

Selectboard Special Meeting Minutes Joint with East Montpelier Selectboard

Monday, October 4, 2021, at 8 pm, East Montpelier Town Office and Zoom

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair), John Brabant* (Member), Rick Kehne (Member), Marc Mihaly (Member), ORCA Media, Katie Lane-Karnas* (Recording Secretary), Judith Dillon*, Carl Etnier*, Seth Gardner, Bruce Johnson, Jon Jewett, Amy Willis
**Indicates attendance by Zoom video call*

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the Calais meeting to order at 8:00 pm. Member
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion to go into Executive Session at 8:04 pm per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (1) (A), negotiations and invited the Recording Secretary to join them. The motion was seconded by Denise Wheeler, voted on and carried 5-0. The East Montpelier Selectboard also made a motion to go into Executive Session. The joint boards discussed how to include Fire Chief Ty Rolland in a conversation and decided to invite him to speak with the joint Boards before they entered executive session.

East Montpelier Town Manager Bruce Johnson screen shared side-by-side contract language: “proposed new agreement EM/Calais” and “proposed new agreement EMFD.”

Ty Rolland encouraged the boards’ questions of him and explained EMFD concerns regarding the notice of non-renewal this year. He noted transparency could be addressed by the Department attending town meeting and being on the floor that day. EMFD observed a long time went by without open, clear communication and they didn’t really understand the proposed change to three years before contract renewal. Chief Rolland commented that the timeline that resulted from the non-renewal process this year didn’t work and he questioned the workability of a shorter time window. He suggested talking about things rather than changing the contract and regretted the EMFD not being included in meetings. Denise Wheeler noted that the EMFD Board had met to discuss this issue but had not invited the Selectboard’s to attend.

Denise Wheeler reviewed the timeline: the working document was initiated by Calais’s proposed language, then underwent changes from East Montpelier, and then from the EMFD; it has landed back with the boards on Sept. 18 for joint review (occurring tonight). Judith Dillon asked about the purpose of the executive session: her understanding is that the meeting’s purpose is to get the input of the EMFD, with Ty Rolland. Members continued to

consider the discussion and use of executive session. John Brabant commented that Calais and East Montpelier are both municipal entities; the EMFD is a private, non-profit organization, with whom the Towns contract, and the boards have the responsibility to run Town Meeting as they see in the best interest of the town taxpayers. A non-profit organization's input on how items are warned, and how Town Meeting is run, is the responsibility of the boards. Sharon Winn Fannon underscored that the Calais Selectboard has been clear about wanting to address the fundamental issue that they were contractually bound *not* to present the EMFD budget as a separate line item, perhaps as much as a year ago. Sharon was surprised the EMFD was surprised by the Calais selectboard request. Denise Wheeler reminded the group that Calais raised this concern many months ago and at that time the Calais Selectboard said it would be submitting and requesting changes. Rick Kehne added that this is the right of a town; a selectboard works for the taxpayers and their best interest. Calais Selectboard emphasized there is no concern to be raised about EMFD's transparency of the budget.

The first issue on the table deals with the contract being reviewed by the parties at least every THREE (proposed) years, and shall not auto renew more than two successive years. This language directs all three parties to review the contract on a more regular basis.

Discussion turned to notice of non-renewal of contract. Ty Rolland explained that the length of time that passed during communication on the current contract was too long, so EMFD proposed language to condense the timeline more succinctly for contract changes. Sharon Winn Fannon noted that none of the three groups can *compel* another to a meeting, and the language that states they must is not going to work. The group moved on.

The EMFD has proposed language that defines actions following a notice of non-renewal, including, for example, frequency of meetings. Selectboard members agreed a clear process to promote meeting and communication in this scenario is important, but again, cannot be compelled.

Ty Rolland explained EMFD does not want the contract to permit Calais to have the EMFD budget to be warned as a separate item. Denise Wheeler reminded everyone that Woodbury Fire Department has been warned separately all along. Chief Rolland expressed concern about voters comparing side-by-side EMFD and WFD budgets on the floor at Town Meeting. John Brabant commented the contract language has embedded in it an implied expectation that Calais and East Montpelier Selectboards unequivocally back the EMFD budget; when that item comes up at town meeting and residents have hard questions, the Departments showing up to answer those questions and increasing presence at the town meeting gives taxpayers what they deserve. He reiterated the contrast that exists between Woodbury's presence at town meeting explaining their budget as a separate warned item (and the strong support they always receive) with East Montpelier Fire Department's involvement in town meeting.

Ty Rolland confirmed the EMFD will commit to increasing attendance at town meeting. He asked what the consideration is if the budget is voted down or lowered on the floor in Calais; further, how this will impact the cost-sharing agreed upon by East Montpelier.

East Montpelier Selectboard voted to enter executive session at 8:51 pm and invited their Town Manager to join them. (Calais Selectboard had already voted to enter executive session at the beginning of the meeting).

The Boards resumed Regular Session at 9:31 pm. Carl Etnier explained what the two boards agreed to in Executive Session: the boards will sign a joint letter to the EMFD thanking them for their participation in this dialogue, and explaining that the Boards prefer to stick with the language of the agreement as signed by both the Calais and East Montpelier Selectboards; and, as a member, Carl Etnier moved to authorize the East Montpelier Selectboard Chair to sign the joint letter on behalf of the EM Board conveying the information as described above to EMFD, and to work with the Calais Selectboard to get their signatures as well before sending the letter to EMFD. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. Marc Mihaly moved the same motion as stated by Carl Etnier; Sharon Winn Fannon seconded the motion, and they authorized Denise Wheeler to sign on behalf of the Board after reviewed by the full Board. The motion was voted and passed unanimously.

5. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: Done.
6. Adjournment: Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion to adjourn at 9:38 pm. Marc Mihaly seconded the motion which was voted on and carried 5-0.

Date: 10/7/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 10/25/2021 meeting

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