Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

DRAFT

October 18, 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; Town Auditor Deb Fillion; Town Lister Ross Hazel

Remote Public Attendance: Road Foreman Guthrie Perry; David Delcore, Times Argus; Tina Martineau, Hickok & Boardman

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m.

Additions to Agenda:

- **Liquor License: Special Event Permit**

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the October 4, 2021 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the October 4, 2021 minutes as amended. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

<u>Town Treasurer Report</u>

- **Budget Status Report**
  - Treasurer Welch presented a report reflecting the first three months of FY2022. The town is on budget with no areas of concern. Tax Year 2021-2022 payments, with the first installment due November 15th, are coming in steadily.
- **Presentation of Draft FY2021 External Audit**
  - The town ended FY2021 with an approximate surplus/fund balance increase of $158,000. The audit, conducted by Sullivan, Powers, includes one finding of "material weakness" in financial management internal controls, reflecting the town's difficulty in utilizing best practices in the separation of duties and responsibilities due to the minimal number of available employees. Treasurer Welch has submitted the required response, acknowledging the challenges inherent in a small town office but rejecting the conclusion that our financial management practices put town assets at risk.
  - The board and Auditor Fillion engaged in a discussion on the use of the town's elected auditors to provide certain services for warrant development and bank statement reconciliation review. This discussion continued off-and-on throughout the meeting, with the board deciding to take up the issue again at a future meeting.

Delinquent Tax Collector Report

TA Johnson provided an update on the current property tax delinquencies, which stand at a collective total of $89,492, compared to $170,583 at this time last year. Over 40 percent of the total is owed by two decedent estates, one of which now has an approved administrator who expects to pay off the delinquency in short order. The other estate remains in limbo. No tax sales are proposed at this time.

Discussion on 2022 Employee Health Insurance Options
Teri Martineau, Hickok & Boardman (town's health care representative through VLCT)

Ms. Martineau's services are provided as part of the Health Insurance Advisory Services (HIAS) agreement between the town, the Vermont League of Cities & Towns and Hickok & Boardman HR Intelligence.

Ms. Marineau provided a breakdown of the projected 2022 cost for town's current health plan offerings to employees. Town employees are allowed to choose a plan of his/her choice from a town-approved list of VT Small Group plans, a change from prior years when small employers were part of the consolidated small group & individual offerings. This shift was an important component of the unexpectedly favorable rate changes for 2022 (BC/BS down 6.2% and MVP up 1.5%). For the past two years the town has agreed to pay up to the value of 90% of the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Platinum Plan premium at the level (single, two-person, family, etc.) desired by the employee. All employees have been taking the MVP Platinum Plan, which has cost less than the 90% BCBS value for the last two years, so no employees currently have premium deductions. This year the gap is smaller, so the board would need to up the figure to 92% in order to ensure employees could continue using the MVP plan without premium costs, although employees would remain fully responsible for the deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums. Board members agreed to pay up to the value of 92% of the BC/BS Platinum Plan.

Seven employees qualify for the town's health benefit with 5 accepting the health plan option (2 two-person; 3 family). One employee is currently under contract with a significant incentive to not use the benefit. One has for years accepted the town's stipend in lieu of option. The last two could choose to take the town's insurance offering during the open enrollment period and, in theory, any of the first 5 could choose not to take the insurance. If the employees stay with current utilization choices, the plan costs would rise from $119,064 to $120,900 a 1.54% increase. The current stipend is 25% of the town's share of the single person BC/BS Platinum Plan premium cost. For 2022 that amount would be $2,434, down from 2021's $2,538. Board members debated the possibility of increasing the stipend level, settling on a doubling to 50% of the single person BC/BS Platinum Plan premium cost, resulting in a stipend of $4,869.

Motion: To set the 2022 employee health benefit at a maximum of 92% of the premium cost of the BCBS Platinum Plan and to allow employees to choose between the BCBS and MVP Platinum Plans. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Motion: To set the annual stipend-in-lieu-of-insurance option at $4,869. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed 4-1 (Ms. Dillon).

Discussion on Proposed Stipend Allocation for Elected & Appointed Officers

The town pays small annual stipends to Selectboard and Planning Commission members along with the constable, health officer and animal control officers. The allotment for each position is set by the budget and will be paid out as part of the November 4th payroll. This year there is just one cost split to determine, for the Planning Commission seat set to be vacated by Siu Tip Lam on October 21, 2021. The board decided to split that seat's stipend two-thirds ($333) to Ms. Lam with one-third ($167) held back for potential, at the board's discretion, distribution to the person who fills the vacancy.

Motion: To approve the slate of stipend payments including a $333 payment to Ms. Lam. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on CV Solid Waste Management District's FY2023 Preliminary Budget

The current budget proposal calls for a continuation of the $1/capita town assessment. The hearing is on Monday, October 25th at 4:00 p.m. Board members had no concerns with the budget. Mr. Jewett noted that CVSWMD is still searching for an appropriate location for the proposed central Vermont household hazardous waste facility.

Status Update on Emergency Services Agreement [Potential Executive Session]

In accordance with the decision made at the October 4, 2021 meeting between the Calais and EM Selectboards, on October 13, 2021 the boards sent a joint letter to the East Montpelier Fire Department urging the EMFD board to approve the proposed emergency services agreement originally presented to EMFD on August 12, 2021. Since the October 4th meeting both Chair Gardner and Vice-chair Etnier have held phone conversations with EMFD Chief Ty Rolland to discuss the situation, but no official response from EMFD had been received by the time of this meeting.

Discussion on Town Management in Light of COVID-19

- **Consideration of Vaccination Mandate for Town Employees**
  - Board members reviewed Ms. Dillon's draft vaccination mandate policy. Town employees would be required to attest to the fact they are fully vaccinated or submit to protocol involving mask use and weekly testing. Mr. Etnier provided an updated draft reflecting a few language tweaks. Using Mr. Etnier's draft as the baseline, the board added a clause requiring unvaccinated employees to either use vacation time or get tested outside of work hours. The policy will take effect on November 1, 2021.
  - **Motion: To adopt the proposed Town of East Montpelier SARS-CoV-2 ("COVID-19") Vaccination and Mitigation Policy for Employees.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Selectboard Meeting Management

- **Discussion on Potential Utilization of ORCA Media for Meetings**
  - Now that the board has some experience at recorded meetings, Mr. Etnier would like members to reconsider the possibility of utilizing ORCA Media to record meetings and make such recordings freely available to the public. An added benefit would be a potential improvement in the town's meeting room presentation for remote users. Board members decided to invite ORCA's Rob Chapman to an upcoming meeting to discuss options for utilizing ORCA's services.

- **Development of Upcoming Meeting Schedule**
  - Board members reviewed the proposed December – February board meeting schedule presented by TA Johnson. The schedule reflects the normal December meetings, two regular SB meetings plus the EMFD budget presentation. There is also the possibility of a joint meeting with Calais to discuss the EMFD budget on the Calais December 13th meeting date. One thing not included on the December schedule is a town appreciation party for volunteers. Given the current state of the pandemic, the board decided to cancel the party for a second straight year.
  - January and February line up almost perfectly for shifting to a 2nd & 4th Monday schedule. The 4th Monday in January is the town meeting warning deadline. The 4th Monday in February is the anticipated town forum date (night before town meeting). Both 3rd Mondays are holidays.
  - Board members by consensus agreed to the proposed revisions to the regular schedule.

Warrants:

- **October 18, 2021 Regular Expense Warrant**
  - Board members reviewed and signed the warrant.

Personnel Matters [Potential Executive Session]

- **Discussion on Existing Town Office Positions & Future Needs**
- **Discussion on Town Treasurer Transition**

The board held a general conversation on the duties for the town office employees. With both the treasurer and municipal assistant expected to retire next summer, the board focused on how to effectively allocate the various responsibilities between 4-5 positions. The board decided to do more research on how other towns manage operations and revisit this topic at the November 1st meeting.

Liquor License: Special Event Permit

Vermont Beer Shapers, LTD (dba Vermont Beer Makers) is requesting permission to conduct a samples tasting event Thursday, October 28, 2021, 3-6 p.m. at Plainfield Hardware. If the board approves the event, the application is sent along to the VT Department of Liquor Control for final approval and permit issuance.

Motion: To approve the special event permit and authorize Town Clerk Rosie Laquerre to attest to the approval. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Other Business

Town Administrator Report

- National Opioids Settlement:
  - The town, which signed onto the class action case years ago, has received notice of the proposed settlement. The town will need to formally opt in in order to participate in the settlement. The town is unlikely to see any monetary award, but by joining the settlement the town will bolster the state's potential award in this case. By consensus board members authorized TA Johnson to complete the opt-in process.
- Notice of Winooski Hydro Licensure Filing to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission:
  - This is a general notice that an application has been filed for relicensure of the dam located just off US Rte. 2 down below U-32. Both the Selectboard and Planning

Commission have party status for this process. There will be subsequent direct notice of specific licensure elements as the process proceeds.

- Rob Chickering Resignation as Lister and Justice of the Peace:
  - After a decade as a lister and nearly two decades as a JP, Rob Chickering has decided that now is the time to step away. The board will advertise the lister vacancy immediately and consider candidates at its November 15th meeting. The JP replacement will be selected by Governor Scott, likely based on a recommendation by the East Montpelier Democratic Caucus.
- Request for Kelton Road Stop or Yield Sign at Snow Hill Intersection:
  - A town resident is requesting a sign at the north end of Kelton Road. The town doesn't generally sign T intersections absent other factors (for example, Sanders Circle at the western intersection with Horn of the Moon has a stop sign due to the odd sight lines and road angles). The board decided to take this issue up at its November 1st meeting, using the topic as an opportunity to review the town's traffic ordinance.
- Walbridge Road Issues:
  - Concerns have continued with actions at 180 Walbridge Road. A 16-site campground, mostly tent sites with some for RVs, is under development. A parking lot for the campground was started on North Street. Active development and use has been halted at the request of permitting authorities from both the town and state. At this time the owner is reviewing options and has agreed to seek the necessary permits if he decides to move forward with the campground. The owner's farm animals continue to wander onto neighboring properties.
- Meeting Schedule:
  - November 1, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting
  - November 15, 2021 6:30 pm Selectboard regular meeting

Zoning Administrator Report

- There have been 2 new applications since the October 4th SB meeting. A total of 60 applications have been received so far in 2021.
- The next DRB meeting is scheduled for December 7, 2021. The biennial permit compliance review of the Casella transfer station is on the docket.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Jewett; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator