

**Select Board Members**

Peter Hood, Chair

Mary Just

Skinner,

Vice Chair

Phil Hyjek

Steve Martin

Liz Scharf

**MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD**  
**Tuesday, July 13, 2021**  
**SPECIAL MEETING**  
**Middlesex Town Clerk's Office**  
**5 Church Street**  
**AND**  
**The Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department**  
**Welch Park**  
**Middlesex, Vermont 05602**  
**(802) 223-5915**

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**MINUTES.**

**PRESENT AT THE TOWN OFFICE MEETING:** Peter O. Hood, Chair, Mary Just Skinner, Vice Chair. Members Steve Martin, Phil Hyjek and Liz Scharf. Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. Listers Amy Whitehorne, Eric Young and Dave Smith. Middlesex resident Randy Drury. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes.

**Call to Order and Welcoming Guests**

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:32 PM and welcomed guests. There were no amendments to the agenda

**Two Listers Announce Intended Resignations/Hired Assessor Proposed**

Amy said that effective December 31, 2021, she would be stepping down as Lister for health reasons. Eric, meanwhile, would not run for reelection when his term expires in March 2022. Since Dave was a relatively new Lister appointed in March of this year, the Board of Listers did not want to leave the Town in a lurch and suggested the Town hire an assessor to do the fieldwork and computer input. Meanwhile, the elected Board of Listers would provide oversight and perform administrative functions. At issue is new statewide property valuation software – Axiomatic – going into effect next summer. Amy and Eric suggested possibly hiring an assessor from the New England Municipal Records (NEMRC) who is familiar with Axiomatic and property valuation. The assessor would report to the Listers for weekly and monthly updates, Eric said.

Peter said the Select Board's discussed this model in the past. He was worried the Town might have to do a town-wide appraisal due to the spike in real estate sales above listed value. Amy said there is currently a two-year wait for appraisers capable of such jobs so it's not an immediate concern for the town. Liz asked if the same was true for assessors; Eric said there are currently 28 towns that use NEMRC assessors and four of those have eliminated their Board of Listers entirely, which the Listers do not recommend.

Amy said much of what's driving this shift in how towns assess properties are daunting state requirements. The Listers plan to attend the Vermont Assessors and Listers Association annual meeting in September and network for possible candidates. The Board thanked Amy and Eric for their excellent work and also Dave for his continued enthusiasm about the position.

The listers left the meeting. There was no action. The Board passed over approving the July 6, 2021 minutes.

The Board recessed at 5:57 to reconvene at the MVFD in Welch Park.

**PRESENT AT THE MVFD MEETING:** Peter O. Hood, Chair, Mary Just Skinner, Vice Chair. Members Steve Martin, Phil Hyjek and Liz Scharf. Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. MVFD Chief Doug Hanson, President Jeff Koonz, Treasurer Eric Metivier, Firefighters Scott Isham and Brendon Lareau. Former Emergency Management Coordinator Paul Otenti. Middlesex resident Randy Drury. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes

### **Call to Order**

Peter reconvened the Select Board meeting at 6:10 PM and thanked the MVFD for the meeting and to coming to his house for what turned out to be a false alarm the Sunday before.

### **MVFD Grievances Aired, Plans Outlined**

Doug read from a prepared statement responding to a proposal drafted by Steve and discussed at the June 15, 2021, Select Board meeting about a path for the Town to turn the MVFD into a municipal department while retaining the 501C3 (which is the MVFD) for fund-raising, recruiting and firefighting purposes. Doug asked where the Select Board has been for the past 30 years and charged the Board had done little to support the MVFD. He said Board consistently asks the MVFD to “sharpen its pencils” during budget discussions when the department has fixed costs that cannot be altered including a pre-set dispatch fee from Capitol West. He said he questioned the motive of the Board’s desire to take control over the fire department and predicted the taxpayers will be in for a shock. He noted the MVFD has been providing affordable fire protection in Middlesex for 50 years.

Peter responded that it was unfortunate the MVFD felt this way, especially since the fire station is newer and better than all the other buildings in town. As for the budget, Peter said the Board routinely budgets exactly what the fire department requests. Moreover, the Town provides virtually 100% of the MVFD’s operating expenses, pays for the bond on the building and the loans on the fire trucks and equipment, yet has no control over the department itself. The Board is looking into a Town fire department largely in response to concerns from neighboring communities that Middlesex cannot live up to its mutual aid agreement.

Jeff responded that Waterbury only calls on the MVFD and noted Montpelier is unionized and calls on Barre because it’s also unionized. Peter and Jeff rehashed the February fire that destroyed the Middlesex United Methodist Church on Church Street and how Montpelier and Waterbury were fed up with being the first responders to Middlesex fires. Peter emphasized that the Board has not made a decision about whether to take municipal control of the fire department; it has no desire to control the day-to-day operations of the fire department, either, but is looking for ideas and cooperation.

Former Massachusetts firefighter Paul Otenti said there was no point in bickering about the past since that’s not helpful. Instead, the Board and MVFD should be planning the future, especially since Middlesex is poised for unprecedented growth in its village area. The two entities should get together and create a timeline – what will the fire department look like in one to three years, step by step. Do it now before Middlesex development explodes.

Peter said one issue the Board agreed upon was upping stipends for the MVFD, perhaps using other departments as models. Doug said the MVFD planned to discuss this at its

next meeting, possibly changing its bylaws. Scott proposed an MVFD liaison who would meet with the Board at each of its meetings. Sarah proposed a subcommittee. Eric said he'd be interested in planning the future. Liz acknowledged the tough jobs the firefighters have that are basically volunteer. Their duties require serious commitment and training. Doug and Jeff said there needs to be more fire-protection input in Town permitting since some of these steep driveways and bridges cannot handle firetrucks, especially in the winter. Steve said the driveway cuts follow state, not local, standards. Peter recommended the MVFD meet with the Board and vice versa once a month, preferably at the Board's second meeting of the month. It was decided that the MVFD would attend the Board's August 17<sup>th</sup> meeting at Town Hall; the Board agreed.

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 JULY 20, 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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STEVEN MARTIN

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ELIZABETH SCHARF