

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

### **December 9, 2021 Selectboard Special Meeting**

**This in-person meeting was hosted by EMFD at the Emergency Services Facility. The Calais Selectboard also participated.**

**The East Montpelier Selectboard provided a Zoom remote participation option.**

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

**Calais SB Attendance:** Chair Denise Wheeler and Rick Kehne; Recording Secretary Katie Lane-Karnas (remote); ORCA was recording the meeting on behalf of Calais

**EMFD Attendance:** Chief Ty Rolland, Sandi Conti, Larry Brown, Paul Guare and Albert Petrella; Clerk Judith Woodbeck

**Public Attendance:** EM Auditor Ed Deegan (remote)

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

**Additions to Agenda: None**

**Public Comment: None**

### **East Montpelier Fire Department Service & Budget Update**

EMFD Chief Rolland welcomed the board members.

Chief Rolland provided a current, through October 31, 2021, status report on the FY2022 budget. There were no major areas of concern, with both the ambulance and fire budgets on target one third of the way through the fiscal year.

Insurance revenues for ambulance services continue the FY2021 result of exceeding expectations. This revenue stream remains notoriously unpredictable month-to-month but the overall rising trendline is good news for the EMFD capital reserve fund. Another positive note for the capital reserve fund is that the EMFD contingency fund, which is allocated up to 25% of the net ambulance service revenue to cover unforeseen expenditures, is currently slightly above the \$40,000 agreed-upon maximum level for that fund. This results in all net ambulance revenue flowing to the capital reserve fund.

EMFD continues to provide COVID-19 vaccination support, in the form of running clinics and other services, to the state under an open-ended contract that covers all expenses. This is an off-budget program, so the FY2023 expectations, if any, for this program will not be reflected in the FY2023 operating budget requests. The discussion on the program did, however, lead to a brief

dialogue on the EMFD protocols on vaccination for EMFD personnel. Most, but not all, EMFD personnel are fully vaccinated. EMFD does not have any vaccination or testing expectation for its employees, but all employees are fully outfitted with high-level PPE when on calls. This disclosure was met with significant disappointment from the town board members. Chief Rolland agreed to bring this topic up at the next EMFD board meeting and get back to the town boards with a response.

Chief Rolland provided a brief update on call volume for Calendar Year 2021. The overall total of 675 calls to date is running slightly above the norm for recent years.

Chief Rolland fielded a question on the FY2021 EMFD financial audit regarding a listed concern that EMFD was allowing an outside entity to utilize its federal EIN. Chief Rolland stated that the issue involved EMFD serving as the host for the local Boy Scout troop. Since the troop is no longer in existence, the internal control concern is effectively resolved.

### **Presentation of the Proposed FY2023 Ambulance & Emergency Services Budget and Updated Capital Plan by the East Montpelier Fire Department**

Chief Rolland presented the FY2023 operating budget requests. The proposed total FY2023 EMFD budget for fire and ambulance services is \$667,012, an increase of \$51,826 (8.42%) over the FY2022 budget of \$615,186. After skipping FY2022, the ambulance budget once again includes a \$15,000 revenue item reflecting a transfer from ambulance service revenue to the operating budget, which drives down the increases requested from Calais and EM. Ambulance service revenue also includes the contracts with Plainfield (\$55,232, up 3%) and Marshfield (\$45,020, also up 3%). The fire service budget revenue remains just the appropriations from the two towns. The expected contributions for FY2023, representing the contracted one-third Calais, two-thirds East Montpelier split:

	<u>Fire Service</u>	<u>Ambulance Service</u>	<u>Total</u>
East Montpelier	\$125,673	\$242,167	\$367,840
Calais	\$ 62,837	\$121,083	\$183,920

This represents a 6.55% increase over FY2022 town contributions. The fire service request rose \$5,396 (2.95%), reflecting increases in dispatch, radio replacement and vehicle repair lines. The ambulance service request from EM & Calais is up 8.52%, somewhat lower than anticipated. As part of the joint town & EMFD effort to reduce dependence on volunteers for ambulance staffing, the towns agreed two years ago to a 3-year plan to increase the ambulance staffing line by a total of \$150,000 in three steps of 25% in FY2021, 25% in FY2022 and the final 50% in FY2023. EMFD is requesting that the final jump be split over two years, resulting in a proposed staffing increase of \$37,500 for FY2023. Coupled with increased in bookkeeping, dispatch, insurance, vehicle repairs, payroll costs and the state tax on ambulance revenue, total ambulance expenses are up \$46,430.

Chief Rolland moved on to the updated 5-year capital plan that anticipates a \$425,000 fire engine replacement in 2023, with the plan reflecting the base cost spread over 10 years. As shown in the plan, the cost of the new fire engine would be covered entirely by the EMFD capital reserve fund, which is fueled by ambulance service revenue. This appears to be an untenable stretch for

the reserve fund and EMFD would prefer to take out a smaller, 5-year loan on the engine. To ease the strain on the reserve fund EMFD is requesting that the towns directly contribute \$200,000 towards the purchase. Based on the current cost allocation agreement, Calais would be responsible for \$66,667 and EM responsible for \$133,333. EMFD would like to get the truck ordered sometime in 2022 as the expected delivery schedule is approximately a year after the order. A capital request of this type, regardless of how each town chooses to fund the request, will likely require town-wide votes to authorize the expenditure for the benefit of EMFD, which is an independent business entity separate from the towns.

The boards will individually, and perhaps jointly, discuss the budget and capital requests. Decisions on these issues should be made by January 2022.

Mr. Etnier raised an issue that came up during the protracted but ultimately successful effort to alter the service agreement between the towns and EMFD. Calais now has the right to set the EMFD budget requests as a separate article on the town meeting warning. During the agreement negotiations it was noted that if the Calais voters declined to pass the EMFD budget article, there was no clear plan of action for remedying the situation. In response to Mr. Etnier's query, the Calais board members stated that the board had not yet made any decisions regarding how to present the EMFD budget requests. Regardless of presentation mode, however, the Calais board expects no problems with voter approval given the respect the town has for the services provided by EMFD.

Chief Rolland closed out the joint meeting.

**Motion: To adjourn.** Made by Ms. Dillon; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

**Approved: December 20, 2021 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting**