

Minutes of the East Montpelier Selectboard

December 20, 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, Judith Dillon (remote), Amy Willis (remote), Jon Jewett and Carl Etnier (remote); Town Administrator Bruce Johnson (remote)

In-Person Public Attendance: None

Remote Public Attendance: Amy Obenauf, RCT; Jamie Smith, GMT; Sandy Rousse, CVHHH; Janna Clar, MSAC; Carolyn Brennan, KHL; Gene Troia & Susan Crampton, TVSC; Ty Rolland & Paul Guare, EMFD

After a brief delay due to technological issues at the town office, Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m.

Additions to Agenda: None

Minutes:

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the December 6, 2021 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the December 6, 2021 minutes as amended. Made by Ms. Dillon; second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Chair Gardner presented the draft minutes of the December 9, 2021 board meeting.

Motion: To approve the December 9, 2021 minutes as presented. Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Budget Discussion: Rural Community Transportation (RCT) and Green Mountain Transit (GMT)

Amy Obenauf, RCT Human Resources & Administrative Coordinator
Jamie Smith, GMT Director of Marketing and Planning

RCT continues to receive the bulk of the US2 Commuter responsibilities and so the majority of the normal \$8,333 request (\$6,834) is going to RCT, with \$1,499 to GMT. The only change from last year is the rounding of the numbers (last year the figures went out to cents). RCT is also requesting the same \$1,000 it received in FY2022 for the Route 14/15 Commuter.

Ridership remains lower than pre-pandemic levels, but there are signs that usage figures are increasing. Both commuter routes remain fare-free, as are all bus routes in Vermont through June 2022. Potentially at that time GMT will start charging again (RCT bus routes are always fare-free), but there is a possibility that rural routes will stay free.

The total request from GMT and RCT is level-funded at \$9,333.

By consensus board members agreed to place an article for \$1,499 for the GMT share of the town's support for the US2 Commuter Bus on the draft 2022 Town Meeting Warning.

By consensus board members agreed to place an article for \$7,834, split between \$6,834 for the RCT share of the town's support for the US2 Commuter Bus and \$1,000 for support of the RCT Routes 14/15 Commuter Bus on the draft 2022 Town Meeting Warning.

Budget Discussion: Central VT Home Health & Hospice
Sandy Rousse, CVHHH President & CEO

Ms. Rousse provided a presentation on how CVHHH has managed to continue to provide its vital services in spite of the enduring pandemic. Tele-health services, despite limited or no Medicare reimbursement, have grown during the pandemic, enabling CVHHH personnel to safely reach out to those in need. CVHHH is partnering with EMFD and other local EMS units to administer COVID-19 tests and vaccines at client homes. Town appropriations provide the financial flexibility to allow the CVHHH staff to add programming and fully serve the residents of our community regardless of ability to pay.

The CVHHH request is for \$6,500, a \$500 increase over last year.

By consensus board members agreed to place an article for \$6,500 for support of Central VT Home Health & Hospice on the draft 2022 Town Meeting Warning.

Budget Discussion: Montpelier Senior Activity Center
Janna Clar, Communications & Development Coordinator, Montpelier Community Services Department

Ms. Clar noted that she has stepped aside from the MSAC director position and taken a new role working with MSAC as well as the Montpelier recreation and parks divisions. Sarah Lipton is the new director but was unable to attend the meeting. Ms. Clar reported that MSAC continues to provide its regular services, to the extent possible, utilizing pandemic-acceptable methodologies. There's a focus on improving access for the elderly to both online services and the devices necessary to utilize the services. MSAC is also hoping to expand its home-based offerings (picture help for outdoor chores) beyond the Montpelier borders.

The MSAC request is level-funded at \$9,000.

By consensus board members agreed to place an article for \$9,000 for support of the Montpelier Senior Activity Center on the draft 2022 Town Meeting Warning.

Budget Discussion: Kellogg-Hubbard Library**Carolyn Brennan, KHL Co-Director, Library Director**

Ms. Brennan provided a general update on the library, with the focus on how services have continued to evolve as the pandemic endures. Online service use continues to grow and KHL has expanded its limited-contact services, including personal delivery of requested items. KHL has implemented, as of July 1, 2021, a long desired, no-late-fee policy for overdue books. You're not off the hook completely, however – a bill for the cost of the missing book will come your way 30 days after the due date.

The library request is for \$46,764, a \$4,742 increase over last year. The request, for EM and the other five outlying towns in the KHL district, is based on \$18/capita, well below the state average of \$35/capita for library funding.

By consensus board members agreed to place an article for \$46,764 for support of Kellogg-Hubbard Library on the draft 2022 Town Meeting Warning.

Budget Discussion: Twin Valley Seniors, Inc.**Gene Troia, TVSC Executive Director****Susan Crampton, Member of the TVSC Board of Directors**

Mr. Troia, a former EM Selectboard member, introduced himself as the brand new Twin Valley Senior Center executive director, trying to fill the shoes of recently retired TVSC icon Rita Copeland. He described the Meals on Wheels service, providing two meals (one hot, one frozen) three times a week, for a total of some 8,900 meals a year. The cost gap between direct funding for meals and actual cost is around \$7/meal, resulting in a significant shortfall that drives the appropriation requests to the six towns in the TVSC service area. Ms. Crampton followed up with a plea for help finding a TVSC board member from East Montpelier, a significant board weakness given that EM is both TVSC's host and largest member town.

The Twin Valley Senior Center request is level-funded at \$5,000.

By consensus board members agreed to place an article for \$5,000 for support of Twin Valley Seniors, Inc. on the draft 2022 Town Meeting Warning.

Discussion on EMFD FY2023 Budget and Capital Requests

EMFD is requesting the following operating budget numbers:

Service	Calais		East Montpelier		Total	
	FY2023 Request	% Increase over FY22	FY2023 Request	% Increase over FY22	FY2023 Request	% Increase over FY22
Fire	\$ 62,837	2.95%	\$125,673	2.95%	\$188,510	2.95%
Ambulance	\$121,083	8.52%	\$242,167	8.52%	\$363,250	8.52%
Town Total	\$183,920	6.55%	\$367,840	6.55%	\$551,760	6.55%

The ambulance service budget includes other revenue items: contracted amounts from Plainfield (\$55,232, up 3% from FY2022) and Marshfield (\$45,020, also up 3%) plus off-the-top EMFD ambulance service revenue (\$15,000, up from zero in FY2022).

Total FY2023 Ambulance Service Budget: \$478,502 (up 10.75% from FY2022)
Total FY2023 All Services Budget: \$667,012 (up 8.42% from FY2022)

Board members decided to table discussion on the EMFD proposed budgets until the board receives a response from EMFD regarding a promised, at the December 9th joint meeting, discussion by the EMFD board on the topic of COVID-19 expectations on EMFD personnel. Currently EMFD does not have a vaccination or testing protocol for its employees

EMFD is also requesting that Calais and EM contribute \$200,000 (split 1/3 – 2/3) to the cost of a new fire engine in 2023. A draft article for the EM share to be pulled from the town's capital reserve fund is included in the current draft 2022 town meeting warning. The Calais Selectboard discussed both items at its December 13th meeting. No decisions were made with further discussion likely at its December 27th meeting. Calais is not interested in a joint board meeting at this time. EM board members directed TA Johnson to reach out to Calais Chair Denise Wheeler to arrange a joint meeting or at least shared disclosure of how the towns are moving forward on the issue of how to handle the proposed purchase of a new fire engine.

The board will revisit both issues at the January 10th meeting.

Discussion on FY2023 Budget Development

The SB reviewed the draft budget which currently anticipates a 3.88% increase overall (2.20 cent increase in the municipal tax rate). Revenues up 3.66% mostly due to an increase in the state highway aid payment. Expenses up 5.7%, driven by a \$90,000 increase in direct and indirect payroll lines, \$22,600 for EMFD and \$13,056 for the capital reserve fund plus a 6.6% increase in the funding request articles. There remain some unknowns, such as the Washington County dues, the Cemetery Committee and EM Signpost requests, and the highway budget lines.

Work on the budget will continue at all the meetings through January 2022, with a focus on the highway budget at the January 10, 2022 meeting.

Discussion on 2022 Town Meeting Warning

There is draft legislation that will be taken up by the legislature early in January that would provide three additional options for holding town meeting-like events:

- Holding remote informational meetings (i.e., town forum);
- Holding all-Australian Ballot town meeting elections; and,
- Moving town meeting to a “safer” date later in the year.

Board members reviewed the draft warning that, in keeping with the proposed legislation, now includes alternative scenarios: (1) for town meeting at EMES and town forum, the evening before, also at EMES; and, (2) for a repeat of last year with an all-Australian Ballot election at EMES on Town Meeting Day and a remote town forum the evening before.

This draft includes proposed figures for all money articles except the EM Signpost, the Conservation Fund and the final general fund budget figure. No appropriation for the Conservation Fund appears necessary given the healthy fund balance and a dearth of expected projects, so that article will be dropped off the next iteration of the draft warning. The slot for an elected second constable, which has been vacant for many years, will also, like last year, be dropped.

This draft still includes a number of potential articles based on previous discussions of the board. These draft articles do not reflect any current determination by the board, but rather show the likely formatting should the board decide to move forward with any of the topics. These articles will be a main focus of the board during the upcoming January meetings.

Work on the warning will continue at January 10th board meeting.

Discussion on Town Management in Light of Covid-19

At its December 6, 2021 meeting when the SB approved the town-wide mask mandate, the board stated that it would review the town mask mandate at every regular meeting. Board members discussed observed results to date at various EM Village businesses. There have been some requests for situational clarifications, such as the effect on office workers when no public is present. At this point board members are comfortable with the operational effectiveness of the mandate. At the January 10, 2022 meeting the board will both review how the mandate is working and decide, in accordance with the requirements of Act 1, the law enabling the adoption of mask mandates, whether to extend the mandate for an additional 30 days.

Lister Errors & Omissions:

➤ Changes in Grand List Due to Current Use Updates

- There appears to be a push from the Property Valuation Review Division of the VT Department of Taxes to ensure proper updating of the archival grand list document kept by town clerks. The “Errors and Omissions Certificate” is not something the town has used previously, but the listers are requesting that the town do so for grand list changes in the future. The listers fill out the form and sign it. The form is then presented to the SB for approval before being given to the town clerk for certification and inclusion in the archival grand list book. The oddity here is that the grand list changes under consideration at this meeting are for Current Use updates, something the Selectboard has never handled even under the previous process utilizing SB motions for approval of grand list changes. This is not a situation where the SB can effectively decline the proposed changes as the SB has no role in Current Use updates. PVR wants to see these certificates used even for state-forced grand list changes. The net effect to the town is essentially zero – the grand list does change, but the state reimburses the town for any lost tax revenue.
- Board members by consensus allowed Chair Gardner and Mr. Jewett, the two members attending the meeting in person, to sign the certificate.

Warrants**➤ December 20, 2021 Regular Warrant for Approval**

- Board members reviewed the warrant. With only two members attending the meeting in person, the board decided to approve the warrant by motion and have Chair Gardner sign the warrant as certification of board approval.
- **Motion: To approve the December 20, 2021 expense warrant and authorize Chair Gardner to sign the warrant on behalf of the board.** Made by Mr. Etnier; second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Other Business**Town Administrator Report**

- VTrans Grant Updates:
 - The Better Roads Category D (up to \$60,000) grant application to replace the Minister Brook/Cherry Tree Hill Road culvert has been submitted.
 - The anticipated time extension amendments for the County Road paving grant and the Morse Farm culvert replacement grant have not yet been received. The VTrans District 7-approved extension requests have now been filed, which makes the actual amendment paperwork more of a formality.
- Meeting Schedule:
 - January 10, 2022 6:30 pm Selectboard “special” regular meeting
 - January 24, 2022 6:30 pm Selectboard “special” regular meeting
 - February 14, 2022 6:30 pm Selectboard “special” regular meeting
 - February 28, 2022 6:30 pm Selectboard “special” regular meeting
 - 7:30 pm 2022 Town Forum (tentative)

Zoning Administrator Report

- There have been no new zoning permit applications since the December 6th SB meeting. A total of 63 applications have been received so far in 2021.
- There is no scheduled or anticipated DRB meeting at this point.
- The Planning Commission is moving forward with amendments to the zoning regulations and the town plan. A hearing will be held in early 2022 for the zoning amendments, with the town plan hearing process expected to follow shortly thereafter. PC Chair Zach Sullivan is scheduled to provide an update to the board at the SB’s January 24th meeting.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Ms. Willis; second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Bruce Johnson, Town Administrator

Approved: January 10, 2022 East Montpelier Selectboard meeting