

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

### **September 14, 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 and Amy Willis; Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

**Public Attendance:** Funding Request Study Committee members Lindy Johnson, Paul Erlbaum, Sarah Kinter and Ginny Callan; Town Tree Warden Paul Cate; Resilient Roads Committee member Jeff Cueto; Dan Cowan; Melissa Gorham

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

#### **Additions to Agenda:**

- **Consideration of Collaboration 133 Proposal to Update Town Website Functionality**

#### **Minutes:**

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the August 24, 2020 board meeting.

**Motion: To approve the August 24, 2020 minutes as presented.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

**Public Comment: None**

#### **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, to about where the East Montpelier Village sign is located, should be 40 mph; and,
- South/west to a point 830 feet past Towne Hill Road should be 40 mph.

The board requested public feedback on the proposed speed limit changes. Comments received were unanimous in support of the 40 mph transition zones. 80% of the respondents also supported the drop to 30 mph through the heart of the village, whereas 20% preferred to see the speed limit remain at 35 mph.

Mr. Cowan asked if the state traffic committee meeting was an opportunity to bring up the issue of Jake brake use by trucks in the village area. Mr. Cowan would like to see the use banned. TA Johnson will contact VTrans prior to the committee meeting to find out the correct way to bring that type of issue up for consideration.

Board members strongly supported the VTrans recommendation. Mr. Etnier and TA Johnson will represent the town at the state traffic committee meeting.

### **Update on Town Ash Tree Management Projects**

Resilient Roads Committee Chair Cueto and Tree Warden Cate provided the board with an update on the town's ash tree management program designed to protect the public and limit the damage inflicted on the town's highway infrastructure by the impending emerald ash borer invasion and projected resultant kill-off of the vast majority of the town's ash trees. The ongoing pilot project to remove ash trees in the U-32/Gallison Hill Road area is mostly complete, with the remaining work expected to occur in early October. Still ahead for the committee is the remediation aspect of the pilot project – to replace some trees on the U-32 grounds, improve the viability of the U-32 hedgerows and treat the selected "iconic" ash trees with a protective insecticide. The bulk of this work will happen next spring.

The committee is now developing a new project to remove impacted ash trees in the Dodge and Johnson Roads area. The intent for this effort is to utilize the town's road crew to do the tree removal as time permits. Tree Warden Cate will hold a public hearing on this project on September 15<sup>th</sup>.

The VT Urban & Community Forestry Program is offering another round of EAB ash tree management grants with a deadline of October 30<sup>th</sup>. The Resilient Roads Committee is interested in applying with the goal of clearing another, still to be determined, high impact area (lots of ash trees and high traffic roads). The terms are the same as the town's current EAB grant that is funding the U-32 work – up to \$15,000 with an equivalent town match. Prior to developing the application, the committee would like to know if the board is willing to commit to the town match. \$15,000 cash is the maximum, but the exposure is likely to be reduced by in-kind activities, including volunteer labor and town force labor/equipment use. Board members encouraged the committee to move forward with the grant application.

### **Consideration of Collaboration 133 Proposal to Update Town Website Functionality**

About a month ago the ability to update the town's website was eliminated by a WordPress update. The town's theme (the website's structure), which was put together by the Snelling Center for Government team as part of the town's grant-funded website development back in 2012/13, has finally hit the end of the road. This is something we knew was likely to happen at some point due to the static nature of the theme (other grant towns have been similarly affected).

Our behind-the-scenes webmaster, Nathaniel Gibson of Collaboration 133 (the Pawlet, VT company that hosts the town's website), was able to institute a work-around to allow updates, but the theme itself needs to be overhauled to bring it up to coding compliance with WordPress.

Collaboration 133 has submitted a proposal to bring our site up to speed with little real-time effect to our site's usability. The estimated cost is \$1,625 with 50% due on acceptance.

**Motion: To authorize TA Johnson to sign the agreement with Collaboration 133.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

### **Conversation with Funding Request Study Committee**

The Funding Request Study Committee reviews requests from civic organizations for town funding, preparing a report that underpins the funding request article voted on at town meeting day. This year's application packet will go out to 35+ organizations by September 25<sup>th</sup> with a due date of October 23<sup>rd</sup>. The committee will present its recommendations to the SB at the December 21, 2020 board meeting.

The total funding recommended last year was \$21,541. With no new organizational requests on the horizon at this point, it seems likely that this year's recommendation will not encroach on the cap of \$25,000 for appropriation articles subject to a floor vote (as opposed to Australian ballot) at town meeting. Absent any new requests or unforeseen circumstances, both board and committee members agreed that this year's funding request increase should not exceed 10%.

Last year the committee recommended that the board set a separate warning article for Twin Valley Seniors, Inc. (the organization operating the Twin Valley Senior Center) due to the size of the request coupled with the need to stay below the \$25,000 cap. The board acquiesced to that request. This year the board agreed to fully remove TVSC from the committee process, joining Central VT Home Health & Hospice, Montpelier Senior Activity Center, Kellogg-Hubbard Library and Green Mountain Transit. These organizations will present requests directly to the SB at the December 21<sup>st</sup> board meeting.

The SB thanked committee members for taking on the job of vetting these organizations and looks forward to seeing their recommendations on December 21<sup>st</sup>.

### **Discussion on Draft 2021-2022 VLCT Municipal Policy**

The board quickly reviewed the draft Vermont League of Cities & Towns municipal policy document for the upcoming 2021-2022 biennial legislative session. Members decided that they needed more time to properly review the document before determining if there were any specific elements that the town would either formally support or recommend altering. After debating various options, the board set a potential special meeting for Monday, September 21<sup>st</sup> at 8:00 p.m. If any member feels the need for a special meeting to discuss the policy and possible board stands on particular issues, that desire should be expressed to the rest of the board by Thursday, September 17<sup>th</sup>. Chair Gardner will then call the special meeting on Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Designation of Town Delegate to 2020 VLCT Annual Meeting and Municipal Legislative Policy Conference**

A standard aspect of the board's preparation for the VLCT annual meeting is to designate someone as the town's voting delegate. This year the delegate will represent the town at both the

VLCT annual meeting (September 30<sup>th</sup>) and the policy conference (September 23<sup>rd</sup>). The board could also designate someone for either or both the PACIF & VERB annual meetings (also on September 30<sup>th</sup>; the PACIF meeting follows the VLCT meeting, with VERB going last). Delegates to the VLCT, PACIF and VERB meetings can be different. In keeping with how the board handled the municipal policy issue, the decision on designation of a delegate was tabled until a determination is made regarding the possible September 21<sup>st</sup> special meeting.

**Motion: To authorize Chair Gardner to designate the town's voting delegate for the 2020 VLCT, PACIF and VERB annual meetings and the VLCT municipal legislative policy conference unless the board holds a special meeting on September 21, 2020, in which case the designation would be made at that meeting.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

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**Update on September 18, 2020: The Selectboard decided not to hold a special meeting on September 21, 2020. Chair Gardner designated board member Jon Jewett as the town's voting delegate for all four VLCT meetings.**

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### **Animal Control Officer Report**

Board member Carl Etnier serves as the town's lead animal control officer and provided the report. Mr. Etnier and the town's assistant ACO Amber Perry work in tandem to handle the large volume and variety of animal concerns brought to them by townspeople and also by residents of nearby localities who appreciate the effective assistance our ACOs provide.

Board members thanked Mr. Etnier for the report and the ACO team's service to the community.

### **Consideration of Winter Sidewalk Plowing Bid Document**

TA Johnson presented a request for bids document for contractors to handle the winter maintenance of the East Montpelier Village sidewalk network. This first year of sidewalk plowing is expected to have an assortment of challenges that will need to be worked through as the winter progresses, with Road Foreman Perry taking the lead to manage the expectations for the selected contractor.

After tweaking the document, board members approved the bid process by consensus. The board will review bid submissions at its October 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### **Consideration of Attorney Barlow Letter of Engagement**

The board authorized tax sale proceedings against six properties at its August 24<sup>th</sup> meeting. Attorney Jim Barlow has provided a letter of engagement to handle the tax sale processes on the standard terms. Attorney Barlow has handled the last four rounds of tax sales for the town.

**Motion: I move to authorize the Collector of Delinquent Taxes to sign James Barlow's September 8, 2020 proposal for attorney services related to tax sale proceedings.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Etnier. 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 October 5, 2020 meeting.

The town has applied for three COVID-19 grant programs offered by the state:

- Secretary of State Ballot Drop Box Reimbursement Program (up to \$1,000)
  - The town has purchased a drop box for \$956. Delivery & installation are expected by September 25<sup>th</sup>. The box will be located outside the town office at the base of handicap ramp. This should make the drop off of absentee ballots much easier.
- Coronavirus Municipal Records Digitization Grant Program (up to \$20,000)
  - The town requested \$8,148 for a large format scanner to digitize the map & mylar portion of the town's land records. Approval of the request came through right before the meeting.
- Local Government Expense Reimbursement Grant Program (up to \$3,300)
  - The town requested \$3,160.14 – \$2,217.13 for actual expenses and \$933.01 for anticipated expenses (a voting booth). A decision on this application is anticipated within the next week.

### **Discussion on Hasland Property: Potential Executive Session**

Chair Gardner described an August 29<sup>th</sup> site visit to the former S&H Underwriters building at 3030 US Rte. 2. Pat Sikora, town resident and one of the principals of Hasland LLC, which owns the property, escorted Chair Gardner, TA Johnson and former board members Gene Troia & Frank Pratt through the 3,300-square-foot building. The building is a 60-year-old ranch house converted to office space fifteen years ago by Hasland. There are numerous offices and two large meeting rooms. The property comes with 14.2 acres along with the road (Village Acres) the town built for access to the new fire station plus a large parking lot the town built as part of the deal to acquire the parcel where the fire station is located.

Board members expressed doubts about the suitability of the building for town office use and were concerned about the likely acquisition cost for the parcel.

### **Access Permits: 20-045; Scolaro, Access to Captain Kidd Road Lot #4**

Mike & Diane Scolaro have purchased Lot #4 of the Duane Wells Captain Kidd Road subdivision. The lot is located on the east side of the cul-de-sac at the end of the road and only has 61 feet of frontage, so options are limited. Road Foreman Perry reviewed the site with the applicants' representative and recommends approval.

**Motion: To approve Access Permit #20-045 and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the permit on behalf of the board.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

### Warrants

- **September 14, 2020 Regular 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 September 14, 2020 expense warrant and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the warrant on behalf of the board.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

### Other Business

#### **Town Administrator Report**

- Update on Sale of Old LaPerle Farm:
  - The closing on the sale of the town-owned parcel to Pat Malone took place on Thursday, August 27, 2020.
- EM Sidewalk Project Update:
  - Project construction was completed on September 1<sup>st</sup>. Some tweaks to sign placement are still expected.
- Cross Vermont Trail Update:
  - Groundbreaking ceremony for the Winooski Bridge project is scheduled for September 18<sup>th</sup>, 3:30 p.m. at the bridge site. CVTA would love to have Selectboard representation. Ms. Willis and Ms. Dillon will attend if their schedules allow.
- Tax Bill Update:
  - L Brown Printing expects to send out the Tax Year 2020-2021 property tax bills on September 17, 2020.
- Concern with Possible Unpermitted Auto Repair Facility on Clark Road:
  - TA Johnson described citizen complaints about loud and noxious auto repair activities occurring at 995 Clark Road. The board will monitor the situation.
- December Meeting Schedule Outlook:
  - As always, the board has a busy projected meeting schedule in December. The second regular board meeting in December is generally a packed session with numerous organizations presenting requests for town meeting warning appropriation articles. This year the second meeting is scheduled for December 21<sup>st</sup>, the Monday before Christmas. The board is comfortable with holding the meeting on that date.
- Meeting Schedule:
 

○ September 15, 2020	1:00 pm	State Traffic Committee meeting
○ September 15, 2020	6:30 pm	RRC public forum on EAB & plan of action
	7:30 pm	Tree warden hearing on Dodge/Johnson Roads
○ October 5, 2020	6:30 pm	Selectboard regular meeting

- October 19, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting

**Zoning Administrator Report**

- There have been 7 new applications since the August 24<sup>th</sup> SB meeting. There have been 45 zoning permit applications in 2020.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for October 6, 2020. There is one warned hearing, for a two-lot subdivision of the main Morse Farm property at 918 County Road.

**Motion: To adjourn.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

**Approved: October 5, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting**