

## **Minutes for the East Montpelier Selectboard**

### **January 3, 2023 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, Town Administrator (“TA”) Gina Jenkins

**Remote SB Attendance:** Judith Dillon, Amy Willis

**In-Person Public Attendance:** Sean Temple, ORCA Media; Deirdre Connelly

**Remote Public Attendance:** Scott Hess, Deb Fillion, Town Treasurer (“TT”) Michele Pallas

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

#### **Additions to Agenda:**

Larry Gilbert submitted a written proposal for future County Road closures for the Board to consider.

#### **Minutes:**

The board reviewed the draft minutes of the December 19, 2022 board meeting. Ms. Fillion suggested a few edits for clarity.

**Motion: To approve the December 19, 2022 minutes with tonight’s amendments.** Made by Ms. Dillon, second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

**Public Comment:** None.

#### **Discussion on FY2024 Budget Development**

The Board reviewed the latest updates to the FY2024 budget. TA Jenkins explained that she hopes to present a final version at the next Selectboard meeting. Mr. Jewett asked if the budget would need to be adjusted if the town begins working with Washington County Sheriff’s Department. TA Jenkins suggested she could add a new code for the Sheriff’s Department and added that there was plenty of room in the budget to expand law enforcement services in FY2024.

The Board expressed their appreciation for the detailed notes in the budget. Mr. Jewett asked if the version of the budget with notes would be posted to the town website and printed in the town report. TA Jenkins thought there wouldn’t be room to print the notes in the town report, but she does plan to post the full version of the budget with notes on the town website.

#### **Discussion on 2023 Town Meeting Warning**

The Board reviewed the latest version of the Town Meeting Warning. Ms. Dillon asked for clarification on which articles would be voted by Australian ballot and TA Jenkins explained that it will be articles one, three, and five.

TA Jenkins noted that Town Clerk Laquerre has put together a guide on running for office and posted it to the town website.

### **Development of 2022 Selectboard Report for Town Report**

The Board reviewed the Selectboard Report for the Town Report and offered a few edits. TA Jenkins will present an updated version at the next Selectboard meeting.

### **Town Treasurer Report**

TT Pallas gave a brief update to the Board on the town's financial statements. She noted that the November financials were held up due to reconciliation issues, but she will have them ready for the Board soon. She is currently working on year-end reports for the state and year-end tax forms.

TT Pallas noted that delinquent taxes are at \$112,785.07, up approximately \$29k from where they were this time last year. She asked what her next steps should be on the delinquent taxes. Chair Gardner asked her to prepare a list for the Board to review. Mr. Jewett suggested notifying people soon so they have the opportunity to set up a payment plan.

TA Jenkins explained that part of the reason November was so difficult to reconcile was due to a high number of fraudulent checks- checks someone was trying to cash that appeared to be from East Montpelier. She noted that the town's bank accounts have good mechanisms for detecting fraud that have ensured no money has been lost, but it has complicated the reconciliation process. She added that she and TT Pallas have met with a few local banks and are considering switching to a new bank soon. Closing the existing M&T accounts will stop the flow of fraudulent checks for those accounts.

### **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: 47.94
- New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population: 8.7
- Staffed inpatient beds in use by patients with confirmed COVID-19: 3%

Mr. Etnier raised the possibility of asking people to wear masks at Town Meeting. He suggested the Board make a decision about it closer to Town Meeting. Ms. Dillon asked how the request should be phrased and TA Jenkins suggested a sign saying "Masks encouraged".

### **Warrants: January 3, 2023 Regular Expense Warrant**

Ms. Dillon asked for more information about the fabricated plate from Walsh Welding. Chair Gardner thought it was for a fabricating piece of equipment for the town, possibly for a sander on a truck. The present Board members signed the warrant.

### **Discussion on Larry Gilbert's proposal for County Road closures in 2023**

The Board discussed Mr. Gilbert's request to close County Road on six Sundays in 2023. TA Jenkins explained that she had checked with Road Foreman Perry and he is comfortable with the proposal. Mr. Jewett voiced concern about the volunteers in the road and suggested they be trained on flagging operations before the first closure. Ms. Dillon suggested the Board ask Mr. Gilbert for more detail on the logistics of the closure Mr. Gilbert organized in 2022, and she also suggested touching base with Calais about the proposed closures. Mr. Etnier was supportive of the idea but suggested that Mr. Gilbert should attend a future Selectboard meeting where the topic is warned on the agenda. He also suggested the town reach out to VLCT and PACIF for input and guidance on the proposal. Ms. Dillon agreed and suggested asking VLCT and PACIF if the closures might impact the town's eligibility for future funding.

### **Town Administrator Report**

TA Jenkins raised the topic of the storm on December 23, 2022 that caused major power outages across East Montpelier. She noted that the town office received two calls after the storm. One was related to a health concern and the lack of power and the other was related to tree debris in the road. TA Jenkins also received two emails expressing concern about the delay in power being restored and the lack of communication from Washington Electric Co-op (“WEC”).

The Board discussed ideas for helping the town prepare for future extreme weather events. Ms. Dillon suggested creating a document that lists common issues like tree debris in the roadway and the appropriate person to contact about those issues. Mr. Etnier noted that Calais opened a warming center at their school and had several people come in for both short stays and overnight stays. He suggested East Montpelier have a plan for warming shelters for future events, including possibly working with Calais to coordinate on warming shelters for both towns.

Chair Gardner suggested the town or East Montpelier Fire Department purchase a generator that could be made available to residents who lose power and have an urgent need. He also suggested encouraging residents to purchase generators for their homes. Mr. Jewett pointed out that generators require a knowledgeable person to complete the hookup and can pose a danger to someone who doesn’t know what they’re doing. Mr. Etnier suggested the town encourage residents to have a plan for power outages but perhaps not go so far as to suggest getting a generator. TA Jenkins noted that WEC has some good resources on their website about planning for power outages and Mr. Etnier added that WEC is planning a special section about generators in their next newsletter. Ms. Dillon suggested encouraging WEC to plan for burying power lines in the future.

Mr. Etnier pointed out that the standard in emergency management is to prepare to be on your own for 72 hours. He suggested encouraging town residents to have a plan in place and to prepare their homes for those 72 hours. He added that WEC relies on people reporting outages, and that their automated system means that reporting doesn’t take a lot of staff time.

There have been no new permits issued since the last meeting.

Meeting Schedule:

- January 17, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special meeting date
- February 6, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- February 20, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- March 6, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date/Town Meeting Forum
- March 7, 2023 9:30 a.m. Town Meeting

### **Other Business**

None.

**Motion: To adjourn.** Made by Mr. Jewett, second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.

Approved January 17, 2023 Selectboard Meeting