

Select Board Members

Peter Hood, Chair
 Liz, Scharf, Vice Chair
 Brigid Browning
 Randy Drury
 Vic Dwire

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, October 3, 2023
Middlesex Town Hall and via Zoom*
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, Vermont 05602
(802) 223-5915

MINUTES

PRESENT: Chair Peter Hood, Vice Chair Liz Scharf, Select Board members, Randy Drury (who is also a member of the Budget Committee) and Vic Dwire (who is also Road Commissioner). Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. Road Foreman and MVFD Chief Eric Metivier. Megan Nedzinski of VIA, David Magida from the Town Hall Renovation Committee; Listers Shelly Desjardin and Annette Halaz. Town Highway FEMA Project Manager Steve Martin. Monica Myles*, Public Affairs Specialist for the SBA. Middlesex Historical Society Members Patty Wiley and Sarah Seidman. Energy Committee members Lauri Scharf and Marge Dethloff. Other members of the public: Chris McVeigh, Jane Tucker and Kevin Thompson. Emergency Management Coordinator Steven Dennis and Samantha Beaudoin. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes, and the meeting was recorded by ORCA. (*indicates attended via Zoom)

Call to Order, Welcoming Guests, Approving Minutes and Agenda

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM

MOTION: Liz moved, and Randy seconded, approving the September 19, 2023, Select Board minutes. The motion passed.

MOTION: Liz moved, and Randy seconded, approving the September 20, 2023, minutes from the Emergency Select Board meeting. The motion passed.

MOTION: Liz moved, and Randy seconded approving the amended agenda for the October 3, 2023, Regular Select Board meeting with the following amendments: a Welch Park update and discussion of loose, unlicensed dogs on East Hill and French roads.

Public Presentation of Town Hall Renovation Plans

History: Liz provided background on how the Town Hall project began. At the 2020 Town Meeting, residents requested a clearer vision of what big-ticket items they could expect to pay for in the future. In response, a subcommittee of the Board and the Budget Committee compiled a Capital Improvement Plan that inventoried all the Town's assets plus a replacement schedule with projected costs. One priority to emerge from that process was renovating Town Hall which, as Liz said, has been in discussion since the late Town Clerk June Lakin was in office twenty years ago. The Town Hall has several issues: it's barely ADA compliant, there is radon in the vault which has exceeded capacity, the plumbing is antiquated and often fails, the heating system is so old it can no longer be repaired, the lift cannot accommodate wheelchairs and is on its last legs, the building is drafty and not weatherized and the electrical system is inadequate and overloaded. David added that the key functions of the building are not guaranteed.

With funding from several grants, the Town Hall committee requested bids from architects who were asked to determine if the building could be renovated, if it needed an addition or if a new building should be constructed on a new location. Vermont Integrated Architects won the bid and went to work, relying on a survey of townspeople for input along with staff comments. The idea was to design a facility that would meet the needs of Town staff and the public today and fifty years from now.

Megan said VIA assessed the Town's needs and studied new locations as well as the benefit of adding an addition. Since the addition didn't seem to offer much benefit and since building new would be more expensive, she said they focused on renovating the current footprint.

Design: Referring to a PowerPoint presentation (see attached), Megan outlined the major improvements in the proposed renovation which include the following: removing the front stairs, increasing accessibility with a gradual ramp to an expanded parking lot at the rear of the building, adding an additional vault while retaining the current one, replacing fossil-fuel-based utilities with energy-efficient electric ones, installing a high-efficiency ventilation system for improved air circulation in the bottom floor, installing a new lift, and electrical system, reworking the space upstairs for community gatherings of approximately 40 people including small spaces for private conferences and a kitchenette. In addition, the Historical Society would have a display case and EV charging for at least one vehicle would be in the parking lot.

Chris asked about flooding potential. Megan said most of the flooding in the building has been due to ground water pooling because of poor grading. She said she would investigate flood gates for the vaults. Peter asked that the computer server be moved upstairs. It was agreed that this building would not be used as an emergency shelter and, therefore, a backup generator would not be necessary.

Peter asked about sprinklers. Because of the building's size and use they would not be required, Megan said. Lauri asked about radon. Megan said if further testing confirms unsafe levels of radon in the building, then a mitigation system would have to be installed. This was not in the proposal. Patty asked about the next step. Megan said that would be design development. David said there would be plenty of opportunities for public input at this level and down the road. Patty and Sarah said they, as Historical Society members, wanted to be part of that.

Cost: Liz said the cost of the above renovations in today's dollars would be \$2.055 million and it would never be cheaper. That said, there are numerous funding opportunities including a Municipal Energy Resilience grant that could provide up to \$500,000 for improved energy efficiency in existing buildings. She said the Town has already embarked on a Level II energy assessment required by the grant application which is slated to open in early 2024. Since this grant is a first come, first served, she said it was imperative that the Town apply as soon as possible.

In addition, she and the Treasurer met with the bond bank to explore debt. If the Town's voters approve a \$1.5 million bond, she estimated that this would add approximately \$400/year to a Town tax bill over the next thirty years for a \$300,000 house. Since this would be a Town tax, not an education tax, those taxes could not be mitigated with homestead payments.

Most of all, the project is a huge process requiring Town support. She suggested a fundraising campaign to solicit private donations.

Chris asked if the MERP grants requires a commitment to renovate Town Hall. Randy said no, but the program is looking for "shovel-ready" projects. The MERP administrators are aware of the Town's serious heating and cooling needs regardless.

Liz said the next phase would cost \$42,000. She encouraged those in attendance to discuss the proposal with their neighbors and to build support since this project will never be cheaper than it is now. Sarah Seidman said that considering Middlesex's history of "not being proactive," she supported going against tradition and advocating for this renovation now.

Deadline for Low-Interest, Disaster-Related SBA Loans

Monica outlined the process for applying for low-interest loans from the Small Business Administration due to the July flood. The deadline to apply is October 12, 2023. (Information available online at middlesexvermont.org.)

Awarding Bid Work for Davy, Upper Sunny Brook, and Bolduc Roads to All Seasons Landscaping

Vic said the Town issued an RFP for repair work on Davy, Upper Sunny Brook, and Bolduc roads with proposals due September 29th. He estimated that the project would cost \$119,78. The bids were as follows: J. Macdonald (\$136, 226), Isaacs (\$136,450) and All Seasons (\$112,050). The All Seasons bid is based on using Town material, which Vic and Steve Martin estimated would cost an additional \$22,000. That brought the All Seasons bid to \$134,050, and therefore the lowest. The Board reviewed the bids and applied the scoring system. Vic said All Seasons, which is already working in Town, could start soon and be done in three weeks.

MOTION: Liz moved that the Town accept All Season's bid to repair Davy, Upper Sunny Brook and Bolduc roads for a total of \$134,050, Vic seconded. Randy asked if the Town was supplying culverts. Vic said all materials will be supplied. The motion passed.

Eric said Road Crew has been ditching along town roads and that gravel will need to be added to Nelly Chase Road since the 3.5” stone is hard to grade. Hauling winter sand will begin next week. Eric said the salt shed needs a new roof.

Authorizing the Treasurer to Pay for Flood Repairs before the October 17 Select Board Meeting

Dorinda said she and Steve Martin have been painstakingly breaking down the contractor’s bills by roads, including material. It’s been time consuming and difficult. They’ve told contractors they won’t be paid until their invoices meet FEMA’s standards. However, they are getting close to pinpointing the expenses and payments. She asked the Board for permission to pay the contractors once their invoices are sorted out before the next Board meeting since some of these contractors have been waiting for weeks.

The Board discussed whether to put a limit on how much can be paid out and decided on \$1.19 million.

MOTION: Randy moved to authorize the Treasurer to pay contractors up to \$1.19 million on an invoice-by-invoice basis once FEMA Project Coordinator Steve Martin has approved the invoices as complete; Vic seconded. The motion passed.

Approving an Adjustment to the 2023 Grand List Due to Errors & Omissions

A current use error affecting parcels owned by the Howell Trust changed the land value from \$623,400 to \$582,900, a Grand List reduction of \$25, Shelley said. She asked for approval.

MOTION: Liz moved, and Vic seconded, approving the above changes in the 2023 Grand List due to errors and omissions. The motion passed and the Board signed the certificate.

OTHER BUSINESS

All orders were signed.

Lauri suggested the Board consider installing internal storm windows known as “Window Dressers” in the upstairs of Town Hall where the windows are old and drafty for a total cost of \$700.

MOTION: Vic moved, and Liz seconded authoring up to \$700 to pay for Window Dressers to be installed in the Town Hall. The motion passed. Lauri said the inserts would be available the first week of November and welcomed volunteers to help assemble them.

MOTION: Vic moved and Randy seconded participating in a Hazard Mitigation buyout of Gloria Field’s home at 158 Three Mile Bridge Road. The motion passed and Peter signed the documents. Liz said she was worried these buyouts would be too much work in addition to Sarah Merriman’s jobs as Town Clerk and Select Board Assistant. Sarah said she’s asked the State to consider overseeing the buyouts since there are so many on the same road. The State is considering this request.

Dorinda said RBTech is proposing to change the current Town email system to Office365 for \$14,000, which seems steep.

Correspondence: Liz read into the record a letter submitted by Blanche LaForce complaining that her comments about Mead Road were ignored by the Chair in favor of Steve Martin’s opinions during a site visit to the road on September 19th. The Board discussed this, and it was agreed Peter would call Blanche to apologize for cutting her off in conversation.

Welch Park update: Peter said attorney John Riley is too overbooked to handle the Welch Park dissolution. Carl Bailin, who also owns property in the office park, suggested letting Olson & Associates in Stowe take over.

Sarah asked the Board for authority to issue initial notices of ordinance violations to owners of unlicensed dogs on East Hill Road that have been harassing passersby and owners of dogs on French Road which were seen loose and chasing and attacking a fawn. The Board approved.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Sarah Merriman, Select Board Assistant

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD ON OCTOBER 17, 2023.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

ELIZABETH SCHARF, VICE CHAIR

N/A
BRIGID BROWNING

RANDY DRURY

VIC DWIRE