

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

August 3, 2020 Selectboard Meeting

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

SB Attendance: Chair Seth Gardner, Carl Etnier (absent during middle of meeting), Judith Dillon, Jon Jewett and Amy Willis (arrived at 6:40 p.m.); Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: None

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

Additions to Agenda:

- **Grant Application Under Coronavirus Municipal Records Digitization Grant Program**
 - The recently enacted Act 137, under which the state is appropriating a portion of the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund monies allocated to Vermont, established a \$2,000,000 grant program for the digitization of municipal land records. The state has opened a short window in which towns can apply for up to \$20,000 in funding for digitization projects. The application deadline is September 1, 2020, the funds are disbursed on a first-come, first-served basis, and the projects must be completed by November 1, 2020.
 - **Motion: To authorize TA Johnson to develop and submit a conforming application to the Vermont Coronavirus Municipal Records Digitization Grant Program.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the July 13, 2020 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the July 13, 2020 minutes as presented. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Ms. Willis joined the meeting.

Public Comment: None

Setting of the 2020-2021 Property Tax Rates

The proposed 2020/21 property tax rates, calculated using a grand list figure of \$3,075,000, up \$30,000 (0.99%) from last year, are as follows:

- Residential (homestead) tax rate: 2.5381; up 0.0817 (3.3%) from last year
- Non-residential (nonhomestead) tax rate: 2.3804; up 0.0899 (3.9%) from last year

Motion: To set the 2020/21 property tax rates at 2.5381 for homestead parcels and 2.3804 for nonhomestead parcels. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Mr. Etnier temporarily left the meeting.

Consideration of Homestead Filing Penalty Waiver

Under 32 V.S.A. §5410(g) the town is allowed to assess an 8% penalty for residents who file their homestead declaration late. The town also has the option to waive the penalty for everyone. There are also certain hardship exemptions.

The town has chosen to waive the late-filing penalty in the past, for a number of reasons: 1) The penalty only affects those who do file but file late; those who are required to file but don't file are not penalized if they are not caught. 2) The town's revenues are not affected by whether someone declares a homestead in town or not. 3) It is in the town's interest to encourage accurate information about who is a resident here, and waiving the penalty encourages people to file a homestead declaration, even if it is late. 4) For a time, the state allowed a homestead declaration to remain in effect until the landowner rescinded it; the SB does not see a good reason for reverting to a system requiring filing each year.

Board members determined that they had seen no new information that would cause a reconsideration of the decision from previous years.

Motion: To waive the homestead declaration late filing penalty. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Notice of Intent to Participate in the FY2021 Municipal Roads Grants-in-Aid Program

This is the fourth year of the grants-in-aid program. This year the program will be split, with the equipment purchase element run through the Agency of Natural Resources and the stormwater infrastructure aspect that the town has utilized all three previous years now run through the Agency of Transportation. There is no information yet on the VTrans element, but the ANR program is now up and running.

For the first time East Montpelier is eligible for an equipment grant (an 80/20 grant). Of the equipment options available, Road Foreman Perry is most interested in the tractor-mounted shoulder disc attachment to help cut down berms and pull material back onto the roads. The estimated cost of the attachment is \$8,000, with the town responsible for \$1,600.

As in previous years, the first step is to submit a letter of intent to participate in the program. Later this year the town will be notified if we are approved to purchase the item.

Motion: To authorize Chair Gardner to sign the letter of intent for the town to participate in the FY2021 Municipal Roads Grants-in-Aid Equipment Purchase Program. Made by Ms. Dillon; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of VLCT PACIF Equipment Grant Application

The town is putting together a small application covering highway department items and town office equipment for submission to the Vermont League of Cities & Towns, the town's insurance provider, under VLCT's PACIF Equipment Grant Program that covers purchases of items designed to improve public and workforce safety and, hence, decrease claims. The current approximate total of the application is \$1,600, but we are awaiting details on two quotes, so the final cost may be closer to \$2,000. This is a 50/50 grant, so the town would be responsible for no more than \$1,000.

Motion: To authorize TA Johnson to sign and submit a VLCT PACIF Equipment Grant Program application for a total amount of up to \$2,000. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on Town Management in Light of Covid-19

Board members discussed possible updates to the town's current emergency order. Once again, members decided to leave the office closed while continuing to monitor the situation. The board will revisit the issue at its August 24, 2020 meeting.

To date the town has sent out 910 absentee ballots (41% of the voter checklist) and received back 450 for the August 11, 2020 primary election. There will be in-person voting on August 11th at the East Montpelier Elementary School. A variety of safety protocols will be in place, including a mandate to wear masks, social distancing and regular disinfection.

Warrants

- **July 23, 2020 Special Warrant for Review**
 - As required by board policy, the special warrant approved by Chair Gardner was presented to board members for review. No action was necessary.
- **August 3, 2020 Regular Warrant for Approval**
 - Board members reviewed the warrant. Following a protocol developed at the board's April 13th 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 August 3, 2020 expense warrant and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the warrant on behalf of the board.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Mr. Etnier rejoined the meeting.

Other Business

The board briefly discussed the options for winter maintenance of the new East Montpelier Village sidewalks. This issue will be included as an agenda item for the August 24, 2020 board meeting.

Town Administrator Report

- Concern with Dodge Road Trail:
 - EM Trails reported that an ATV has utilized a portion of the trail. The use does not appear to be a regular thing and no damage has been noted. It seems that an abutting landowner used the trail to access a portion of his parcel. Board members discussed ATV use on the town-controlled legal trails in general. Although the town has no official policy, motorized vehicles are prohibited on the EM Trails network, which includes some legal trails such as the first half-mile of the Dodge Road Trail. Although the reported minimal use is not a significant concern, the board will continue to monitor the situation.
- Recreation Field Facility Use Issues:
 - The East Montpelier Elementary School has requested permission to utilize the recreation field for recess and outdoor classroom space. The Recreation Board is in support of the requested use.
 - The Rec Board is currently working on plans for the fall soccer season and wondered if the Selectboard would like to be directly involved in the planning.
 - The Selectboard is comfortable leaving these issues in the hands of the Recreation Board at this time.
- Meeting Schedule:

○ August 13, 2020	7:00 pm	EMFD budget & service update at ESF
○ August 24, 2020	6:30 pm	Selectboard “special” regular meeting
○ September 14, 2020	6:30 pm	Selectboard “special” regular meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There have been 6 new applications since the July 13th SB meeting. There have been 34 zoning permit applications in 2020.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for September 1, 2020. There is one application at this point, for a setback waiver for a garden shed at 219 Brazier Road.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: August 24, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard Meeting