

Select Board Members

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

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, November 17, 2020
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. Budget Committee members George Longenecker, Elias Gardner and Bill McManis. Town Moderator Susan Clark. Vic Dwyer. Middlesex Energy Committee Coordinator Lauri Scharf. 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 5:00 PM and welcomed guests. There were no amendments to the agenda.

FY22 BUDGET WORKSHOP

Public Works Department Proposed Budget

Steve, who is also Road Commissioner, noted the department budget is a mere 0.9% increase over the current year thanks, in part, to using winter sand from the Town pit on Notch Road instead of having to purchase it elsewhere and trucking it in. Overall, the winter maintenance budget is down almost \$30,000.

As for summer maintenance, the road gravel budget increased substantially – up to \$27,000 – because the department will be buying from two sources. One source supplies gravel that's better for flatter areas. And there are a lot of roads that need to be resurfaced. Roadside mowing will now be done twice a year. The Town will use more chloride on the roads, an increase of 36.5%. Several trees need to be removed by professionals. The Town Road Crew shouldn't do it, so the cost will increase from \$1,000 to \$5,000 in the FY22 budget. Steve also budgeted \$5,000 for unforeseen road repairs often due to storms.

Most equipment maintenance is routine, a 2% increase. The specialized services line item represents part of the \$40,000 voters at the 2020 Town Meeting allocated toward ditching. The department will start ditching in mid-June and do more over the summer, thereby straddling both fiscal years. Also, about \$20,000 has been allocated toward mud mitigation. Garage maintenance was fairly level aside from fuel-tank maintenance since the new fuel tank needs a roof. The budget includes paying for a construction of a table on which the Road Crew can repair chains since they're currently working on the floor. Utilities are level funded. As for wages and benefits, Steve is suggesting a 2% increase. Steve increased the request for culverts by about \$2,000. About \$4,000 is being allocated for signs. He said \$6,000 should be contributed to the bridge fund and \$30,000 to the paving fund as well as \$5,000 to the Town Garage Building Fund. (This is the third year of contributing to that fund.)

Peter asked about large-equipment purchases. The truck that needs to be replaced has a three-year service warranty, but that, too, will need to be replaced in FY23. The Town needs to purchase a grader, but if the Town purchases it after July 1, it won't be included until FY23, Dorinda said. Phil asked if the existing grader is worth anything; Steve said not much.

Steve said the Town also needs to replace the pickup. Steve thinks the \$30,000 windfall from the State this year could be used to pay for that. Peter estimated the net cost of the grader will be \$250,000 to \$300,000 financed over ten years.

Phil brought up wage increases and whether they will be enough to retain employees. He also asked about peeling off the tar on Center Road. Bill asked about state paving programs; Steve said he's applied. Steve said this is the third year of applying for a paving grant and he has no idea if the Town will receive one.

The Middlesex Conservation Commission

Presenting on behalf of the MCC of which he is a member, George said the MCC is not requesting much – a total of \$500. Depending on the state of COVID, he said the MCC

hopes to finish the kiosk at the Town Forest and do trail work if possible. The other question is how much to ask for the Conservation Fund. It will be discussed at the next MCC meeting. It might be less.

In other budget developments, Liz noted there is another round of FEMA grants opening at the end of November where the Town or the Fire Department can apply for funds to pay for the expensive air tanks the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department needs. There was some discussion as to whom should be responsible for overseeing those grants since the MVFD is a separate 501C3, but Peter pointed out the Town owns the MVFD equipment so it should apply. George, Bill and Elias left the meeting

Regular Meeting

The 2021 Town Meeting during COVID

Susan said she discussed with Will Senning from the VT Secretary of State's Office whether a 2021 in-person Town Meeting could be postponed from March to May so a floor meeting could be held safely outdoors. Will suggested municipalities hold off on making those decisions until the Legislature passes emergency legislation or an executive directive is issued empowering the Secretary of State to release more guidelines on the matter within the next few weeks. Peter said the other more viable choice is to vote all articles by Australian ballot. Susan said you could not have a total town meeting via Zoom. Mary asked if there will definitely be a special session of the Legislature; Susan said there are 250 towns asking this question and it is likely the Legislature will hold one. Steve said his take is that Town Meeting is three-and-a-half months away, not far, and it's better to just use Australian ballot next year. Vic said people in Town have been talking about this and that he's not too excited about standing under a tent in May. COVID will still be around and it's a little early for that. He said the Town should try to do Australian ballot. Peter said the Board might consider delaying the meeting and then decide to do Australian ballot even then. Susan left the meeting.

Highway Report

Steve said the Road Crew has been putting up signs and removing small trees. Vic asked if the guardrail at McCullough and Center roads that had been damaged by a DUI driver a few years ago had been repaired. Not, yet.

Treasurer Report

Dorinda said minor suggestions by the auditor on the FY20 financials have been addressed. However, in aftermath of this process, it's clear the Board needs to look at what each employee's role in Town is, along with his/her duties. For example, we're now handling five or six grants but one person is not designated with overseeing and coordinating the grants. The Town is currently budgeting 16 hours a week in the finance department – the Treasurer and hired bookkeeper – which is not nearly enough time to get the job done. Dorinda suggested a finance manager in the office four days a week who is experienced with municipal accounting. Peter asked if an experienced municipal accountant were hired, could they do it for 16 hours per week. Dorinda said she doubted that, especially when it comes to managing grants and doing the bookkeeping as well. The bookkeeper is budgeted for 12 hours a week and Dorinda is budgeted for four. Phil wondered if Dorinda has thought about subcontracting. Dorinda said she has. For example, the Town could hire someone from NEMRC but the fees are so high, you might as well as have a fulltime person. Peter said it would be ideal to have a person ready to go at the beginning of the new fiscal year as well as willing to come on board earlier for training and continuity. The Board agreed to discuss it at the December 1 meeting when the office budget is proposed.

OTHER BUSINESS

MOTION: Mary moved and Phil seconded approval of the minutes for the November 10, 2020 Select Board meeting Mary and Phil. Motion passed.

All orders were approved via email

CORRESPONDENCE: The Board reviewed a 5-page handout from the Middlesex Energy Committee about how to build a new home or major remodel to maximize energy efficiency. Lauri Scharf said the Committee meant the handout to be instructional and to give prospective builders ideas and resources. It also complies with the Planning Commission's energy plan. The Committee hopes the Select Board would direct the Zoning Administrator to include this handout with all approved building permits. Steve thinks it's a good idea. The Board will vote on this at its December 1st meeting. Lauri left.

The meeting adjourned at 7:03 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 DECEMBER 1, 2020.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

MARY JUST SKINNER, VICE CHAIR

PHILIP HYJEK

STEVEN MARTIN

ELIZABETH SCHARF