

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, April 20, 2021
REMOTE VIA ZOOM
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, Vermont 05602
(802) 223-5915

Select Board Members

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

MINUTES.

O. Hood, Chair, Mary Just Skinner, Vice Chair. Members Steve Martin and Liz Scharf. Road Commissioner Vic Dwire. Road Foreman Shane Brickey. VT Agency of Natural Resources Secretary Julie Moore. Middlesex Listers Dave Smith and Eric Young. Middlesex Recreation Director Mitch Osiecki. Residents Randy Drury and Mike Rouelle. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes and the meeting was recorded by ORCA.

Call to Order

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:03 PM. There were no amendments to the agenda.

VT Agency of Natural Resources Secretary Julie Moore on VT Clean Water Laws

A civil engineer by training with a background in water quality, Middlesex resident and VT ANR Secretary Julie Moore said a lot of attention is being paid to how water runoff from town roads affects water quality in Lake Champlain. In 2016, the State agreed with the EPA to enact certain regulations, including requiring that all Vermont towns seek Municipal Roads General Permits (Act 64, the Vermont Clean Water Act). The intent of the permit is to identify which town road "segments" pose erosion hazards that further contribute to mucking up streams flowing into Lake Champlain. Every town must inventory its road segments. Julie said Middlesex has completed this inventory and has a permit, though there are many road segments remaining where erosion still needs to be mitigated.

She said Middlesex has 940 "road segments." Of those, more than half are not connected to waterways so they are of no concern. However, there are about 300 road segments that do not meet, or do not fully meet, Act 64 standards and, of those, there are 18 "high priority" segments that need to be brought up to standard by 2025. Already, 68 segments have been modified in accordance with Middlesex's MRGP. Julie noted that in the course of preventing erosion, these roads also become more resilient to damage.

She said the VTRANS Better Roads program is designed to provide support to towns with road-inventory assistance and other resources. There also is a small grant permit that helps towns purchase small equipment (hydro-seeders) that helps with stormwater management.

Peter asked if there's a report that shows what areas need to be worked on. The Department of Environmental Conservation has an online list, Julie said, and Shane confirmed the Town has a list. Peter asked if the projects are included in the Town road plan. Vic said the projects have been included, but they need to be prioritized.

Liz asked if money to upgrade the problematic roads needs to be set aside as part of the capital-spending plan currently underway. Julie said State grant funding helps, but does not pay for everything. She said the challenge of implementing these programs is that a lot of the costs are up front and the grants are meant to offset some of that. But a capital spending plan helps because it determines the total costs down the, er, road, and the town can plan accordingly. Liz asked about fines for not meeting deadlines; Julie says they exist, but that's not the State's focus. The focus is trying to meet the goals of the 2016 EPA agreement. The Town is keeping up with the permit requirements, but it needs to keep with the program in order to meet the standards.

Vic asked about cleaning up Great Brook. There are trees in the stream and the water runs into the banks, turning the water mud brown. Is that part of the MRGP? Julie said over time humans have been working on rivers for human convenience. What happens is that rivers will often revert to their original flow. It's a natural process, but the rate that's occurring is unnatural. Sometimes the fallen trees help by absorbing energy or providing habitat. Engineers study streams and figure out if what's going on is problematic. It's a matter of equilibrium. Julie said the Better Roads program does have grants to address river bank stabilization; it's not funded through the Agency of Natural Resources.

Mary asked Julie about her views about how the Town handles erosion. Julie referred to "check dams" where large rocks are placed in road ditches to diffuse water flow. Sometimes towns don't arrange the rocks for maximum efficiency; the State is trying to educate road crews about how to effectively place the check dams in a "smile." The Board thanked her and Julie left.

Road Crew 2021 Summer Hours

Peter said he was startled to discover the road crew had already shifted to summer hours (four days per week and 10 hours per day). Usually, the highway department shifts in the last week of May with approval of the Select Board. Peter says he's received calls about this from the community. Vic said he can see both sides of the issues. The employees feel they are promised this schedule. It's easier if the Board decides what they want from the highway department, he said, since there is no written policy. Peter said he knows the road crew likes the four-day workweek; some people in town don't. The question is what is the most effective way of maintaining roads. The practice in the past is to be flexible since seasons vary. He said he was surprised when all of a sudden, the crew was working summer hours in the middle of April. Shane said he called eight towns and every one is May 1st to November 1st summer hours and in each town, the decision is the foreman's, weather depending. His proposal is to go May 1st to November 1st, weather depending, after consulting with the Road Commissioner who can apprise the Select Board. The crew must dedicate themselves six months to the job in the winter and they deserve a break in the summer. Randy said it's good to have a policy because everyone knows what to expect. He also suggested putting out public notices so residents understand what's going on.

Liz questioned how much work gets done in a ten-hour work day, especially hard physical labor. She asked Shane if the crew is actually putting in about 35 hours of work. Steve said he's worked in construction all his life and, yes, these crews accomplish more in 10-hour days because they don't lose tempo. Liz said that was good to know. Vic said it also cuts down on commuting time. Vic said Shane was willing to be flexible. For example, if the weather at the end of the week is bad then they would start on Tuesday instead of Monday. This helps cut down on overtime. Peter said the bottom line is that it all comes down to good communication and common sense. Shane should make a recommendation to the Road Commissioner and the Road Commissioner should let the Board know. The change in schedule should be posted on the town website and Front Porch Forum. Steve said the biggest thing is keeping people in Town informed. Mary said she disagrees with the expanded summer hours into April and October. Peter said the 10-hour days have never been guaranteed in the crew's employment contract. Besides, 10-hour days benefit the Town, then what's the harm?

The Board agreed that the practice is that the road crew works summer hours May 1st to November 1st, unless other factors come into play and that the Town will be notified of such. Also, the foreman will confirm with the Road Commissioner who will notify the Select Board.

Other highway news: the new grader will likely arrive mid-July. The Town received a \$3000 quote for sweeping all intersections in Town. The Board agreed it was a good idea. Shane said the Town is going to put up the Putnam speeding signs the first week in May. The Highway Department is renting a mower for 2 weeks with unlimited hours which costs the same as hiring someone to roadside mow for one week. It means putting a member of the crew on the mower, but it's still a savings. The Board thanked Shane for his good work and he left the meeting.

2021 Select Board Goals

The Board set its goals for 2021, below:

- Completing the capital spending plan
- Addressing the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department
- Reviewing all policies, including the personnel policy, many of which need updating
- Resolving issues with Welch Park
- Addressing the old fire station behind Town Hall
- Mitigating radon in Town Hall
- Replacing the windows upstairs in Town Hall
- Upgrading the Town Garage

Listers' Request for More Mapping Funds

Dave said the Town's online and paper tax maps are out of date and need to be updated. There is an additional sense of urgency because the State is moving over to a new software program called Axiomatic and it involves merging GIS systems. It would be better if the Town tax maps were up to date (or at least in progress) to coordinate with the new software. The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) bid to do just that costs \$3,960 over two years with 12 free hours per year. Money has been budgeted for updating maps, but it hasn't been used. There is \$750 budgeted for maps this year.

Peter said he was frustrated because the new fiscal year hasn't started and these expenses were tacked on after the FY22 budget meetings. Eric said the Listers are not going to utilize their salaries so money allocated to pay can be used for the maps. Peter

asked if the bill could be entirely paid up front before July 1st dipping into \$26,000 in the Listers budget currently set aside for payroll. Steve asked to make sure the 12 free hours/year is included. Peter asked if the Board signs the agreement and pays \$3,960, with 24 hours of free labor from the CVRPC over two years, is the Town's portion completely paid? Eric said yes. Dave said for a quicker time line it would \$6,240 with 12 hours credit. Peter said he's suggesting the CVRPC do the work over two years; there is no need for a quicker timeline. What about the software deadline? Eric said he thinks the Town might be a little ahead of the curve, so that won't be an issue. The only question is whether if this CVRPC bid is approved now, will it meet the State requirements and the needs of the Listers. Dave and Eric said yes.

MOTION: Steve moved and Mary seconded paying the CVRPC \$3,960 out of the FY21 budget to update the Town tax maps over two years, provided the CVRPC provides 12 free hours each year. To meet this expense, \$750 will be taken from the Listers' mapping budget and the remainder from the Listers' payroll account. The motion passed and Dave and Eric left the meeting.

Reviewing Summer Mowing Bids for the Town Recreation fields.

The Board reviewed three bids for mowing the Town's fields. Peter asked if there was any dissatisfaction with the current contactor, Corey Michaud, one of the bidders. Mitch said Corey is easy to work with, responsive and flexible, though he wasn't the cheapest bid. Peter says he'd rather stay with the guy who's been doing a good job, even if he's slightly more expensive. Peter asked that mowing around the fire department be included. Other Board members agreed. The Board agreed to stay with Corey Michaud. Mitch left the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Board passed over approving the minutes of the April 13, 2021 Special Select Board Meeting.

RE: the April 13, 2021 Special Meeting devoted to the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department. The Board discussed forming committees and agreed that this issue needs to be addressed by the Board as a whole. The Board will hold a Special Select Board meeting at 5 PM on May 11th to hold further discussions about the MVFD. Peter Lynch, chief of training at the Vermont Fire Academy, will be invited, along with managers from Waterbury and Montpelier to discuss potential alternatives to the current system.

All orders were signed.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 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 MAY 4, 2021.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

MARY JUST SKINNER, VICE CHAIR

PHILIP HYJEK

STEVEN MARTIN

ELIZABETH SCHARF

DRAFT