

## Selectboard Special Meeting Minutes Joint with East Montpelier Selectboard

*Monday, June 7, 2021 at 7 pm via Zoom conference call*

**Present:** Denise Wheeler (Chair), John Brabant (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), Rick Kehne (Member), ORCA Media, Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Paul Guare, Seth Gardner, Bruce Johnson, Amy Willis, Carl Etnier, Judith Dillon, Jon Jewett, Rose Pelchuck

**Absent:** Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair)

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the Calais Selectboard meeting to order at 7:03 pm (the East Montpelier Selectboard meeting had already been in process and continued their meeting after the Calais Selectboard adjourned the joint section of the meeting).
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Discussion of Contract with East Montpelier Fire Department (EMFD): The Calais Selectboard has discussed this contract in executive session as permitted by state statute. The group decided to proceed publicly at this meeting (it was warned as a “potential” executive session item). Calais Selectboard had proposed three language changes to the contract between the three contractual parties: Town East Montpelier, Town of Calais, and the EMFD.

Calais proposed that each town have the choice to either put the emergency services budget amount in the Selectboard budget, or have it voted on from the floor at Town Meeting. Denise Wheeler explained that there is an opportunity lost when there is no discussion from the floor at Town Meeting regarding the emergency services budget. John Brabant added that it is currently “on the floor” at Town Meeting anyway—a motion for a separate line item discussion on that budget has the potential to happen at any time. We have warned items for all other large budget items. Including the EMFD works in favor of the Department, so they can explain the work they do and where all of this money is going, avoiding a future scenario when one person starts pushing to know why this is so much money without voter awareness of how it is used.

Woodbury Fire Department presents at Town Meeting each year and usually gets a round of applause. Denise Wheeler agreed this lends a greater understanding and appreciation for what the departments do. Rick Kehne agreed that this engages the people in understanding the great service to the community that is largely supported; greater transparency discourages pressure from a single individual who feels the Board is making decisions on significant budget items without public input. Denise Wheeler commented that in terms of transparency, it is a good opportunity for fire departments to tell folks about the important work they do, engage potential volunteers, and receive appreciation.

Seth Gardner clarified that East Montpelier does not permit a floor vote for items above \$25,000. Calais members discussed how the rising expense is well addressed by having the voters hear all the details directly from our emergency professionals at each town meeting. Seth Gardner identified the one argument raised in the past being what would happen if the budget does pass in one town, but the other town does not approve the budget line item. In this scenario, would that town be left hanging? Calais members reiterated that this scenario could happen now at any town meeting in Calais, as a budget line item can be called out separately to be adjusted. It could be voted down in its entirety, amended from the floor; this doesn't change that process in Calais. It adds to transparency, improves democracy, or if needed, another special meeting can be called to approve the budget.

Judith Dillon asked about acknowledgment that each town is making a commitment (to each other) for what they are going to present to the citizenry to pay for the EMFD and questioned if removing that amount of cost allocation would also remove the commitment to each other. Rick Kehne noted that people directly benefit in this service; by directly engaging voters at town meeting, it diffuses resistance to the budget, and allows for answering questions directly, keeping people engaged; the existing agreement is already able to be undermined. Clif Emmons commented that operating as transparently as possible is how we achieve the greatest results in our communities and the contract itself that we enter into represents our commitment to each other. The commitment for cost share is set out in another item.

Conversation turned to the fact that East Montpelier votes Australian ballot. East Montpelier could continue to vote the emergency services budget as they have had, and Calais will be able to select either option. If one town votes the emergency services budget down and the other does not, as has always been a potential outcome, the means of resolution would be a special meeting.

East Montpelier planned to warn this as a discussion item at their next meeting so they may come to a decision of their position as a board. They will then reach out to Calais Selectboard and then meet jointly with the EMFD. Calais emphasized the due diligence owed the taxpayers to not simply auto-renew every year but to regularly review all details of the contract with the current board members; therefore, they have proposed the joint contract not auto-renew more than every three years. It was noted that it is possible that Calais's contract and East Montpelier's contract be written differently.

Calais also proposed a change in the renewal process, changing the amount of notification for non-renewal of contract from five months to sixty days' notice.

5. Adjournment: Rick Kehne made a motion to adjourn at 7:42 pm. John Brabant seconded the motion which was voted on and carried 4-0.

Date: 6/8/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary  
*Approved by the Selectboard at the 6/28/2021 meeting*