

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

October 5, 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, Jon Jewett, Judith Dillon and Amy Willis; Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: Road Foreman Guthrie Perry

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

Additions to Agenda:

- **Review of Draft FY2020 External Audit**
- **Discussion on WEC Conceptual Proposal for Office Building Use**

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the September 14, 2020 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the September 14, 2020 minutes as presented. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

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

This is the fourth year of the Municipal Roads Grants-in-Aid program aimed at combating road erosion into surface waters. Last year's grant paid for an erosion control/drainage improvement project on Codling Road. East Montpelier is eligible for \$11,300 in funding (plus a 20% town match, so total value of \$14,125) to implement best management practices on hydrologically connected segments of municipal roads. To participate, the board must submit a letter of intent by October 31, 2020.

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

Report from the VT League of Cities & Towns Annual Meetings **Jon Jewett, EM Delegate for the VLCT Annual Meetings**

Mr. Jewett participated in the September 23, 2020 biennial municipal legislative policy conference and the PACIF, VERB and VLCT annual meetings on September 30, 2020.

Highlights of the policy conference included: a conversation on public safety officer training in the areas of mental health and procedural justice; thresholds for Act 250 review in towns without zoning; and, shifting Agency of Natural Resources funding to towns for wastewater facility treatment improvements from loans to grants. The legislative policy was adopted at the VLCT annual meeting. The VERB (Vermont Employee Resource and Benefits Trust) annual meeting produced a budgetary warning that unemployment insurance rates are likely headed higher in 2021. The PACIF (Property and Casualty Intermunicipal Fund) meeting provided good news for budgets, with the workers compensation rates expected to decrease 9-11%. There will also be an increase in the legal support hours for towns involved in employee terminations, situations that often lead to costly insurance claims.

Road Foreman Report

- **Consideration of EM Village Sidewalk Plowing Bids**
 - No bids were received. Road Foreman Perry spoke to a number of potential contractors and received advice from neighboring towns with similar sidewalk networks. The key appears to be some form of guaranteed income to ensure contractors can afford the necessary equipment. The town did not include such a guarantee in the request for bids.
- **Discussion on Next Steps for Winter 2020/21 Sidewalk Plowing**
 - Road Foreman Perry and board members discussed options for the sidewalk winter maintenance. The preference continues to be for the hiring of a contractor to do the work rather than the town purchasing equipment and paying a new part-time employee to handle the job. The board decided to approach targeted contractors with a conceptual agreement for up to a \$10,000 guarantee for a 5.5-month (November to mid-April) agreement. Road Foreman Perry will reach out to contractors with this new concept and report back on the results.
- **Consideration of Winter Roads Policy**
 - Road Foreman Perry recommends no changes to the current winter roads policy.
 - **Motion: To adopt the 2020-21 Winter Roads Policy as presented.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

The board and Road Foreman Perry discussed some recent complaints: speeding on Brazier and Barnes Roads; and, new ditching in the Gould Hill/Dillon Roads area. The state police will be asked to spend some of the town's contract time on Brazier and Barnes, particularly during afternoon release times for U-32. The ditching concern is normal as raw ditches often seem deep and dangerous. Now that rain has returned to the area, the road crew can hydroseed the ditches, which should soften the appearance.

Grant updates:

- The town has been awarded the requested \$6,400 from the FY2021 Municipal Roads Grants-in-Aid Equipment Purchase program to purchase shoulder disks.
- The Agency of Transportation has canceled the FY2021 structures and paving grant programs due to the budgetary limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. All pending applications, which include the town's request for paving funds to repave a portion of County Road, will be considered under the upcoming FY2022 program.

- The VTrans FY2021 Better Roads program grant decisions should be released in the near future. The town has two applications in the queue, one for replacement of a County Road culvert and the other for repair of a Codling Road culvert.

Consideration of VLCT PACIF Membership Renewal

The town's annual renewal application for continued membership in the Vermont League of Cities & Towns insurance offerings is October 9, 2020.

Motion: To authorize TA Johnson to sign and submit the paperwork to renew the town's membership in VLCT PACIF. 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 October 19, 2020 meeting.

Updates on the three COVID-19 grant programs offered by the state:

- Secretary of State Ballot Drop Box Reimbursement Program (up to \$1,000)
 - The blue drop box has been installed outside the town office at the base of handicap ramp and is already in heavy use for the return of absentee ballots.
- Coronavirus Municipal Records Digitization Grant Program (up to \$20,000)
 - The large format scanner purchased under this program had been received and is expected to be operational within a week. The intent is to utilize the scanner to digitize the map & mylar portion of the town's land records.
- Local Government Expense Reimbursement Grant Program (up to \$3,300)
 - The town has been notified that it received the requested \$3,160.14 – \$2,217.13 for actual expenses and \$933.01 for anticipated expenses (a voting booth). The new voting booth has already arrived and will be ready for use on November 3rd.

Discussion on Hasland Property: Potential Executive Session

Board members briefly renewed discussion on the possibility of making an offer on the former S&H Underwriters building and 14.2 acres of land located at 3030 US Rte. 2. As it did at the board's September 14th meeting, the board decided to forego this option for the time being.

Discussion on WEC Conceptual Proposal for Office Building Use

Washington Electric Cooperative is considering, as part of its long-term plan, the consolidation of its business operations at its current warehouse location at 230 Fassett Road in East Montpelier. WEC would like to know if the Selectboard might be interested in purchasing the 40 Church Street building for town office use if the consolidation plan moves forward. The board instructed TA Johnson to pass along the message that the town would be interested in a preliminary conversation on the topic.

Review of Draft FY2020 External Audit

The draft audit has been received. There are no areas of significant concern, although there are two “material weaknesses” reported based on how the town presented information to the auditors revolving around timing elements of grants, mostly dealing with sidewalk project invoices and deferred revenue. The completed audit is expected to be delivered before the end of the year.

Personnel Matters: Potential Executive Session

A concern was brought to the board regarding the town handling of a dog bite incident involving the East Montpelier Fire Department.

Motion: To enter into executive session under 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(3) for the evaluation of a public employee. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

The board entered executive session at 7:33 p.m. and exited at 7:50 p.m.

Motion: To send a letter, bearing Chair Gardner’s signature, to the East Montpelier Fire Department supporting the town employees’ handling of the incident in question. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Warrants

- **September 22, 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.
- **October 5, 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 October 5, 2020 expense warrant and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the warrant on behalf of the board.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Other Business**Town Administrator Report**

- EM Sidewalk Project Update:
 - The town has been approved to stripe the crosswalk at the post office, which should happen on Wednesday (weather dependent). The signage at the base of Quaker Road will be revised in the near future to put the street sign on the north side of the road and the stop sign in a protected spot about 30 feet further up Quaker but still on the south side.
- Meeting Schedule:
 - October 19, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting
 - November 2, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There have been no new applications since the September 14th 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 Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: October 19, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting