Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

DRAFT

January 11, 2021 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, Amy Willis and Judith Dillon; Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: Road Foreman Guthrie Perry; Town Moderator Michael Duane; Town Clerk Rosie Laquerre; Geoff Beyer

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Additions to Agenda:

- **Discussion on North Street No Parking Signs for Nordic Trails**

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the December 21, 2020 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the December 21, 2020 minutes as amended. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the December 29, 2020 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the December 21, 2020 minutes as amended. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

<u>Road Foreman Report</u>

- **Update on Trucks**
  - Road Foreman Perry explained that the 2012 Freightliner approved for purchase at the December 29th special board meeting is officially part of the town fleet and was effectively utilized for the two storm events around New Year's Day.
  - The 2015 International is now back at the town garage and is operational.
- **Discussion on North Street No Parking Signs for Nordic Trails**
  - A number of handmade no parking signs have been installed along North Street & Sparrow Farm Road to try to discourage parking by those trying to take advantage of recreational opportunities. The signs were not authorized by the town and no notice was given to the town before installation. The town's traffic ordinance prohibits traffic signs that do not have prior board approval before installation.
  - Board members expressed concern regarding the improper nature of the installation and the discordant effect of the signs on an otherwise aesthetically pleasing tableau.

- Geoff Beyer, the former head of Montpelier Parks & Recreation and a leader in the effort to maintain Nordic trails in the area after the demise of the Morse Farm Ski Touring Center, explained that the signs were an effort to limit problems for landowners and traffic flow along the affected routes. He agreed to gather information on the issue for presentation to the board at an upcoming meeting.
- Board members were generally in agreement that the homemade signs should come down soon and, if warranted, proper signage could be installed by the town.

➢ **Proposed Personnel Policy Amendments**

- Road Foreman Perry requested consideration of two amendments to the personnel policy:
  - The town has no officially recognized holiday between New Year's Day and Town Meeting Day. The state and many municipalities recognize both Martin Luther King Jr. Day (third Monday in January) and Presidents' Day (third Monday in February). The town has 9 official holidays whereas state employees have 12.
  - The overtime policy expressly limits the ability to utilize sick, vacation and holiday leave in determining the hours "actually worked" to meet the 40 hours of work requirement before overtime will be paid. Mr. Perry stated that the inability to utilize sick leave results in situations where crew members come to or stay at work when they shouldn't and rearrange appointments to avoid losing overtime. He considers this policy to be both unfair to the employees and not reflective of proper protocol during the pandemic.
- TA Johnson suggested that the policy should acknowledge the standard use of Veterans Day as a floating holiday for use during November & December. The board reviewed a draft version of the personnel policy that included the recommended changes.
- **Motion: To adopt the East Montpelier Personnel Policy as revised by the proposed amendments as presented.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on FY2022 Budget Development

➢ **Highway Operations**

- Road Foreman Perry is requesting a mainly level funded highway operations budget for FY2022 with four exceptions:
  - $5,000 increase in the gravel line to make up for lost purchasing power over the past couple of years.
  - $5,000 increase in the vehicle equipment/repairs sector due to rising costs and the fact the town consistently overruns the current $60,000 level.
  - Two small increases for standard town garage expenses due to rising costs:
    - $200 increase in the electricity line; and,
    - $500 increase in the rubbish line.
- Board members supported the highway budget figures proposed by Mr. Perry and agreed to put them into the draft FY2022 general fund budget.

➢ **FY20200 EMFD Ambulance & Emergency Services Budget Request**

The East Montpelier Fire Department's FY2022 budget request:

Service	Calais		East Montpelier		Total	
	FY2022 Request	% Increase over FY21	FY2022 Request	% Increase over FY21	FY2022 Request	% Increase over FY21
Fire	$ 61,038	-5.9%	$122,076	-5.9%	$183,114	-5.9%
Ambulance	$111,580	17.3%	$223,159	17.3%	$334,739	17.3%
Town Total	**$172,618**	**7.9%**	**$345,235**	**7.9%**	**$517,853**	**7.9%**

The ambulance service budget includes other revenue items: contracted amounts from Plainfield ($53,624, up 3% from FY2021) and Marshfield ($43,709, up 3%) but nothing from off-the-top EMFD ambulance service revenue (down $15,000).

Total FY2022 Ambulance Service Budget: $432,072 (up 9.4% from FY2021)
Total FY2022 All Services Budget: $615,186 (up 4.3% from FY2021)

At its December 28, 2020 meeting the Calais Selectboard approved the operating budget requests as presented.

Board members moved quickly to approve the budget requests that have had the board's support since presented by EMFD on December 3, 2020. The delay in approval was due to the desire to act after the Calais board had made its decision.

Motion: To include in the town's FY2022 general fund budget the EMFD operating budget requests of $122,076 for the fire service and $223,159 for the ambulance service. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

- **Review of Draft FY2022 Budget**
  - Board members reviewed the proposed final FY2022 budget, which reflected an updated figure for the town's Washington County budget allocation as well as the approved highway and EMFD figures.
  - **Motion: To approve the FY2022 Selectboard budget as presented, setting the to-be-raised-by-taxes figure for the 2021 Town Meeting Warning at $1,927,032.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on 2021 Town Meeting

- **Consideration of Options for Conducting 2021 Town Meeting**
  - Board members discussed the options available to the town for conducting a permissible and safe town meeting during the current state of emergency. Members agreed that a one-time shift to an all-Australian ballot election makes the most sense given the circumstances.
  - **Motion: In light of COVID-19 health and safety concerns, for 2021 the in-person town meeting is canceled and town meeting voting will all be done by Australian ballot.** Made by Ms. Dillon; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.
  - The board expressed a decided interest in mailing ballots to all active voters if that option is approved by the legislature. This issue will be revisited at the January 18, 2021 board meeting.
- **Discussion on 2021 Town Meeting Warning**
  - With the decision made to hold an all-Australian ballot election, the board reviewed a version of the town meeting warning designed for that type of voting. Board members

decided to remove the position of second constable from the list of elected officer slots as that post has not been filled for many years. Two issues remained in play: the possibility of shifting from an elected to an appointed constable and the format of the required property tax article.

- After a brief discussion, board members agreed to table the constable issue until next year. The board felt it was important to provide the opportunity for a robust public discussion on the potential shift, something not possible as part of an all-Australian ballot town meeting.
- The issue with the property tax article was whether to include, as part of the article's language, a phrase making it clear that postmarks up to the property tax installment due date will be accepted as proof of timely payment. 2020 Town Meeting featured an entertaining discussion on postmarks before the voters, by floor vote, amended the standard property tax article to allow for postmark acceptance. Board members would prefer, if the town desired a shift away from postmarks, that the change occur as a result of another town meeting discussion on the issue.
- The board preliminarily agreed to a slate of 13 articles for the all-Australian ballot warning. The expectation is that the warning will be finalized at the board's January 18th meeting.
- The required pre-town meeting informational forum to discuss the warning articles will be held on Monday, March 1, 2021 starting at 7:30 p.m. The forum will be conducted utilizing Zoom remote conferencing services.

Development of 2020 Selectboard Report for Annual Report

Board members brainstormed topics to be included in the Selectboard report to be included in the town's annual report. A variety of subjects were proposed, including the town's & townspeople's response to the pandemic, the EM Village sidewalk project, the Resilient Roads Committee's ash tree management projects, the Cross VT Trail's progress, 2020 election challenges and 2021 town meeting choices.

The report will be finalized at the January 18, 2021 board meeting.

Discussion on Town Management in Light of Covid-19

As they do at every meeting, board members discussed the state of the pandemic and whether there was a need to alter the town's current emergency order. With no sign that the pandemic will retreat any time soon, the board once again had no interest in altering the current protocol. The board will revisit the issue at its January 18, 2021 meeting.

Warrants

- **January 11, 2021 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 TA Johnson sign the warrant as certification of the board approval.

- **Motion: To approve the January 11, 2021 expense warrant and authorize TA Johnson to sign the warrant on behalf of the board.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Other Business

Town Administrator Report

- January 7, 2021 Tax Sale Update:
  - The delinquency was paid off on the one remaining property subject to the tax sale, resulting in the cancelation of the sale.
- Washington County Budget Meeting:
  - The annual budget meeting for the FY2022 Washington County budget is set for this Friday, January 15, 2021, at noon by Zoom remote conferencing services.
- Common Level of Appraisal Report
  - Town's CLA rose slightly to 94.18% from 93.82%.
- Update on AT&T Cell Tower Proposal:
  - AT&T has formally withdrawn the advance notice filing and has no plans to move forward with the Jacobs Road project. The scheduled January 14, 2021 information meeting has been canceled.
- Mark Levine, the VT Commissioner of Health, has officially appointed Ginny Burley, as recommended by the Selectboard, to another three-year term as the town's health officer.
- Meeting Schedule:
  - January 13, 2021 7:00 pm BCA meeting
  - January 18, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting
  - January 25, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard special meeting
  - February 1, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There have been 2 new applications since the December 21st SB meeting. There were 53 zoning permit applications in 2020 and 2 so far in 2021.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for February 2, 2021. There are two anticipated hearings, one for a 3-lot subdivision/reconfiguration of the Messier East Hill Road parcels and the second for a dog daycare facility at 1678 US Rte. 2.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator