

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

March 1, 2021 Selectboard Meeting including the 2021 Town Meeting Information Forum

This meeting was conducted remotely using the Zoom conferencing platform. Participation options were provided to the public.

SB Attendance: Chair Seth Gardner, Carl Etnier, Jon Jewett, Amy Willis and Judith Dillon; Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: EM Treasurer Don Welch; EM Health Officer Ginny Burley; EM Auditor Ed Deegan; State Representative Kimberly Jessup; Carolyn Brennan, Kellogg-Hubbard Library; Becca Jordan, Montpelier Senior Activity Center; Scott Hess; Sandal Cate; Paul Cate; Erica Zimmerman; Kim Watson; Florence Morse; Michael Duane; Jeff Cueto; Nona Estrin; Lynn Talamini; Wayne Fisher; Rachael Grossman; Paul Erlbaum; Terry Allen; Lawrence Miller; Christine Fitch; Carol Dickson; Mark Lane; Ben McCall; Denise Roy; Tracey Loysen; Edie Miller; Charlie Wanzer; Lydia Faesy; Kate Phillips; Steve Justis; Gene Troia; Shari Young; Jennifer Myka; “Sarah”; “Rick”

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Additions to Agenda: None

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the February 15, 2021 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the February 15, 2021 minutes as amended. Made by Ms. Dillon; second by Ms. Willis. Passed 4-0 (Mr. Jewett abstained).

Public Comment: None

Town Treasurer Report

➤ Presentation of Proposed Finance Policies

- Treasurer Welch presented two policy documents designed to formalize protocols already in use by the town. The first, a new accounting, auditing and financial reporting policy, lays out a general framework for competent and transparent management of town finances, including annual external audits and monthly treasurer reports to the Selectboard. The second is a revision to the town’s fund balance policy, adopted in 2012, that alters the definitional language of the “committed” and “assigned” fund balance categories to align with our updated understanding of the terms. This change will standardize the language used to report certain board budget management activities.
- **Motion: To adopt the proposed Accounting, Auditing and Financial Reporting Policy as presented.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.
- **Motion: To adopt the revised Fund Balance Policy as presented.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

➤ **Conversation on Auditor Expectations & Protocol Development**

- For years the town's external auditors have been including boilerplate recommendations for the town to do a fraud risk assessment and develop a formal internal controls policy. Treasurer Welch explained that his research into the risk assessment revealed a cost upwards of \$10,000 for a negligible benefit given the solid controls already in place coupled with the relatively uncomplicated nature of the town's financial activities. His recommendation to forego a formal fraud risk assessment drew support from Town Auditor Deegan and board members.
- Treasurer Welch, Auditor Deegan and the board similarly evinced little desire to craft a policy on internal controls to match the recommendation of the external auditors. The new reporting policy along with existing policies, written protocols and controls in place provide solid documentation of the town's financial management practices.

➤ **Current Year Budget Status Report**

- Treasurer Welch presented a financial status report through the end of February showing the town in good shape with FY2021 revenues and expenditures tracking expectations. His intent, in line with the newly adopted reporting policy, is to provide this type of report on a monthly basis.

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 state and federal officials continuing to call for patience, the board once again saw no reason to alter the current protocol. The board will revisit the issue at its March 15, 2021 meeting.

Warrants

➤ **February 18, 2021 Warrants for Review**

- As required by board policy, board members reviewed the three warrants (a special expense warrant and the regular payroll & payroll vendor warrants for the February 18th pay date) the board gave TA Johnson authorization to approve at the February 15th board meeting. No action was necessary.

➤ **March 1, 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.
- Due to a continuation of the unforeseen circumstances discussed at the February 15th meeting that make it impossible to follow the board's standard procedures for payroll warrants, board members also reviewed the current payroll and payroll vendor warrants. As with the expense warrant, the board decided to approve the payroll warrants by motion and have TA Johnson sign the warrants as certification of the board approval.
- **Motion: To approve the March 1, 2021 expense warrant and the March 4, 2021 (pay date) payroll & payroll vendor warrants and authorize TA Johnson to sign the warrants on behalf of the board.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Other Business**Town Administrator Report**

- Town Meeting Ballot Update:
 - As of 4:00 p.m. on March 1st, 749 early ballots had been received. Of those, the Board of Civil Authority tabulated a combined total of 539 ballots at its two tabulating events on February 18 & 25, 2021.
- Update on Health Officer Concern with North Montpelier Apartments:
 - Health Officer Burley reported that Judge Kilgore of the Probate Division of the Vermont Superior Court has ordered the appointment of a special administrator for the David Rogers Estate to enable emergency actions in response to the town and state health & safety concerns at the four apartment buildings in North Montpelier owned by the estate. Necessary maintenance is now ongoing at both the apartment buildings and at the single-family rentals the estate owns in the North Montpelier area.
- Update on Center Road/Mallory Brook Culvert Relocation Study:
 - At the February 15th board meeting, board members directed TA Johnson to notify VTrans that the board favored installing standard galvanized guardrail as part of the anticipated culvert relocation project as opposed to the guardrail options proposed by the VTrans Historic Preservation Officer. After a discussion handled by email, the Historic Preservation Officer agreed to the board's choice. The town's design engineering consultant will now finalize the plans.
- Meeting Schedule:

○ March 2, 2021	7 am – 7 pm	All-Australian ballot vote at EMES
○ March 15, 2021	6:30 pm	Selectboard regular meeting
○ April 5, 2021	6:30 pm	Selectboard regular meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There were no new zoning permit application since the February 15th SB meeting. There have been 8 applications so far in 2021.
- The next DRB meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 6, 2021.

Conversation with State Representative Kimberly Jessup

Representative Jessup opened with a quick description on the struggles some local residents have had trying to navigate the unemployment compensation bureaucracy during the pandemic, her efforts to help and her sponsorship of a bill to improve the system. Ms. Jessup went on to provide a brief overview of the current legislative session, focusing on the utilization of existing and anticipated coronavirus relief funds. Access to broadband remains a major concern, with the hope that the federal relief funding can fuel infrastructure expansion to poorly served areas of the state. Other areas of legislative action include improvements to the childcare system and shifting transportation priorities to include an emphasis on equity and climate goals.

Ms. Jessup will post an update on the legislative session to the community on her website:

<https://www.kimberlyjessupvt.net/>.

East Montpelier Town Forum

Chair Gardner opened the forum at 7:30 p.m.

Additions to Agenda: None

Public Comment: None

Review of & Discussion on 2021 Town Meeting Articles

Chair Gardner explained that he would read each article and then allow questions and comments on the presented article.

- **Article 1: Town Offices up for Election**
 - No public feedback on the article.
- **Article 2: FY2022 Budget**
 - No public feedback on the article.
- **Article 3: Property Tax Protocol**
 - Short discussion on how the pandemic has affected property tax collections. The town did alter the late interest and penalty provisions last year to lessen the impact of those fees on taxpayers struggling with the pandemic's economic ramifications. Overall, the town hasn't seen much of a change in the collection rate.
- **Article 4: Kellogg-Hubbard Library Appropriation**
 - No public feedback on the article.
- **Article 5: Four Corners Schoolhouse Association Appropriation**
 - Discussion on the development of the association and the schoolhouse's value to the town. The first of many reminders of how important the influence of Jean Cate was to community engagement in East Montpelier over the latter part of the 20th century.
- **Article 6: East Montpelier Signpost Appropriation**
 - Discussion on the Signpost's importance to the town and the excellence of the volunteer-produced newsletter.
- **Article 7: East Montpelier Trails, Inc. Appropriation**
 - Discussion on the planned expansion of the trails network, both in the Sparrow Farm and U-32 parts of town. A question was raised regarding replacement of the Mallory Brook Trail's main bridge, which has fallen into disrepair and is no longer useable, leaving the trail's middle section impassable much of the year. Significant engineering and cost challenges have slowed a replacement project, but there is an ongoing planning effort to find a solution to enable all-season use of the trail.
- **Article 8: Montpelier Senior Activity Center Appropriation**
 - Discussion on the successful shift of classes to an online environment.
- **Article 9: Central Vermont Home Health & Hospice Appropriation**
 - No public feedback on the article.
- **Article 10: Rural Community Transportation, Inc. Appropriation**
 - No public feedback on the article.
- **Article 11: Green Mountain Transit Appropriation**
 - No public feedback on the article.
- **Article 12: Twin Valley Seniors, Inc. Appropriation**
 - No public feedback on the article.

➤ **Article 13: Funding Request Study Committee Recommendation for Appropriations to Worthy Organizations**

- Brief discussion on whether there were any new organizations included in the general funding request article this year – there aren't.

Other Business

Positive reviews for the annual report and the effort put forth to provide a pandemic-safe forum.

Discussion on the cutting-edge activities of the Resilient Roads Committee and Town Tree Warden Paul Cate to proactively deal with the threat of the Emerald Ash Borer to the town's ash trees as well as improve roadside vegetation.

Thanks expressed for the efforts of Town Clerk Rosie Laquerre and Board of Civil Authority members to effectively manage a year's worth of elections under pandemic protocols.

Thanks expressed for the efforts of the road crew, especially the focus on improving the roadside vegetation and combating invasive species.

"See you all next year in person!"

Motion: To adjourn the town forum and Selectboard meeting. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: March 15, 2021 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting