Policy and decided to keep it in place for the time being. Consideration of both revisions to the policy and potential tax sales will be taken up at the board's second August meeting.
- **Motion: To adopt as presented the alterations to the town's delinquent property tax interest and penalty protocol.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Mr. Northrup. Passed unanimously.

### **Discussion on Town Management in Light of Covid-19**

The town office remains closed to the public, but researchers and attorneys can once again access vault materials under the terms originally set up before all in-person actions were banned – one at a time and only by appointment from Town Clerk Laquerre. Mandated protocols (masks; health survey; etc.) are in effect for such appointments.

The recreation field complex will be reopened once signage is available to instruct that usage must be in accordance with Governor Scott's recently relaxed guidelines for such places. The school fields remain off-limits, so signage to that effect will be installed between the two areas.

### **Consideration of Name for Private Road off US Rte. 2**

- **East Montpelier Acres LLC Development Road: "Cote Drive"**
  - An existing drive across US Rte. 2 from the Carpet Barn complex currently serves 2 residences with a third under construction and two more in the planning stage. Following the town's addressing ordinance and state E-911 guidelines the drive needs to become a named private road. The development owners have requested "Cote Drive" as the new name. There are no local conflicts with the proposed name.
  - **Motion: To approve "Cote Drive" as the name for the private road serving 4023 & 4027 US Rte. 2 and the East Montpelier Acres LLC development.** Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

### **Development of Selectboard's Summer Schedule**

TA Johnson presented a proposed summer schedule to avoid holiday conflicts while maintaining reasonable splits between meetings:

- June 1 regular meeting
- June 22 special meeting, in place of June 15

- July 13 special meeting, in place of July 6 & 20
- August 3 regular meeting
- August 24 special meeting, in place of August 17
- September 14 special meeting, in place of September 7 & 21
- October 5 regular meeting – back to normal schedule

There will also be two East Montpelier Fire Department budget & service updates to the Calais and EM boards scheduled for June 11<sup>th</sup> and August 13<sup>th</sup>. Board members were comfortable with the revised schedule.

**Motion: To adopt the revised Selectboard meeting schedule as presented.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

### Warrants

#### ➤ **May 18, 2020 Warrant for Approval**

- Board members reviewed the warrant. Following a protocol developed at the board's April 13<sup>th</sup> meeting to deal with the difficulties inherent in individually signing a warrant during a remote meeting, board members decided to approve the warrant by motion and have Chair Gardner sign the warrant as certification of the board approval.
- **Motion: To approve the May 18, 2020 expense warrant and authorize Chair Gardner, or Mr. Northrup if Chair Gardner is not available, to sign the warrant on behalf of the board.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

### Other Business

#### **Town Administrator Report**

- Update on EM Village Sidewalk Project:
  - The pre-construction meeting is scheduled for May 21<sup>st</sup>. The contractor, J. P. Sicard, intends to start by late May with a target end date in late August.
- Online EM Land Records:
  - The digitized town land records are now available online at: <https://i2d.uslandrecords.com/vt/eastmontpelier/d/default.aspx>. The site still has a few minor kinks that need to be worked out.
- Fence Concerns:
  - Marc Fontaine has fenced in the Old LaPerle Farm property and is grazing beef cows. He has not yet completed the purchase of the town-owned parcel and does not have board permission to utilize the land. The board will revisit this issue at its June 1<sup>st</sup> meeting.
  - The new owners of 30 Cutler Heights are installing a full-property fence. The owners are working with TA Johnson to ensure the fence is within the town's regulations, but one neighbor is considering a challenge to the fence's conformity with the regulations.
- Meeting Schedule:
 

○ June 1, 2020	6:30 pm	Selectboard regular meeting
○ June 11, 2020	7:00 pm	EMFD budget & service update at ESF

**Zoning Administrator Report**

- There have been 3 new applications since the May 4<sup>th</sup> SB meeting. There have been 13 zoning permit applications in 2020.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for June 2, 2020. There is one warned hearing for a reconfiguration of the Northrup residential and business properties on US Rte. 2. There will also be at least two sketch plan reviews for subdivisions.

**Motion: To adjourn.** Made by Mr. Northrup; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

**Approved: June 1, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting**