

Minutes for the East Montpelier Selectboard

April 17, 2023 Town Forum

This forum 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, Scott Hess, Town Administrator (“TA”) Gina Jenkins

In-Person Public Attendance: Finn , ORCA Media; Deirdre Connelly; Carolyn Brennan; Carolyn Shapiro; Hobie Guion; Andy Shapiro; Bruce Chapell; Nik Khosla; Zoe Christiansen; Christian Meyer

Remote Public Attendance: David Delcore

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

Additions to the Agenda: None.

Public Comment: None.

Review and Discussion of 2023 Special Town Meeting Article: Kellogg-Hubbard Library Appropriation

Mr. Etnier gave some background, explaining that this article normally would have been included in the Town Meeting ballot but was accidentally omitted. The special election will be held Tuesday, April 25th and voters can drop off ballots in the drop box at the town office until 5p.m. on election day. TA Jenkins reported that 456 absentee ballots have been received so far.

Chair Gardner wondered whether the special election would bring in more affirmative votes than if the article had been on the ballot for Town Meeting. TA Jenkins will be able to report that information after the election.

There was no public comment or discussion.

Motion: To close the forum. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Forum adjourned at 6:37 p.m.

April 17, 2023 Selectboard Meeting

Chair Gardner called the meeting to order at 6:39 p.m.

Additions to the Agenda:

TA Jenkins noted the WEC Annual Meeting voting authorization.

Chair Gardner asked for time to report on the Emergency Services Meeting.

Minutes:

The board reviewed the draft minutes of the April 3, 2023 Board meeting and made a few edits for clarity.

Motion: To approve the April 3, 2023 minutes with tonight's amendments. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None.

Discuss Potential Law Enforcement Contract (Washington County)

The Board reviewed the contract and Chair Gardner noted that it did not specify the number of hours the Sheriff's department would work per month. TA Jenkins asked the Board to discuss on the hours they'd like to request. She also noted that the contract ends June 30, 2023. Starting in July, the rate for the Sheriff's department will go up. TA Jenkins estimated that five hours per week would keep the contract within the town's budget, and that the Board can review the actual costs later in the year and adjust the hours if needed. Mr. Etnier commented that any hours the town can get with the Sheriff's department will be more than we've had with VT State Police in recent years. Mr. Jewett noted that the Sheriff was very willing to work with the town to target areas in need of patrols. Mr. Etnier stated that he likes the short-term contract because it will give the Board time to get to know the Sheriff's department and get some feedback from them.

Motion: To accept the Washington County Sheriff's Department contract at a level of approximately 20 hours per month through June 30, 2023. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Mr. Hess. Passed unanimously.

Conversation with Four Corners Board

Ms. Shapiro gave a brief recap of the mold issues in the Four Corners Schoolhouse. She noted that the organization is concerned about liability issues and they are considering closing the building altogether until the mold issues are addressed. She explained that the mold can't be dealt with piecemeal, and the organization's budget does not include funds to cover the extensive work needed to address the mold. The organization is looking into a Cultural Facilities grant through the Vermont Arts Council, but it does require a 1:1 match.

Mr. Guion gave some background, explaining that the board began making updates to the building in 2008 with a focus on energy efficiency. Insulation was installed in the crawlspace along with a plastic barrier. In 2020 mold was found in a closet and treated, but it has reappeared and grown every year since.

Mr. Shapiro explained that he is an energy and building science consultant and has dealt with mold issues in the past. He noted that mold will grow with humid conditions and that wiping the mold off surfaces will not prevent it from regrowing in the future. To solve the mold issues, the building needs to be updated to keep the humidity below the levels that allow mold to grow. He recommended a dehumidifier in the crawlspace, moving the air return for the furnace, adding a heat pump to cool the space and dehumidify in the summer, insulating the walls to help maintain an even temperature and humidity within the building, and then addressing the mold on the surfaces of the building once all mechanical elements are installed and ready to turn on.

Ms. Shapiro and Mr. Guion provided a spreadsheet with cost estimates and noted which expenses had quotes and which were estimates based on research. The total costs are estimated to come to around \$60k.

Chair Gardner commented that the board needs to discuss and may need to go to the town to vote for this expense. Mr. Jewett commented that the role of the Selectboard is to allocate where the money goes, but they do need to consider where the money will come from. Mr. Etnier asked what the timeline is to complete the grant application. Ms. Shapiro stated that the application deadline is May 1. Chair Gardner

asked if they can apply for the grant without approval for the matching funds from the town. Ms. Shapiro stated that it would help the application to have the funds lined up.

Chair Gardner stated that he would like to help the organization submit a strong application. Mr. Etnier asked what other opportunities the group has for raising funds for this project. Ms. Shapiro stated that she thought they might run a kickstarter and get the word out through Front Porch Forum, and she knows of some local foundations that might be willing to help. There are also grants available for historical preservation, though the application isn't due until the fall. She added that it would be helpful for the Cultural Facilities application to have a letter from the Selectboard stating that the town is at least considering matching the grant funds. Mr. Jewett commented that he felt this would be a good investment for the town. Chair Gardner asked the other Board members for their input and all were in support of matching the grant funds up to \$30k.

Motion: To commit up to \$30k to match monies contributed to the Four Corners Schoolhouse by the Vermont Arts Council for the purpose of mold remediation. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Mr. Hess. Passed unanimously.

Conversation with Selectboard Candidates

Mr. Chapell introduced himself and stated that his family has lived in town for more than 200 years and has a history of being involved in the community. He stated he would like to contribute to the town and make it the best it can be. Mr. Etnier asked if Mr. Chapell has held any other positions in the town in the past and Mr. Chapell stated that he worked on land conservation in town when he worked for the USDA. Chair Gardner asked if he thinks he will be able to commit to the meeting schedule. Mr. Chapell said yes, though he may not be available at times during the sugaring season.

Ms. Christiansen introduced herself and stated that she grew up in town and her father was a politician, so she spent a lot of time as a young person reading up on tax data. She stated she is eager to learn and contribute to the town. She has experience organizing and has a love and appreciation for the rural communities of Vermont. Mr. Etnier asked if she has held any other positions in the town and Ms. Christiansen stated she has not. Chair Gardner asked if she thinks she will be available for the meeting schedule. Ms. Christiansen said that her schedule is very flexible and she can accommodate the schedule.

Mr. Khosla introduced himself and explained that he moved to town last August and recently joined the Planning Commission. He is future-oriented and interested in setting roots and contributing to the community. His background is in tech and real estate, and he has experience working with organizations to learn about their needs and figure out how to address those needs. Mr. Etnier asked if he has held any other positions in the town and Mr. Khosla stated that he is on the Planning Commission and looking for other ways to get involved in the town. Chair Gardner asked if he thinks he can be available for the meeting schedule and Mr. Khosla said he does.

Conversation with Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (“CVRPC”)

Mr. Meyer introduced himself as the new Executive Director of CVRPC and he gave an overview of the tools and services CVRPC offers to towns, including land use planning, zoning updates, water and natural resources, grant writing assistance, GIS services, and energy planning.

Mr. Etnier asked if CVRPC was involved with the historical culvert project in East Montpelier. Mr. Meyer was unsure but stated that CVRPC does perform culvert record-keeping.

Discussion on ARPA Annual Reporting

TA Jenkins presented the updated report and noted that the only change was adding the rbTech bills for the VPN setup. She added that her approach to pulling numbers for salaries and wages was to focus on the staff transition period from April to August in 2022. She added that the external auditors and the ARPA rep at VLCT were all comfortable with this approach. This will result in a credit to the general fund, which the Board can evaluate at the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Etnier asked why TA Jenkins chose not to commit the full amount of ARPA in this reporting period. TA Jenkins explained that if the town were to experience a FEMA event it could trigger an issue with the town using too much federal funding at one time. Her intention is to spread out the ARPA funds over a longer period of time to prevent that possibility.

Financial Reporting Package

TA Jenkins presented the reporting package and noted that the listers are projected to run over budget. The Board discussed the projected overage and whether they could ask the listers to stop working to prevent or reduce it. They decided to ask the listers to come to the May 15 Selectboard meeting to discuss the overage, and to ask the listers to limit their hours as much as possible until that meeting.

TA Jenkins mentioned that she will have more updates on the budget as we get closer to the end of the fiscal year.

Appointments

The Board reviewed the slate of appointments. There was no discussion.

Motion: To appoint Alison Underhill and Kimberly Meeks to the Funding Committee and Rachael Grossman and Renee Kievit Kylar to the Emergency Planning Committee. Made by Mr. Jewett, second by Mr. Etnier. Passed unanimously.

TA Jenkins noted that she has been attending the RPC Transportation Advisory Committee meetings and is happy to continue. Mr. Etnier stated he is talking to someone who may be interested; he will circle back with that individual and let the Board know at a future meeting.

Emergency Services Meeting Report

Chair Gardner reported that he, Mr. Etnier, and Mr. Jewett attended this meeting. The budget is on target and new fire truck was discussed. Chair Gardner noted that the main concern is fire chief, with Ty Rolland and Larry Brown now gone. He stated he thinks the position should not be elected. Mr. Hess asked how the rules could be changed and Chair Gardner explained that the bylaws would need to be updated by the EMS board. He added that the Board should talk to Mr. Talbot before bringing any changes.

Chair Gardner said the second concern is the increasing personnel expense and the current budget structure that allocates large amounts of money to the capital fund. He suggested reallocating the fees collected from carries to the organization's general fund and calculating town contract fees based on population. Mr. Etnier added that another reconfiguration could be Barre Town taking over the facilities.

Chair Gardner noted that the Calais Selectboard has completely turned over and the new board members may be more open to changing their relationship with the department. He added that if Calais could be removed from the business relationship, it would be easier to negotiate changes.

The Board decided to invite Mr. Talbot to the May 15 Selectboard meeting for contract negotiations.

WEC Annual Meeting Voting Authorization

Mr. Etnier recused himself from the discussion.

TA Jenkins stated that there are four candidates, and the Board can vote for up to three. Mr. Hess asked if any of the candidates other than Mr. Etnier reside in East Montpelier. The board reviewed the list and determined that all other candidates live in other towns. Mr. Jewett stated he would like to promote a local person and Mr. Hess and Chair Gardner agreed.

Motion: To vote for Mr. Etnier and authorize TA Jenkins to fill out and submit the ballot on behalf of the town. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously. Mr. Etnier recused himself from the vote.

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: 30.82
- New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population: 4
- Staffed inpatient beds in use by patients with confirmed COVID-19: 1.2%

Mr. Etnier thanked TA Jenkins for the updated numbers and stated that Covid-19 remains a serious ongoing cause of illness, death, and disability in the US and the world. The latest figures from the Centers for Disease Control show a seven-day average of 1,870 daily hospital admissions in the US for Covid, and a seven-day average of 190 daily deaths in the US. Even though Covid deaths are down compared to most phases of the pandemic, Covid-19 at its current level is still approximately 50% deadlier than traffic fatalities were over the course of 2022—and 2022 had an unusually high number of traffic fatalities. Furthermore, long Covid remains poorly understood, and estimates of the rate of long-term disabilities from the disease vary widely.

Nonetheless, the trend is away from any sustained government response. While the Selectboard will examine any Covid-related issues that come to its attention, we will no longer automatically include the issue in each meeting's agenda.

Warrants: April 17, 2023 Regular Expense Warrant

The present board members signed the warrant.

Town Administrator Report

TA Jenkins noted that Town Clerk Laquerre will be out of the office the first week of May. Denise Sparrow will work the front desk Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of that week. TA Jenkins and Town Treasurer Pallas will cover the front desk for the remainder of the week.

There have been two new permit applications since the last meeting.

Mr. Etnier reported that he heard from Mr. Zeilenga on the Rec Board and the County Road closure is still being discussed.

Meeting Schedule:

- May 1, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- May 15, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- June 5, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- June 19, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- July 24, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special meeting date

Other Business

None.

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 Mr. Hess. Passed unanimously.

The Board entered executive session at 8:48 p.m. and exited at 9:05 p.m.

Motion: To appoint Zoe Christiansen to open seat for 1-year term of 3-year position through 2024. Made by Mr. Etnier, second by Mr. Hess. Passed unanimously.

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.

Approved May 1, 2023 Selectboard meeting.