

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, JANUARY 17, 2023
Middlesex Town Hall 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. MVFD Chief and Road Foreman Eric Metivier, MVFD President Jeff Koonz, Firefighter Scott Isham, Budget Committee Member Mark Harris. The meeting at Town Hall was recorded on Zoom and by ORCA. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes. (*signifies attendees via Zoom)

Liz, acting as Chair, called the meeting to order at 5 PM. The agenda was amended to include a curb cut for Codi Wendel on Lower Barnett Hill Road and discussion about a dangerous curve on Culver Hill.

Approving a FY24 Town Budget of \$1,657, 287

Dorinda said moving the \$50,000 to a Special Article fund brought the proposed FY24 budget to \$1,657, 287 - a 10.24% increase over the current budget. The Board clarified that \$30,000 should be allocated to gravel; an additional \$50,000 from ARPA funds would bring the total spent on gravel to \$80,000. Mud mitigation (contracted services) should be \$37,500 and the cost of the salt shed should be spread out over two years with \$30,000 for each year. If that's not possible, then \$30,000 from the ARPA funds should be spent, according to Randy.

MOTION: Peter moved, and Vic seconded approving a FY24 budget of \$1,657, 287, an increase of 10.24% over the current budget, to be presented to the voters at the March 7, 2023 Town Meeting. The motion passed and Mark left the meeting.

Increasing Fees for DRB Appeals

Due to rising postage and advertising costs as well as the considerable time it takes for the Zoning Administrator Kevin Thompson to process appeals and for the Town Clerk to properly notify abutting landowners about appeals before the Development Review Board, Sarah said she and Kevin recommend updating fees charged to appellants appearing before the DRB. Peter said the Board should review all the fees the Town charges to bring them in line with increased costs. The Board discussed an effective date and decided on March 7, 2023 - the Annual Town Meeting; Sarah said she wanted to get the new fees into the 2022 Town Report.

MOTION: Randy moved, and Phil seconded increasing the fees per DRB appeal to \$150/appeal + \$10/abutter mailing. The motion passed and the new fees will be instituted March 7, 2023.

MVFD Joint Meeting

The meeting with the MVFD began at 5:27 PM. Jeff reviewed the MVFD's calls since the last meeting (below). He noted that, due to a storm over the Christmas weekend, Rumney School lost power for five days since the school's generator - which needed a part - was not functioning. When the power came back on, the sprinkler system activated an alarm but there was no damage. And since the "wet" fire-suppression system was in place, there was coverage.

Peter asked about the alarm situation re: the fire pond at Welch Park. Jeff said the MVFD station in Welch Park relies on water from a fire pond in the park for its sprinklers and also to recharge its tankers. Neither Peter nor the MVFD knew the fire pond was connected to the MVFD's fire suppression system. Peter said engineering reports make no mention of this, which could be problematic when Welch Park is disbanded. Jeff said the dry hydrant at the pond is crucial for fire suppression at the State Archives across US Route 2. Peter said the lawyer doing the title search on the Welch Park dissolution would need to investigate further.

Randy asked about average response time; Jeff said it's variable and depends on where firefighters are located and where the call is coming from. Therefore, it's not possible to make improvements. Randy said he was just curious.

Dorinda asked about billing people for MVFD responses on I-89 since the Town has an ordinance allowing the Town to bill insurance companies for the cost of the Town's MVFD and Fast Squad responses. Jeff said the Town's had little success collecting because insurance companies argue this is the MVFD's job. And then there's the argument that the billing system's not fair since the MVFD doesn't charge residents for services. The Board discussed this.

Jeff referred to a letter from Capital Fire Mutual Aid for which the Select Board wrote a letter of support last year. Phase 1 of the grant application was successful and Capital Fire Mutual Aid has been conditionally awarded \$2.44 million to upgrade its radio system. They will be applying for Phase 2 - the remaining \$1.1 million. The MVFD portion of the meeting ended at 5:50 PM and Jeff left.

Highway report

Eric said there is an issue with the chipper. The oil was contaminated, and it killed the motor. Now the department is looking for the best option. Used engines cost \$6,000 - \$10,000. Randy asked if the 1989 chipper complied with today's safety standards. Vic said it's been repaired and now complies with OSHA. Liz asked about renting. Eric said that would cost several hundred dollars a day. Randy asked him to calculate how often it's used. It has a 12-inch capacity and a refurbished one would cost \$25,000 - \$50,000. Eric left the meeting.

Resuming In-Person Town Meeting; Warning for Meetings by Australian Ballot

House Bill 42, currently working its way through the Vermont Legislature, would again give floor-vote towns the opportunity to hold Town Meeting via Australian ballot to prevent COVID exposure. The bill is predicted to pass by January 25th.

Liz spoke in favor of holding the March 7, 2023, Town Meeting in person, stressing the importance of citizens acting as legislators, engaging in civil discourse and gathering as a community.

Vic said he preferred holding it by Australian ballot since increasing political divisions intimidate some from appearing and speaking their minds. Also, many people can't attend the Tuesday evening meeting due to their work/family schedules which means they can't vote on the budget. Randy agreed saying that voting by Australian ballot leads to more voter participation; he wishes there could be a combination of the two.

Phil agreed with Randy and Victor. Town meeting is a great old tradition that's anachronistic and disenfranchises a lot of people. Peter spoke in favor of a floor vote. But if Town Meeting is in person this year, the Board should add a question to the Warning about whether it should be held by Australian ballot, he said. The problem is that articles can be amended from the floor; they can't be amended once they're on the ballot.

Sarah informed the Board that due to current legislation, floor-vote towns may not place articles on a temporary COVID (Australian) ballot that asks voters if town meeting should be held from thereon out by Australian ballot. However, those questions can be warned and voted on by a traditional in-person town meeting as long as they're broken down into whether the budget should be voted on by Australian ballot and/or whether all public questions should be voted on by Australian ballot.

MOTION: Randy moved, and Phil seconded holding the March 7, 2023, Town Meeting in person at Rumney School and adding articles on the Warning about whether the budget and public questions should be voted on by Australian ballot. All but Vic voted for the motion, which passed. Peter said he was going to contact representatives in the Statehouse to ask them to change the law so these questions could be asked by Australian ballot to begin with.

Special Meeting to Approve the March 7, 2023, Annual Meeting Warning

Since petitions to add special articles to the March 7, 2023, Annual Meeting Warning aren't due until January 19th at 5 PM, the Board will hold a Special Meeting via Zoom at 6 PM on January 24, 2023, to review and approve the Warning.

Treasurer Report

Dorinda thanked everyone for their hard work on creating the FY24 budget.

OTHER BUSINESS

MOTION: Phil moved, and Vic approved the 2023 Certificate of Highway Mileage. All but Peter signed the certificate.

MOTION: Peter moved, and Phil seconded approving Codi Wendel's application for an access permit on Lower Barnett Hill Road. The motion passed and Liz signed on behalf of the Board.

MOTION: Vic moved, and Phil seconded approving the minutes from the January 3, 2023 Select Board meeting. The motion passed and Board members present signed the minutes.

All orders were signed.

The Board discussed a recent accident at a dangerous curve on Culver Hill Road that Liz noted could have resulted in serious bodily harm to the 21-year-old driver. She has long been advocating for signage along that curve that has a deep culvert and a string of mailboxes that are taken out by motorists every year. Vic said he asked the Road Foreman to put up a sign, but it hasn't been installed. Randy said the foreman had other, more pressing priorities. Vic objected to Liz sending an email to him, the Road Foreman, and other Town officials with pictures of the totaled car and the accident scene. Peter said the Board may not have made a formal motion, but it directed the Highway Department to install the sign. If the ground is frozen, nail it on a tree. This isn't a priority for Liz, he said, but for the whole Select Board which is concerned about the safety of its citizens.

Town Hall update: Liz said Vermont Integrated Architects visited Town Hall last week, met with Town officials and photographed the building. They will return to update the Select Board and the public about their process in assessing Town Hall's viability on February 21st, March 21st and April 18th. There will also be a survey to be distributed in town asking residents about their vision for Town Hall.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM

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 FEBRUARY 7, 2023.

PETER O. HOOD, CHAIR

ELIZABETH SCHARF, VICE CHAIR

RANDY DRURY

VIC DWIRE

PHIL HYJEK

17 Jan MVFD Notes

Total calls to date: 5 in end of Dec, 4 in Jan
Calls over the last month: 8
Mutual Aid out: 0
Mutual Aid in: 1
Max members respond: 8
Min members respond: 2
Avg members respond: 4.89

E-1 out 6 times
E-6 out 0 times
T-1 out 2 times
R-1 out 5 times
Tk-14 out 0 time

Calls:

22 Dec, I-89, Car vs Deer, E-1, R-1, 3 responders
23 Dec, Rt 12 and Wrightsville Dam, Tree on power line, R-1, 2 responders
23 Dec, Upper Sunny Brook Road Tree down in road, E-1, R-1, 7 responders
27 Dec, Rumney School, Sprinkler Alarm in dry system, E-1, R-1, 6 responders
MA in as a precaution.
29 Dec, I-89, Vehicle in ditch, 4 responders
Canceled by VSP before any vehicles could respond.
01 Jan, I-89, Vehicle into median rocks, E-1, R-1, T-1, 8 responders
01 Jan, US Rt 2 and Center Road, 2 vehicle accident, E-1, 5 responders
10 Jan, Consolidated Communications, Alarm Activation, 3 responders
False Alarm, canceled by K-2 on scene.
12 Jan, Culver Hill Road, Vehicle roll over off the road, E-1, 3 responders

Training: Emergency vehicle scene/road closure

Repairs: None

Purchases: Upcoming, new AED to replace non-working one.

FAST Sq:

15 total for the reporting period
10 medical only calls
5 in conjunction with FD calls