

Minutes for the East Montpelier Selectboard

December 19, 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, Town Administrator (“TA”) Gina Jenkins

Remote SB Attendance: Judith Dillon, Amy Willis

In-Person Public Attendance: Rowan Hartle, ORCA Media; Deirdre Connelly; Carolyn Brennan, Sarah Swift, Sandy Rouse, Chris Racanelli, Deb Fillion, Ross Hazel, Zach Sullivan, Michael Duane

Remote Public Attendance: Scott Hess, Bill Bollenbach, Sarah Lipton, Jamie Smith

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Additions to Agenda:

None.

Minutes:

The board reviewed the draft minutes of the December 5, 2022 board meeting and made a few edits for clarity.

Motion: To approve the December 5, 2022 minutes with tonight’s amendments. Made by Mr. Jewett, second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None.

Budget Discussion: Kellogg-Hubbard Library (“KHL”)

Carolyn Brennan, KHL Co-Director, introduced Sarah Swift as the new town representative and presented an update on the library’s activities and budget. Ms. Brennan stated that the library has an updated mission statement and strategic plan for 2023-2025. She noted that the library is back to pre-pandemic conditions in many ways, with lots of foot traffic, a full slate of programming, and strong lending in both physical and digital resources. She added that she is conscious of spotty access to broadband in the region and is not pushing large expansions to the digital collection at this time.

Mr. Etnier asked if lack of broadband access or lack of knowledge about digital formats was responsible for low usage. Ms. Brennan explained that it was a combination of both factors. She added that the cost for digital resources is typically higher than the cost of physical resources. Ms. Dillon asked if digital resources limit the number of times a volume can be checked out. Ms. Brennan explained that yes, that is the case, though the exact number depends on the publisher.

Ms. Brennan noted that the library’s staff is seeing more people coming in for help accessing benefits and reaching caseworkers. Mr. Etnier asked if the library planned to bring in caseworkers to help library staff with that work. Ms. Brennan said yes, part of the library’s strategic plan is to form partnerships with community resources, and they would love to have caseworkers come into the library on a regular basis.

Chair Gardner noted that the library's finances look good. Ms. Brennan agreed and noted that the library's recent capital campaign also funded a maintenance reserve so the organization could begin putting money away for future costs. Chair Gardner asked if the library has had trouble absorbing increased expenses due to inflation in the past year. Ms. Brennan noted that the staff is unionized, and an inflation cap is built into their contract, which has helped buffer some of the recent economic swings.

The board was comfortable putting KHL's funding request on the warning for Town Meeting.

Budget Discussion: Montpelier Senior Activity Center ("MSAC")

Sarah Lipton, MSAC Director, shared some of the programming the organization has offered in the past year, including meals on wheels and curbside meals, online and in-person classes, drop-in conversation groups, and a lending library of books, DVDs, and puzzles. MSAC is working on some partnerships in the coming year, including a partnership with the Montpelier High School and All Brains Belong to develop a tech café to offer technical support and education, a partnership with KHL to offer joint programming, and a partnership with the Pride Center of Vermont to provide queer-focused events.

Ms. Lipton noted that Montpelier decided to increase their funding to the organization this year. MSAC is required to request increases from all contributing towns when the city of Montpelier increases its funding, and so they are requesting a 7.7% increase. The Selectboard did not have the numbers for the increased funding request and asked Ms. Lipton to resend that information.

Mr. Etnier asked if MSAC was planning to expand their village initiative. Ms. Lipton explained that they had hoped to expand the program but were unable to hire an AmeriCorps staffer to run the program this year, so the program is currently dormant. However, some of the program's work can be carried out through other programming, such as tech support through the new tech café. MSAC is also applying for a grant to support an at-home repairs project and a retired community member has volunteered to be a carpenter for that program.

The board was comfortable putting MSAC's funding request on the warning for Town Meeting.

Budget Discussion: Central Vermont Health & Hospice ("CVHHH")

Sandy Rousse, CVHHH President and CEO, offered a short presentation on the organization's work in the past year, which included collaborations with the cardiology team at Central Vermont Medical Center ("CVMC") to streamline information sharing and with OB-GYNs on maternal and child health services. CVHHH also invested in a complex care coordinator in the past year to help staff figure out the best approaches to care for each patient.

Ms. Rousse noted that CVHHH is mandated to accept all referrals for home hospice, which can limit their ability to negotiate with payers. The organization was also recently hit with a Medicare decrease and has struggled to hire and retain full time staff. They have relied on travelling clinicians to help serve their patients in the past year. CVHHH's Finance committee has decided to use some of the organization's savings to increase pay for employees to help retain their staff.

Chair Gardner noted that CVHHH was requesting level funding from East Montpelier this year. He asked if the organization expected a large increase next year after using savings to cover the salary increases. Ms. Rousse explained that they didn't expect a large increase in the coming year, and that they hoped some staffing costs will go down if the organization can reduce the number of travelling clinicians they need to hire.

The board was comfortable putting CVHHH's funding request on the warning for Town Meeting and expressed their thanks for the important services the organization offers to the community.

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

Jesse Pelow, RCT Office Administrator, could not attend the meeting. TA Jenkins noted that both RCT and GMT are requesting level funding and both organizations provided materials for the board to review.

Jamie Smith, GMT Director of Marketing and Planning, was late to the meeting due to a power outage. Ms. Smith briefly noted that GMT has seen a significant increase in ridership in the past year along Route 2, up from approximately 60 rides to over 600 rides in the last year. She thanked the board for their support.

The board was comfortable putting the funding requests for RCT and GMT on the warning for Town Meeting.

Budget Discussion: Twin Valley Seniors, Inc.

Gene Troia, Twin Valley Seniors Executive Director, was not available to attend the meeting. Bill Bollenbach, Board Treasurer, explained that the organization’s income has decreased as expenses have increased. Twin Valley Seniors, Inc. is requesting an increase in funding to help offset the increase in expenses.

Ms. Dillon asked which income streams had decreased and why they had gone down. Mr. Bollenbach explained that donations have decreased, and that the organization had received a large amount of one-time Covid relief funding that was no longer available.

The board was comfortable putting the funding request for Twin Valley Seniors on the warning for Town Meeting and expressed their thanks for the programming and services the organization provides to the community.

Listers Year End Report

Ms. Fillion presented the Listers year-end report. She noted that they had reviewed 92 property transfers, of which 36 were determined to be valid sales. She noted that the town should be anticipating reappraisal soon. Chair Gardner asked how much a full reappraisal costs and Mr. Hazel stated it cost approximately \$85 per parcel for the last appraisal.

Ms. Fillion noted that the parcel co-owned by the Gully Jumpers and used as a trailhead on Route 14 South was granted an exemption by voters at the Town Meeting in 2002. She noted that despite the wording and intention of the article, the voted exemption must be renewed by vote every five years. She recommended this article be added to the warning for the upcoming Town Meeting.

Ms. Fillion requested the board consider purchasing a fourth fireproof filing cabinet for the Listers’ records. TA Jenkins will speak with Town Clerk Laquerre about whether any of the Listers’ land records belong in the vault instead of file cabinets. Ms. Fillion also requested an allowance for the Listers to consult with the town attorney in the upcoming year. Chair Gardner noted that the town budget has a line for professional services and explained that the Listers can access those funds by putting in a request to TA Jenkins.

Ms. Fillion noted that the Lister’s hours were unusually high in 2022 due to training for newer staff. They expect their hours to fall back to more typical levels in the coming year.

EMFD Meeting Recap

Ms. Dillon and TA Jenkins attended the EMFD meeting. EMFD went over their budget at the meeting and during that discussion Calais asked about the building on Templeton Road that is used by both EMFD and East Montpelier to house equipment. Calais wondered if it was fair for them to contribute funds toward the

heating costs for East Montpelier's highway equipment. Ms. Dillon pointed out that East Montpelier owns the building and thus is contributing to the costs. Chair Gardner also noted that the heat was primarily needed for the fire trucks that contain water, not highway equipment.

Ms. Dillon noted that EMFD is proposing a 7.5% increase in salaries for staff. They propose that EMFD will absorb that increase in their FY2023 budget but are looking for Calais and East Montpelier to pay a proportional share of that increase in FY2024. EMFD noted that this increase is intended to help them retain and hire new staff.

TA Jenkins noted that Chief Larry Brown resigned effective December 12. Albert Petrella is the interim chief until the election in May. The board noted that Larry Brown had made tremendous contributions to the town and expressed their gratitude for his years of service.

Chair Gardner suggested the board take a look at the EMFD business model in the future and consider taking more of the organization under town jurisdiction. He noted that it is an expensive service the town pays for, and largely out of the town's control.

Review Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District ("CVSWMD") Annual Summary Financial Report and FY2024 Per Capita Assessment

TA Jenkins explained that CVSWMD's per capita assessment was consistent with the prior year. Mr. Jewett noted that the General Manager resigned, and the organization will be looking to fill that position in the coming year. He added that the organization hasn't had a full staff in recent years and thus has shown a budget surplus. Mr. Jewett stated his frustration with the current system for handling solid waste and the way the state funds CVSWMD. Mr. Etnier noted that he had recently met with Ela Chapin and CVSWMD had come up during their conversation. Ms. Chapin previously worked at the organization and is familiar with many of the issues it faces.

Discussion with Planning Commission Chair

Mr. Sullivan, Planning Commission Chair, noted that the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission ("CVRPC") approved the most recent Town Plan amendments. He reported that the Planning Commission ("PC") is now working on the energy plan and working to recruit members for a new Energy Committee and have at least five interested individuals.

Mr. Sullivan added that the PC is beginning to look at other projects and considering a housing assessment and looking at wastewater options for the village center. Mr. Etnier noted that the town had investigated wastewater options in the past and ultimately found the costs prohibitively high. He suggested that the PC may want to reach out to CVRPC to find out if additional federal and state funds might be available for a wastewater project.

Mr. Sullivan added that the other project the PC is considering is assessing the town's progress on action items from the Town Plan. Mr. Etnier recalled that the last Town Administrator had put together a list of action items assigned to the Selectboard for the board to review. He suggested that the board have a priority-setting session after Town Meeting to review action items from the Town Plan and consider the work they would like to tackle in the coming year.

Discussion on FY2024 Budget Development

TA Jenkins provided the latest updated budget. The board briefly discussed the rate increase for the Listers. TA Jenkins noted that because the Listers expect their hours to drop back down to more normal levels in the coming year, and because they have consistently come in under their budgeted \$23k, she does not think the hourly increase will necessitate a change to the budget line this year.

Discussion on 2023 Town Meeting Warning

The board reviewed the current draft of the Town Meeting warning. Mr. Etnier requested TA Jenkins add the article for the Gully Jumpers tax exemption that was suggested by the Listers.

The board discussed the timing for the Town Forum. Mr. Jewett suggested removing the times on the agenda after the call to order to allow the board to end the Town Forum when the discussion ends, rather than having to wait until 9:00 pm.

Discussion on 2022 Selectboard Annual Report

The board brainstormed topics for the Selectboard Annual Report. Suggested ideas included the County Road project, Town Office staff transitions, the East Montpelier trails and the new bridge that opened this past year, the town's support of Wrightsville Beach, recent data on population growth, updates to the tax rates and the town's budget, speeding concerns and the town's attempts to address those concerns, the allocation of ARPA funds to CV Fiber, and the fact that Covid-19 is still a force in the community.

Discussion on ARPA Funds

TA Jenkins explained that she has been contacted by a consulting firm assisting municipalities in managing their ARPA funds. The board discussed the idea and concluded that the town has the knowledge and resources to manage their ARPA funds without consultants.

Chair Gardner suggested the board put together a list of projects and ask the town to provide input on which projects they'd like to see move forward. He also suggested that a small portion of the ARPA funds could go toward budget shortfalls and asked TA Jenkins to put together a list of ARPA-eligible budget items for the board to consider. Ms. Dillon suggested inviting ideas for projects from the town, rather than providing a list. She added that the board could provide some parameters or project types for those ideas. Mr. Etnier suggested sending out a survey to gather those ideas and Judith suggested sending the survey out with town ballots.

Access Permits

The board reviewed permits 22-075 and 22-076. TA Jenkins noted that they are related to a subdivision recently approved by the DRB and that Road Foreman Perry has approved both curb cuts.

Motion: To approve the curb cut authorized in permit 22-075. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Motion: To approve the curb cut authorized in permit 22-076. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

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: 49.65
- New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population: 5.8
- Staffed inpatient beds in use by patients with confirmed COVID-19: 2.3%

Mr. Etnier noted that by the old Community Transmission standard of CDC, 13 of Vermont's 14 counties are at high or substantial rates of transmission—with case results estimated to be greatly underreported compared to the time before at-home tests were widely available. Washington County is at substantial transmission. Only 28% of Vermonters age 5 or over have received the updated (bivalent) Covid-19 booster

vaccine. Masking, getting the full round of vaccinations, and being cautious around holiday gatherings can help reduce spread of Covid and reduce the death rate.

Warrants: December 19, 2022 Regular Expense Warrant

The present board members signed the warrant. Mr. Jewett asked about the burial costs and Chair Gardner explained that East Montpelier pays the City of Montpelier to use their equipment to dig burial holes.

Town Administrator Report

TA Jenkins noted that Four Corners Schoolhouse requested an increase to the FY2024 appropriation. The board was comfortable with the funding request going on the Town Meeting warning.

TA Jenkins added that she and Road Foreman Perry have submitted an application for a grant to fund a culvert replacement project on Haggett Road. She noted that the interest posted for November to the EMFD Fund Balance increased the total amount beyond what was approved by motion at the last meeting.

Motion: To clarify that the Selectboard's motion to transfer the remainder of the balance in the Emergency Service Facility fund to the East Montpelier Fire Department includes all funds in the balance. Made by Mt. Etnier, second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

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

Meeting Schedule:

- 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
- February 20, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date

Other Business

Mr. Etnier wondered if the meeting room should be rearranged to offer better camera angles. The board discussed a few options and Mr. Jewett suggested the board ask ORCA to setup the camera in a different corner of the room. TA Jenkins noted she was considering a Meeting Owl for the board to use for meetings.

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.

Approved January 3, 2023 Selectboard Meeting