

Select Board Members  
 Peter Hood, Chair  
 Mary Just Skinner,  
Vice Chair  
 Phil Hyjek  
 Steve Martin  
 Liz Scharf

**Middlesex Select Board**  
**Tuesday, February 16, 2021**  
**2021 INFORMATIONAL MEETING\***  
**Remote via Zoom**  
**Middlesex Town Clerk's Office**  
**5 Church Street**  
**Middlesex, Vermont 05602**  
**(802) 223-5915**

**MINUTES.**

**PRESENT:** Peter O. Hood, Chair, Mary Just Skinner, Vice Chair, Members Steve Martin, Phil Hyjek and Liz Scharf. Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. Road Commissioner Vic Dwire. Town Moderator Susan Clark. Facilitators Sarah Birgé and Delia Clark. Participants: Randy Drury, Johnnie Krezinski, Michael Levine; Lisa Parrish, Kim Farnum of Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice, Mary Hood, Kellogg-Hubbard Library Co-Director Carolyn Brennan and KHL Middlesex representative Sarah Seidman, Montpelier Senior Activity Center Director Janna Clar, North Branch Director Chip Darmstadt, North Branch Board Member Jan Thouron, Waterbury Senior Center Board Chair Justin Blackman

**Call to Order/Tech Introduction**

Peter called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and invited the Select Board members to introduce themselves. Peter noted it was an informational meeting of the Select Board to discuss the March 2, 2021 Town Meeting and there would be no action. It is not a candidate's forum. He reminded everyone that this is the first of two informational meetings; the second will be held at 6 PM February 23<sup>rd</sup> also by Zoom. Delia provided helpful Zoom tips and how to participate in the meeting.

**ARTICLE 5: Shall the Town of Middlesex voters authorize the Select Board to purchase a new grader in an amount not to exceed \$290,000 to be financed over a period not to exceed 15 years? (24 V.S.A. § 1786a (c)) Select Board members to present followed by questions from participants.**

Former Road Commissioner Steve Martin said the current grader is 23-years old and needs to be replaced. If Article 5 passes, the new grader would be purchased after July 1, 2021 with the first payment due July 2022. It came up for replacement in the Town's normal schedule ten years ago, but the Board was horrified by the price, Peter said, so the Board decided to spend money on repairs to extend its life instead. The grader's current trade-in value is \$35,000 - \$50,000. But if there is a "catastrophic failure," Peter said the Town would have to rent a grader while the current grader would lose all value. To rent a grader for a year the Town would end up paying \$55,000 per year, Steve said. Short-term would be even more expensive. Peter said it's the one-crucial piece of equipment that has no substitution on the highway department. There were no questions.

**ARTICLE 4: Shall the Town of Middlesex vote to accept a fiscal year 2021-2022 budget of \$1,382,738 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Town and authorize the Select Board to set a tax rate sufficient to provide the same? Select Board members to present followed by questions from participants.**

The Board discussed this at 6:15 PM as warned. Peter invited Phil to provide background on the budget. Phil highlighted portions of the budget, explaining the 41.35% increase in administration costs is due to a reorganization of personnel, particularly in hiring a municipal bookkeeper to manage complicated municipal grants. In addition, Phil said the State is switching over to a new grand list software and the Town needs to upgrade its software to comply. Town Hall expenses have decreased because fewer people are using Town Hall during the pandemic. Public works decreased because the Town is using material from its own sand pit. Phil said the Board tried to piece together a budget that met the community's needs. Peter emphasized the Board drafted this budget in collaboration with the Town Budget Committee which supported the budget.

The proposed FY21-22 budget was put up on Zoom. Susan Clark asked a question about election expenses and whether they can be reduced through CARES grants due to COVID. Sarah said hopefully COVID won't be an issue in the FY21-22 year. Steve said the Town is saving several thousands of dollars each year by digging and storing its own sand from its pit on Notch Road. He said the Town needs to spend more on its gravel budget. Johnnie Krezinski asked if there is money budgeted to replace the pitted and rutted asphalt on Center Road near Martin Farm. Steve said the Town's been applying for grants to repave it because it's very expensive. If the Town does not get a grant, then the Town may just pull up the asphalt. Johnnie said he's in favor of saving the money and turning it back to gravel all the way to McCullough Hill Road.

Michael Levine asked if there is a certain distance from the I-89 interchange the State must maintain. Steve said the State maintains up to the turn around, so not that far from the interstate. Lisa Parrish asked about the tree service line item. Peter said occasionally there are trees that are too large for the Town to bring down and the Town has to hire an outside tree service to maintain them. Lisa followed up with a question regarding recent tree trimming along Center Road that she said was ugly. Steve said the Town used a machine that will not be used again. Peter said part of the problem is that there's a labor shortage. Regarding the asphalt on Center Road, Vic said the Town will be applying for a grant to pay for that after July 1. He encouraged those who are interested to contact the office of Senator Patrick Leahy to encourage appropriation of the grant.

Steve addressed the specialized services line item dedicated to ditching; he said the crew hopes to get to that this summer. Also, money from the line item will be spent on hiring an outside company to deal with mud mitigation. Peter said the Highway Department represents approximately 66% of the total budget. Randy asked about stockpiling materials such as gravel and paying for them out of the specialized services allocation. Steve said that's the Highway Department's intent.

**ARTICLE 2: Shall the Town of Middlesex authorize payment of all property taxes to the Town Treasurer, as provided by law and without discount, in four installments as follows: the first installment will be due on or before 5:00 PM, August 20, 2021; the second installment will be due on or before 5:00 PM, November 20, 2021; the third installment will be due on or before 5:00 PM, February 20, 2022, and the fourth installment will be due on or before 5:00 PM, May 20, 2022, except if post marked by the US Postal Service on or before the aforementioned dates accordingly? (32 VSA Sec. 4773) Town Treasurer to present followed by questions from participants.** Peter said after a period of adjustment, people in Town like this payment scenario. There was no discussion.

**ARTICLE 3: Shall the Town of Middlesex charge an interest at the rate of 0.5% per month or fraction thereof on overdue tax installments from the applicable due dates? (32 VSA Sec. 5136) Treasurer to present followed by questions from participants.** There was no discussion.

## SPECIAL ARTICLES

**ARTICLE 6: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$2,500 to the Middlesex Conservation Fund?** There was no one present from the MCC so Peter explained that the Town has been contributing \$5,000 annually to the Conservation Fund. This year, the MCC requested only \$2,500 out of sensitivity to budget constraints and the effect of the pandemic. There was no discussion.

**ARTICLE 7: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$600 to the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation?** Peter said he serves on this independent non-profit organization that supports economic development. The lion's share of the budget comes from a state grant, though CVEDC also requests dues from members and small contributions from towns, he said. A lot of activity this year has been helping businesses through the pandemic. There was no discussion.

**ARTICLE 8: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$4,050 to Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice?** Kim Farnhum from CVHHH invited Mary Hood to speak. Mary said CVHHH is a non-profit visiting-nurse agency that serves 23 communities, visiting people in their homes no matter their ability to pay. During COVID, CVHHH has been active while following safety protocols. Mary referred to CVHHH's report in the Middlesex 2020 Town Report where further statistics are published about the agency's services in Middlesex. Mary thanked the Board for not requiring petitions. Peter explained the Board decided not to request petitions for special articles as long as the organizations requested the same amount of money as at the 2020 Town Meeting.

**ARTICLE 9: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$3,000 to Community Connections?** Liz spoke on behalf of Community Connections. She said it is an after-school program that also offers summer programs. It's affordable, great for working parents and operates on a sliding scale based on income. In addition, children are enriched by Community Connections' special programs such as skiing, Legos, etc.

**ARTICLE 10: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$1,500 to Girls/Boyz First Mentoring?** Liz spoke on behalf of Girls/Boyz, saying it paired U32 students with adult mentors. This relationship can make a huge impact on a teen's life, especially for those who grow up in single-parent households, Liz said. It has not been operating during COVID which Liz said is a shame since now, more than ever, young people need the support of mentoring.

**ARTICLE 11: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$29,801 to the Kellogg-Hubbard Library?** Kellogg-Hubbard Library Co-director Carolyn Brennan and Sarah Seidman, who is the Middlesex representative, spoke on the library's behalf. Carolyn said Middlesex pays for 3% of KHL's annual budget, which averages to \$17 per capita. Due to COVID, the Library reduced its budget by 4%. Sarah Seidman noted this is one of the best libraries in the state with 70,000 books as well as audiobooks available for free. It's unusual for small towns like Middlesex to have access to libraries this extensive, she said.

**ARTICLE 12: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$7,000 to the Montpelier Senior Activity Center?** Janna Clar, executive director of the Montpelier Senior Activity Center, said the center is still offering regular classes despite COVID restrictions. In addition, the center offers curbside meals-to-go twice a week. The center does not offer Meals on Wheels. The Center has been helping people with Zoom training and reaching out to 1,200 members with wellness calls. The Center offers services to 70 residents in Middlesex. Due to COVID, many of the Center's operations have been curtailed, but Janna hopes to bring back full services soon.

**ARTICLE 13: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$2,000 to the North Branch Nature Center? (By Petition)** North Branch Executive Director and Middlesex resident Chip Darmstadt said the Center hasn't requested funds in many years. Because of that, North Branch had to solicit petitions to receive the necessary signatures to appear on the Warning. He said many of North Branch's programs have been shuttered temporarily due to COVID. The Center will be offering summer programs and there will be a blossoming of online programs. He estimates 250 Middlesex residents use the center, but that doesn't include all those who come to ski and snowshoe and walk. He said the Center is starting an Eco program at Rumney. Jan Thouron, who is on the Board of North Branch, said that especially during COVID, many people have gravitated toward nature and the Center was able to set up outdoor events which were very popular.

**ARTICLE 14: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$10,000 to support the Waterbury Senior Center's Meals on Wheels program?** Speaking on behalf of the Waterbury Senior Center, Justin Blackman, chair of the center's board, said eight Middlesex residents receive Meals on Wheels through their center, about 2,500 meals each year for Middlesex residents. The federal government provides a little over \$3 per meal, which means the Senior Center must raise additional funds, a hard task during COVID when fund raisers are not possible. He said the \$10,000 will pay for meals and also welfare visits of Middlesex residents.

**ARTICLE 15: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$5,017 to support the following organizations:**

|                                     |          |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| American Red Cross                  | \$250.00 |
| Big Heavy World                     | \$250.00 |
| CV Adult Basic Ed                   | \$250.00 |
| CV Council on Aging                 | \$250.00 |
| The Children's Room                 | \$250.00 |
| Circle                              | \$199.00 |
| Community Harvest of CV             | \$250.00 |
| Family Center of Wash. Cty          | \$250.00 |
| Good Beginnings of CV               | \$250.00 |
| Good Samaritan Haven                | \$250.00 |
| Green Mt. Transit Agency            | \$249.00 |
| Green Up Vermont                    | \$100.00 |
| Montpelier Veterans Council         | \$250.00 |
| MOSAIC (Sex Assault Crisis Team)    | \$250.00 |
| Our House of Central VT             | \$250.00 |
| VT Association for the Blind        | \$249.00 |
| VT Center for Independent Living    | \$195.00 |
| VT Family Network                   | \$250.00 |
| VT Rural Fire Protection Task Force | \$100.00 |
| Wash. County Diversion              | \$250.00 |

|                                      |          |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Winooski Natural Resources District  | \$250.00 |
| Youth Service Bureau of Wash. County | \$175.00 |

Peter explained that those requests cannot be broken out on the Australian ballot. It's either a yes or no on the question. Liz said many of these organization use the small appropriations as proof of community support when applying for larger grants.

**ARTICLE 16: Shall the Town Voters authorize that all Special Articles requesting Town taxpayer funding, except the Annual Municipal Town Budget, be voted on by Australian ballot starting at the March 1, 2022 Town Meeting? (By Petition)** Peter noted this article appeared by petition; it was not placed on the Warning by the Select Board. Sarah Seidman asked why there was no report of it in the 2020 Town Report. Sarah Merriman said none had been submitted. Peter explained that if Article 16 passes, all the above articles requesting funding - aside from the Town budget – would be voted up or down on the Australian ballot. They could not be amended as they can be at Town Meeting.

Susan Clark spoke in opposition. She said if Article 16 passes, voters actually lose their ability as legislators since they will only be able to vote yes or no, not modify a special article in question. Imagine Sen. Patrick Leahy being forced to vote yes or no, she said. Moreover, an Australian ballot overlooks other voices. As an example, consider what happened to the school meetings when all the questions were moved to Australian ballot. No one attends. She is worried about Town Meeting attendance dropping. She said she understands it's frustrating and takes courage to speak up as a member of the minority. However, there is now a capital planning committee because of discussion at the 2020 Town Meeting. The Conservation Commission is asking for half the money it usually does because it's sensitive to members of the Town. Randy said just the fact the Article 16 is on the ballot has generated necessary conversation about this issue. He supports passage of the article because it gives those who cannot attend Town Meeting another tool to express their voice, he said. Vic said he appreciates Susan's position, but when you have 150 voters deciding for everyone else, everyone else doesn't have that much power. As for anyone being able to attend Town Meeting and vote, you couldn't get 1,400 Town voters in the gym and that causes great division in the town. He said Article 16 gives those who are less fortunate, those who aren't as well versed in the English language an opportunity.

Peter thanked Delia and Sarah for volunteering their skills and time. He adjourned the meeting at 7:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Sarah Merriman, Town Clerk/Select Board Assistant

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE REMOTELY APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD ON MARCH 2, 2021.

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PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

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MARY JUST SKINNER, VICE CHAIR

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PHILIP HYJEK

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STEVEN MARTIN

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ELIZABETH SCHARF