

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

### **January 17, 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, Amy Willis, Judith Dillon, Town Administrator (“TA”) Gina Jenkins

#### **Remote SB Attendance:**

**In-Person Public Attendance:** Gilberto Diaz-Santos, ORCA Media; Deirdre Connelly; Michael Duane; Sexton Elliot Morse; Florence Morse

**Remote Public Attendance:** Deb Fillion, David Delcore

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

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

None.

#### **Minutes:**

The board reviewed the draft minutes of the January 3, 2023 board meeting and Mr. Etnier suggested an edit for clarity.

**Motion: To approve the January 3, 2023 minutes with tonight’s amendments.** Made by Ms. Dillon, second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

**Public Comment:** None.

### **Discussion with Cemetery Committee to review FY2024 Budget Request**

Mr. Morse reviewed the Cemetery Committee’s FY2024 budget request with the Board. He explained that the increase in the Fences & Painting line is due to 12 posts that need replacing. Pressure treated lumber is used for the posts and while it’s more expensive, it will last longer than ordinary wood. Chair Gardner asked if concrete is poured at the base of the posts. Mr. Morse explained that they do not use concrete, just a post hole digger to create the hole. Mr. Etnier asked why fences are needed for the cemeteries. Mr. Morse explained that back when most legislators were also farmers, they made a rule that all cemeteries must be fenced to ensure farm animals wouldn’t disturb the graves. Ms. Willis asked if this law is still active, and Mr. Morse stated he believes it is.

Mr. Morse noted the line for corner markers and explained that the Cemetery Committee has stopped using granite markers, which are expensive and take a while to arrive, and now use metal markers that can be hammered directly into the ground. The metal markers are also easy to find with a metal detector if they become obscured by vegetation. Ms. Morse added that individuals may still request granite corner markers if they prefer.

Mr. Morse noted the new line for stone repairs. Chair Gardner asked if foundations are installed for tilted or toppled stones. Mr. Morse stated that they are not; the fallen stones are typically just pushed back into the ground.

Mr. Morse noted the new, one-time budget line for surveying and mapping at Doty Cemetery. He explained that the surveying work will identify graves boundaries and ledges. Mr. Etnier asked how this is done and Mr. Morse explained that the surveyors use an electronic device to detect remains and ledges below ground. He added that Doty was used as a cemetery as far back as the 1700s, but many burials at that time didn't use a marker or used a wooden marker that is now long gone.

### **Discussion/Finalization of FY2024 Budget Development**

The Board reviewed the latest edits to the FY2024 budget. Ms. Fillion noted that she found an error in the East Montpelier Fire Department ("EMFD") budget; a couple of lines appear not to be included in the budget total. This error affects the portion East Montpelier is expected to contribute to EMFD's budget. Chair Gardner noted that Calais should be alerted. Ms. Dillon suggested talking to EMFD to get clarity before the Board finalizes the FY2024 budget for East Montpelier and Chair Gardner agreed. Ms. Fillion explained that she can layout the pages for the town report and wait for the final numbers.

Ms. Fillion noted a few errors she found in the Change from Prior Year column on the East Montpelier FY2024 budget. TA Jenkins made a note of these errors and will correct them in the final budget.

Ms. Fillion noted that EMFD changed the order of their columns in their FY2024 budget. For clarity, Ms. Fillion plans to revert to the format of past years with actuals listed to the left of the budget lines. The Board supported Ms. Fillion's suggested formatting.

Mr. Etnier suggested the Board should meet again at the end of January. The group decided to meet on Monday, January 30<sup>th</sup> to finalize the budget and Town Meeting Warning.

Chair Gardner noted that the FY2024 budget reflects an overall increase of 6.1 cents to the tax rate. The Board reviewed the budget to see if any numbers could be removed or lowered. Chair Gardner noted that the salaries and health insurance costs are the main drivers of the increase and are out of the Board's control.

Chair Gardner asked if the present Board members were satisfied with the budget numbers, aside from the EMFD number. The present Board members were satisfied with the budget.

### **Finalization of 2023 Town Meeting Warning**

Mr. Etnier explained that Vermont League of Cities and Towns ("VLCT") emailed to say they are working to introduce legislation regarding flexibility on remote meetings and Australian ballot votes for Town Meetings. Chair Gardner asked if this legislation would be permanent or just for 2023. Mr. Etnier explained that the intention is to make it permanent so towns would have a suite of options available every year for Town Meetings. He added that at least one neighboring town is asking for input from townspeople on Covid protocols and suggested that East Montpelier should consider doing so as well.

The Board discussed the idea of asking for town input on Covid protocols and decided that there was not enough time to do real outreach to get an accurate view of town opinions before the 2023 Town Meeting. Mr. Etnier asked if any Board members had received feedback from townspeople saying it is too early to return to an in-person town meeting. None had heard from any townspeople, and TA Jenkins noted that neither she nor Town Clerk Laquerre had heard anything either. Ms. Dillon suggested it might make a

good discussion topic for Town Meeting and Chair Gardner agreed. TA Jenkins will add an article to the Town Meeting Warning for a discussion about future Town Meetings.

Ms. Fillion suggested a few edits to the Town Meeting Warning and TA Jenkins noted them.

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

TA Jenkins noted that she will update the budget numbers in the Selectboard Report once the FY2024 budget is finalized. Ms. Fillion added that there will be room in the Town Report for a photo and TA Jenkins suggested a photo of the new Town Office staff. The Board liked that idea.

### **Town Treasurer Report**

TA Jenkins noted that Town Treasurer Pallas completed the November and December financial reports. Chair Gardner asked if the bank account is still getting fraudulent checks attempting to be cashed against the town account and TA Jenkins said it is. She added that the best course of action is to close the bank accounts, but she would like to wait until she has hired a new Municipal Assistant and gotten through Town Meeting.

Ms. Fillion noted that the elected auditors are going to begin reviewing bank reconciliations. TA Jenkins explained that the external auditors have noted that a person who is not a signer on the bank account needs to review the reconciliations. The Municipal Assistant will take on this role once hired. Until then, the elected auditors are stepping in to fill that role.

### **Consideration of 2023 Annual Certificate of Highway Mileage**

TA Jenkins noted that she ran the 2023 Annual Certificate of Highway Mileage past Road Foreman Perry. Chair Gardner asked if a motion was needed, and TA Jenkins stated she didn't think one was needed and that there wasn't a motion in 2022.

The present Board members signed the 2023 Annual Certificate of Highway Mileage.

### **Consideration of County Road Grant Reimbursement Requests**

TA Jenkins presented two grant reimbursement requests totaling approximately \$300k. She is working on two additional reimbursement requests totaling approximately \$80k but needs more time to work on those requests with the external auditors to be sure the general ledger aligns with the grant budget.

The present board members signed the reimbursement requests.

### **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: 70.19
- New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population: 8.7
- Staffed inpatient beds in use by patients with confirmed COVID-19: 3.7%

### **Warrants: January 17, 2023 Regular Expense Warrant**

Ms. Willis asked for more information about the mushroom shoe purchase. Chair Gardner explained that a shoe is usually a replaceable piece that is attached to equipment to protect from wear. He guessed that the term "mushroom" referred to the shape of the shoe.

The present board members signed the warrant.

### **Town Administrator Report**

TA Jenkins noted that her computer experienced a hardware failure and needs to be replaced.

TA Jenkins noted that the regular meeting scheduled for February 20, 2023 falls on President's Day and asked if the Board would like to reschedule for another day. The Board decided to move the meeting to Tuesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>.

TA Jenkins noted that Jessica Adam's last day is January 19<sup>th</sup>. TA Jenkins has posted the open position and is reviewing applications. Denise Sparrow is helping with some special projects in the interim.

TA Jenkins asked the Board to identify a meeting to discuss Larry Gilbert's proposal for County Road closures. She added that she is tracking the feedback she is receiving via email about the proposal. She also noted that she has been in communication with VLCT and they pointed out that there are liability considerations for this kind of event. Typically, events are held by organizations with liability insurance, but because these proposed closures are organized by individuals the town may be held liable. Mr. Etnier asked what it might mean if the town assumes liability for these events. TA Jenkins didn't know and is waiting for more information from VLCT. Ms. Fillion noted that past Rally Day events had been organized by individuals and the town assumed the liability for those events.

Mr. Etnier suggested bringing the topic to Town Meeting. Ms. Willis pointed out that if the town decides to support the closures at Town Meeting and TA Jenkins later discovers that the town would be liable for the events, it might be complicated to cancel the events. Mr. Etnier suggested that if the townspeople want the closures and the town is liable, the closure events could still take place.

Ms. Dillon suggested discussing the proposed closures at the February 21, 2023 Selectboard meeting. TA Jenkins hopes to have more information from VLCT by then.

There was one new permit issued since the last meeting.

Meeting Schedule:

- January 30, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special meeting date
- February 6, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- February 21, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special 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 Ms. Willis, second by Ms. Dillon. Passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.

Approved January 30, 2023 Selectboard Meeting