

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

Middlesex Select Board
Tuesday, February 23, 2021
2021 TOWN MEETING
INFORMATIONAL MEETING
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. Road Commissioner Vic Dwire. Facilitators Sarah Birgé and Delia Clark. Participants: Bill Hahn, Randy Drury, Mary Hood for CVHHH, Margaret Ferron, Fred Skeels from Girls/Boyz Mentoring, Kellogg-Hubbard Library Co-Director Carolyn Brennan and KHL Middlesex representative Sarah Seidman, Montpelier Senior Activity Center Director Janna Clar, North Branch Director Chip Darmstadt, North Branch Board Member Susan Sussman, Waterbury Senior Center Board Chair Justin Blackman. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes and ORCA recorded the meeting.

Call to Order/Tech Introduction

Peter called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and invited the Select Board members to introduce themselves. Peter noted it was an informational meeting of the Select Board to discuss the March 2, 2021 Town Meeting Warning and there would be no action. It was not a candidate's forum. Delia provided helpful Zoom tips and how to participate in the meeting.

ARTICLE 5: Shall the Town of Middlesex voters authorize the Select Board to purchase a new grader in an amount not to exceed \$290,000 to be financed over a period not to exceed 15 years? (24 V.S.A. § 1786a (c)) Select Board members to present followed by questions from participants.

Former Road Commissioner Steve Martin said the current grader is 23-years old. It's tired and needs major work. The Town has been offered \$35,000 from one of the vendors. The Town would receive the grader after July 1, 2021, with the first payment due after July 1, 2022. Peter said if the Town waits any longer and there is a catastrophic breakdown, the current grader will be a) valueless or b) very expensive to repair. The grader causes the Road Crew to work at a slower pace without the results the Highway Department wants. By spreading out the cost over 15 years, the hit won't be as hard. Bill Hahn asked about the life expectancy. Steve said about 12-15 years. Randy asked about the range of bids. Steve said the Town hasn't gotten to that point.

ARTICLE 4: Shall the Town of Middlesex vote to accept a fiscal year 2021-2022 budget of \$1,382,738 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Town and authorize the Select Board to set a tax rate sufficient to provide the same? Select Board members to present followed by questions from participants.

The Board discussed this at 6:15 PM as warned. Peter invited Phil to provide background on the budget and directed participants to refer to his budget summary on page 23 of the 2020 Town Report. Phil said because we're a small town, a 100% budget increase might be no more than \$50. Bill Hahn asked if the pandemic affected the budget and what about going forward. Peter said the Board had been worried about the pandemic, specifically that people wouldn't be able to pay their property taxes. To date, that has not been a concern. The Board was worried about the effect of COVID on town employees and the Town Clerk's Office. Sarah said the office was modified by volunteers and has been open to research by appointment. Vic said the Road Crew adheres to COVID restrictions to the best of their ability. Peter said no staff member has had a positive COVID test so far.

ARTICLE 2: Shall the Town of Middlesex authorize payment of all property taxes to the Town Treasurer, as provided by law and without discount, in four installments as follows: the first installment will be due on or before 5:00 PM, August 20, 2021; the second installment will be due on or before 5:00 PM, November 20, 2021; the third installment will be due on or before 5:00 PM, February 20, 2022, and the fourth installment will be due on or before 5:00 PM, May 20, 2022, except if post marked by the US Postal Service on or before the aforementioned dates accordingly? (32 VSA Sec. 4773) Town Treasurer to present followed by questions from participants. Peter said this payment scheme is popular. There was no discussion.

ARTICLE 3: Shall the Town of Middlesex charge an interest at the rate of 0.5% per month or fraction thereof on overdue tax installments from the applicable due dates? (32 VSA Sec. 5136) Treasurer to present followed by questions from participants. Peter said this has been the town's policy for the past few years. There was no discussion.

SPECIAL ARTICLES

ARTICLE 6: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$2,500 to the Middlesex Conservation Fund? There was no one present from the MCC so Peter explained that the fund is administered by the Middlesex Conservation Commission and has been used for notable projects such as compiling the Town Forest. The Town has been contributing \$5,000 annually to the Conservation Fund. This year, the MCC requested only \$2,500 out of sensitivity to budget constraints and the effect of the pandemic. There was no discussion.

ARTICLE 7: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$600 to the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation? Peter spoke to this since he's member of the CVEDC Board. He said it's an independent, non-profit organization funded by a state grant and member dues to promote economic development in the region. Red Hen was a former project. Peter explained that, due to COVID, the Select Board decided not to require petitions from organizations that requested the same amount last year. There was no discussion.

ARTICLE 8: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$4,050 to Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice? Mary Hood who is on the CVHHH Board thanked the Board for its no-petition policy this year. She said CVHHH nurses have been able to administer COVID vaccines. She referred people to page 69 in the Town Report. CVHHH serves 23 communities in Central Vermont, meeting a variety of health-care concerns. CVHHH was very active in Middlesex this year.

ARTICLE 9: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$3,000 to Community Connections? Liz spoke on behalf of Community Connections. She said it is an after-school and before-school program that also offers camps during school vacations and in the summer. She said her children attended Community Connections camps. Mary Hood asked if there was a sliding scale fee for parents based on income. Liz confirmed. Randy asked if Community Connections stayed open during COVID. Sarah Birgé said she works in the Roxbury

School System and a similar program is open there so she expected Community Connections would be open here. Margaret Ferron said CC is open and offering camp this week.

ARTICLE 10: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$1,500 to Girls/Boyz First Mentoring? Fred Skeels spoke on behalf of Girls/Boyz. He said there are four mentors from Middlesex and five mentees. The total budget is \$60,000 for the year with no federal funding. The organization solicits funds from local municipalities and the majority of the funds go toward operating expenses. Liz asked if the organization had been impacted by the constraints imposed by COVID. Fred said yes due to social-distancing requirements and that Girls/Boyz will be searching for a new executive director.

ARTICLE 11: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$29,801 to the Kellogg-Hubbard Library? Kellogg-Hubbard Library Co-director Carolyn Brennan and Sarah Seidman, who is the Middlesex representative, spoke on the library's behalf. Carolyn said KHL has seen a similar upheaval due to COVID. She said there are 70,000 items and 80,000 digital items including movies through Kanopy and downloadable ebooks. She said this year's operating budget is \$887,672 which is down about 5% from the previous year's budget. Middlesex pays for 3% of KHL's annual budget. Randy asked about library cards. Carolyn said anyone who is Kindergarten age or older can get a library card for free if they live in member towns, including Middlesex. Each person can get a card or families can share a card. Randy asked what if you're not a member of a participating community? KHL charges \$50 per card per family for those from non-member towns, Carolyn said. Mary Hood thanked Carolyn and Sarah for putting together a detailed report for the Town report. Liz asked if KHL loans out snowshoes. Carolyn said no; the library does not collect things such as cleats for child athletes, bear spray, etc. Sarah Seidman said the library offers free WI-FI and computers to use with high-speed internet connections.

ARTICLE 12: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$7,000 to the Montpelier Senior Activity Center? Janna Clar, director of the Montpelier Senior Activity Center, said at least 70 Middlesex residents participate in her center. She said there's a lot of intergenerational programs. Before the pandemic, the center offered 75 weekly classes. During the pandemic, the center has pivoted to offering classes online, most of which involve movement. There are also foot-care clinics and free tax preparation clinic with low-contact, during COVID. The center houses the Savoy's DVD archive and offers WIFI and a computer lab. Janna said there are vacancies on the Board and encouraged those interested to apply. She thanked Middlesex for its past support. The center offers curbside meals and Meals on Wheels, though not to Middlesex. There was no discussion.

ARTICLE 13: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$2,000 to the North Branch Nature Center? (By Petition) Peter explained North Branch did not ask for money last year, so it solicited a petition to appear on the Warning this year. Executive Director and Middlesex resident Chip Darmstadt said North Branch has served 250 Middlesex residents, not including those who come to hike the groomed trails. You can sign out snowshoes for free. The building has been closed to the public since last March. However, there are a lot of online programs at northbranchnaturecenter.org where you can watch free presentations. North Branch offers online courses for a fee. Educating Children Outdoors has been working with schools. Chip said summer camp is happening, but it's already full. There is a scholarship slot still available for each week. As for the construction, Chip said North Branch will be a net-zero campus thanks to a weatherization grant. There was no discussion.

ARTICLE 14: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$10,000 to support the Waterbury Senior Center's Meals on Wheels program? Speaking on behalf of the Waterbury Senior Center, Justin Blackman, chair of the center's board, said eight Middlesex residents receive Meals on Wheels through their center, about seven meals each week – or about 2,500 meals each year for Middlesex residents. Most importantly, each delivery is a wellness visit or assisting in some small way about 260 times each year. Funding is difficult during COVID. Every penny of the \$10,000 will be very well spent, he said. There was no discussion.

ARTICLE 15: Shall the Town of Middlesex appropriate the sum of \$5,017 to support the following organizations:

American Red Cross	\$250.00
Big Heavy World	\$250.00
CV Adult Basic Ed	\$250.00
CV Council on Aging	\$250.00
The Children's Room	\$250.00
Circle	\$199.00
Community Harvest of CV	\$250.00
Family Center of Wash. Cty	\$250.00
Good Beginnings of CV	\$250.00
Good Samaritan Haven	\$250.00
Green Mt. Transit Agency	\$249.00
Green Up Vermont	\$100.00
Montpelier Veterans Council	\$250.00
MOSAIC (Sex Assault Crisis Team)	\$250.00
Our House of Central VT	\$250.00
VT Association for the Blind	\$249.00
VT Center for Independent Living	\$195.00
VT Family Network	\$250.00
VT Rural Fire Protection Task Force	\$100.00
Wash. County Diversion	\$250.00
Winooski Natural Resources District	\$250.00
Youth Service Bureau of Wash. County	\$175.00

Peter called this the omnibus article. Voters must vote for all or none. He said the reports are in the Town Report. There was no discussion.

ARTICLE 16: Shall the Town Voters authorize that all Special Articles requesting Town taxpayer funding, except the Annual Municipal Town Budget, be voted on by Australian ballot starting at the March 1, 2022 Town Meeting? (By Petition) Peter noted this article appeared by petition. If this article passes, all the special articles will be voted on by Australian ballot starting with next year's Town Meeting.

Peter adjourned the informational meeting at 7:06 PM

Peter asked the Board to stay to discuss about background checks regarding the new municipal bookkeeper slated to start March 8th. A community member has expressed concern that the Town hasn't conducted a background check. Peters said the bookkeeper has no authority to move money; the town has many levels of checks and balances, so the position is not high risk. Dorinda and Peter agreed provided recommendations don't really amount to much. Dorinda said it would be impossible for the bookkeeper to walk away with money. Liz said she still would check references, especially when it comes to a bookkeeper. Dorinda noted Liz was the only member not at the meeting when the new bookkeeper was hired. The Board conducted the interview and no one suggested it. The previous bookkeeper was hired without a background check and so was the bookkeeper before that. Peter said since this wasn't a warned agenda item, he has no problem taking action on his own calling up the new bookkeeper and asking him for references that Liz can then call.

The meeting adjourned at 7:31 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 MARCH 2, 2021.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

MARY JUST SKINNER, VICE CHAIR

PHILIP HYJEK

STEVEN MARTIN

ELIZABETH SCHARF

DRAFT