

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

DRAFT

January 18, 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: Geoff Beyer

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

Additions to Agenda: None

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the January 11, 2021 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the January 11, 2021 minutes as amended. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Consideration of 2021 Annual Certificate of Highway Mileage

The VT Agency of Transportation requires an annual certification of highway mileage within the town. There have been no changes to the town's road mileage or classifications in the past year.

Motion: To approve the 2021 annual certificate of highway mileage. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Board members will come to the town office during the following week to sign the certificate.

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. Governor Scott has extended the state of emergency through February 15, 2021 and there continues to be no sign of a lessening of the pandemic. The board decided to maintain the current protocol. The board will revisit the issue at its February 1, 2021 meeting.

Access Permits

➤ **Access Application #21-003; 440 East Hill Road**

- Norman & Carla Messier have applied to reconfigure/subdivide their three-parcel, 33.5-acre property located along the south side of East Hill Road. The existing 440

East Hill Road curb cut serves the Messiers' home lot, a second building lot and the town's dry hydrant located at the Messiers' pond. The requested curb cut, located about 100 feet east, will replace the existing access and serve the same two lots and the dry hydrant.

- Road Foreman Perry reviewed the site and recommends approval. The new drive will come straight into East Hill Road, replacing the current angled approach, improving the line of sight significantly. A drive culvert will be required and the existing access will need to be abandoned and landscaped once the new curb cut is constructed.
- **Motion: To approve Access Permit 21-003 subject to the listed conditions and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the permit on behalf of the board.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on North Street No Parking Signs for Nordic Trails

Geoff Beyer, representing a group of volunteers working to establish and maintain a Nordic trail network in the North Street/County Road area loosely based on the now-closed Morse Farm Ski Touring Center trail system and linked to the North Branch trails in Montpelier, presented a proposal for parking control signage near the intersection of North Street and Sparrow Farm Road and along Sparrow Farm Road east of the farm. The group had installed homemade signs without town knowledge or permission along those roads in early January, leading to a conversation between Mr. Beyer and board members at the January 11th board meeting. The upshot of that discussion was that Mr. Beyer would return with a signage plan for consideration by the board.

Mr. Beyer explained that the group has narrowed the scope of its initial signage plan and is just looking to have around 10 signs near the North/Sparrow Farm intersection and another 4 on Sparrow Farm between the 154 Sparrow Farm driveway and the farm access about 200 feet to the west. The intent is to prevent on-road parking in the areas where sight lines and general traffic safety would be most affected. The group is maintaining two off-road parking areas, one on Cummings Road near North Street and the other on County Road just north of Cummings, with the expectation that 75% of trail users will park at those locations. The signage the group put up on North Street near the Cummings Road intersection will be removed.

Motion: To approve the proposal for parking control signage as presented and explained by Mr. Beyer on a trial basis for the remainder of the 2020-21 ski season or April 15, 2021, whichever comes first. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed 4-1 (Ms. Dillon).

The board will revisit this issue after the current ski season.

Discussion on 2021 Town Meeting

➤ Discussion on 2021 Town Meeting Ballot Distribution

- At its January 11th meeting the board, due to COVID-19 health and safety concerns, approved a one-time shift to an all-Australian ballot event on Town Meeting Day. The Washington Central Unified Union School District annual meeting will also be an all-Australian ballot affair on Town Meeting Day. Board members previously expressed a preference to send absentee ballots, including the school district ballot, to all active voters if that became a legal option. The state legislature has passed H.48, which allows for that distribution option. The bill has not yet been signed by Governor Scott, but is expected to be in the near future.

- There are also some open questions as to whether the town can include the school ballot in the proposed mailing. The town clerks of the WCUUSD member towns have been debating whether all the towns have to use the same distribution method for school ballots and, if so, who makes the determination. The Secretary of State is expected to issue some guidance on this issue within a few days.
 - The state has issued general statements that there will be up to \$2,000,000 in CARES Act (the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) funding made available to the towns to enable 2021 town meeting adjustments necessary due to the pandemic. Program details and guidelines, however, have not yet been released.
 - Board members discussed the various concerns swirling around the option to mail ballots to all active voters. In the end, despite the uncertainties, the board decided that the mass mailing for both town and school ballots was the right thing to do for the community and, given the fast-approaching deadlines for election matters, the time to approve that option was at hand.
 - **Motion: To authorize the mailing of the 2021 Town Meeting Day Election town and school district ballots to all active voters subject to the following conditions:**
 - **The mailing of ballots to all active voters must be legal;**
 - **The mailing of the school district ballot to all active voters must be both legal and otherwise acceptable to the WCUUSD; and,**
 - **The cost of this unforeseen and unbudgeted ballot distribution methodology will be borne by the town with the expectation but not the requirement that the expense will be reimbursed by the state.**
 - Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed 4-1 (Mr. Etnier). Mr. Etnier voted no despite supporting the motion in order to preserve the ability to revisit this decision at a later date if it becomes advisable to do so.
- **Discussion on 2021 Town Meeting Warning**
- The board reviewed the draft warning developed at the January 11th board meeting. The warning includes 13 articles set for an all-Australian ballot vote on Town Meeting Day, March 2, 2021.
 - 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.
 - **Motion: To approve the 2020 Town Meeting Warning as presented.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.
 - Board members will come to the town office during the following week to sign the warning.

Development of 2020 Selectboard Report for Annual Report

The board reviewed the draft Selectboard report for inclusion in the town's 2020 annual report. After making a few edits, the board agreed by consensus to accept the report as amended.

Consideration of EM Signpost Town Meeting Issue Article

The board decided that there was no need to submit an article on town meeting as no controversial articles are up for consideration and voting would already be underway when the EM Signpost's

town meeting issue comes out in mid-February. Details on the procedural aspects of town meeting voting and participation in the informational forum will be included in the issue.

Warrants

➤ **January 18, 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 Chair Gardner sign the warrant as certification of the board approval.
- **Motion: To approve the January 18, 2021 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

➤ Meeting Schedule:

- January 25, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard special meeting **if needed**
- February 1, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting
- February 15, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting
- March 1, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting (truncated)
- 7:30 pm Information forum on town meeting ballot items
- March 2, 2021 7 am – 7 pm All-Australian ballot vote; no in-person meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There were 5 new zoning permit applications since the January 11th SB meeting. There have been 7 applications so far in 2021.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for February 2, 2021. There are three warned hearings: one for a 3-lot subdivision/reconfiguration of the Messier East Hill Road parcels; the second for a dog daycare facility at 1678 US Rte. 2; and, the third for an alteration of the 2019 permit authorizing a PRD and community center at 170 Cherry Tree Hill Road to allow a time extension to file the necessary Declaration of Condominium.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator