Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee Notes & “How To”

The Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee is an ad hoc group of volunteers working since 2001 to improve participation in Middlesex’s town meeting and our town’s civic affairs in general.

As noted in Middlesex Annual Reports, given the effects of the pandemic on Middlesex’s town meeting, our committee has functioned more like a network over the past three years, collaborating on projects wherever we could be useful. For this reason, in place of “meeting minutes,” we offer the following document outlining the town meeting-related activities that the committee has taken on.

In addition to being a record of activity, we hope this document might be useful to future volunteers in continuing and building on these efforts.

Note that in addition to the town meeting-related preparation identified here, the Solutions Committee has led efforts at other times of the year such as fall candidates’ forums, voter education, community visioning, etc.

Our gratitude goes to the Middlesex Town Clerk’s Office, Selectboard, Planning Commission, Middlesex Community Fund, and other town committees for their support. And a huge thank-you to the many Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee members and supporters who have spent innumerable volunteer hours on these efforts, including but not limited to: Joanne Breidenstein, Mark Bushnell, Kimberly Hagen, Ron Krauth, Tim Murphy, Chris Reilly, Nancy Reilly, Amy Rose, Lauri Scharf, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch, and Greg Whitchurch.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Clark, Chair

March 2024

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Annual Town Meeting Preparation

Unless otherwise noted, the following tasks are initiated or organized by the Town Meeting Solutions Committee.

Most of this organizing begins each year in early January, if not before.

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Town Meeting Dinner

GOAL: To arrange a post-meeting dinner, both to facilitate meeting attendance and to allow residents to gather informally after the meeting and strengthen community

HOW TO:

- Identify a volunteer chef to make the meal. We've been fortunate to rely on a Middlesex resident who is also a trusted Rumney cook so that we can have permission to use the school kitchen seamlessly. For many years it was Liz Scharf; in 2024 it was April Davis
- Menu is chef's choice, but for years has been spaghetti (choice of meat sauce, pesto, and marinara), salad, homemade rolls and butter. Vegetarian and gluten-free options available. The cook orders the ingredients and is repaid through meal proceeds
- We have often used local ingredients, e.g. Persons Brothers Farm on Center Road gave us a generous deal on meat for the spaghetti sauce
- Determine a broad-based Middlesex organization that can supply volunteers to help with the set-up and clean-up. In addition to goodwill/PR, an incentive is that they will receive any proceeds from the meal
- Recruit and organize the volunteers to set up tables as soon as Town Meeting ends, serve and clean up the meal, wash dishes, swab tables, sweeping, put away chairs etc. In addition to volunteers from the organization(s) that benefit from the meal proceeds, recruit more volunteers via emails to engaged neighbors and via FPF. (Town meeting attendees always pitch in as well.)
- Solicit desserts (via Town Report, Front Porch Forum, and Facebook) for potluck dessert table. Generally we've had plenty of bakers and lots of great options.
- Thank all volunteers!

COMMENTS:

- Many years ago when Town Meeting was held at Middlesex Town Hall in the Village, the dinner was hosted by Middlesex Methodist Church. Later the Fire Department benefitted; in more recent years it was Middlesex Food Shelf. In 2024 it was split between Middlesex Community Fund and Rumney School's Parent-Teacher-Neighbor Organization (PTNO)
- We have made the meal "by donation," with a suggested donation that covers the costs while raising a small amount for local groups. Everyone is served; no one is turned away. The idea is to balance affordability with the appeal of contributing to a community cause. In 2024 the suggested donation was $10/adults, $4/kids under 12

Town Meeting Childcare

GOAL: To offer reliable and affordable (ideally free) childcare from 4:00 pm-7:00 pm to allow parents to attend Town Meeting

HOW TO:

- Contact the school's Community Connections (CC) program to see if they're willing to do the childcare. In the past they have done it as part of their programming
- In 2024 CC did not have the funding to do it, so we wrote an application for funding from the Middlesex Community Fund to pay Community Connections. The cost was $200

COMMENTS:

- We are always looking for ways to lower barriers to democratic participation, and UVM research has shown that offering childcare measurably increases town meeting participation, especially among women.
- Offering free child are also sends a strong message to all residents: Our community values and works toward engagement for all
- In the past, CC offered both K-6 and preschool/toddler childcare. In 2024 they did not have the staffing for this. Unfortunately, this reduced the number of families served by the childcare service
- Idea: if Community Connections continues to be unable to do preschool/toddler care one possibility might be for the Middlesex Community Fund to offer toddler-care vouchers for parents who want to attend Town Meeting
- Community Connections staff has games to play, crafts and activities, and perhaps a movie to watch depending on how the kids are feeling that evening
- Before Community Connections was involved, we tried various other arrangements (e.g. when Town Meeting was held in the Village at Town Hall 15+ years ago, we hired babysitters at the Methodist Church across the road). However, safety and liability were concerns. Parents likely feel more comfortable if childcare in the same building as Town Meeting. It is crucial that parents know the childcare is safe and reliable

Town Meeting Sound System

GOAL: To have a high-quality sound system so that Moderator, Selectboard, and Town Clerk can be heard clearly. Also, to have two roving microphones so that voters can speak from their seats

HOW TO:

- We have been extremely fortunate to have Middlesex resident Bennett Shapiro of MadTech Sound volunteer the professional sound system for years. The Town Clerk generally contacts him ahead of time. TMSC confirms, offers batteries for microphones, etc.
- Bennett sets up one microphone for the Moderator, at least two additional microphones on the front table to be shared by Selectboard and Town Clerk, and two mobile microphones (carried to voters by students)
- Bennet does the set-up and break-down, and is present throughout the meeting to trouble-shoot if a mike acts up
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COMMENTS:

- It is crucial to have mobile microphones. Advantages include:
    - Increasing accessibility for voters who have limited mobility
    - Reducing wait-time between speakers and allowing deliberation to continue apace
    - Reducing a barrier to participation by decreasing people's nervousness about speaking up (no standing in line at a stationary microphone)

Town Meeting Microphone Runners

GOAL: To have students carry microphones to voters during Town Meeting

HOW TO:

- Ask teachers to send a notice home to families. (See sample text below.)
- Post the same notice on Front Porch Forum
- Circle back with teachers if you aren't getting enough volunteers—they can send it out a few times. Generally having between four and six kids who rotate out works well.
- Identify an adult volunteer to be their "minder" throughout the meeting, making sure they're paying attention and switching out kids every 20 minutes or so
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COMMENTS:

- Having mobile mikes with agile carriers is critical to keeping the discussion going at pace (see above). Plus, having a young person hand them the microphone helps everyone remember to act like the adults in the room
- Appropriate ages for mike runners include 5-6th graders, mature 4th graders, and 7-8th or older students (although they can be harder to get). Given our school's grade structure we have targeted 5-6th graders with success.

Sample Text for Teachers to Send to Families

Town Meeting Day is coming up, and Middlesex 5-6th graders are needed!

Every year, Middlesex's young people help make our lively Town Meeting a success by carrying microphones, allowing voters to speak their minds on town issues. It's an important community service, and a terrific opportunity to witness real democracy in action!

We're looking for some wonderful students who can commit to being at Town Meeting (every student doesn't have to be there the whole time), stay alert, wait for the Moderator to call on someone, and then run the microphone over to that person.

We're also looking for a few hardy grown-ups who can supervise the students and help them take shifts during the meeting.

Middlesex Town Meeting is Tuesday, March DATE, starting at 4:30 pm and running until approximately 6:30 pm. (Note: This is the last day of school break.) All are welcome at a community dinner in the Rumney gym afterwards!

To sign up, or if you have questions, please contact NAME AND CONTACT INFO

Remote Town Meeting Viewing

GOAL: To allow people to watch and hear Town Meeting remotely

HOW TO:

- Contact ORCA Media to confirm that they will attend and live stream the meeting.
- Publicize the availability of watching (but not speaking/voting) from afar via Front Porch Forum, Facebook, Middlesex website, etc.
- Unlike publicity about childcare, rides, dinner, etc. which should happen early, outreach about remote town meeting viewing can happen closer to the meeting date. While remote viewing is important for those who need it, the goal is to encourage people who can to make a plan to attend in person

COMMENTS:

- For many years (2008-2020), with guidance from the Vermont Secretary of State's office, the Middlesex Solutions Committee facilitated remote town meeting participation (including speaking and voting) for those who could not attend due to health/mobility issues or public service. However, as of 2021 the Secretary of State's Office disallowed this practice, at least until new security regulations are defined regarding identification of remote voters. The Solutions Committee hopes to bring back the remote town meeting option for those who need it once those details are worked out
- During the time that Middlesex offered full Remote Town Meeting Participation, the Solutions Committee created a formal protocol. Remote Town Meeting Participation is also endorsed in Middlesex's officially adopted Town Plan

Welcome New Voter Letter

GOAL: To send an informational letter to every voter who has been added to the town's checklist since the previous Town Meeting Day

HOW TO:

- Obtain list of new voters and their addresses from the Town Clerk. (Note that their offices are super busy at this time of year, so don't expect them to get around to giving them to you until after the Town Report is done.)
- Create labels, print letters, and obtain envelopes and stamps. Our letter is signed by the Selectboard and they reimburse us for the stamps
- Host an envelope-stuffing party!
- Mail the letter in early to mid-February

Sample Text: Welcome New Voter Letter

February, YEAR
Dear Middlesex Neighbor,

Welcome, new voter! We have received your name as a newly registered voter in Middlesex. Spring is an exciting time of year for local democracy in Vermont, and we want to be sure you have all the information you need to participate. Please take a look at the *Town of Middlesex Annual Report* for information and sample ballots. You've probably received a copy in the mail by now. It can also be viewed at the Middlesex website (more on that below).

Town Meeting Day occurs this year on **Tuesday, DATE**, and all voter activities in Middlesex will be held at the Rumney Memorial School on 433 Shady Rill Road.

In Middlesex, a pre-printed paper Australian ballot is used to vote for **town officers** and **school-related matters**. This year is a Presidential Primary year, so you can also choose to vote in the Republican or Democratic Primary at this time. You can stop by Rumney School anytime between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. to cast your ballot. Early/absentee voting is also available on these articles; contact the Town Clerk for more information PHONE NUMBER AND EMAIL ADDRESS.

We then heartily invite you to participate in the **Middlesex Town Meeting**, which begins on Tuesday, March 5 at 4:30 p.m. Find the agenda (called the "Warning") in the *Middlesex Annual Report* or the town website. At Town Meeting, you can engage in democracy in its most direct form, speak on issues of interest to you, learn your neighbors' viewpoints, make amendments, and vote. This is your opportunity to engage in a powerful New England democratic tradition, and an important way to meet your neighbors and learn what issues are most pressing in our community.

After the meeting is over, all are encouraged to stay at the school for a delicious **Town Meeting Spaghetti Supper** with salad, homemade rolls, and a variety of desserts, to benefit the

Middlesex Community Fund and Rumney PTNO. (It's pay what you can, suggested donation $10 for adults, $4 for children under 12.) You're also invited to show off your cooking talents by bringing your favorite treat offering for the dessert potluck!

If you need a **ride to town meeting**, please call NAME AND CONTACT INFO.

Free childcare will be available during town meeting at the Rumney School, for those who reserved by DEADLINE DATE. For more information, please contact NAME AND CONTACT INFO. Thanks to the Middlesex Community Fund for providing funds to make childcare free.

ORCA Media will record this year's Middlesex Town Meeting, and will stream it live if Rumney's internet can handle the load. If you'd like to watch from home (but not participate), go to www.orcamedia.net.

A few other great Middlesex resources, now and year-round:

- Visit the official **Middlesex town website,** www.middlesexvermont.org. It features agendas and minutes for town committees, election details, contact information, and more. You can also phone the Middlesex Town Clerk's office with any questions: PHONE NUMBER AND EMAIL ADDRESS

- Check out the **What's Next Middlesex site** www.whatsnextmiddlesex.org. Here you'll find the Middlesex Candidates Page, where candidates have all been invited to say a little about themselves so you can make an informed vote. You'll also find updates from Middlesex's planning commission, energy committee, capital planning, trails, and other local projects.

- **Front Porch Forum**, Middlesex's free online "bulletin board," features daily postings from Middlesex officials and your neighbors about everything from local meetings to yard sales to lost pets. If you have email, you can join Front Porch Forum. It's free! Go to www.FrontPorchForum.com

We welcome you to the ranks of Middlesex's voters. Democratic participation is your privilege and your right, and we encourage you to come on out.

See you at Town Meeting!

Sincerely,
Your neighbors on the Middlesex Select Board, and Town Meeting Solutions Committee

*The **Middlesex Select Board** welcomes your involvement throughout the year. If you have questions, contact NAME AND CONTACT INFO.*

*The **Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee** works to promote participation in Middlesex's Town Meeting and, by extension, in all of our community affairs. For more information, please contact NAME AND CONTACT INFO.*

Middlesex Candidates Profile Web Page

GOAL: To offer basic information about candidates for Town positions, so that voters can make informed decisions

HOW TO:

- When the petition deadline has passed and the ballot is finalized, obtain names and contact information about all town candidates from the Town Clerk
- Reach out to all candidates and solicit their information. Use the description from the sample introductory text below
- Many candidates will need reminding a few times
- Post responses on WhatsNextMiddlesex website
- Publicize availability of Candidate Profiles early and often on Front Porch Forum. Remember: Early publicity is important since absentee ballot voting begins well in advance of Town Meeting Day

COMMENTS:

- We have only done this for Middlesex town candidates, not school candidates, because that would involve reaching candidates across all five towns in WCUUSD. We would encourage the posting of information about school candidates if a future group wants to take that on
- We have created this page in collaboration with the Vermont League of Women Voters, to ensure this is an unbiased informational effort

Sample Introductory Text for Candidates Page

Welcome to the spring, 2024 Middlesex Candidates page. Below are statements from the candidates for public office we have heard from so far, in response to these three questions:

1. Please tell us something about yourself.
2. Why are you running for this office?
3. What do you think are the most interesting or important issues relating to the Middlesex position you're running for?

All candidates are welcome to submit text to this webpage. If you're a candidate, submit your text to **mdxvolunteer@gmail.com**. Please keep it simple—no more than a few sentences/100 words or so for each question.

This Candidate Profile project is a partnership of the Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee and the League of Women Voters of Vermont. It is provided as a service to help Middlesex voters make an informed choice, and is not an endorsement of any candidate. To view the ballot and for more information about Town Meeting Day 2023, please visit the official Town of Middlesex website: **http://middlesexvermont.org**

Town Meeting Outreach

GOAL: To remind residents that Town Meeting Day is coming up, why participation will be important and interesting, and offer basic information on engaging

HOW TO:
Outreach varies from year to year. A few examples:

- Often we post a series of "Town Meeting Tidbits" on Front Porch Forum in the weeks leading up to Town Meeting Day. See examples below
- The Middlesex website has several subsections on democracy-related topics such as how to get an item on the Warning, where to vote, etc. To highlight this info we created a single "Town Meeting" page with Q&A and links on the WhatsNextMiddlesex website
- In 2024, after three-year break from in-person town meeting due to Covid, and also given the huge flooding of 2023, we solicited "2023: What a Year!" photos from Middlesex residents, for use in a slide show to help people feel connection. People submitted flooding shots, as well as many things that brought them joy (wildlife, sugaring, ski and hike adventures, etc.) Slide show was available at WhatsNextMiddlesex website and was shown on a loop in the hallway at Rumney School during the full-day of Presidential Primary and Town Meeting Day voting
- One year TMSC organized "living room meetings" where community members offered to host a gathering of neighbors and we reviewed the Warning, how the meeting would run, answered questions, etc.
- We always include key details about town meeting dinner, childcare, rides, etc. on the cover or first page of the Town Report

Sample "Town Meeting Tidbits"

Below are some Front Porch Forum postings that have been used to publicize the meeting in the weeks leading up to Town Meeting Day.

Town Meeting Tidbits: We Care About Child Care!

Good news for democracy: Rumney School and Community Connections will offer FREE child care for town meeting. Please contact [name/email] to notify them that your child will be attending. Note: Pre-registration by [date] is required (before school break).

Now here's your fun fact for the day: When it comes to women, town meeting is one of the most inclusive legislative bodies in the country. Although women make up about half of our population, women make up only 23.2% of the U.S. Congress and 26% of the Senate – the groups that create and pass the American budget and raise the taxes to pay for it. At the Vermont level, things equalize a bit more: women make up 40% percent of the House. And maybe Vermont's percentage of women leaders is so high because of good training at the local level.

Because at the town level, the body that deliberates on the budget and taxes to pay for it – the town meeting – is generally nearly 50% women. In fact, Vermont women regularly comprise a majority at town meeting. Until 2019 this has never been true in any state or national legislative body in the entire history of the United States.

Child care helps. In towns offering child care there's is a measurable increase in meeting participation – especially among women.

Remember, Middlesex Town Meeting will be held at Rumney Memorial School on [date] starting at [time]. The polls will be open for Australian ballot voting (including presidential primary voting) from 7:00 am – 7:00 pm. Stick around for spaghetti dinner and potluck dessert afterwards! "Town Meeting Tidbits" are brought to you by your neighbors on the Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee. See you at Town Meeting!

* *

Town Meeting Tidbits: How & Why to Read Your Town Report

You're curled up in your favorite chair by the woodstove with a warm beverage. You have a choice between picking up that colorful new seed catalogue, that crisp novel you just started, and the Middlesex Town Report. Let's be honest – which will you choose?

We'd like to make an argument for the Town Report. Here's why.

This year's report, with a beautiful cover illustration by the late Middlesex artist Connie D'Anna (mother of town employees Cindy Carlson and her brother Joe D'Anna, the newest member of the Middlesex road crew), has been mailed to every Middlesex voter. It was carefully created by Town Clerk Sarah Merriman, and thoughtfully designed by Kate Alberghini. It is a treasure trove of facts about your money, and stories about your community. It's jam-packed with information about things that affect you every day.

--Interested in your road in mud seasons to come? See p. 18.
--Who had babies, who passed away, and who got hitched? See pp. 30-31.
--How about all of the organizations we give money to – what do they do with our dollars? See their reports (conveniently organized by our town clerk in the order that they appear on the agenda)
--From Budgets to Bandstand to Boy Scouts, Fast Squad to Rumney School, Listers to Historical Society, your neighbors have contributed to this story of your town. Of course, you'll also find the agenda ("Warning") for Town Meeting, along with samples of the ballots you'll be presented with when you vote.

And be sure to bring your Town Report to Town Meeting. As former Vermont Assistant Secretary of State Paul Gilles suggests: "Having your report handy, you can follow along when the debate gets hot. Rolled up, it can serve as a great prop to wave around theatrically while

you're speaking to the assembly. Most importantly, it is a reference tool for finding answers from town officials. You can cite authority if you have your report with you at Town Meeting."

[End with boilerplate info about Town Meeting: When, where, voting, dinner, etc.]

* *

Town Meeting Tidbits: Town Meeting Is More Versatile than You Think

Town Meeting Day in Vermont is a celebration and implementation of local democracy. But it has other uses too! For instance:

--Folks at the Calvin Coolidige Homestead in Plymouth, Vermont use Town Meeting Day as a reminder to cut back the potted geraniums they've brought inside for the winter.
--Tradition has it that old-time Vermont sugarmakers used Town Meeting Day as the date to begin tapping their maple trees. (It's a sign of the changing climate that nowadays, tapping usually begins several weeks earlier.)
--Town Meeting Day is traditionally the reminder for Vermont gardeners to plant tomato seeds (inside, of course). The seedlings should be ready for outdoor planting by Memorial Day.

Town Meeting traditions are truly part of Vermont's landscape. Hope to see you there!

[End with boilerplate info about Town Meeting: When, where, voting, dinner, etc.]

* *

Town Meeting Tidbits: Who Was the "Robert" in Robert's Rules?

"All those in favor say 'aye'"—why do we use these words at town meeting? According to state law, Vermont town meetings are governed by Robert's Rules of Order (unless the town adopts some other rules). Who was Robert, and why does he make the rules?

Just after the Civil War, more and more Americans became involved in civic groups, and all heck was breaking loose. People realized they needed a clear process for running meetings. Army Corps of Engineers Brigadier General Henry Robert created "Robert's Rules" in an effort to standardize and demystify democratic decision making.

So, people who criticize Robert's Rules for being too linear won't be surprised to learn that they were created not only by an engineer, but a general. But those who have experienced tumultuous meetings that use no parliamentary system credit General Robert with ensuring that "majority rules" while minority viewpoints are also respected.

Robert's Rules may seem a bit arcane, but town moderators are trained to make them work for you. And under Robert's Rules, it is always, always okay to raise your hand and ask questions—General Robert would be the first to agree!
[End with boilerplate info about Town Meeting: When, where, voting, dinner, etc.]

* *

Town Meeting Tidbits: You Can’t Say They Didn’t Warn You

Want to know what we'll be talking about at Middlesex Town Meeting this year?

In Vermont, the Town Meeting agenda is known as the "Warning." (Sounds scarier than it really is.) The Warning has been mailed to every voter in Middlesex within the pages of your Town Report. You can also find it on the Middlesex website, www.middlesexvermont.org.

You'll also find links on the Middlesex website to sample ballots -- for instance the Rumney and the U-32 ballots -- if you want a preview. (We'll vote on these in the voting booth by Australian ballot.)

So you've been "warned": Town Meeting will be held at Rumney School on Tuesday, March 6, 2018 starting at 4:30 pm. Polls will be open for Australian ballot voting from 7:00 am–7:00 pm. (Early voting/absentee ballots are available from the Town Clerk now.)

But it's not all business. You're also invited to stick around afterwards for a spaghetti supper with your neighbors—and don't forget the dessert potluck!

"Town Meeting Tidbits" are brought to you by your neighbors on the Town Meeting Solutions Committee. See you at Town Meeting!

Robert's Rules Flyer

GOAL: To help voters feel comfortable with meeting procedure. Also, to offer an evaluation/suggestion form

HOW TO:

- The Solutions Committee created a two-sided form based on information from the Vermont Institute for Government. See link to flyer below
- Get to Town Meeting early and place a copy on all the chairs.
- At the end of the meeting the Moderator reminds people to fill out the evaluation, and to return unused copies so they can be re-used next year
-

COMMENTS:

- We have received some useful suggestions on the evaluation forms which have led to action
- We often put a piece of chocolate candy on all the chairs too, as a sweetener

Find the flyer on the Resources tab at www.vtinstituteforgovt.org

Rides to Town Meeting

GOAL: To make sure no one misses Town Meeting due to needing a ride to the meeting

HOW TO:

- The Solutions Committee placed a notice in the front of the Town Report: “IF YOU NEED A RIDE: The Middlesex Solutions Committee will be glad to coordinate transportation to and from Town Meeting for any Middlesex voters needing a ride. Please contact Dave Shepard, [phone number].”
- The Solutions Committee also includes this information in multiple Town Meeting-related Front Porch Forum posts

COMMENTS:

- Transportation does not appear to be a limiting factor in Middlesex Town Meeting attendance. In nearly two decades of offering this service, we’ve only had one request

Town Meeting Civil Invocation

GOAL: To have a voter read a welcoming message at the beginning of Town Meeting

HOW TO:

- Middlesex has long used the Civil Invocation below, a version of the invocation that originated in Danville, Vermont featured in the book *All Those In Favor* by Susan Clark and Frank Bryan
- In advance of the meeting, the Town Moderator identifies a Middlesex resident to read the Invocation
- Generally it has been a new voter (who has just started voting or is about to turn 18)
- Town Moderator contacts U32 Guidance to send out a message to Middlesex juniors and seniors; posts on Front Porch Forum; and reaches out to friends and neighbors to find an interested reader
- It's not always a young person. Other people we have had read the Invocation include: esteemed community elders (including Middlesex's first woman select board member); a New American first-time voter

COMMENTS:

- It can be surprisingly difficult to track down a reader—Town Meeting is on the last day of school break, and teenagers are really busy! Keep trying. It's worth it.
- When there has been more than one interested reader, we have had students share the reading (split invocation into parts)
- The Civil Invocation has become a beloved tradition, and helps set the tone for a constructive meeting

Town Meeting Civil Invocation

Welcome to Town Meeting.

We have come together in civil assembly, as a community, in a tradition that is older than our state itself.

We come together to make decisions about our community.

As we deliberate, let us advocate for our positions, but not at the expense of others.

Let us remember that there is an immense gap between saying "I am right" and saying "I believe I am right."

And that our neighbors with whom we disagree are good people with hopes and dreams as true and as high as ours.

And let us always remember that, in the end, caring for each other, in this community, is of far greater importance than any difference we may have.

Welcome.