

Select Board Members

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

**MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD**  
**Tuesday, December 15, 2020**  
**REMOTE VIA ZOOM**  
**Middlesex Town Clerk's Office**  
**5 Church Street**  
**Middlesex, Vermont 05602**  
**(802) 223-5915**

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**MINUTES.**

**PRESENT:** Peter O. Hood, Chair, Mary Just Skinner, Vice Chair, Members Phil Hyjek and Liz Scharf. Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. Town Moderator Susan Clark, Washington County State Rep. Kim Jessup, Planning Commission Chairman Sandy Levine and member Theo Kennedy. Budget Committee members George Longenecker, Elias Gardner and Bill McManis. Vic Dwire. Former Road Foreman Paul Cerminara 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 4:02 PM and welcomed guests. There were no amendments to the agenda.

**Holding the 2021 Town Meeting by Australian Ballot**

Act 162, emergency COVID-19 legislation passed by the Vermont State Legislature in October, grants "floor vote" towns like Middlesex permission to hold Town Meetings in 2021 entirely by Australian ballot for safety. Susan has been discussing this law and alternatives with State officials, members of the Legislature and people in Middlesex. She said many were enthusiastic about possibly delaying the 2021 Town Meeting until May when it's safer to gather outdoors. However, several expressed concerns about safety considering the vaccine will not be universally distributed then. Therefore, Susan recommended that the safest course would be Australian ballot, though she's nervous about the potential effects doing so could have on future Town Meetings. She said she hopes the Select Board will take care in how it promotes this unique situation. Still, it's hard to justify an in-person meeting during a global pandemic.

Peter agreed that May is way too soon to feel safe gathering. Also, it will be confusing if the Town proceeds with an outdoor meeting and then can't. Liz noted the Governor may still limit the size of groups. As for holding Town Meeting virtually, Susan said, there are no guidelines issued by the Legislature yet. Kim said she didn't have new information regarding the Legislature's decision making around Town Meeting since the Legislature has yet to formally convene.

The Board discussed the logistics of an informational meeting to accompany the Town Meeting Australian ballot and when the Warning must be posted. Peter said Steve, who could not attend tonight's meeting, is in favor of Australian ballot. Susan said neighboring towns seem to be leaning toward Australian ballot as well. Liz said the Board needs to make it clear that they value and support Town Meeting and look forward to holding an in-person Town Meeting in 2022.

**MOTION:** Liz moved to hold the 2021 Town Meeting by Australian ballot for all items normally considered by a floor vote. Mary seconded. The motion passed and Kim and Susan left the meeting.

**Highway Report**

Peter said he and Liz introduced Shane Brickey to the Road Crew and had a positive discussion. Afterward, Shane accepted the vacant position of Road Foreman and is undergoing pre-employment tests required by the U.S. Department of Transportation. He has accepted the salary/vacation package the Board discussed and will start work January 4, 2021.

Because Shane is the son of Road Commissioner Steve Martin, Peter said the Board needs to figure out how to go forward with this new arrangement. In order to comply with the Town's anti-nepotism policy, the Select Board will oversee Shane until Steve steps off as Road Commissioner. In the meantime, Steve will train Shane. Historically, the Road Commissioner has always been a largely volunteer duty performed by a member of the Select Board. It may be that for the first time, the Road Commissioner is part time and paid.

### **Treasurer Report**

Dorinda and Peter virtually met with Bonnie Batchelder, the auditor who reviewed the Town's FY20 finances. There were no major findings. The Board moved discussion of the bookkeeper advertisement to the FY22 Budget discussion.

#### **Approving the VTrans Project Commitments Agreement for Bike/Ped Scoping Study with 20% Town match**

Sandy said this VTrans grant provides \$30,000 to move forward with a scoping study to analyze the costs for installing sidewalks in the Village and is necessary for going forward with the project as a whole. Also, it includes a more detailed study about recreation paths through the Village. She said because the VTrans grants tend to be complicated, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission can assist with administration, for a fee. Or, if Sarah administers it, her time could be part of the 20% match. Sandy stressed that it's a reimbursement grant meaning the Town pays the costs up front and then applies for reimbursement later. Peter asked if we spend \$3,000 allocated for administrative costs, would that be part of the match. Yes, if it's invoiced as such, Sandy said. Peter said this might be a consideration for a new financial person. Sandy said contracting with the CVRPC for the administration would also count toward the match.

Theo, who is on the PC and active in this project, described the scoping study as a chasm between the prior grant the Town received and any grants the Town might receive in the future. Without it, there are no future grants. On behalf of Steve, Peter asked if there's a possibility of a bike lane option or is that off the table. Sandy and Theo said the width of US Route 2 does not accommodate a bike lane. Peter also asked if the sidewalks have to be concrete. Sandy says she doesn't know, but that since it's within the VTrans right of way, VTrans will probably insist on concrete. That does not imply VTrans will maintain the sidewalks. Peter said Steve thinks the Board should go forward. Phil agreed and also that the Board should consider contracting out administration of the grant, especially since it will count toward the match. Mary concurred. Sandy said the administration costs are limited to \$3,000 and that CVRPC can keep it within that limit. Dubois and King is also familiar with these requirements.

**MOTION:** Mary moved and Liz seconded approving the Project Commitments Agreement for the Walkable Middlesex Scoping Study with the intention that the CVRPC administer the grant at a cost of no more than 10% of the grant or \$3,000. The motion passed and the Board agreed the Select Board chair will sign. Sandy left the meeting.

### **FY22 BUDGET WORKSHOP**

The Board discussed compensation for Town employees, full and part time. Peter stressed that at this stage, the Board is considering reorganizing compensation per job as opposed to pay raises. Dorinda said the Board needs to focus on the bookkeeper since that job is changing. The Board reviewed a spreadsheet of pay per employee and budgeted hours. Peter said in addition to a municipal bookkeeper working more hours, the Town may have to be looking at a paid Road Commissioner.

The Board discussed the new municipal bookkeeper. Liz said it would add at least \$20,000 to the budget. Peter said he wants someone there for a set time, such as four mornings a week. Also, he would like an accountant who can prepare reports for the Select Board and move into the position of grant administrator. Peter said he's thinking about \$50,000 without benefits. The Board approved the draft employment ad and asked that it run ASAP.

Regarding the Road Commissioner, Vic said he would volunteer for the job. Peter said the Board is not ready to tackle that. Liz said the Board is still working out the process. Victor stressed that Steve cannot oversee Shane, the new Road Foreman, because Shane is Steve's son and the Town's anti-nepotism policy doesn't permit it. Peter said he does not want to fund the Road Commissioner position; the rest of the Board agreed. To recap, Dorinda says her concerns are the bookkeeper, Road Commissioner and budgeting for the Town match on these grants. The Board did not decide on compensation. Bill, Elias, George and Dorinda left the meeting.

### OTHER BUSINESS

**MOTION:** Mary moved and Phil seconded approving the Energy Committee's request that its handout on how to construct energy efficient buildings be distributed to everyone who applies for a building permit. The motion passed. Theo applauded Lauri Scharf's work as head of the Town Energy Committee.

**MOTION:** Peter said Steve has reviewed and approved a driveway access for land between Upper and Lower Sunnybrook roads that fronts onto a legal trail. Phil moved and Liz seconded the permit, authorizing Sarah to sign on Steve's behalf.

**MOTION:** Mary moved and Liz seconded approving the minutes of the December 1, 2020 Select Board. The motion passed.

All orders were approved via email

### CORRESPONDENCE:

The Board tabled the WCUUSD's request that the Town assume maintenance of an electric charging station at Rumney for the next five years at a cost of \$5,000. Mary, who is on the Board of the Washington Electric Co-op which initiated the agreement with Rumney's school board almost five years ago, asked to do more research.

Regarding Penny Downen's email that Government Hill was not being adequately sanded. Steve told Peter that the road has been sanded and they put on extra sand because it's so steep. Peter said he will respond to Penny, but recommended that on icy days, drivers should take alternative routes from French Road to Shady Rill and vice versa.

Regarding Bryan Redmond's email that because the Class 4 section at the top of Notch Road is not maintained in the winter – though it's used by those accessing the Town Forest – icy conditions have made it a safety hazard. Peter discussed this with Steve who said he's explained that work on improving access to the Forest won't begin until next year. Peter proposed two solutions. Proposal #1 is to gate off the road so people can't drive up there. The three residents will have keys to unlock the gate. Proposal #2: the Town pays 50% of the cost of hiring a private contractor to sand that Class 4 section of road. The concern is that if you start sanding one Class 4 road, you'll have to sand them all. Mary said she doesn't mind the Town paying half, but the Town should not be executing the contract. She worries that this would in effect upgrade that portion of road to a Class 3. Peter said it's an unusual situation because of the Town Forest. The Board will discuss at its January 5, 2021, meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:26 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 JANUARY 5, 2021.

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PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

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MARY JUST SKINNER, VICE CHAIR

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PHILIP HYJEK

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N/A  
STEVEN MARTIN

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ELIZABETH SCHARF