

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

October 19, 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, Carl Etnier and Amy Willis; Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: Planning Commission members Julie Potter, Clarice Cutler, Zach Sullivan and Scott Hess; Teri Martineau, Hickok & Boardman; Town Treasurer Don Welch

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m.

Additions to Agenda: None

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the October 5, 2020 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the October 5, 2020 minutes as presented. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Conversation with Julie Potter, PC Chair & CVRPC Representative

Ms. Potter provided a general update on the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic CVRPC has closed its Montpelier office, with all employees working remote for the most part. Like the East Montpelier Town Office, services are still available and normal activities are still ongoing, just with modifications.

The Central VT Regional Plan was recently amended to eliminate the regional housing implementation plan element and to alter the future land use map to align with Montpelier's growth center boundary.

Ms. Potter announced that she will be stepping off the CVRPC board at the end of her term in March 2021.

Switching hats, Ms. Potter explained that the EM Planning Commission has been meeting remotely since May. The PC continues to work on zoning regulation revisions, but the focus and scale have shifted. The whole-town, complete update effort has been shelved in favor of a more targeted, phased approach with an emphasis on amending the existing regulations rather than developing an entirely new set of regulations. Phase 1 is centered on EM Village, with the intent to develop regulations to implement the EM Village Master Plan. Other elements expected to be

tackled in Phase 1 include setback modifications to better fit with current sensibilities and alterations to the accessory dwelling standards in light of the recent legislative action to increase the utility of the accessory dwelling concept.

Discussion on 2021 Employee Health Insurance Options

Teri Martineau, Hickok & Boardman (town's health care advisor through VLCT)

Ms. Martineau's services are provided as part of the Health Insurance Advisory Services (HIAS) agreement between the town, the Vermont League of Cities & Towns and Hickok & Boardman HR Intelligence.

Ms. Martineau provided a breakdown of the projected 2021 cost for town's current health plan offerings to employees. Town employees are allowed to choose a plan of his/her choice from a town-approved list of VT Health Exchange plans, with the understanding that the town would pay up to the value of 90% of the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Platinum Plan premium at the level (single, two-person, family, etc.) desired. Last year all employees selected the MVP Platinum Plan, which cost less than the 90% BCBS value, so no employees currently have premium deductions.

Seven employees qualify for the town's health benefit with 5 accepting the health plan option (2 two-person; 3 family). One employee is currently under contract with a significant incentive to not use the benefit. One has for years accepted the town's stipend in lieu of option. The last two could choose to take the town's insurance offering during the open enrollment period and, in theory, any of the first 5 could choose not to take the insurance. If the Selectboard sticks with the current options and the employees stay with current utilization choices, the plan costs would rise from \$117,019 to \$119,064, a 1.75% increase. The current stipend is 25% of the town's share of the single person BCBS Platinum Plan premium cost. For 2021 that amount would be \$2,538, up from 2020's \$2,430. Board members were delighted with the projected minimal increase in health benefit costs, a welcome relief after the 18% budget line increase last year.

Motion: To set the 2021 employee health benefit at a maximum of 90% of the premium cost of the BCBS Platinum Plan, allow employees to choose between the BCBS and MVP Platinum Plans, and set the annual stipend-in-lieu-of-insurance option at \$2,538. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Town Treasurer Report: Treasurer Don Welch

Treasurer Welch presented a report reflecting the first three months of FY2021. The town is on budget, although a couple of budget lines are either over-expended or nearly so. This is due to Covid-19 grant expenditures that will be offset by grant revenue. Tax Year 2020-2021 payments, with the first installment due November 16th, are coming in steadily.

Treasurer Welch briefly discussed the draft FY2020 external audit, focusing on two issues that have been a minor concern for years. He intends to develop an accounting internal controls document that sets out the protocols followed to ensure proper handling of the town's financial affairs. The other item, regarding a fraud risk assessment, will require a determination by the

board as to whether the potential insights gained is worth the expense. Treasurer Welch will research the options for an assessment along with the costs involved.

Delinquent Tax Collector Report: Delinquent Tax Collector Bruce Johnson

TA Johnson provided an update on the current property tax delinquencies, which stand at a collective total of \$172,071, 25% higher than last year at this time. Last month the town started the tax sale process against 6 parcels. Three of those delinquencies are now paid off. One is in limbo as a probate estate is being established. The other two continue on track for tax sale.

Discussion on Proposed Stipend Allocation for Elected & Appointed Officers

The town pays small annual stipends to Selectboard and Planning Commission members along with the constable, health officer and animal control officers. The allotment for each position is set by the budget and will be paid out as part of the November 5th payroll. This year there is just one cost split to determine, for the Selectboard seat vacated by Casey Northrup in June and now filled by Ms. Dillon. By consensus board members decided to prorate the stipend one-third to Mr. Northrup and two-thirds to Ms. Dillon.

Consideration of Application to Vermont Emerald Ash Borer Management Grant Program

The Resilient Roads Committee is working on a grant application, due on October 30th, to support an ash tree removal project planned for the County Road area. The request will be for a \$15,000 grant with a \$15,000 match (combined in-kind and cash). At the Selectboard's September 14th meeting the committee and board discussed the possibility of this application, although the project location had not yet been determined. At the time board members encouraged the committee to develop an application, acknowledging the possibility of a \$15,000 town match cash expenditure.

Motion: To authorize the submission of the Emerald Ash Borer Management Grant application to the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on CV Solid Waste Management District Hearings:

- **CVSWMD 2020 Solid Waste Implementation Plan**
 - This is the 5-year (2021-2025) plan for the area towns that are part of CVSWMD along with some neighboring communities. There are two hearings on the plan – Wednesday, October 21st at 5:00 p.m. and Thursday, October 22nd at noon.
- **CVSWMD FY2022 Preliminary Budget**
 - The current budget proposal calls for a return to the \$1/capita town assessment. This year, due to Covid-19, the assessment was cut to \$0.50/capita. The hearing on the budget is Monday, October 26th at 4:00 p.m.
 - Mr. Jewett, who is a member of the CVSWMD advisory group for the construction of a central Vermont household hazardous waste facility, mentioned that the current focus is on determining viable locations, which have proven a challenge to identify. The group is investigating a promising site in Barre Town.

Consideration of Application to Center for Tech and Civic Life COVID-19 Response Grant Program for Election Equipment Expenses

The Center for Tech and Civic Life is a non-profit set up to provide resources for local election offices. The organization is providing grants to communities for election equipment, extra workers, signage and other similar expenses to help offset election challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The size of the grant is based on community size and need. East Montpelier qualifies for and has been offered \$5,000.

Motion: To accept the Center for Tech and Civic Life grant of \$5,000 and authorize TA Johnson to complete the necessary paperwork. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. 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 November 2, 2020 meeting.

As of mid-afternoon on October 19th the town had received 869 ballots (37% of current voter checklist of 2,361) for the November 3, 2020 general election. On Thursday, October 15th a Board of Civil Authority team ran 373 ballots through the same tabulator that will be used for in-person voting on November 3rd at EMES. A count of ballots is made, but no actual results can be observed or generated. There will be two more Thursday afternoon tabulations prior to election day. These tabulation events are live streamed to the public.

Warrants

- **October 14, 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 19, 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 19, 2020 expense warrant and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the warrant on behalf of the board.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Other Business**Town Administrator Report**

- Update on Town Website Upgrade:
 - The rehabilitation of the town website's behind the scenes structure is complete and undergoing testing. The intent is to push it out to the public sometime this week. There should be no significant difference for desktop/laptop users, but

mobile devices should see better navigation capabilities along with a more responsive framework for types of displays. The real improvement will simply be that the original theme/template is now updated to match current WordPress expectations, allowing for site updates without triggering constant error messages.

- Notice Regarding Water/Wastewater Permit Overshadowing of Tinkham Cemetery:
 - Jeff & Jodi Parker, 1035 Cherry Tree Hill Road, have applied for a wastewater permit to construct a replacement mound system. The isolation zone for the system includes the town-owned Tinkham Cemetery located to the west (away from the road) of the Parker lot.
- Update on FY2021 VTrans Better Roads Grant Applications:
 - The town applied for two Better Roads grants – a Category C grant for a culvert repair on Codling Road and a Category D grant for a culvert replacement on County Road. Both were denied. Due to budget constraints VTrans only awarded Category B (road erosion improvement work) grants. The town's applications were favorably reviewed so they would likely be successful if the town decides to apply under the FY2022 program, which should open within the next month.
- Meeting Schedule:
 - November 2, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting
 - November 16, 2020 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- 4 permit applications have been received since the October 5th SB meeting. There have been 49 zoning permit applications in 2020.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for December 1, 2020. Applications are anticipated for some outdoor classroom pavilions at Orchard Valley Waldorf School and for at least one subdivision.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: November 2, 2020 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting