

Select Board Members

Liz, Scharf, Chair
 Randy Drury, Vice Chair
 Vic Dwire
 Peter O. Hood
 Zara Vincent

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, June 4, 2024
Middlesex Town Hall and via Zoom*
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, Vermont 05602
(802) 223-5915

MINUTES

PRESENT: Chair Liz Scharf, Vice Chair Randy Drury. Select Board members, Peter Hood*, Vic Dwire (who was also the Road Commissioner) and Zara Vincent (Chair of the Town Roads Subcommittee). Anne Connell. Treasurer Cheryl Grandfield. Jeff Koonz. Town FEMA Coordinator Steve Martin. Ken Davis*, Shelly Desjardin, Samantha Beaudoin and Former Road Foreman Paul Cerminara*. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes, and the meeting was recorded by ORCA. (*indicates attended via Zoom)

Call to Order

Liz called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Guests were welcomed.

MOTION: Randy moved, and Zara seconded approving the minutes from the May 21, 2024, Middlesex Select Board meeting. The motion passed and the minutes were signed by those present.

MOTION: Vic moved, and Peter seconded approving the agenda for the June 4, 2024 Middlesex Select Board meeting, which was amended to include discussion of digging on McCullough Hill Road. Randy moved and Zara seconded. The motion passed.

Anne Connell's Request to Bury a WEC Powerline Under East Bear Swamp Rd.

Anne requested permission to install an underground WEC power line to connect with her camp at 507 East Bear Swamp Road. She clarified that WEC won't be installing the underground power line; she will. Sarah said in conversations with engineers at WEC and other towns that have dealt with similar issues, their recommendation is that the Town should draft a Memorandum of Understanding noting the depth of the powerline and its GPS coordinates for future reference that can be indexed with Anne's property and other affected properties. Randy said he's concerned about maintenance of the road after the line's installation and encouraged the Road Foreman's review. Anne said she's still not sure if this is the route to go; she might hit ledge. Vic asked who will approve the installation. Anne said the electrician would attest to what work was done and then the Road Foreman Eric would inspect the road condition. The Board discussed needing a buried power line/septic line policy for Town roads.

MOTION: Randy moves and Zara seconds approving a Memorandum of Understanding with Anne Connell to permit installation of a Washington Electric power line under East Bear Swamp Road to her residence at 507 East Bear Swamp. The motion passed.

Highway Department Update

Great Brook bridge/debris removal: Vic said the Town met with representatives from the VT Agency of Natural Resources to address removing gravel from the Great Brook on either side of the bridge to McCullough Hill Road and that the State suggested a feasibility study. Zara said the original ANR permit was for only one side of the bridge when the permit should be for both sides. The permit expires on October 1. Either the Town obtains an extension or issues a request for quotes (RFQ) to have the work done. If the stone is going to be reused, it needs to be stored for over a year to make sure there's no knotweed contamination and then crushed. Vic said he's hoping for a grant that will pay for the work. Jeff reminded the Board there's a standpipe near the proposed worksite that the MVFD uses for water. The Board discussed the \$12,000 Better Roads grant the Town just received. That's supposed to be spent on improving deficient road segments that need to be brought into compliance for runoff management.

Lower Sunny Brook culverts. As an alternative to installing two culverts on Lower Sunny Brook Road, Vic said the Town might consider pursuing an easement or purchasing land to straighten the stream so only one culvert would be required. The Town would have to hire a design engineer and pursue a grant. Zara said she's working on a pre-application and needs information for the June 21st deadline. Vic said Charles Pelcher ended his employment. The Town thanked him for his service.

Using CIP funds to purchase the excavator. Cheryl asked the Board if they wanted to use money in the Capital Improvement Fund as a downpayment on the new excavator. Currently, \$50,000 for equipment is available and another \$50,000 will be added to that on July 1. This will lower the borrowing cost. The Board discussed this. Randy said if a bank can offer a loan with zero interest for a certain period, then it would be better not to use Town funds. Cheryl said she'll research interest rates. The Board agreed to decide at its next meeting on June 16.

Dirt Tech update. Steve said Dirt Tech started permanent road repairs on May 13 by working on Macey Road, which is now completed. All the culverts have been installed on Wood Road. They are now ditching and doing stonework on Shady Rill Road with some riprap on the banks. The guard rail is next. Peter asked about Wood Road and ensuring that Wood and Macey are properly graded before the final surface is put down. Vic said Eric and will grade those two roads. Ken Davis, a member of the Town Roads Subcommittee, said people on Wood Road are pleased with Dirt Tech's work. Steve said Dirt Tech replaced two culverts on Bolduc Road and did a little ditching. They will be working on Portal Road to do ledge removal and ditching. The box culvert on Portal Road is a long-lead item that will be handled by the State of Vermont. After that, Dirt Tech will apply a final surface to Macey, Wood, Government and Portal roads.

All Seasons Excavating is finishing its contract work from 2023 and are on Upper Sunny Brook doing ledge removal and ditching. They should be done by the end of the month.

Ken thanked Steve for allowing Dirt Tech to establish a staging yard on his property. Randy said he's heard lots of communication from townfolk, and it doesn't look good for the town to have staging area on the FEMA coordinator's property. He said he's concerned about the perception.

Steve disagreed with that. He said there's no conflict since he's not charging Dirt Tech for the use of his land. Zara said she's heard townspeople don't like that kind of negative comment from the Select Board and is happy Dirt Tech has two locations, one at the highway garage and the other on the other side of town at Steve's property on Center/Brook roads. That eliminates unnecessary mileage for Dirt Tech.

Vic clarified that the garage is not being used for staging, a stipulation he made clear during the pre-bid meetings with contractors this spring. He said it would be too confusing for contractors to use a Town space for staging, so Steve offered his property. Liz suggested posting something weekly on FPF about the staging area, etc. Randy said he wasn't being negative; he was relaying comments from the community. Zara said she was, in turn, relating comments that sometimes the hurdle for the road crew is the Select Board.

Jeff Koonz's letter arguing for four-day workweek. Liz read aloud Jeff's May 22, 2024, email supporting a four-day workweek for the road crew. Zara read her response. Jeff said since writing that letter, he's noticed Northfield is extremely pleased with the four-day workweek which he said costs nothing to the Town. Paul said when he was the Road Foreman, every employee who joined the road crew knew the summer, four-day schedule was an available benefit. He said as the days grow shorter, the four-day week is no longer feasible. Liz recalled the "summer" four-day week migrated in both directions until it began in April and ended in October. Charles said the four-day week was May 1st to November 1st when Shane Brickey was the foreman. Zara said Ken Davis contacted five neighboring towns. Most offered a summer four-day week. Shelly said she fears losing road crew members over this issue and that the crew works hard all winter. Samantha concurred, noting no one likes to be micromanaged. Liz thanked Zara and Jeff. She proposed spending time thinking about this, getting input from the Road Foreman and revisiting the issue later.

Vic said he wanted to make it clear that he's not the only one on the Select Board concerned about the four-day workweek. He disputed the "fear mongering" that employees would quit since a polling of the crew shows they plan to stay. Steve said he's worked a four-day workweek professionally and there are benefits. As a former Road Commissioner and Select Board member, he recommended the Board stick with its May 21st decision to allow the crew to work four days per week from June 1st to September 2nd, but should settle the issue

when the personnel policy is updated this summer. It should be included in the policy. Zara suggested a carrot of extra month of a four-day week as a bonus if the crew works hard over the summer. The Board agreed to examine this issue when it updates the personnel policy.

Personnel Policy Passed Over

The Board passed over this agenda item and will devote most of the June 18th meeting to updating this policy.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Board reviewed the annual speeding contract with the Washington County Sheriff’s Department. Cheryl asked how the sheriffs could stop people for speeding when the Town speeding ordinance can’t be held up in court. The Board agreed the value of having a sheriff around was to slow traffic. However, only \$2,500 was budgeted for speeding in FY25 since the sheriffs rarely do speed enforcement in Middlesex during the summer during the road-construction season when they’re busy elsewhere. Zara suggested skipping a year to see the effect. Randy asked for a revised contract where the sheriffs would patrol from the start of the school year to Thanksgiving. The Board decided not to approve the contract.

Correspondence: In response to an email from Samantha concerning yellow flags hanging off trees on Mead Road that obstructed the drivers’ view, Liz said she contacted the owners of the property who’ve been instructed to keep the Town’s right-of-way clear. The owners responded that any communication about Mead Road be directed to their attorney. Peter said the end of Mead Road needs to be downgraded to a legal trail, mostly because the bridge there has been out for some time and relations between the neighbors are not improving. Liz said if this were on a Class 3 road, these tags would be removed and asked the Road Commissioner and Foreman in an email to do so; she received no response. Vic said he discussed this with the Foreman, and it was “just too much of a hornet’s nest” for them to deal with. Liz said they should have responded. Randy said this is a matter of safety. Peter asked about grading Mead Road. The Board discussed this and suggested the road be graded in the next 30 days, weather permitting. Liz said she would write a letter to the Evelyn Prim and Zach French’s attorney asking that his clients remove the flags and comply with previous order.

Liz updated the Board about Vermont Integrated Architects’ schedule re: Town Hall renovation and outlined two grants that might offset any costs to which she and Planning Commission Chair Sandy Levine are applying.

All orders were signed.

MOTION: Peter moved, and Zara seconded entering Executive Session to discuss the “appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee, provided that the public body shall make a final decision to hire or appoint a public officer or employee in an open meeting and shall explain the reasons for its final decision during the open meeting” as permitted under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a) (3). The motion passed and the Board entered Executive Session at 7:12 PM. The Board exited at 7:45 PM.

MOTION: Liz moved, and Randy seconded excusing Vic Dwire from the position of Road Commissioner and appointing Road Foreman Eric Metivier to that position while the Board considers applicants to fill the vacancy on the Road Crew. Randy, Liz and Peter voted in favor. Zara abstained. Vic voted against. The motion passed. The Board thanked Vic for his contributions to the Town as Road Commissioner.

The meeting adjourned at 7:46PM.

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD ON JUNE 18, 2024.

LIZ SCHARF, CHAIR

RANDY DRURY, VICE CHAIR

VIC DWIRE

PETER HOOD

ZARA VINCENT