

## **Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard**

### **July 12, 2021 Selectboard Meeting**

**This meeting was held in-person at the town office building with a remote participation option using the Zoom conferencing platform.**

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

**In-Person Public Attendance:** Town Treasurer Don Welch; Geoff Beyer; Dave Sparrow

**Remote Public Attendance:** Road Foreman Guthrie Perry; Jeff Cueto and Paul Cate, Resilient Roads Committee; Toby Talbot and Ty Rolland, EMFD; Scott Hess

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

**Additions to Agenda: None**

### **Minutes:**

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the June 21, 2021 board meeting.

**Motion: To approve the June 21, 2021 minutes as presented.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

**Public Comment: None**

### **Discussion on Town Management in Light of COVID-19**

The board reviewed the current state of municipal operations under the June 22, 2021 Selectboard order. The Planning Commission has held one reasonably successful in-person/hybrid meeting. The DRB will shift to hybrid meetings in August. The office remains open for normal services with limited internal building access. There is no current push from employees or committees for greater freedom &/or flexibility. Board members will continue to monitor the situation as case numbers rise throughout the state and nation. The board will revisit the issue at its August 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

### **Discussion on Winter Parking Restrictions Along North Street and Sparrow Farm Road**

As agreed back in January, the board, Road Foreman Perry and Geoff Beyer, representing an informal Nordic skiing alliance, gathered to review this past winter's signage effort along North Street and Sparrow Farm Road to control parking by Nordic enthusiasts wanting to utilize the trail system. Although there remain concerns about the visual impact, placement and effectiveness of the signs, the effort received positive reviews.

The group discussed options for the upcoming season. Consensus quickly formed around a continuation of low-key, informal signage handled by Mr. Beyer and his team of volunteers

Road Foreman Perry expressed satisfaction with the way the informal signage effort played out last winter. Town plows occasionally dislodged signs and trails personnel replaced them. His main concern is that the town not be responsible for the signs, which everyone agreed to.

Prior to any formal approval of the signage scheme, board members would like to see a more detailed plan of action including a map showing the proposed location of signs. Mr. Beyer will craft the requested documents for presentation to the board at a future meeting.

### **Consideration of Ash Tree Management Plan**

Resilient Roads Committee Chair Jeff Cueto and Town Tree Warden & committee member Paul Cate presented an updated “final” version of the East Montpelier Ash Tree Management Plan, designed to proactively combat the highway safety implications of the anticipated devastation of ash trees by the emerald ash borer, for consideration by the board. The plan, developed to supplant the interim version crafted two years ago, reflects the experience gained over the past eighteen months as the committee, town road crew and outside contractors conducted three ash tree removal projects at selected sites around town. The key component of the plan is the 5-year budget and actions chart, which envisions the removal of 260 trees per year, insecticide treatment for a few special trees and targeted planting of replacement trees. The estimated per year cost is \$21,300, although grants may offset a portion of that figure. The expectation is that it will take 8 to 10 years to accomplish the management goals in the plan. Road Foreman Guthrie Perry, also a member of the committee, expressed his support for the plan.

The committee and the board agreed that the cost is worth bearing to prevent hazards associated with uncontrolled collapse of large numbers of trees on public roads – particularly since a large storm could block many roads and knock many trees onto power lines at once.

By consensus the board approved the plan and thanked the committee for its continued excellent work.

### **Town Treasurer Monthly Financial Report**

Treasurer Welch presented the monthly report for the period ending June 30, 2021. As this date is also the end of the fiscal year, Treasurer Welch provided an FY2021 budget status report that included the July 12, 2021 Selectboard expense warrant items to give a better sense of FY2021 financials with further updates anticipated in August. The town remains solidly on the surplus side of the ledger.

### **Review of Treasurer’s Financial Management Questionnaire**

24 VSA §872 requires the board to review the town treasurer’s financial management questionnaire (a form provided by the VT State Auditor), describing the town’s internal financial control mechanisms. The questions and responses are the same as last year.

**Motion: To authorize Chair Gardner to sign the treasurer’s financial management questionnaire.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

### **Discussion on Capital Improvement Committee's Annual Request for Information on Future Capital Projects**

The Capital Improvement Committee (CIC) annually requests town entities to fill out a questionnaire on potential projects to allow the committee to properly plan for the financial implications of the projects. Board members discussed various possibilities, such as upgrades to the town garage and town office. Treasurer Welch reminded the board that the CIC would also like to know about preliminary studies for conceptual projects, as those too have costs that can be included in the annual capital plan. The board determined that at this point there are no projects far enough along to warrant completing the CIC questionnaire.

### **Preview of 2021-2022 Property Tax Rates**

The state has released the education rates for the upcoming tax year:

Homestead rate: \$1.8215, down 0.0714 from FY2021 (3.8% decrease)

Non-homestead rate: \$1.7116, down 0.0236 from FY2021 (1.4% decrease)

Using a current estimate of \$3,100,000 for the grand list (0.81% increase), the projected tax rates for the 2021-22 tax year:

Homestead rate: \$2.4818, down 0.0563 from FY2021 (2.2% decrease)

Non-homestead rate: \$2.3719, down 0.0085 from FY2021 (0.4% decrease)

The tax rates are expected to be set at the August 2, 2021 board meeting.

### **Consideration of VTrans Grant Agreements**

#### **➤ FY2022 Better Roads Category D Grant for County Road Culvert**

- VTrans has awarded the town a \$60,000 Better Roads Category D grant for replacing the damaged and undersized County Road culvert located at the Mallory Brook crossing north of Barnes Road and south of Powder Horn Glen Road. The project is estimated at \$168,000, so this is a partial grant, supplemented by the additional funding listed below.
- **Motion: To accept the FY2022 VTrans Better Roads Category D grant for the culvert replacement project on County Road and authorize TA Johnson to complete the necessary paperwork.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

#### **➤ FY2022 VTrans Structures Grant for County Road Culvert**

- VTrans has awarded the town a \$24,772.62 town highway structures grant for replacing the "North of Barnes" County Road culvert.
- **Motion: To accept the FY2022 VTrans Town Highway Structures Program grant for the culvert replacement project on County Road and authorize TA Johnson to complete the necessary paperwork.** Made by Ms. Dillon; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

### **Discussion on Emergency Services Agreement** **[Potential Executive Session]**

Board members decided to hold this discussion in open session.

The East Montpelier Fire Department provides emergency services to the towns of Calais and East Montpelier under the terms of an agreement originally executed in 2013. That agreement renews annually unless one of the parties submits a timely notice of non-renewal. Calais submitted such a

notice on March 30, 2021, seeking to negotiate a new emergency services agreement prior to the expiration of the current agreement at midnight on September 1, 2021. The Calais Selectboard came to the EM Selectboard's June 7, 2021 meeting to provide an explanation of the concerns the Calais board has with the current agreement. The Calais board followed up with a draft agreement proposing changes to Paragraph 1 & 6 of the existing agreement. The EM board reviewed the draft at its June 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. Chair Gardner directed TA Johnson to develop a response draft in line with board member comments and concerns for consideration at this meeting.

Chair Gardner presented the new draft that included the following revisions:

- Paragraph 1 clarifies but keeps the intent of the proposed Calais changes to shift to a 3-month notice of non-renewal and limit the maximum term of the agreement to three years without review;
- Paragraph 6 keeps the Calais change to allow the boards to individually determine how to present EMFD budget requests to their respective communities, but adds a modifying clause to create an obligation on the part of the boards to support the operating budget figures agreed upon by the boards and EMFD; and,
- Appendix C is altered to update the EMFD vehicle list.

Board members reviewed and supported the new draft agreement. Discussion shifted to next steps in this process. The board settled on sending a signed proposed agreement to Calais with the thought that if Calais accepts and signs the agreement, the two boards can jointly present the proposal to EMFD in late July/early August. The intent is to complete the process and have a new agreement in place before the current agreement expires on September 1, 2021.

**Motion: To accept and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the proposed 2021 Contract with Respect to Fire Suppression, Ambulance, and Other Emergency Response Services.** Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

### **Liquor Licenses: Caledonia Spirits Catering & Special Event Applications**

The Maple Roots Festival is being held at Morse Farm on Saturday, July 24<sup>th</sup>; Caledonia Spirits is requesting a catering permit for the event. Caledonia Spirits, on behalf of itself and Good Measure Brewing, is also requesting a special event sales permit for the festival.

**Motion: To approve the Caledonia Spirits catering and special event requests and to authorize Town Clerk Laquerre to complete the approval process.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

### **Warrants: July 12, 2021 Regular Warrant for Approval**

Now that in-person meetings have resumed, the board was able to revert to the normal protocol for approving regular expense warrants. The board reviewed and discussed the warrant, with all board members individually signing the warrant.

### **Personnel Matters [Potential Executive Session]**

The board decided to hold this discussion in open session.

TA Johnson requested that the board allow his unused vacation time, which would otherwise be lost, to roll over to FY2022 due to the pandemic-related challenges that limited vacation opportunities over the past year.

**Motion: To approve the rollover to FY2022 of all accrued vacation time for TA Johnson in light of the loss of planned vacations due to the exigencies of the Covid-19 pandemic.** Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

### **Other Business**

Board members discussed potential uses for and the protocols governing usage of the anticipated funds the town will receive under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The town has formally requested the first installment of ARPA municipal funding. Details regarding the timing of funds receipt, the possibility of receiving the funds dedicated to counties and the specific rules for funding usage are all still in flux. The board will continue to closely follow the ARPA process to ensure the town takes effective advantage of this rare opportunity.

### **Town Administrator Report**

- Update on County Road Project:
  - All required wetlands and stream alteration permits for the two culvert replacement projects are finally in “draft permit” status. The latest out-of-notice-period date is August 9<sup>th</sup>, which now becomes the target date for commencement of the culvert projects.
- Meeting Schedule:
  - August 2, 2021                      6:30 pm              Selectboard regular meeting
  - August 12, 2021                   7:00 pm              Tentative – EMFD update at ESF
  - August 23, 2021                   6:30 pm              Selectboard “special” regular meeting

### **Zoning Administrator Report**

- There were 4 new zoning permit applications since the June 21<sup>st</sup> SB meeting. There have been 45 applications so far in 2021.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for July 20, 2021. This meeting is for the continuation of the hearing for Application 21-032, the proposed building & business expansion at 1528 US Rte. 2 (Demers Auto & Green Mountain Day Spa).

**Motion: To adjourn.** Made by Ms. Dillon; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.  
Meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

**Approved:    August 2, 2021 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting**