

Select Board Members

Peter Hood, Chair
 Mary Just
Skinner,
Vice Chair
 William Callnan
 Steve Martin
 Liz Scharf

MINUTES

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD

Tuesday, December 15, 2015

5:00 PM

Middlesex Town Clerk's Office

5 Church Street

Middlesex, Vermont 05602

(802) 223-5915

MINUTES

Present: Chair Peter Hood, Vice Chair Mary Just Skinner, Members Bill Callnan, Steve Martin and Liz Scharf. Treasurer and Zoning Administrator Cindy Carlson. Members of the Middlesex Budget Committee: George Longenecker, Bill Dorigan, Barry Bolio and Elias Gardner. Road Foreman Paul Cerminara. Wrightsville Recreation Area Manager Colin O'Neil and Wrightsville's Middlesex Representative Jane Dudley. Also, Vic Dwire, Bill Preis, John Lemmon, Danielle Suffredini, Dave Shepard, Scottie and Robert Brower, Don Hirsch, Sue Pelchar, Alicia Darmstadt, Aaron Weed, Susan Clark, Mark Bushnell, Bill Rossmassler and Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman.

Call to Order/Amendments

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM and welcomed guests, most of whom were present for the McCullough Road Upgrade Public Hearing. There were no amendments.

McCullough Road Upgrade: Public Hearing

Peter invited public comment on a request to upgrade .4 of a mile of McCullough Road from Class 4 to Class 3 so the entire road can be maintained and opened to through traffic in the winter. Scottie Brower, who circulated an informal petition in favor of the upgrade, said this section of the road has been plowed by neighbors on an as-needed basis, has not been sanded and, as a result, in the winter is unsafe. Dave and Sue Warren, also residents of McCullough Hill Road, spoke in opposition. They said because the road is closed to through traffic in the winter, other Middlesex residents use it to walk recreationally. Dave questioned the taxpayer expense of an upgrade and whether that should be absorbed by the petitioners. Aaron said the town might be setting a dangerous precedent by paying for this upgrade as other residents of Class 4 roads will expect the same.

In response, Peter said he considered this a unique situation because it's such a short segment in an otherwise Class 3 road. He said the town did not plan on expanding the road significantly if it were upgraded aside from some ditching, pruning and sanding. Bill Preis observed that McCullough is also special because it ends at an interstate, unlike other Class 4 roads in town.

John Lemmon noted that he and his wife just bought a McCullough Road house a week ago and were comforted that it was closed to through traffic in the winter so they, too, were opposed. In response, Liz said she doubted that more people would use the road in the winter even with the upgrade because it would still be winding and narrow. Also, for the sake of community, wouldn't it be fairer to spread the traffic more evenly across town?

Susan Clark, who was also opposed, urged the Select Board to install signs on the road warning of the road's dangers in the winter if McCullough were upgraded. Peter agreed that the signage should say, "Dangerous for Winter Travel," or something to that effect. Vic said from what he'd observed, most drivers slid off the road specifically because it wasn't sanded. Bill Callnan noted that upgrades do not have to be permanent; the town has the ability to downgrade a road as well, provided statutory hearings were held. Peter ended the public discussion at 5:50 p.m.

McCullough Road Upgrade Approved

The Board discussed the public comments. Bill Callnan said he was confident the town would not set a precedent with the upgrade and Peter said upgrading this section of road wouldn't alter McCullough Hill Road's character.

MOTION: Bill moved and Liz seconded a request to upgrade the remaining .4 of a mile of McCullough Hill Road that was still Class 4. The motion passed unanimously.

Wrightsville Beach Assessment Increase

Jane said when Wrightsville Recreation Area was established in 1983, the annual assessment on each of the four communities – Middlesex, Worcester, East Montpelier and Montpelier- was capped at 50 cents. She said the beach hit that ceiling six to eight years ago and has been working on a shoestring budget ever since. Colin, the hired manager, even loaned Wrightsville \$2,000 of his own money to buy a mower last summer. Therefore, each representative is asking the select boards of his or her town to raise the ceiling to \$1.50/resident, though the increase for the upcoming year would only be 90 cents if it passes. In the last fiscal year, Middlesex paid \$904 to Wrightsville.

MOTION: Bill moved and Steve seconded raising the Wrightsville assessment ceiling to \$1.50 per Middlesex resident. The motion passed unanimously. The board thanked Jane and Colin for all their hard work maintaining a valuable recreation area.

Approving Purchase and Sale Agreement for Steed Property

MOTION: Bill moved and Liz seconded approving an agreement to purchase 39.9 acres at the end of Notch Road owned by Cynthia Steed that would provide additional land and access to the Town Forest for \$40,000 with \$20,000 coming from the Conservation Fund and \$20,000 from unanticipated revenue due to the sale of the Morse property to DAMSTAT Properties earlier this year. Peter should review the final Purchase and Sale Agreement and consult with the town's attorney before signing. The motion passed unanimously.

FY17 Budget Workshop

Peter said he was more or less willing to support the budget even though it exceeded the targeted 2%. He said wages needed to be increased by \$1/hour for town employees and the highway budget couldn't be cut like it was last year. Therefore, he suggested putting \$30,000 from the fund balance toward lowering the tax rate. Bill said once the budget

was raised, that laid the foundation for bigger budgets in the future and the fund balance wouldn't be around forever.

The way Bill saw it, personnel costs were responsible for the increase, not just in wages, but in insurance. While he believed that employees should be paid competitive wages, he wondered if the town could operate on a three-person road crew and he wished the town would get out of the health insurance business. A 4.4% increase in the budget was hard on those with fixed incomes.

Liz noted that every year it seems the highway department does not completely spend its budget. Cindy said that wouldn't happen this year. The board agreed to think more about the budget and vote on it at the next regularly scheduled meeting of January 12, 2016. Liz left the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

MOTION: Steve moved and Bill seconded approval of the December 1, 2015, Select Board meeting minutes. The motion passed.

MOTION: Mary moved and Bill seconded approval of Red Hen's liquor license renewal. The motion passed.

The Board discussed the CVRPC's request for a "voluntary donation" from communities involved in an upcoming hazard mitigation plan and decided to table the issue until the end of the fiscal year.

Peter signed the VT AOT Grant Agreement for repaving Shady Rill Road.

All orders were signed.

The Board granted Timberline Events permission to use the Town Hall parking lot for a road race on the weekend of June 11, 2016.

Peter adjourned the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Merriman
Town Clerk/Select Board Assistant