

Select Board Members

Peter Hood, Chair

Mary Just

Skinner,

Vice Chair

Phil Hyjek

Steve Martin

Liz Scharf

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, May 11, 2021
SPECIAL 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. MVFD President Jeff Koonz, Treasurer Eric Metivier, Chief Doug Hanson and Firefighter Scott Isham. Waterbury Fire Chief Gary Dillon. Montpelier Fire Department Chief Bob Gowans and Montpelier City Manager Bill Frasier. Middlesex residents Randy Drury and Mike Rouelle. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes.

Call to Order, Welcoming Guests, Agenda Amended

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:04 PM and welcomed guests. There were no amendments.

Addressing Concerns about the MVFD

Peter said he met with Waterbury City Manager William Shepeluka and Fire Chief Gary Dillon; he held a Zoom meeting with Montpelier City Manager Bill Frasier and spoke to the Worcester chief about the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department issues. Everyone is interested in trying to resolve issues with the MVFD, he said. If Waterbury or Montpelier provide fire-protection service, thereby disbanding the MVFD, these towns would provide fire service through a contract. This service would be paid for by determining the fraction of Middlesex's grand list compared to either Waterbury or Montpelier's grand list and then multiplying that fraction by the total either municipality budgeted for fire protection.

It's likely the bill from Montpelier would be higher because it's a full-time fire department. Both Montpelier and Waterbury are willing to consider working in conjunction, for example by splitting the town. They also offered assistance to the MVFD, including training. Peter noted the MVFD sent a letter to the Board outlining concerns and their view of the situation and that he agreed to let Jeff speak first. Jeff said he wanted to correct the misperception that there were no MVFD firefighters at February 24, 2021 fire that destroyed the United Methodist Church on Church Street. Two MVFD firefighters were there during the day and two arrived later. There is not a town in this county that can handle a structure fire of that magnitude on their own, he said. Jeff asked the Board to decide how many people need to be in town on call during the day. Peter said the answer is whatever the number required to hold up its responsibility for mutual aid. Jeff said since the church fire, the MVFD has been called out three times and has not called for mutual aid once. There are three applications pending to become MVFD firefighters and, of those, two are available during the day. The MVFD met in April to brainstorm about solutions. Here are a few things that were discussed: raising the stipend, offering bonuses to new members who can commit during

the day after completing minimum training, contacting businesses in town to see if they'd let their employees who wanted to be on the MVFD respond to calls during the day, train the road crew to operate trucks and pumps, have college students stay at the station, buy new equipment so the MVFD doesn't have to wear old gear, create a video ad to be shown on ORCA featuring the new gear and vehicles, open a training night to the public to generate interest in the fire department. The point, he said, is that this matter isn't going to be solved immediately.

Peter questioned how realistic some of these suggestions are, especially since the new recruits will need to be retrained. Jeff said there are many duties they can fulfill aside from entering burning buildings. The people who've applied have had experience in other departments.

Bob Gowans said these are great ideas and Montpelier will help out any way they can. Peter said similar ideas have been proposed before, but what's different this time? He asked how Waterbury pays its firefighters.

Dillon said stipends are based on rank. Firefighters are compensated about \$14/hour with a response to each call constituting an hour at the minimum, officers are offered a dollar more, and top officers are offered a dollar more than that. Peter said that's significantly more than the Town pays the MVFD. In terms of equipment, Peter said the Select Board has granted almost all of the MVFD requests, has provided a beautiful fire station, air bottles and trucks.

Jeff said if the Town has a paid department, the Town will have to meet the NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) standards for equipment. It will be required. Peter said so far there is no intent to have a paid department. That said, the Town has no real say or control over how the MVFD operates, though the town provides 98% of the financing, since the MVFD is a 501C3.

Peter said it will probably be a few years until Middlesex gets where it wants to be in terms of fire protection. Can the Town still count on mutual aid from its neighbors? Waterbury Chief Gary Dillon said he's willing to help in any way, and so would his officers. Bill Frasier said what everyone wants is for Middlesex to have a robust fire department. But we have to acknowledge that we get calls from Middlesex and we're the only ones on the scene and, like Waterbury, the (other) taxpayers are paying for this service, he said. He thinks Montpelier can be patient.

Liz said Calais contracts out with East Montpelier. How much would that contracted service cost? She noted the Town is still paying a bond on the MVFD building. Peter says he has provisional numbers for a contract, upwards of \$40,000 to \$50,000. Which raises the question of what should be the MVFD's budget. That's the question that needs to be addressed first.

Randy Drury suggested the MVFD cross train with neighboring departments to build faith in the MVFD.

Peter asked about moving forward. Should the Board meet once a month or meet with the MVFD? He would like a plan by the end of summer. Steve said the Board needs to come up with a plan ahead of time. Waterbury has offered training for two to three years. But there are other issues, such as whether the MVFD stays as a separate 501C3. Meanwhile, the MVFD needs to come up with a recruiting and training plan. Ultimately, Steve said, we want the Middlesex Fire Department to be able to respond and provide mutual aid. We need to decide what direction we're going in and then proceed. If we're building the

fire department, we need to rely on them for the next 12-18 months. The Board decided every second meeting of the month should include the MVFD. Peter asked about training; Jeff said on average the MVFD meets a minimum of three times a month. One is a business meeting, one is a work night, and the other is a training meeting. Liz noted there would be a tour of the Fire Station in Welch Park at 6 PM on May 20th and the public was encouraged to attend – bring the family! Phil said he continues to have concerns about sustainability and the impact of the MVFD on the neighboring departments. He would hate for this to drag on for two years or more. Other options need to be explored, such as looking at the assets. Bill Frasier thanked Phil for that sentiment and the Town for its efforts, but noted Montpelier has been picking up a lot of the burden. Bill said he and Peter first talked about this more than a decade ago. The next Select Board meeting to include discussion about the MVFD would be June 15, 2021. Everyone but the Select Board, Treasurer and Select Board Assistant left the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

All orders were reviewed by email and approved.

MOTION: Phil moved and Steve seconded entering executive session as permitted under 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a) (1) (A) and to allow Dorinda and Sarah to attend. The motion passed and the Board entered executive session at 6:28 PM; it exited executive session at 6:36 PM.

MOTION: Mary moved and Liz seconded entering executive session as permitted under 1 V.S.A § 313 (a) (7) (E) and to allow Dorinda and Sarah to attend. The motion passed and the Board entered executive session at 6:37 PM; it exited at 6:42 PM.

MOTION: Mary moved to retain Town Attorney Rob Halpert to represent the Town in Manosh Properties, LLC's appeal to the VT Environmental Court of the Planning Commission's April 23, 2021 decision on Application No. #20-54 for a 4-Lot Subdivision of 395.96 at 229 East Bear Swamp Road. Phil seconded. The motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 6:43 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 MAY 18, 2021.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

MARY JUST SKINNER, VICE CHAIR

PHILIP HYJEK

STEVEN MARTIN

ELIZABETH SCHARF

DRAFT