

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 8, 2013, Middlesex Town Hall

Present: Susan Clark, Tim Murphy, Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch, and Dave Shepard (at the very end)

1. Middlesex Website Update

Susan reported that she had spoken with the Town Clerk's office, and they said minutes from the Selectboard have now been brought up-to-date. All town committees including TMSC and the Conservation Commission can send minutes to the Assistant Town Clerk and she will post them.

Tim brought in a copy of the 2008 *Middlesex Operator's Manual* with notes on which sections were transferred from the old town website onto the current website, and which are missing. Several key sections are missing – most important for our committee, the entire “Local Democracy and You” section including sections on voting rights, how to participate in town meeting, how to run for office, etc. We agreed that we need to meet with the Town Clerk to see if we can get these and other missing sections onto the current site. Susan said she will initiate that conversation.

2. Solutions Committee Priorities for 2013-2014

Susan provided the list of priorities the group had set for the past two years, and everyone ranked these ideas as 1 (“Important/definitely do this”), 2 (“Good idea”), 3 (“Might be nice if you get around to it”), 4 (“Probably not worth the time”) or 5 (“A bad idea/don't do this”). Results were as follows:

A. Child care for town meeting – continue to work with Community Connections to organize child care during town meeting.

Everyone ranked this as a “1.”

B. Remote town meeting participation (continue to facilitate technology so that voters who are homebound or traveling due to public service can participate in town meeting).

Everyone ranked this as a 1, except one 4.

Discussion: Susan added that the VT League of Cities and Towns recommends that towns doing this adopt formal policies and procedures, and the group agreed that we should work on these this year.

C. Middlesex web site

Most people ranked this as a 1 or 2; one 4.

Discussion: Now that the site TMSC created has been adapted and adopted by the Town, TMSC's role is to assist and support the Town and, if necessary, serve as “watchdog.” The group agreed that we should work with the Town Clerk's office and possibly the Selectboard to ensure that there is a set of expectations for the site – content, timeliness of minutes, etc. From there, we can identify any areas where TMSC can be helpful. Tim (who was the “4”) said he'd rank this higher if we are playing more of a watchdog role.

D. Middlesex Operator's Manual, especially Contacts Page

Combined with "C" as a website process, and receiving same rankings.

Discussion: We talked about whether the Manual needs to be reprinted, or whether we should just update key sections on the Town website. Reprinting would be prohibitively costly (especially since National Life doesn't donate printing anymore) but it also may not be critical to most citizens, since many have access to the town website. Dave and Susan (who both ranked it highly) want to pursue updating this.

E. Civics education for youth

Rankings: 2, 3, 3, 5.

Discussion: We agreed that although this is a good idea in concept, teachers have not generally had much time for this, so it is probably not worth our committee's time to pursue at this point. If a committee member wants to take it on, we are happy to support them in doing so.

F. Middlesex Public access to the Web

Rankings: 4s and 5s. We tried during the e-VT project but no one used the computers. We'll take this off future priority setting lists.

G. Community-wide discussion on affordability/livability or other key topics.

Rankings ranged widely: 1,2,2 ½, 3,5

Discussion: Susan talked about an idea for a series of small, diverse "study circles"-style living room conversations to build trust and understanding, followed by a community-wide a "vision-to-action" forum. She proposed partnering with the Planning Commission and other community organizations. She said that in other communities, these processes often reinvigorated interest in community projects like historic preservation, the food shelf, conservation projects, etc. and can launch surprising coalitions and create new solutions. Greg said he was concerned that these conversations could drive people apart and be polarizing. Barb noted that it is important to go where people are, not ask them to come to you.

H. Other ideas:

--Discretionary funding committee. Several people said they thought TMSC should make sure this committee is reinvigorated next year, probably by taking the lead ourselves (but maybe finding new members to help). Tim asked whether we could explore changing how we talk about discretionary funding at town meeting—is there a different process we could use?

--Explore Australian Ballot for school—should Middlesex move back to a traditional school meeting? At a recent TNSC meeting, Rumney School Board member Chris McVeigh he said he might like to have the School Board ask this as a non-binding question of voters—should we move back to a floor meeting? We agreed Susan would ask Chris if he would like to pursue this with the School Board.

--Welcome New Voters letter. There is no evidence that the town clerk's office sent this out last year. We should probably go back to doing it ourselves this year.

--Robert's Rules flier as a tri-fold: Tim suggested we reformat the RRO handout we put on chairs at town meeting into a tri-fold. Susan noted that we just reprinted it, so it might be a couple of years before we do that.

--More cookies with nuts for TMSC meetings.

3. Minutes from the April 10, 2013 Town Meeting Solutions Committee Meeting

Minutes were approved.

Next meeting: Tuesday, June 4, 2013, Middlesex Town Hall.

Minutes recorded by Susan Clark