

Select Board Members
X Peter Hood, Chair
X Liz, Scharf, Vice Chair
X Randy Drury
X Vic Dwire
X Phil Hyjek

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2022
Town Clerk's Office and via Zoom*
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, Vermont 05602
(802) 223-5915

MINUTES.

PRESENT: Peter O. Hood, Chair, Liz Scharf, Vice Chair. Members Randy Drury (also a member of the Budget Committee), Phil Hyjek and Vic Dwire, who is also Road Commissioner. Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. Road Foreman Eric Metivier. Bandstand Committee members Elliot Burg and Paul Boffa. Budget Committee member Mark Harris.* Town Moderator Susan Clark.* WCUUSD Board Member Chris McVeigh. WCUUSD Clerk Rosie Laquerre*. The meeting was recorded on Zoom and by ORCA. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes. (*signifies attendees via Zoom)

Call to Order

Peter called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM and welcomed guests. The agenda was amended to include an Executive Session to discuss a tax appeal.

FY24 BUDGET WORKSHOP

Allocating \$1,500 to the Middlesex Bandstand

Paul said the Bandstand is in its 17th year of programming and is now attended by over 2,000 people during the course of the summer to see topnotch talent, including Grammy winners from all over the world.

Because of that, the Bandstand is looking at a larger mix of revenue streams and is asking the Town to consider allocating \$1,500 in its upcoming budget to the program or, barring that, adding a special article on the 2023 Town Warning requesting the same amount. Elliot noted the bandstand was built with volunteer labor and contributions. However, the cost of booking performers has increased and the floor of the bandstand will need to be replaced. He thanked the Board for allowing construction of a shed on the Town Recreation Field.

Peter asked about the total annual budget. Paul said it's not more than \$12,000, though the committee anticipates expanding that along with pursuing underwriting. Phil asked what percentage of the budget goes to the performers; Paul said three quarters. Liz asked if the vendors find it profitable; Paul said they have record sales. They also feed the performers for free. Liz said she's found the events to be helpful advertising for other events. It's a nice place to see the community at once. Paul said since it's public property, politicians were able to respectfully work the crowd during an election season last summer and money has been raised at events for the fire department.

Liz said if the \$1,500 is included in the budget, the Board should include an explanation. Randy asked about reporting. Dorinda said bills would be submitted and then the Town would pay from the line item. Dorinda asked if this money would be spent on repairs. Elliot said it would be used for operating expenses or perhaps to pay the lion's share of the sound person's \$1,800 bill.

MOTION: Phil moved and Liz seconded allocating \$1,500 to the Bandstand as a line item in the FY24 Town Budget. The motion passed.

Highway Department Presentation

Eric presented a proposed budget of \$1,204, 032, a 53% increase over the current Highway Department budget. He said he originally budgeted \$40,000 for gravel and increased the allocation to \$100,000 because the roads are lacking in gravel. This would be sufficient to cover the major arteries in town. Liz asked if it would help with mud; Eric said it would help with the greasiness. He also added money for oil recycling and included \$70,000 for a salt shed since \$14,000 had already been paid to install the concrete pad. The budget for gas and diesel was increased due to rising prices and he plugged in a 5.9% increase under highway wages. He also added \$198,000 for paving Shady Rill after the \$200,000 grant. Dorinda said there's still money in the paving budget for that. Eric increased the budget for ditching stone because the cost is going up. Vic said some of that might be mitigated because the Highway Department will be applying for grants.

Randy said this is a Capital Improvement Plan goal, to address such issues as increased gravel expenses. Peter floated the possibility of borrowing money and spreading the cost over years. Dorinda asked about culverts and Eric said the Town still has a decent inventory of culverts. Peter said borrowing to pay for the salt shed might make sense. Stone and gravel will be recurring costs.

Randy said he attended a session about ARPA money available to municipalities and said it might be beneficial to reach out to see if money might be available for the salt shed and gravel. Vic discussed the cost of gravel, a big cost of which is the cost of trucking. He also said when you put sand on top of gravel, it deteriorates the gravel.

Peter said perhaps a special article on the 2023 Town Meeting Warning might work because it's a one-shot deal. Randy and Liz disagreed that gravel is a one-shot deal. Randy said there are big capital expenditures coming down the road and that the Town needs to start putting money into a fund, such as financing a truck. If there's \$100,000 sitting in a capital-improvement fund, then that could offset the blow of future big expenses. He reminded the Board that the Fire Department has significant costs ahead, which is to say that the days of 3%-5% budget increases are over.

Dorinda reminded the board that there'll be approximately \$20,000 of debt service for the truck. Liz said she's been looking at Airbnbs in Town that increases traffic on the roads and that they might be sources of revenue.

Preliminary Discussion of Wage Increases

The Board discussed wages. Randy said he likes separating cost of living increases from merit pay. Peter said over the years, the Town has tried these methods. The problem this year is that the cost of living has gone up so much that there's nothing left for performance increases. In addition, it's challenging to reward better employees, especially in a small operation. Is the goodwill you create for compensating a good employee worth the ill will that results among other employees? Peter asked. Health insurance will increase 13% and the Town covers that cost for employees, Randy said. That needs to be taken into consideration. Therefore, employees don't need a significant adjustment in their pay because of that, he added, noting the town made significant market adjustments the previous year. Some of those increases were 20% jumps in pay with another 5% increase on July 1, 2022. The Board will continue this discussion at future meetings.

Highway Department Update

Eric said the temporary salt shed is up and the new truck, a Kenworth 2023 T880, has arrived. The new road crew employee Richard Dudley received his CDL. Eric left the meeting.

Town Meeting Discussion

The Board decided there was no reason to vote to hold the 2023 Town Meeting in person since, as it stands now, all COVID precautions have been lifted and the Town will have no other option. Susan said the Town doesn't have a choice unless the Legislature changes its mind, which does not appear likely.

Mailing Every WCUUSD Ballot

The Board reviewed a letter from Flor Diaz Smith, chair of the Washington Central Unified Union School District, asking Select Boards of the five participating towns to approve mailing every active, non-challenged voter a WCUUSD Annual School Ballot in 2023. All the towns must agree, or it can't happen. East Montpelier's Select Board approved the request at its December 5, 2022, meeting. Randy said if it increases voter participation, then he's in favor.

Speaking as Town Clerk, Sarah said she initially opposed the idea out of concern mailing every voter a WCUUSD ballot would create voter confusion. Voters will need to request Career Center and Town ballots if they want to vote early. However, they won't be able to vote on the FY24 Town budget or special articles unless they attend Town Meeting. That said, she's reconsidered since there'll be no cost to the Town; WCUUSD is paying for the ballots and postage. In addition, the WCUUSD budget accounts for most of the annual Town tax bill, so it's probably a good idea to get as many voters as possible.

Chris said the WCUUSD Board is pushing the idea because it's a big budget and the more voters weighing in, the better.

MOTION: Liz moved, and Phil seconded, authorizing the WCUUSD 2023 Annual School Meeting ballots to be mailed to all active, not-challenged Middlesex voters. The motion passed.

Dorinda asked why the Town is overseeing school elections. Rosie said this was overlooked during the school mergers and the Agency of Education plans to address school voting with the Legislature this year.

OTHER BUSINESS

MOTION: Liz moved, and Vic seconded approving the minutes of the November 15, 2022, Select Board Meeting. The motion passed and the Board signed the minutes.

All orders were signed.

Liz said the Town has applied for a \$25,000 municipal planning grant to cover the architectural-study of Town Hall.

MOTION: Liz moved, and Vic seconded, entering Executive Session per 1 VSA § 313(a)(1)(F) to discuss an ongoing tax appeal and to include Dorinda. Everyone aside from the Board and Dorinda left the meeting. The Board entered Executive Session at 6:45 PM and exited at 6:55 PM. No action was taken.

Respectfully submitted by Sarah Merriman, Town Clerk/Select Board Assistant

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD ON DECEMBER 20, 2022.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

ELIZABETH SCHARF, VICE CHAIR

RANDY DRURY

VIC DWIRE

PHIL HYJEK