

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

March 15, 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, Carl Etnier, Jon Jewett, Amy Willis and Judith Dillon (joined after public comment period); Town Administrator Bruce Johnson

Public Attendance: EM Treasurer Don Welch; Lt. David White, VT State Police Middlesex Barracks Commander

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

Additions to Agenda:

- **Personnel Matters: Town Clerk Leave Bonus For Holiday Election Work
[Potential Executive Session]**

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the March 1, 2021 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the March 1, 2021 minutes as presented. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Discussion with Vermont State Police; Consideration of 2021 State Police Contract

Lt. White provided a brief update on VSP service to the town. Sgt. Todd Stackhouse will be our contract manager going forward as our former manager, Sgt. Charles Winn, is currently deployed on active duty. The proposed contract remains at the reduced level of 20 hours/month with a 2.3% increase in the hourly rate. VSP continues to struggle to meet the time allotment due to staffing availability, so any desire to increase the contract back to 40 hours/month, as it had been for over a decade until last year, will need to wait another year.

Motion: To approve the contract for VSP services at the level of 20 hours/month and authorize TA Johnson to sign the contract on behalf of the board. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

State Police Community Advisory Board Report

Don Welch, wearing his hat as one of the town's representatives on the Central Vermont State Police Community Advisory Board, provided a history of the organization, which acts as conduit of information between the VSP Middlesex Barracks and the municipalities the barracks serves. The CAB has basically been on hiatus during the pandemic and now there are questions as to whether the

organization still has a purpose going forward. The vast array of direct communication options coupled with the speed of interactions appears to have negated the need for and value of an intermediary contact organization. CAB has not yet had the opportunity to see if it has a place in the ongoing community policing discussions on racial equity and social justice issues. Mr. Welch closed with a request that board members ponder possible roles for CAB in the future.

2021 Selectboard Organization

Mr. Etnier, as senior board member after Chair Gardner, assumed control of the meeting and called for nominations for the chair position. Mr. Etnier nominated Mr. Gardner. There were no other nominations.

Mr. Etnier called for a vote. Mr. Gardner was elected chair 4-0 (Mr. Gardner recused himself) and resumed control of the meeting.

Chair Gardner called for nominations for the vice-chair position. Mr. Jewett nominated Mr. Etnier. There were no other nominations.

Chair Gardner called for a vote. Mr. Etnier was elected vice-chair 4-0 (Mr. Etnier recused himself).

Chair Gardner opened discussion on the issue of assigning individual board members to review and approve payroll warrants, payroll vendor warrants, and occasional special warrants. The reason for assigning this duty is that warrants of this nature are for time sensitive payments that do not conform to the schedule of the board's regular meetings. The records of these orders are made available to board members in both hard copy and digital form.

Motion: To designate authorization authority under 24 V.S.A. §1623(1) to Chair Gardner for the following:

- 1. Regular payroll warrants;**
- 2. Regular payroll vendor warrants; and,**
- 3. Special warrants for standard expenditures under the town-approved budget and reserve fund expenditures authorized by the Selectboard when such warrants are necessary due to required payment timing.**

Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

2021 Selectboard Rules of Transaction

The board reviewed the draft 2021 rules, which are essentially identical to the current 2020 version. No changes were proposed.

Motion: To adopt the 2021 Selectboard Rules of Transaction as presented. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Annual Highway Financial Plan

The board needs to approve the highway financial plan for FY2022 and certify that the town budgets funding of at least \$300 per mile for the town's highway system. Conservatively calculated, we town-fund at around \$10,000/mile.

Motion: To approve the FY2022 highway financial plan, certify that the town will raise by municipal taxes at least \$300 per mile for each mile of Class 1, 2 & 3 town highways and authorize TA Johnson to sign the form on behalf of the board. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Annual Certification of Compliance for Town Road & Bridge Standards and Network Inventory

Annually the board needs to certify that the town complies with the state's minimum road & bridge standards. The town's current standards, tracking the most recent VTrans template, were adopted in July 2019. The second part of the certification is to confirm that the town has an up-to-date highway network inventory. The town's road network inventory was completed in 2019 by Central VT Regional Planning Commission. The inventory is one of the required elements of the municipal roads general permit that all towns must comply with.

Motion: To certify that East Montpelier is in compliance with the state expectations for town road & bridge standards and highway network inventories and authorize TA Johnson to sign the form on behalf of the board. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Application for a Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program 2021 Arbor Day Tree Planting Grant

The Resilient Roads Committee would like to apply for a \$1,000 Arbor Day grant. The application, which is still under development, is due March 26, 2021. There is no monetary town match component, though town volunteers will be providing the labor. The committee is targeting the Waterman/Fielder/Reed properties across from the Old Meeting House in EM Center for roadside, but outside the right-of-way, planting of maple trees.

Motion: To authorize the submission of an Arbor Day Tree Planting Grant application to the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

2021 Town Meeting Review

Board members discussed the solid voter turnout for the all-Australian Ballot town meeting and the positive effect of mailing ballots to all voters. 914 ballots were submitted, the highest total ever in a non-presidential primary year.

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. The board believes that Governor Scott either has already extended or soon will extend the state of emergency, which expires at midnight, through April 15, 2021. [Update: Governor Scott did extend the state of emergency as expected] With no change in state and federal guidance, the board once again decided to maintain the current protocol. The board will revisit the issue at its April 6, 2021 meeting.

Appointments [Potential Executive Session]**➤ Consideration of Annual Appointments to Committees/Boards/Positions**

- Paul Winters has declined reappointment to the Recreation Board. That board is actively seeking prospective members and will provide a recommendation when appropriate.
- Charles Johnson has declined reappointment, after 30+ years, to the Conservation Fund Advisory Committee.
- Julie Potter, as she explained to the board in February, will step down as our CVRPC representative at the end of May.
- **Motion: To approve the slate of 2021 appointments and authorize TA Johnson to complete the board representation form for CVSWMD.** Made by Ms. Dillon; second by Ms. Willis. Passed 4-0 (Mr. Etnier abstained due to his inclusion on the slate as Animal Control Officer, a paid position).

Warrants**➤ March 15, 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 15, 2021 expense warrant and the March 18, 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.

Personnel Matters: Town Clerk Leave Bonus For Holiday Election Work
[Potential Executive Session]

The board annually considers providing additional leave time to Town Clerk Laquerre in appreciation for her willingness to put in the long hours necessary during the town meeting election period.

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

The board entered executive session at 7:55 p.m. and exited at 7:59 p.m.

Motion: To provide Town Clerk Laquerre with 24 hours of sick leave in compensation for her recent evening and holiday workload. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Other Business**Town Administrator Report**

- 2021 American Rescue Plan Act Funding for Local Governments:
 - Details are sketchy but there appears a likelihood that East Montpelier will receive an allotment of funding from the recently enacted stimulus program. The initial estimate is \$250,000. Program guidelines are still being developed. The expectation is that the funds will be sent in two equal parts, the first \$125,000 arriving this summer, the second a year later. Funds need to be utilized by the end of 2024.
 - Use of the funds appears likely to be highly restricted, with the initial categories revolving around infrastructure (water, wastewater and broadband), COVID-19 revenue reduction areas, and general COVID-19 emergency costs.
- Update on County Road Ash Tree Management Project
 - The request for proposals was released today to the arborists/loggers in the central Vermont area for the grant-funded project along County Road. Bids are due Friday, April 2nd. The Resilient Roads Committee intends to present a recommendation to the Selectboard at the board's April 5th meeting. The desire is to get the project completed by the beginning of June if possible to avoid the Emerald Ash Borer flight season (June to September).
- CVRPC P&Z Roundtable Series:
 - On March 31st CVRPC will host a roundtable discussion on Act 164 ("An Act Relating to the Regulation of Cannabis") and the regulation of cannabis production & sale in Vermont.
- Meeting Schedule:
 - April 5, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting
 - April 8, 2021 7:00 pm Tentative EMFD budget/service update
 - April 19, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting
 - May 3, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There were 4 new zoning permit applications since the March 1st SB meeting. There have been 12 applications so far in 2021.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for April 6, 2021.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: April 5, 2021 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting