

Minutes for the East Montpelier Selectboard

December 5, 2022 Selectboard Meeting

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

SB Attendance: Chair Seth Gardner, Carl Etnier, Jon Jewett, Judith Dillon, Amy Willis, Town Administrator Gina Jenkins

Remote SB Attendance:

In-Person Public Attendance: Wayne Fisher, ORCA Media; Deirdre Connelly, Michael Duane, Don Welch, Collin O'Neil, Kim Kendall

Remote Public Attendance: Maia Stone, Rosie Laquerre, Ed Deegan, Lindy Johnson

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

Additions to Agenda:

TA Jenkins requested adding discussions of the EMFD meeting with Calais and the EMFD Remaining Bond Balance to the agenda. Planning Commission Chair Zach Sullivan requested via email a discussion of Planning Commission candidate Maia Stone and a general Planning Commission update.

Minutes:

The board reviewed the draft minutes of the November 28, 2022 board meeting and made a few edits for clarity.

Motion: To approve the November 28, 2022 with tonight's amendments. Made by Mr. Jewett, second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None.

Presentation of the FY2023 Capital Improvement Committee Plan

Don Welch and Ed Deegan from the Capital Improvement Committee presented the FY2023 Capital Improvement Committee Plan. Mr. Welch explained that there were few changes, and the budget is essentially level funded. The committee consulted with RF Perry on updating the paving costs and took feedback from TA Jenkins and Town Treasurer Pallas on the overall plan. Mr. Welch noted that the committee hadn't finalized plans for the trucks. The plan currently lists one six-wheeler and three ten-wheeler trucks but Mr. Welch noted that the town is keeping a fourth ten-wheeler as a backup this year. He suggested that this equipment would be something to revisit next year.

Mr. Etnier asked why the inflation factor is set to 0.0% and Mr. Welch explained that inflation and interest generally offset each other.

Mr. Deegan explained that it was not a unanimous decision to level fund the budget this year. He noted that the town went through a lot of transition in the last year and that the town's operating budget will be tight in the coming year, which factored into the decision to level fund this year. He added that the capital

budget has worked well for the town so far and offers a lot of flexibility. Mr. Deegan noted that the long-term goal is to have sustainable growth built into the budget and that they may look at 2% growth next year. He added that the town has been discussing a new town garage and new municipal building for some time, but those items are not currently being budgeted for in the capital plan. He suggested the Selectboard keep those points in mind moving forward.

Chair Gardner thanked Mr. Deegan for calling attention to those points. He agreed that it seemed best to level fund this year considering the town operating budget and the unusually high amount of delinquent taxes.

Discuss Request from Wrightsville Beach to Increase Cap of the Annual Per Capita Assessment

Collin O'Neil, General Manager for Wrightsville Beach, presented a request to increase the cap of the per capita assessment for Wrightsville Beach from \$1.50 to \$4. If approved, Mr. O'Neil said, the per capita assessment would rise to \$2.50 in 2023 and would not increase more than 3% in subsequent years. Mr. O'Neil explained that the increase would allow the organization some flexibility in their budgeting in the next few years as they apply for grants to support replacing and improving buildings, working with adjacent towns to connect trail systems, and purchasing and maintaining rental equipment. The increase would also help support the park's expanded season and help to maintain an affordable price of admission. He added that increasing the cap to \$4 would allow the organization to raise the per capita assessment in future years without having to come to towns to advocate for increases every year. Mr. O'Neil explained that when Wrightsville Beach was created in 1985 the cap was set at \$.50. It was later increased to \$1.50 and has been at that level for more than a decade.

Mr. Etnier voiced support for increasing the per capita assessment to \$2.50 in 2023 but questioned the necessity of increasing the cap to \$4. He pointed out that other organizations such as the Kellogg-Hubbard Library come to town Selectboards every year to advocate for their budget requests, so it would not be unusual to ask Wrightsville Beach to come back to ask for future increases. Chair Gardner added that approving the \$4 cap would set a precedent for this kind of ask. Mr. O'Neil pointed out that the precedent was set in past years when the cap was first set at \$.50 and later increased to \$1.50.

Mr. Jewett voiced support for the \$4 cap increase and noted that it gave Wrightsville Beach the flexibility to assess their rates in the coming years. Ms. Willis said she felt torn between Mr. Etnier and Mr. Jewett's arguments.

Ms. Dillon asked what the rate of increase had been after the cap was last raised from \$.50 to \$1.50. Mr. O'Neil said he wasn't sure exactly, but he estimated the actual per capita assessment rose from \$.50 to \$1.50 over approximately five years, and the increase was driven largely by the minimum wage increase. Ms. Dillon stated support for the \$4 cap, understanding that it is consistent with how the Wrightsville Beach was funded in the past and that there was nothing to suggest the higher cap would be abused in future years.

Motion: To increase the per capita assessment cap for Wrightsville Beach Recreation District from \$1.50 to \$4, with the understanding that it will be \$2.50 in 2023 and the understanding that it will not increase more than 3% in following years. Made by Ms. Dillon, second Ms. Willis. Passed 4-1 (Mr. Etnier).

Presentation of Funding Request Study Committee Report

Lindy Johnson, Chair of the Funding Committee, presented the report. Mr. Etnier noted that appropriations are slightly down overall. Ms. Johnson explained that two organizations didn't request money this year and many of the other requests were level funded.

The board thanked Ms. Johnson and the committee for their work.

Discussion on 2023 Town Meeting: Consideration of Approval for WCUUSD School Board to Authorize Ballot Mailing to All Active Non-Challenged Voters

The board discussed the letter from WCUUSD requesting approval to mail annual meeting ballots to voters. Mr. Etnier asked if this request was approved by all five towns last year; Ms. Johnson reported that yes, it was. Mr. Etnier asked for clarification on the phrase "active non-challenged voters". Town Clerk Laquerre ("TC") explained that any voter who is registered is considered an "active voter". The term "challenged voter" refers to an active voter who may have moved out of town but not yet given written permission to remove their name from the rolls. East Montpelier currently has approximately 350 challenged voters and the town will save time and postage by not mailing ballots to these challenged voters.

Mr. Duane asked why the town sends out the school ballots on behalf of the school. TC Laquerre explained that though the school district is its own municipality, the legislature did not grant them their own election authority and so it is still up to individual towns to send out ballots on the school's behalf.

Mr. Jewett asked if sending out the ballots for the school would cost the town additional money. TC Laquerre explained that the school will reimburse the town for mailing costs. Ms. Johnson pointed out that the town could combine the mailing with regular election ballots to reduce the number of items in the mail for voters.

Motion: To approve mailing the WCUUSD annual meeting ballots to all active non-challenged voters on the checklist, consistent with the November 16, 2022 request from the WCUUSD board.
Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on 2023 Town Meeting: Consideration of Ballot Mailing to All Active Non-Challenged Voters

The board discussed whether to mail regular election ballots. Chair Gardner explained that before 2021, townspeople came to the school to vote in person at town meeting. Starting in 2021 and due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the town mailed ballots for both Australian ballot items and town meeting items because no town meeting was held. This year the town is planning for an in-person town meeting, but considering mailing ballots for the items that would typically be on the Australian ballot. Chair Gardner added that he supported the idea of mailing ballots to all active non-challenged voters because it makes it easier for people to vote.

TC Laquerre added that absentee ballots have always been available by request from the town. She also noted that Central Vermont Career Center will be sending out ballots by request only.

Mr. Etnier suggested wording the motion to allow the town the option to send out all items on mailed ballots if the legislature chooses to change the laws early in the coming session. The board supported this idea.

Motion: To mail town meeting ballots for 2023 to all active non-challenged voters on the checklist.
Made by Mr. Etnier, second Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on 2023 Town Meeting: Discussion on 2023 Town Meeting Warning

The board discussed the draft 2023 Town Meeting Warning. TA Jenkins noted that the only change from the last draft was updating the date of the forum to Monday, March 6. The board discussed the structure for the forum and meeting on March 6. Mr. Etnier suggested the board start the Selectboard meeting at 6:30 pm, then go into recess and start the forum, and then return to the meeting when forum business is complete. The board supported this idea.

Mr. Duane asked if there would be a line in the warning about hearing reports from town officers. He noted that this was not currently on the warning. TA Jenkins will look back at earlier warnings for this information and to check for anything else that may have been omitted.

Discussion on Planning Commission Candidate

The Planning Commission has submitted Maia Stone for consideration for the open seat. Ms. Stone noted that she plans to run for the seat in March after the current term is complete. Chair Gardner noted Ms. Stone seems like a good fit for the committee.

Motion: To appoint Maia Stone to the Planning Commission for the remainder of the term of the open seat. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Ms. Stone thanked the board and said she was excited to be engaging with the community at this new level. TC Laquerre asked Ms. Stone to come see her before the next PC meeting to swear the oath.

EMFD Meeting with Calais

TA Jenkins noted that this meeting is coming up on Thursday, December 8. Mr. Etnier and Ms. Dillon are available to attend. TA Jenkins will reach out to ORCA to see if they can attend.

EMFD Bond Balance

TA Jenkins explained that Toby Talbot had reached out to ask if a check could be cut for the remainder of the balance in the ESF fund. The Selectboard had previously authorized the remainder of the fund to be spend on lighting and paving projects at the fire station. Releasing the funds would help eliminate confusion around who is responsible for bills and payments for these projects.

Motion: To approve transferring the remainder of the balance in the Emergency Service Facility fund totaling \$6,754 to the East Montpelier Fire Department. Made by Mr. Etnier, second Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on FY2024 Budget Development

TA Jenkins noted that the updated draft included numbers from RF Perry on the highway department portions of the budget. She added that she would like more time to work on the draft before beginning an in-depth discussion on the budget with the board.

County Road Project – Financial Update

TA Jenkins provided a summary of costs for the project and the board reviewed the numbers. She noted that the total cost to the town was approximately \$900k. Chair Gardner noted that the town does not typically have projects of this scale and expense. He added that the town was able to pay for this project outright rather than having to bond this project, which speaks to the town's planning for roads and capital projects.

Discussion on Town Management in Light of COVID-19

Using the CDC’s community level tool, Washington County is at “Low.” The latest data is as follows:

- Case Rate per 100,000 population: 56.5
- New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population: 6.2
- Staffed inpatient beds in use by patients with confirmed COVID-19: 2.4%

Mr. Etnier added that it is hard to say what the case rates are these days with most testing happening at home.

Warrants: December 5, 2022 Regular Expense Warrant

The present board members signed the warrant.

Town Administrator Report

TA Jenkins noted she and Town Treasurer Pallas have received the audit report but have not had time to review it. She will bring it to the board for discussion at the next meeting.

The board discussed the schedule for meetings in January.

There was 1 new permit application since the last meeting for a total of 78 this year.

Meeting Schedule:

- December 19, 2022 6:30 p.m Regular meeting date
- January 3, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special meeting date
- January 17, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special meeting date
- February 6, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date

Other Business

Ms. Dillon requested a discussion of ARPA funding be added to the agenda for the next meeting. She wanted to discuss how the board would go about deciding how to use the money and whether to engage the public in those discussions.

Mr. Etnier thanked TA Jenkins for the Selectboard email addresses and reminded board members to use the links to setup their emails.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Jewett, second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.

Approved: December 19, 2022 East Montpelier Selectboard Meeting