

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

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD  
Tuesday, January 19, 2021  
**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 and Liz Scharf. Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. Listers Amy Whitehorne and Eric Young. Juli Beth Hinds, Principal of Birchline Planning and Russ Bennett of Planetary Matters. Randy Drury and Vic Dwire. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes and the meeting was recorded by ORCA.

**Call to Order/Amendments**

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:01 PM and welcomed guests. There were no amendments to the agenda.

**Listers Discuss New CAMA Program**

The Listers explained why they submitted a last-minute budget request for \$15,000 to purchase new property-assessing software, otherwise known as CAMA. Eric said the State is mandating new grand list software for FY23, but the Town needs to implement new CAMA software by August in coordination. Amy said the State has never provided CAMA software; the Town buys it. In the past, that Town CAMA software has come through NEMRC. Peter asked why the Town is switching. Amy said the NEMRC software is antiquated and it will be harder to interact with the new State grand list software. Peter asked what the Town pays now for software vs. what the Town will pay in the future for this new software. Amy said she didn't have the numbers at the ready, especially since many of the NEMRC programs are interconnected. Peter said the expense has been budgeted, but the Select Board would like more detailed information to understand what is being purchased. Steve asked for a comparison of numbers having to do with this software including Marshal & Swift tables, NEMRC maintenance costs and the drawing program. Dorinda says the Town pays about \$5,000 for the NEMRC programs, much of which goes for support. Amy and Eric left the meeting.

**Approving the March 2, 2021 Town Meeting Warning**

The Board discussed Article 5 about the road grader. If passed, the article wouldn't affect the proposed budget. However, voters need to approve the purchase before the Select Board can take possession of the grader after July 1, 2021. The first payment would be due exactly a year to the day the note is taken out, i.e. in the FY23. Liz asked if there should be an entry in the Town Report explaining about the Road Grader. It was decided that Phil should add this info in his budget explanation and that Steve should add it to the Highway Report. Peter said it might be a good idea for the Town Report to mention the potential costs of renting a grader should the current grader break down before the new one is purchased.

**MOTION:** Mary moved approval of the March 2, 2021 Town Meeting Warning; Steve seconded. The motion passed.

**Mailing 2021 Town Meeting/WCUUSD Ballots to All Active, Registered**

Having already voted at its December 15, 2020 meeting to enact provisions in Act 162 to allow "floor-vote" towns like Middlesex to hold its March 2, 2021 Town Meeting strictly by Australian ballot, the Board took up whether to implement the next step and mail every active registered voter in Middlesex Town and School ballots for March as allowed in H.48, emergency COVID-19 legislation the Governor signed into law that morning. The Board considered a letter from the WCUUSD superintendent explaining that all 5 towns must distribute ballots the same way, either by request or by automatic mailing. Sarah said that, according to the VT Secretary of State's Office, \$2 million in CARES money was available to reimburse towns that decided to use Australian ballots and to pay for mailing because of health and safety concerns resulting from COVID. The Board agreed the school district should be billed for its share of the costs. Randy asked if the Town would also seek compensation for staff hours and expressed concern that this set a precedent where the Town would be mailing ballots on behalf of the school even though, with the 2019 merger, there was no longer a Middlesex Town School District. **MOTION:** Mary moved school and Liz seconded that, due to concerns about COVID, the Town will mail 2021 Town Meeting and WCUUSD school ballots to all active registered Middlesex voters and bill the WCUUSD for its share of the costs. The motion passed.

**Approving the 2020 Select Board Report**

In reviewing the 2020 Select Board report, the Board decided to add a paragraph explaining Article 16 on the Town Warning that would require all future Special Articles requesting Town taxpayer money be voted on by Australian ballot. Mary suggested adding information about H.48 as well.

**MOTION:** Liz moved approval with explanations of Article 16 and Act 48 added; Steve seconded. The motion passed.

**Approving the Application for the Better Places Grant**

Juli Beth Hinds said a grant through the Better Places Act would cover the costs of installing one, and maybe two, walkways overlooking the Winooski River behind Camp Meade in Middlesex Village. While no Town money would be required for any type of match – especially if only one walkway was built, the Town would need to be applicant and would need to "agree to an agreement" between the town and the private landowner allowing the public to enter this private space. The application deadline is Friday, January 22. Russ said the cost for one would be \$12,000. Two would be slightly above \$20,000. Since the maximum grant is \$20,000, if the Town would pay for attorney costs, they could pursue both overlooks. A memo from Town Attorney Rob Halpert was read into the record in which he described as an "agreement to agree" regarding a perpetual right of public access. Peter asked who administers the grant. Russ said he would ask Juli Beth to administer the grant. He noted that Planetary Matters now owns the blue house adjoining the parking lot; that property goes to the river. But Planetary Matters doesn't want to open that area until it's safe. This might be a good way to jump start access to the river in a safe way to see the waterfalls and the generator plant, Russ said. Liz asked if there would be a fundraiser to defray some of the costs. Peter said they should apply for \$20,000 and see what that produces. What the Town doesn't want to do is pursue a half-baked project that's dangerous, he said, though he loves the idea of a public access over the river. Mary asked if Planetary Matters wants to execute and easement now; Russ said they are still investigating the best locations with "wow-ability" but also concern for safety and liability. Steve asked about the ancillary legal fees that might incur if Planetary Matters goes above \$20,000. Juli Beth recommended the Town apply for the one overlook which would cost @ \$12,500 to build with barricade fencing, clearing, and signage. To do both overlooks would be about \$23,500. Liz said Planetary Matters should apply for \$20,000 and

the Town would be supportive of fundraising efforts. Given short notice of this, Liz said right now is not the time for the Town to commit up to \$3,000 in legal fees toward this project, which she supports. Peter suggested the Town apply for the grant and see what happens. Russ said it should be a zero cost to the Town.

**MOTION:** Mary moved and Liz approved applying for the Better Places Grant and to authorize Peter Hood to execute the agreement with Planetary Matters. Russ and Juli Beth left the meeting.

#### **Highway Report**

As Acting Road Commissioner, Peter said the Town should advertise ASAP for Road Commissioner. The ad should mention compensation and how much time will be required. Vic asked for details about the job. Peter said he and Steve, the former Road Commissioner, are still figuring it out. Randy asked why the Town is now considering a paid Road Commissioner after historically volunteers have served in the position. Vic said two people have volunteered to serve; why are they being thrown out? Peter said they are not being thrown out. Dorinda says, speaking as a private citizen, it seems like for some reason the Board doesn't want to appoint one of these two citizens who have volunteered. Peter said the Board is trying to expand its policy of advertising through free mediums. In response to Vic's question, Peter and Steve said they have no one in mind. Liz said it's important the Road Commissioner get along with the staff. Peter suggested the Town run the ad, see who applies and include the Road Foreman in the interview process. He said he wants it to be a deliberate, careful process. Meanwhile, Peter said with rain predicted last Saturday based on weather reports, the Highway Department held off on plowing so the roads wouldn't turn to ice. In hindsight, that might not have been the best decision considering it snowed more than rain. Can't win.

#### **Treasurer Report**

The Board reviewed the financials as of today. No one has replied to the ad for a municipal bookkeeper. Peter said it may be that the Town hires an accounting firm as a subcontractor.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

**MOTION:** Steve moved and Liz seconded approving the minutes of the January 5, 2021 Select Board meeting. The motion passed.

All orders were approved via email

**CORRESPONDENCE:** The Board reviewed emails from Notch Road residents concerning Town Forest congestion on their road. The Board discussed improving signage and plowing the Town pit for parking.

The Board discussed how best to run the two Zoom informational meetings and agreed to search for a moderator separate from the Town Meeting Moderator so as not to cause confusion. And, for the same reasons, the Board decided Peter should run the meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 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 FEBRUARY 2, 2021.

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PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

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MARY JUST SKINNER, VICE CHAIR

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N/A  
PHILIP HYJEK

\_\_\_\_\_  
STEVEN MARTIN

\_\_\_\_\_  
ELIZABETH SCHARF