

Minutes for the East Montpelier Selectboard

March 6, 2023 Town Forum

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, Town Administrator (“TA”) Gina Jenkins

Remote SB Attendance: Amy Willis

In-Person Public Attendance: Sean Temple, ORCA Media; Deirdre Connelly; Michael Duane; Richard Brock

Remote Public Attendance: Carolyn Brennan, Co-Director Kellogg-Hubbard Library; Erica Zimmerman; Jeff Cueto; Sandal Cate; Eileen Dube; Scott Hess; Shelby Perry; Birgit McCall; Don Welch; Ari Preston; Sarah Swift; Norma Raymond; Rob Chickering; Rachael Grossman; Kim Watson

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

Additions to the Agenda: None.

Public Comment: None.

Review of & Discussion on 2023 Town Meeting Articles

Chair Gardner invited input on the Town Meeting Articles.

- Article 2: Town Officer Reports
 - Chair Gardner noted some highlights from the Selectboard report, including staffing changes and budget increases. Ms. Willis asked how much the tax rate is expected to increase. Chair Gardner estimated the tax increase from the municipal side may be approximately 5.8 cents, but it could be less. The Board has discussed using ARPA funds to cover some one-time expenses that may help lower the tax rate increase. Ms. Grossman asked if the Board has a plan for using the ARPA money. Chair Gardner explained that \$100k has been allocated to CV Fiber for, leaving approximately \$650k to spend. The Board is exploring options for the remaining funds. Mr. Etnier added that the Board will notify the town and invite input once they know the allowable uses.
- Article 3: FY2024 Budget
 - No discussion.
- Article 4: Property Tax Protocol
 - No discussion.
- Article 5: Kellogg-Hubbard Library Appropriation
 - Chair Gardner noted that this article was accidentally left off the ballot, so the Board will adopt a resolution for a separate vote on this appropriation and run an election through the town office.
- Article 6: Four Corners Schoolhouse Association Appropriation
 - No discussion.
- Article 7: East Montpelier Signpost Appropriation

- No discussion.
- Article 8: East Montpelier Trails, Inc. Appropriation
 - Ms. Zimmerman asked if the Trails needed additional funds from the town to help with cleanup after the recent severe winter storms. Mr. Brock stated that the East Montpelier Trails board does not believe additional funding is needed beyond the appropriation.
- Article 9: Montpelier Senior Activity Center Appropriation
 - No discussion.
- Article 10: Twin Valley Seniors, Inc. Appropriation
 - No discussion.
- Article 11: Central Vermont Home Health & Hospice Appropriation
 - No discussion.
- Article 12: Rural Community Transportation, Inc. Appropriation
 - Mr. Etnier explained that in past years the town has made an appropriation to Rural Community Transportation (“RCT”) and Green Mountain Transit (“GMT”) in one article. The combined appropriation for RCT and GMT amounts to level funding this year. RCT is asking for a percentage of the combined appropriation, and GMT is asking for the remainder. Ms. Grossman commented that the Route 2 bus is an excellent service for the community.
- Article 13: Green Mountain Transit Appropriation
 - No discussion.
- Article 14: Funding Request Study Committee Recommendation for Appropriations to Organizations
 - No discussion.
- Article 15: Tax Exemption for the 0.68-acre trailhead parking area on VT Route 14 South owned by East Montpelier Trails, Inc. and East Montpelier Gully Jumpers, Inc.
 - Chair Gardner explained that the trailhead parking area has been tax-exempt for a long time and the exemption must be periodically voted on.
- Article 16: Other Business
 - Ms. Perry commented that she just moved to town from Montpelier and has never lived in a town with a Town Meeting; she asked if all votes happened on the floor. Chair Gardner explained that appropriations over \$25k are voted by Australian ballot and anything under \$25k is voted on the floor.
 - Ms. Grossman asked if there would be a zoom option for participating in Town Meeting. TA Jenkins explained that Town Meeting will be live streamed so people can watch remotely, but there will not be a way to participate or vote remotely.
 - Mr. Welch asked if there were any updates on the Town Garage. Chair Gardner explained that he, Mr. Jewett, Road Foreman Perry, and TA Jenkins are part of a committee exploring options for the Town Garage.
 - Mr. Duane commented that Representative Chapin will attend Town Meeting and plans to speak around 11 a.m.

Other Business

Ms. Cate thanked Ms. Willis and Ms. Dillon for their service on the Board. She asked if the Board has a plan to fill the three-year seat. Chair Gardner explained that someone could be elected to the seat through a write-in campaign. If no one is elected, the Board will advertise the opening, interview applicants, and appoint someone for the year. At the 2024 Town Meeting that appointee or another individual may run to serve for the remaining two years of the three-year seat.

Ms. Zimmerman introduced herself as a write-in candidate for the two-year seat on the Planning Commission.

Mr. Hess introduced himself as a candidate for the Selectboard. Ms. Watson thanked him for his years of service on the Planning Commission.

Ms. Watson asked if the Board was considering using ARPA funds to help reduce the coming increase to the tax rate. Chair Gardner explained that the Board is investigating the possibility of using ARPA funds for one-time expenses such as the land records digitization project, with the hope of reducing the increase to the tax rate. He added that the increase from the municipal budget is expected to be approximately 5.8 cents and the increase from the school budget is expected to be approximately ten cents. TA Jenkins commented that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns has encouraged towns to identify some larger infrastructure projects for ARPA funds, and then invite input from the town on the remaining funds. Chair Gardner added that the Board will solicit public input on the use of ARPA funds.

Ms. Watson commented that the elected listers are not professionally trained appraisers and asked if the Board had any plans to reevaluate those positions. Chair Gardner explained that the Board is considering forming a committee to study the elected lister and auditor positions.

Forum adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

March 6, 2023 Selectboard Meeting

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m.

Additions to Agenda: None.

Minutes: The board reviewed the draft minutes of the February 27, 2023 Board meeting and made a few edits for clarity.

Motion: To approve the February 13, 2023 minutes with tonight's amendments. Made by Ms. Willis, second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None.

Discuss Murray, Bliss, Barnes Roads Ash Tree Removal Project Request for Proposal

TA Jenkins reported that she has been working with the Resilient Roads committee on this ash tree removal RFP. She reviewed the town's RFP process, and it seems that no ad was taken out in the Times Argus for this RFP. It was posted in many other places, including the post office, the Four Corners Schoolhouse, and the town website. She asked the Board to confirm they are comfortable with forgoing the Times Argus ad for this RFP. Mr. Etnier thanked TA Jenkins for bringing this to the board and stated that if the Resilient Roads committee is confident they have reached enough people with the posts they've made, he is comfortable forgoing the Times Argus ad. The present Board members agreed.

Discuss Resident Request to Create Emergency Planning Committee

Mr. Etnier thanked Ms. Grossman for the good write-up and stated he felt this was a good reason to form a committee. Chair Gardner asked Ms. Grossman if she will participate on the Emergency Planning committee and she said yes. Mr. Etnier asked if Ms. Grossman has any thoughts on how many people should be on the committee. Ms. Grossman suggested five members and added that she has at least one person in mind to ask to join. Chair Gardner suggested the Board could advertise for additional members on Front Porch Forum. Ms. Grossman stated that she will be out of town until the end of April, so she won't be available for committee meetings until early May.

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: 29.11
- 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 mentioned a few large events he'd recently attended and noted that few people wore masks and there was no effort to take attendee information for contact tracing at these events. He suggested asking people who attend Town Meeting to report if they experience any symptoms or a positive COVID test within five days of Town Meeting. TA Jenkins noted that COVID exposures have become difficult to track with so many people going out without masks. Mr. Hess stated he thought it was impractical to try to do contract tracing for Town Meeting. Mr. Etnier pointed out that it might be a good idea for individuals to test for COVID after attending large events, regardless of contact tracing information.

Warrants: March 6, 2023 Regular Expense Warrant

Motion: To authorize Chair Gardner to sign the warrant on behalf of the Selectboard. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Town Administrator Report

TA Jenkins mentioned that she will be out of the office March 9 and 10, and that the Town Clerk's office will be closed on Thursdays until the Town Office is fully staffed.

Meeting Schedule:

- March 7, 2023 9:30 a.m. Town Meeting
- March 20, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- April 3, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- April 17, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date

Other Business

None.

Selectboard Work Session on Municipal Assistant Position Transition

Motion: To go into executive session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) – the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee, provided that the public body shall make a final decision to hire or appoint a public officer or employee in an open meeting and shall explain the reasons for its final decision during the open meeting. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

The Board entered into executive session at 7:52 p.m. and exited at 8:15 p.m.

No action taken.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Ms. Willis. Passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.

Approved March 20, 2023 Selectboard meeting.