

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

MINUTES
MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, November 5, 2019
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 Phil Hyjek, Steve Martin and Liz Scharf. Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. Road Foreman Paul Cerminara. Listers Amy Whitehorne and Eric Young. Sue Bettmann of ORCA and Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman.

Call to Order/Amendments

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:05 PM. There were no amendments.

Listers' Update: Wages, Computers, & HS-122 Fees

Due to more stringent state requirements and a changing real estate market, Amy said the Listers can no longer work just between nine a.m. and noon on Wednesdays with increased hours during the early spring appraisal period. The Listers have revised their schedule. Now, one will work 15 hours a week, the other 8 and the third 3 hours for 30 weeks out of the year. That means they will overrun the FY20 budget wages of \$14,000 by likely another \$14,000. Amy noted that towns of similar size often have Listers working 30-40-hour weeks. Therefore, the Listers asked to amend the current budget.

Peter said the budget is approved by the voters at Town Meeting and cannot be amended over the course of the year without holding a special Town Meeting. However, the Listers should put in for their hours worked and, if there's an overrun, the Board will deal with that as the year progresses. Eric noted that's been the Listers' practice in the past. However, in this case, the numbers are so high, he and Amy felt the Board needed to be appraised. The Board agreed that updates and communication were key.

Eric also said it was his understanding quite some time ago that the Listers would be getting a new computer. The Listers computer currently is a laptop running on Windows 7 that after January 1, 2020, will no longer provide security updates and, therefore, cannot be hooked to the Town system. Peter and Phil concurred that the Listers were budgeted for a new computer in this fiscal year. Amy said they do not want tablets, but would like a laptop with enough power to run the grand list/CAMA programs with an external hard drive, preferably before January. The Board agreed.

Amy asked the Board to consider implementing the 8% penalty on homestead residents who fail to file their Homestead Declarations (HS-122) with their state income taxes on or before April 15. Most towns with higher homestead rates – like Middlesex – impose the fee for two reasons: revising the tax bills of late filers requires extra work on the part of the bookkeeper, Treasurer and Listers, and it's unfair to fellow taxpayers who pay the higher homestead rate. While most of those who file their HS-122s late or not at all simply have overlooked the form, there are a few who don't declare their homesteads because the non-residential rate is lower. According to the Listers' calculations, by imposing the fee, the Town could have recouped over \$6,000, some of which could be applied to the increased Listers' costs because, as Eric noted, the State has shifted the burden of policing the HS-122s to the towns. The Board agreed to take the Listers' recommendations under advisement when it considers whether or not to waive the penalty as it does each spring. Eric and Amy left the meeting.

Highway Department Building and Five-Year-Road Plan Update

The Board discussed DeWolfe Engineering's assessment of the structural integrity of the highway garage on Shady Rill Road. In a nutshell, the garage is stable as long as snow doesn't accumulate on the roof, which means the garage will continue to lose heat during the winter if a new one is not built. The Board discussed potential solutions aside from an entirely new building.

The Board reviewed a revised Five-Year Road Plan that needed to be reworked due to the impact of heavy spring storms that damaged several town roads. As a result, roads that were scheduled for service in the summer of 2019 will now be serviced in the summer of

2020 with the exception of Portal Road, which underwent mud mitigation in 2019. All of this may affect the budget Paul and Steve are preparing for FY21 as the Road Crew hustles to catch up with projects delayed by these weather events. In addition, the Highway Department needs to meet new state standards. For example, any road with a grade of 7% or more needs to be “stone lined,” an expensive and time-consuming process affecting roads such as McCullough Hill.

In other bad news, shortly after the State awarded to Middlesex a \$72,000 grant Paul applied for to mitigate the cost of spring storms, the motor on the 2014 Western Star broke. It needs to be repaired at a cost of \$52,000, though it has only 80,000 miles on its odometer. Peter said from now on the Town needs to buy extended warranties on all new trucks. Paul said he will ask Charlesbois for a used “loaner truck” to handle plowing since another Town truck has been at their shop for 5 weeks for warranted repairs. Paul left the meeting.

Considering Tech Group’s Proposal & New Computers

Phil said Peter and he met with representatives from Tech Group, a South Burlington IT firm that works with a lot of municipalities and school districts and, therefore, may be more familiar with the Town’s needs than the Town’s current IT provider, RBTech. While Phil felt Tech Group’s proposal to assess the Town’s security and network might be a bit redundant – especially since he has confidence in the security and network established by RBTech – he thought they might be less expensive for other services. Specifically, Tech Group can offer a town email system compliant with state and national requirements that is far less expensive than RB Tech’s proposal.

Peter said the first priority should be setting up a Town-based email system so board and committee members are not using their personal emails.

In addition, the Board decided it needed to make a decision on a new Listers’ computer within 30 days. Phil said he would draw up the specs on a new Dell and ask Tech Group for a bid on the cost of installation. The Listers may need two computers and the bookkeeper may need one more.

Treasurer’s Report – Approving the FY19 Audit

The Board discussed whether it would be necessary to invite Bonnie Batchelder, a CPA who audited the Town’s books for FY19, to explain her report. Dorinda noted she found no weaknesses in the Town’s finances. Peter said he’d prefer that Dorinda explain the audit report at the November 19th meeting. In the meantime, the Board should vote to accept the audit.

MOTION: Mary moved and Steve seconded accepting the FY19 audit report of the Town’s finances. The motion passed.

OTHER BUSINESS

MOTION: Mary moved and Steve seconded approving the October 15, 2019, Select Board Minutes. The motion passed and those present signed the minutes. Phil abstained because he was not at that meeting.

All orders were signed.

CORRESPONDENCE: The Board reviewed and approved a letter to Mike Smith, the new Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Resources, regarding plans for closing the Therapeutic Care Facility.

The Board reviewed a letter from VT Attorney General TJ Donovan regarding the benefits of not opting out of the State’s Negotiating Class litigation. Liz noted the municipal FAST squads incur additional costs responding to overdoses and medical events caused by opioids, but said that, according to corresponding information from the VT Attorney General’s Office, the Town stands to gain approximately \$258 from the lawsuit. The Board agreed not to opt out. The letter required no action.

The Board discussed assisting the MVFD in recruiting more members, especially Town residents, and other support it may need to improve service.

Mary moved and Steve seconded adjourning the meeting at 7:01 PM

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

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A
REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
ON NOVEMBER 19, 2019.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

MARY JUST SKINNER, VICE CHAIR

PHILIP HYJEK

STEVEN MARTIN

ELIZABETH SCHARF