

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

August 24, 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, Judith Dillon, Jon Jewett and Amy Willis;
Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: Town Treasurer Don Welch

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

Additions to Agenda:

- **Consideration of EMFD Capital Reserve Fund Use for New Ambulance Cot**
- **Consideration of Increase to Town Administrator's Town Credit Card Limit**

Minutes:

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

Motion: To approve the August 3, 2020 minutes as presented. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Town Treasurer Report

Treasurer Welch presented two reports: the end-of-FY2020 figures and an early budget status report for FY2021. Sullivan Powers completed the town's FY2020 financial audit on August 11th. The town ended up on the plus side of the ledger by about \$88,000. Since the town put \$100,000 of its fund balance into the budget, this essentially means the town's overall fund balance dropped approximately \$12,000, a solid result that puts the town in excellent shape as we progress into FY2021.

Treasurer Welch detailed the plan for the FY2021 tax bills, which will go out the week of September 8th. The delay this year compared to our usual mailing in mid-August is due to state information (homestead filing and state payment for income sensitivity details) being late as a result of the Covid-19 related alterations to the state's income tax deadlines. There is a large block of state information coming to towns on September 1st. Unlike a lot of communities, our first tax installment is due relatively late (in November), so the town has the option to delay sending out bills until after the state information arrives as opposed to having to process a large number of revised bills.

General Discussion on Upcoming Selectboard Activities

Board members reviewed a set of topics that had been put on the backburner.

- Town garage facility upgrade/replacement:
 - The town garage is both showing its age and suffering from a dearth of space for the equipment necessary to maintain the town's highway infrastructure. Back in 2018 the board formed a committee to look into options for expanding or replacing the garage facility, but not much progress has been made. The board will encourage the committee to pick up the pace, perhaps with the assistance of an engineer &/or architect to provide a focus to the project.
- Town office building upgrade/replacement:
 - Although a town office replacement is still likely many years away, there is a need to consider maintenance and short-term upgrades to a town office building that last saw significant work in the mid-to-late 1980s. The board will consider options at an upcoming meeting.
- Tax collection protocols:
 - After following the same tax collection protocol for many years, at 2020 Town Meeting a proposal was made from the floor, and subsequently approved by voters, to allow mail postmarks to serve as proof of timely payment of taxes. Soon thereafter the economic struggles caused by the Covid-19 pandemic led to concerns regarding a range of tax payment issues, including the timing of installments, grace periods, and the fees charged for late payment. Board members agreed that this would be a good time to review the town's tax collection scheme.
 - Mr. Jewett and Mr. Etnier will take the lead on this project. The intent is to complete the review and, if the board decides to move forward with the effort, to develop an updated protocol by January 2021 with an eye toward presenting the proposal to voters at 2021 Town Meeting.

Road Foreman Report

Road Foreman Perry was unable to attend the meeting. Board members discussed options for dealing with winter maintenance of the town's new sidewalk network in EM Village. The board decided to conduct an open bid process, with the understanding that it would be difficult to capture all the variables involved in keeping the sidewalks safe to traverse. TA Johnson will develop a bid packet for the board's consideration at the September 14th meeting.

Delinquent Tax Collector Report

TA Johnson, the town's delinquent tax collector, presented the current list of delinquencies. In May, as part of the board's effort to provide some relief to taxpayers in light of Covid-19, decisions on potential tax sales was postponed to this meeting. Six properties are more than one full year delinquent. Board members authorized TA Johnson to move forward with the tax sale process for the six parcels.

Discussion on Upcoming State Traffic Committee Meeting with Regard to Proposed US Rte. 2 Speed Limit Change Through EM Village and Continuing Past Towne Hill Road

In March the board sent a letter to the VT Agency of Transportation requesting a study of the speed limit on US Rte. 2 from EM Village south past the Towne Hill Road intersection. VTrans

has completed its review and is supporting a change in the speed limit through EM Village along US Rte. 2. The recommendation that will be presented to the state traffic committee at its September 15, 2020 meeting is:

- Current 35 mph zone through EM Village should become 30 mph;
- East toward Plainfield for 1,200 feet should be 40 mph; and,
- South/west to a point 830 feet past Towne Hill Road should be 40 mph.

The town is encouraged to participate in the traffic committee's meeting. The board decided to advertise for public feedback on the proposed speed limit changes. The deadline for comments will be September 14th, culminating with a public comment period at the board's meeting that evening. At that time the board will craft its position on the recommendation and determine who will represent the town at the traffic committee meeting.

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 September 14, 2020 meeting.

Consideration of EMFD Capital Reserve Fund Use for New Ambulance Cot

At the August 13, 2020 East Montpelier Fire Department budget status presentation to the Calais and East Montpelier Selectboards the department provided information on an upcoming purchase of new defibrillators and a single power cot for the two EMFD ambulances under very favorable financial terms. Chief Rolland explained that the power cot would shift locations so that it was always in the lead ambulance. At the time board members brought up the possibility of purchasing a second cot. After researching the issue, EMFD determined that a second cot could be purchased for \$17,060 at \$284.33/month for 60 months. This proposed additional purchase puts the combined EMFD Capital Reserve Fund use above \$20,000, which triggered the requirement that both boards authorize the transaction. Board members discussed the necessity of new cots for both ambulances, deciding to support the purchase on the basis of the added level of safety for EMFD employees.

Motion: To authorize the use of the EMFD Capital Reserve Fund for the purchase of two power cots on the terms as presented. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Increase to Town Administrator's Town Credit Card Limit

The town office now utilizes subscription-based software such as Microsoft 365 and Adobe Acrobat. These subscriptions are generally paid for online by credit card. TA Johnson is responsible for these purchases, but the credit line available for his card is too low to handle the costs of, for example, the renewal of the town's Office 365 licenses. Board members agreed to bump up the limit from \$2,000 to \$4,000.

Motion: To authorize Treasurer Welch to arrange for an increase in the credit limit to \$4,000 for TA Johnson's town credit card from People's United Bank. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Warrants

➤ **August 24, 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 24, 2020 expense warrant and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the warrant on behalf of the board.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Other Business

Mr. Etnier, speaking as the town's lead animal control officer, provided a short update on recent activities and requested that an animal control officer report be placed on the board's September 14, 2020 meeting agenda.

Town Administrator Report

- Update on Sale of Old LaPerle Farm:
 - The closing on the sale of the town-owned parcel to Pat Malone will take place on Thursday, August 27, 2020.
- EM Sidewalk Project Update:
 - The project is winding down with a projected completion date of no later than September 4, 2020. The formal substantial completion review is scheduled for August 28, 2020.
- Meeting Schedule:
 - September 14, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard "special" regular meeting
 - September 15, 2020 1:00 pm State Traffic Committee meeting
 - October 5, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There have been 4 new applications since the August 3rd SB meeting. There have been 38 zoning permit applications in 2020.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for September 1, 2020. There is one warned hearing, for a setback waiver for a garden shed at 219 Brazier Road.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: September 14, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting