

Select Board Members
X Peter Hood, Chair
X Liz, Scharf, Vice Chair
X Randy Drury
X Vic Dwire
X Phil Hyjek

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
TUESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2023
MVFD Station, Welch Park +
Middlesex Town Hall and via Zoom*
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, Vermont 05602
(802) 223-5915

MINUTES.

PRESENT: Peter O. Hood, Chair, Liz Scharf*, Vice Chair. Members Randy Drury (also a member of the Budget Committee), Phil Hyjek and Vic Dwire, who is also Road Commissioner. **At Middlesex Fire Department:** MVFD Chief and Road Foreman Eric Metivier, MVFD President Jeff Koonz, MVFD Firefighters Scott Isham, Doug Hanson, Steven Peck and Jamie Catchpaw. **At Town Hall:** Treasurer Dorinda Crowell, Budget Committee Member Mark Harris. The meeting at Town Hall was recorded on Zoom and by ORCA. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes. (*signifies attendees via Zoom)

Call to Order at the MVFD in Welch Park

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM and welcomed guests.

Marking the MVFD's Transformation into a Town Department

In a gathering to celebrate the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department's formal inclusion as a Town department (versus a separate 501C3 organization operating out of a Town building), Peter called it an auspicious evening after a lot of hard work by both parties. Jeff called it a long and bumpy process in which everyone worked out the bumps. He said the Town will see the benefit of both entities working together. Jeff demonstrated the new MSA airpacks with lithium battery packs, eight of which were purchased with \$70,000 of ARPA funds. The remaining approximate \$200 was made up from the MVFDs savings. There are now eleven members plus one junior in the department. Jeff said in ideal world, twenty-five would be nice. Peter thanked everyone. The meeting recessed at 5:30 PM and reconvened in Town Hall at 5:45 PM.

FY24 BUDGET WORKSHOP

The Board reviewed the proposed FY24 budget line by line.

Email: In light of rbTech's discussion about problems with Rackspace email and current office frustrations, the Board decided to plug in \$8/month per user at \$1,344.

Discretionary fund: level fund at \$4,000

Legal fees: the Board took that up to \$7,500 in light of potential legal issues

Equipment purchase: \$20,000 for a new server. The Board discussed whether this should be paid for from a capital improvement fund or part of the operational budget. Mark noted that every three or four years the Town will need a new server. Randy said it makes sense to leave the server in the FY24 operational budget but going forward, the Town should start allocating money into a fund to pay for a replacement down the road.

NEMRC contract: Because the Listers will try to take over more of the work that the NEMRC assessor did the previous year, that line item dropped to \$12,000 from \$18,000.

Speed Enforcement: since the Washington County Sheriff's Department never uses all the \$7,500 traditionally budgeted, the Board dropped that to \$2,500.

MVFD: the Board discussed whether it needed to budget for a new capital radio dispatching system and decided it was not an expense to have to include in the FY24 budget. Mark asked about replacing the rescue vehicle. Peter said the MVFD is working hard to find a used vehicle. Peter said it's due for replacement. Mark said it's from the mid-1980s.

Public Works (Highway): This was passed over until Eric could attend.

Recreation Budget: The Board discussed whether the Recreation Director was working too many hours. Peter said there've been no problems with the Recreation issues so the figure should stay as is.

Mark said the Board should reverse its approach to the budget by starting with how much the budget needs to be cut and then work down from there. The Board decided to go forward line by line.

Planning Commission: many numbers were missing so the Board plugged in estimates.

General Discussion:

Mark asked if the Board had a budget goal because there's not much to cut in this budget. Peter said the Board agreed with a 3% wage increase as a floor. Randy noted a 1% wage increase would add \$5,000 to the budget.

Liz suggested using ARPA funds for mud mitigation - \$37,500. She also suggested using ARPA funds for a CIP fund; Dorinda said ARPA money cannot be used for rainy day funds.

The Board discussed extending the life of the temporary salt shed for another year. Mark asked about the effect on the salt; Eric said he keeps limited amounts of salt in storage at a time.

Mark said slashing \$100,000 from the proposed budget would reduce the increase from 21% to 14%. Here were his suggestions: 1) The salt shed (line 146). Remove \$50,000 from the \$70,000 allocated to salt shed for a total of \$20,000 2) Cut \$20,000 from road and gravel (line 121) and remove \$30,000 from the heavy equipment CIP (line 275) for a total of \$10,000. There are only a few big-ticket items and that's just the way it is. Lower the \$20,000 designated in the CIP for vehicle purchase to \$10,000. That way something is being contributed.

Dorinda reminded the Board that ARPA funds must be allocated by the end of 2024 and expended by the end of 2026. Peter said it's better to use ARPA funds now to offset costs, if possible.

Phil raised concerns about a discretionary fund (opportunity fund) that rolls over into a special fund; the Board agreed and cut it from the CIP.

Now the budget increase was at 12.7%. Dorinda asked how the Town Hall study will be paid if an applied grant doesn't come through. (Grant notification will be in February. Liz said the Board had already agreed that if the grant doesn't come through, ARPA money would be used to pay for the study. The Board did not disagree with Mark's \$100,000 cut. ARPA funds will be used to offset the costs of mud mitigation. Now the Budget is at 12%. Randy said he'd like use more ARPA money on road work, but leave the CIP as is, other than the opportunity fund. Randy proposed reducing the salt shed to \$20,000; leaving mud mitigation at \$37,500 and allocating \$30,000 for road gravel.

Wages: Peter suggested raising wages by 4% which would add \$15,000 to the budget for a total budget increase of 13.5%. Liz said it should be made clear to voters that a 4% wage increase does not translate into a 4% increase in the budget. The Board will likely vote on the proposed budget at its next meeting on January 17, 2023. Mark left the meeting.

Disbanding the Welch Park Association

Peter informed the Board that he'd had preliminary discussions about disbanding the Welch Park Association which oversees a business park off US Route 2 where the MVFD is located. Benderson, which owns the building that houses Consolidated Communications, would take over the fire pond and associated equipment while the Town would agree to maintain the road into the business park. Dorinda asked about insurance; Peter said everyone will have their own insurance. This will end the uncomfortable arrangement of the Town handling finances for the Welch Park members. Peter said it's likely the Town will have to grant Benderson an easement to run a water line across a town-owned road and the Town will have to abandon a right to put a leach field under other side of fire pond, though it's unlikely the Town would need a leach field uphill from the MVFD.

There was no Treasurer's Report.

Highway Department Report

After losing power during the Christmas-weekend storm and borrowing a generator from Bolduc's Salvage, Eric investigated purchasing a portable generator for the Highway Department. Generators ranged from \$1,400 to \$3,100. The department is already wired for one.

OTHER BUSINESS

MOTION: Randy moved, and Vic seconded approving the minutes of the December 20, 2022 Select Board minutes. The motion passed and Phil abstained.

All orders were signed.

Correspondence: The Board acknowledged receipt of the State of Vermont's notification of the Town's Common Level of Appraisal for 2022 – 81.78% with a coefficient of dispersal at 16.74%. Dorinda correctly noted that any CLA below 85% automatically generated a town-wide reappraisal. Sarah said the Listers, anticipating the low CLA due to the skyrocketing real-estate market, sent out RFPs last fall for appraisers to do just that. Unfortunately, many are already booked.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 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 JANUARY 17, 2023.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

ELIZABETH SCHARF, VICE CHAIR

RANDY DRURY

VIC DWIRE

PHIL HYJEK