

## Selectboard Joint Special Meeting with East Montpelier Board and East Montpelier Fire Department Minutes

*Thursday, December 9, 2021 at 7 pm at the EMFD and Zoom*

**Calais Selectboard:** Denise Wheeler (Chair), Rick Kehne (Member), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary)

**East Montpelier Selectboard:** Seth Gardner (Chair), Carl Etnier (Vice Chair), Jon Jewett, Judith Dillon, Amy Willis, Bruce Johnson (Town Administrator)

**EMFD:** Ty Rolland, Judith Woodbeck, Sandy Conti, Paul Guare, Albert Petrella, Larry Brown

**Additional:** ORCA Media, Scott Hess

1. Call to Order: There was not a quorum of the Calais Selectboard, but the meeting was brought to order at 7:01 pm.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Service and Budget Updates: The audit and balance sheet were reviewed. Chief Rolland reported that contingencies were maxed out and now everything is going into the capital account. To clarify, he explained that all ambulance revenue (once expenses are deducted) are split 25% for contingencies, 75% to capital; a threshold set for contingencies has been met for the year, so the total revenue now goes to the capital account.

Chief Rolland brought the group's attention to an administrative error, and noted that expenditures are right on target; he answered questions about many line items. The EMFD manages income from Marshfield and Plainfield within the budget, and the Chief explained that income from Marshfield is directed to a salary line item. He explained that the state of Vermont ambulance tax, overall, impacts the EMFD neutrally. Insurance revenue was approx. \$49,000 for this period (the budget status being reviewed comprises a third of the year) and the Chief noted this is pretty good. The Dept. has seen an increase of call volumes for the last year or so, and the revenue stream has reflected that overall. The COVID vaccination contract (for staff working at vaccine clinics a few times each week) was originally a state grant for \$100,000 for the Dept. to expend strictly for payroll for this purpose. It includes mileage and reimbursement expenses. Vaccine demand has been strong and a second such grant is being negotiated.

Profit and loss document was reviewed. 67% of the budget has been taken in so far. The building had a large expense for regular maintenance (mechanical system servicing and repairs). Forestry firefighting equipment for the UTV, and other repair and replacement parts were larger expenditures. The lift for the ambulance that was approved will come out of the capital account; it has been ordered and expected to arrive later in the winter. The building on

the hill (Station 1) had a new water line installed in coordination with the town of East Montpelier. Chief Rolland noted that the budget is tracking as we usually expect to.

The group reviewed the capital plan. One revision has been the yearly revenue amount: it has been adjusted up from approx. \$100K to \$130K, better reflecting the increased number of calls that have been holding strong. \$18K is about what has been consistent for the last ten years to come in from the ambulance revenue (the Chief noted this does fluctuate a bit year to year and this is a best estimate). The group reviewed the future of the loan schedules. A heavy hydraulic tool (the cutter) needed to be replaced out of sequence; one truck does already have a heavy hydraulic tool on it. Rick Kehne suggested adding this item to the schedule so it gets replaced as needed and the Chief added that the trend is actually moving toward batteries instead. Engine 4 is a 1994 and it is expected to be replaced soon (best practice is 25-year lifespan). It has been inspected and is safe to run, but the safety features are not comparable to new trucks. Engine 2 would become a secondary response truck once Engine 4 is replaced. Utility 1 vehicle would then be pushed back down the schedule somewhat. The composite fiberglass tanks' replacements and parts were discussed (they were fully replaced a number of years back). The technology in new air packs is dramatically improved from what is on board now, and these tech improvements primarily positively impact the firefighters' safety.

The group reviewed the FY 23 ambulance budget, including review of the actuals versus budget for FY22. Chief Rolland explained there is no increase for Plainfield or Marshfield until their contracts come up for renewal, at which point their contracts go up 3%. Calais's increase is 8.5%. The Calais and East Montpelier Boards had planned to support salary budgets through planned, yearly increases the past two years, with the third year (FY23) proposed at \$75,000. The EMFD is asking to do \$37,500 this year and next year, rather than the full \$75,000 this upcoming year. The Selectboards appreciated this approach.

The Dept. has contributed funds from the capital budget to the regular budget to reduce significant budget increases, keeping fire at about a \$5,000 increase. Ambulance is going up approx. \$46,000, largely due to increase in salary (this would be an increase of only \$9,000 without the salary increase). Chief Rolland reported he does have a fair amount of employee applications on his desk with whom to follow up. In addition to the COVID grant discussed earlier, ambulance revenue also included approx. \$17,000 in hazard pay for staff during the pandemic. The Chief reported that EMFD has not mandated vaccines at this point, and all but one staff member is vaccinated. All staff are wearing PPE and there is no mandatory testing instituted. Board members inquired why the Dept. is not requiring vaccination, or regular testing. The Chief explained there is no regulatory enforcement for such a requirement, or legal bounds to rely on other than firing an employee. East Montpelier Selectboard noted they just instituted a mask mandate, and provide a large portion of EMFD funding. They pointed out that as their funding source, the Town may be able to provide a policy that the expectation is for people servicing vulnerable populations to be protecting the safety of the community. EM Selectboard emphasized the importance of doing everything we can do to protect the safety of the community and reiterated the Towns hold the power of the purse; Judith Dillon questioned if the Boards could encourage the Dept. to have that policy for their personnel. The Chief said they would take that under consideration and felt it was far-reaching by the towns. East Montpelier has required weekly testing if employees are not vaccinated, and asked why the Dept. would not at least require their employees get tested. East Montpelier public feedback was 6:1 in favor of mask mandates, which they ended up passing. East Montpelier

Board members questioned what community feedback would be on whether their emergency responders should be vaccinated, or tested in the case of not being tested. The Boards asked the Department when they will discuss this and to return to the Boards with their response.

The Chief was asked about an audit comment regarding another organization utilizing the EIN of EMFD and Chief Rolland explained they had chartered the Boy Scouts who can't operate without it; the Boy Scout troop's assets were under control of the EMFD. The organization no longer is in operation so the audit comment is outdated.

For calendar year 2021, there have been approximately 675 calls so far. The Boards thanked the Department for the budget presentation.

5. Replacement of Engine 4: Chief Rolland explained the proposed manufacturer is Toyne, an American made company that provides a custom truck. Toby Talbot is a representative for this company, but he is not getting his percentage for the sale of a fire truck and he has disqualified himself from this process on the truck purchase. The Dept. has narrowed down the type of truck they want and while EMFD has not purchased from this manufacturer previously, multiple trucks are in Vermont by this manufacturer.

The proposed timeline is to go out for purchase in FY23 with estimated total cost \$425,000, knowing that material cost fluctuations are hard to predict at this point. The chassis would be a freight liner and the cab would be a commercial one (not a custom). There are complications with demo models being a potential savings option, because they are often built for a city (smaller motor, less water on them, less hose to carry, etc.). The Department plans to go with a rear wheel drive truck and run chains rather than purchase AWD. The used markets are empty these days.

The Chief discussed water hydrant options in our towns and their changing availability depending on weather and seasons. Payment is not due until the truck is delivered. The Dept. is asking the towns to split the cost of \$200,000 and they would pay the rest out of the capital fund. The split of the \$200,000 is 2/3 East Montpelier, 1/3 Calais. The Dept. expects to get a 5-year loan for their portion of the truck. Bruce Johnson explained that East Montpelier would need to get authority from the voters to transfer this money, even from the Capital Reserve, a vote would be needed. Calais would have to put it on their Town Meeting Warning to handle from the floor.

6. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: Carl Etnier reminded the group about this year's change to the interlocal agreement permitting Calais to put the EMFD budget in front of the voters as a separate item. He asked Calais about their budget warning and voting plans. Denise Wheeler commented that the Board has not gotten that far in budget planning and Rick Kehne added that the taxpayers will also figure out how to support this very valuable asset that they consistently strongly support.
7. Adjournment: The Calais Selectboard meeting ended at 8:35 pm.

Date: 12/10/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary  
*Approved by the Selectboard at their 2/14/2022 meeting*

*Click on the link below to view documents associated with this agenda:*  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DHYMdYUhcN0ZuP1d2Rjf2AGRemH8nf?usp=sharing>