

Minutes for the East Montpelier Selectboard

June 19, 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, Jon Jewett, Scott Hess, Town Administrator (“TA”) Gina Jenkins

Remote SB Attendance: Zoe Christiansen

In-Person Public Attendance: ORCA Media; Deirdre Connelly; Jon Boucher

Remote Public Attendance: Patty Giavara, Town Clerk Laquerre

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

Additions to the Agenda: TA Jenkins requested time to discuss a potential RFP for a consultant to help with the town garage. She also requested the Board review a new permit that came in, 23-025.

Public Comment: Ms. Giavara spoke to the County Road closure events that were approved at the last Selectboard meeting. She explained that she felt the event was coming as a surprise and was not out in the open as much as she’d hoped. She expressed concern that the feedback that TA Jenkins collected from residents about the closures was disregarded. Ms. Giavara noted that she wasn’t try to stop the event from happening, and offered two recommendations for the upcoming July closure: first, that the closure divert traffic to Center Road, rather than Barnes Road, because Barnes can be tricky to navigate; second, that data be collected around the number of cars diverted, the number of people participating, and where people are coming from to participate in the event. She offered to assist with this data collection.

Chair Gardner addressed the point about the meeting discussion not being out in the open. He and TA Jenkins noted where the Selectboard meeting agendas and zoom links can be found on the town website and that they are posted at the municipal office, post office, and Four Corners Schoolhouse. Ms. Giavara clarified that she thinks Mr. Gilbert should be more open about the event and invite more feedback from residents. She added that she will pass along her two recommendations to Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Etnier. Ms. Christiansen addressed the concern about the Board disregarding resident’s feedback, explaining that much of the negative feedback about the events seemed to be about misunderstandings about the event or about elements that hadn’t yet been smoothed out. She reassured Ms. Giavara that the feedback was carefully considered and discussed. Chair Gardner also noted that the approval for the four events is revocable if the first event goes poorly.

TA Jenkins observed that no information or communication about the event has gone out to residents yet.

Minutes: The board reviewed the draft minutes of the June 5, 2023 Board meeting.

Motion: To approve the minutes from the June 5, 2023 Board meeting as presented. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

Washington County Sheriff

The Board reviewed the statistics from May and the contract renewal. TA Jenkins noted the rate increase was in line with what was discussed earlier in the year. Mr. Jewett commented that he noticed a car posted in North Montpelier and was pleased to see it as he knows it’s an area prone to speeding.

Motion: To approve the contract renewal with Washington County Sheriff's Department for the period July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Ms. Christiansen. Passed unanimously.

Consideration of Cemetery Price Changes

The Board reviewed the proposed cemetery price changes. Mr. Boucher noted that the increased prices place more of the monetary burden of upkeep on the people using the cemetery rather than on taxpayers. He also noted that he requested the Cemetery Committee meet to discuss the price changes, but the chair declined to call a meeting.

Mr. Jewett and Mr. Hess expressed support for the price increases. Chair Gardner expressed reservations; he was concerned that some of the prices would more than double. Mr. Jewett asked how many lots are left to sell in the cemeteries. Mr. Boucher noted that only one cemetery has available lots and it is being surveyed right now, so he doesn't know the exact number. He estimated half a dozen lots are sold each year. Mr. Boucher noted that the higher prices would mean more money goes to perpetual care.

Mr. Hess asked if Chair Gardner would be more comfortable with spreading the increases over a few years. Chair Gardner supported that idea. Mr. Jewett noted that the prices probably hadn't changed in at least a decade, which might explain why the increase feels so extreme. He added that the opportunity to bring in income for perpetual care will go away once all lots are sold.

Chair Gardner suggested doubling the prices for two- and four-grave lots this year and revisiting the prices again next year.

Motion: To increase the prices for cemetery services as presented, to double the price for two- and four-grave lots, and to revisit the prices again in one year. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Ms. Christiansen. Passed 3-1. (Mr. Jewett).

Town Treasurer Report

The Board reviewed the report, there was no discussion.

Consideration of Fiscal Year End Fund Balances

TA Jenkins noted the Treasurer Transition Fund had a remaining balance of \$10k and recommended the Board release the balance to the general fund.

The Board reviewed the FY2023 variances highlighted by TA Jenkins. She noted that salaries and health insurance costs were big expenses this year, as well as an overage for the Ash Tree Removal work. She added that the highway budget is trending under budget, which has helped somewhat. TA Jenkins pointed out that the budget is tighter this year than it has been in past years, and she is keeping a close eye on it for reforecasting next year.

Motion: To release the \$10k balance in the Treasurer Transition Fund back to the General Fund. Made by Mr. Jewett, second by Mr. Hess. Passed unanimously.

Investment of Town Funds

Mr. Hess presented the research he'd done on investing town funds. He offered the investment policy from VLCT as well as the town's investment policy, and he explained that he is primarily looking into US Treasury obligations and certificates of deposit, both of which are listed as allowable in the guidance from VLCT. He added that the investments he is looking into will keep funds liquid for the town while still offering significant potential earnings.

Town Clerk Report

Town Clerk Laquerre noted the written report she'd prepared for the board in advance of the meeting. She pointed out that the Board had discussed changing the policy about retaining cleared checks in the summer of 2022. The Board was interested in changing the policy so cleared checks would only be held for a week, rather than keep them in the vault for six months. Because Town Treasurer Pallas was still new to the office, Town Clerk Laquerre decided not to bring this change to the Board to vote on last summer, so the discussed change never took effect.

Consideration of Quote to Replace Town Office Network Server

TA Jenkins noted that because the server is not included in the capital plan, the ARPA funds give the town office an opportunity to make this replacement. The quote from rbTech is approximately \$23k for equipment and installation services. TA Jenkins noted that she is interested in exploring a cloud server option, but the financial software may not be compatible with it. The Board supported looking into a cloud option with rbTech before making a decision on the quote for a new physical server.

Appointments

TA Jenkins presented the list of appointments for the Board to review:

- Patricia Canada for Assistant Town Clerk and Assistant Town Treasurer
- James Mangan for Cemetery Sexton
- Pam Biron for the vacant seat on the Cemetery Committee

TA Jenkins also noted that there is a seat open on the East Montpelier Village Committee due to Alice Smith's recent passing. She passed around forms from the state for the Board to sign to reappoint Ty Rolland as the fire warden and the present members signed the forms.

Motion: To approve the slate as presented. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Ms. Christiansen. Passed unanimously.

Access Permit 23-020

The Board reviewed permit 23-020. TA Jenkins noted that Road Foreman Perry reviewed the curb cut and mentioned that the culvert it requires will benefit the road as well.

Motion: To approve permit 23-020. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Ms. Christiansen. Passed unanimously.

Discussion on potential RFP to seek a consultant to assist with the design request for a new town garage

TA Jenkins explained that she researched some other RFPs for town garages and noticed that Brookfield put out an RFP for someone to draft the project RFP. She further explained that she wants to move this project along but doesn't have the bandwidth to put together a specific design request for the project RFP, so she is interested in hiring someone to assist with that work. Mr. Jewett noted that he know someone who did this kind of work and could connect TA Jenkins after the meeting.

Access (ROW) Permit 23-025

TA Jenkins explained that this permit is to allow a trench across a road for septic work.

Motion: To approve permit 23-025. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Ms. Christiansen. Passed unanimously.

Warrants: June 15, 2023 Special Expense Warrant and June 19, 2023 Regular Expense Warrant

The board reviewed and signed the warrants; there was no discussion.

Town Administrator Report

TA Jenkins noted that Patricia Canada joined the Town Office on Monday, June 12th.

TA Jenkins reported that the resident who raised the trash issue on Route 2 visited the office to let TA Jenkins know that the trash has been cleaned up at the site and trash bins are visible in front of the residence. TA Jenkins has let Mr. McCall know about this update.

Meeting Schedule:

- July 24, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special meeting date
- August 7, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- August 10, 2023 7:00 p.m. EMFD meeting date
- August 23, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- September 11, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special meeting date
- September 18, 2023 6:30 p.m. Special meeting date
- October 2, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date
- October 16, 2023 6:30 p.m. Regular meeting date

Consideration of FY2024 Employee Pay Rates

Personnel Matter

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. Hess, second by Mr. Jewett. Passed unanimously.

The Board entered Executive Session at 8:22 p.m. and exited at 8:50 p.m.

No action was taken.

Motion: To approve the FY2024 employee wages and salaries as proposed with new pay rates effective July 1, 2023. Made by Mr. Jewett, second by Mr. Hess. Passed unanimously.

Other Business

None.

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.

Approved July 24, 2023 Selectboard meeting.