Select Board Members
X Liz, Scharf, Chair
X Randy Drury, Vice Chair
X Vic Dwire
X Peter O. Hood
X Zara Vincent

MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, December 3, 2024
Middlesex Town Hall and via Zoom*
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, Vermont 05602
(802) 223-5915

MINUTES

PRESENT: Chair Liz Scharf. Vice Chair Randy Drury. Select Board members Vic Dwire, Peter Hood* and Zara Vincent who also Chairs the Town Roads Subcommittee. Treasurer Cheryl Grandfield. Road Commissioner/Foreman/Fire Chief Eric Metivier. CVRPC Planner Lincoln Frasca. MCC Chair Adrienne Magida. Budget Committee Chair Mark Harris*. Former Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. Listers Annette Halasz and Shelly Desjardin*. Planning Commission Chair Sandy Levine. WCUUSD Board Member Chris McVeigh. Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman took the minutes, and the meeting was recorded by ORCA. (*indicates attended via Zoom)

Call to Order

Liz called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.
MOTION: Zara moved, and Vic seconded approving the minutes for the November 19, 2023, Middlesex Regular Select Board meeting. The motion passed and the minutes were signed by those present.
MOTION: Randy moved to approve the agenda for the December 3, 2025, meeting; Vic seconded. The motion passed.

EWP Project Budget Amendments and Extensions

Lincoln said all 2023 EWP projects have been completed aside from 289 Brook Road because the program is waiting for extended funding approval. The process is underway, but it will be a while until the money has been obligated to the Town. Once that happens, he said, Liz needs to sign an amended contract with J. Merrill to complete construction. The extra work/engineering was necessary because of the additional damage caused by the 2024 floods, Lincoln said.
There are two grant amendments and three contract amendments that need to happen to finish up the EWP project. The first two can be implemented right away if the Board approves them at this meeting.
1 – Authorize the Chair to sign an amended award from the Natural Resources Conservation Service extending the award to September 15, 2025. This may not be necessary, but approval is a prudent precaution, Lincoln said.
2 – Authorize the Chair to sign an amended contract with New England Consulting Engineers, extending the contract date to August 29, 2025.
3- Authorize the Chair to sign an amended award from the NRCS increasing the budget by $111,949.30 to complete the remaining design and construction work. This money may be coming soon. That would bring the total award amount to $816,516.
4 – Authorize the Chair to sign an amended contract with New England Consulting Engineers (Dexter Lefavour) to increase the budget from $38,000 to $42,100. Lincoln said of that increase, $1,800 was needed to address the overall impact of the 2024 flood and another $2,300 was requested for 289 Brook Road specifically.
5 – Finally, authorize the Chair to sign an amended contract with J. Merrill Construction to increase their budget from $662,766 to $774,416. Lincoln said that increase is also due to extra work at 289 Brook Road.
Randy asked Lincoln to explain the pricing for Merrill since it's important for people to know there's some backing for these numbers.
MOTION: Randy moved to authorize the Chair to do the following: sign an amended award from the Natural Resources Conservation Service extending the end date to September 15, 2025; sign an amended contract with New England Consulting Engineers extending the contract to August 29, 2025; sign an amended award from the NRCS to increase the budget by $111,949.30 to $816,516 and; sign an amended contract with NECE to increase the budget from $38,000 to $42,100 and sign an amended contract with J. Merrill Construction to increase the budget from $662,766 to $774,416. Lincoln confirmed that the money has to be received before work can begin. Zara seconded. The motion passed.
MOTION: Randy moved and Zara seconded authorizing the Treasurer to release the funds to New England Consulting Engineers and J. Merrill Construction once the invoices have been approved by the Select Board Chair. The motion passed.
RE: 2024 projects. Of the 16 sites that applied, four were approved, Lincoln said. However, unlike the 2023 projects that were 100% paid by NRCS, there will be a 25% cost for the sponsor. He suggested drafting a landowner agreement requiring the landowner to pay the 25% before construction begins. Randy asked if there is ongoing work regarding the remaining 12. Lincoln said those properties were found not to be in imminent threat.
Adrienne listed the approved 2024 properties which are on Brook and Center roads. Most of the EWP work involves streambank rehab and debris removal. Liz said the work for one of the owners was estimated to be over $100,000 so she would seek resources to help her with the 25% match if possible.

Highway Report & Right-of-Way Driveway Culvert Policy Approval

Eric provided his biweekly report (please see report below). Liz said she received an email complaining about online praise for the Road Crew since the authors of the email felt McCullough Road had not been plowed.
Culvert policy. Zara read an email from Todd Eaton re: driveway culverts. She said the road subcommittee voted that the driveway culvert policy should be adopted by the Board since it saves money in the long run and grants the Town more power to fix and maintain roads. Randy said his previous concerns were addressed by changing to the wording that emphasizes maintenance of the culverts at the Town's discretion.
MOTION: Peter moved and Zara seconded approving the Right-of-Way Driveway Culvert Policy. The motion passed and the Board members present signed the policy.
FEMA Update: Zara reported that the FEMA PDM has signed off on Brook, East Hill and Center roads and the committee is working on Portal, Notch and McCullough Hill. South Bear Swamp and Norton are next followed by Upper Sunny Brook and Davy roads, and then Lower Sunny Brook, Zdon, Upper Barnett and Nellie Chase roads. The others were sent to FEMA months ago.

Harlow Ballard's Access Permit

MOTION: Vic moved and Randy seconded approving an access permit for Harlow Ballard on property he owns on Wood Road near the Worcester town line. The application was approved and Liz signed the permit.

BUDGET WORKSHOP FY26

Listers Presentation

Shelly said the Listers under-budgeted themselves this year so they wanted to make sure there was enough money this year. The Listers requested 35 hours total, $1,000 for a computer, $2,000 for mapping and $1,500 for mileage and expenses. The Board discussed the townwide reappraisal set to begin this summer. The first year will cost $52,500. The Board agreed they didn't need $26,500 requested for support since the Listers are better trained than they were last year and NEMRC general support could handle most of their questions. Mark asked how the Listers are compensated; by hourly rate of @$27/hour. Randy asked about the reappraisal money. Sarah noted the $52,500 for the townwide reappraisal could be reduced since the Town has a reappraisal fund into which the State puts money every year.

Planning Commission Presentation

Sandy said for the most part the Planning Commission's budget hasn't changed aside from $3,000 allocated for signage around Rumney School. Although road signage doesn't normally fall under the bailiwick of an entity like the Planning Commission, she said there's been so much concern about speeding there that the PC took up the cause. The $3,000 in the PC's proposed budget for these signs reflects only the cost of the signs, not the labor to have them installed, Randy agreed that the signs should be in the Highway Department budget. Sandy said she doesn't want to foist work onto the Highway Department. Vic raised questions about enforcement; Randy concurred that the Board needs to change its highway ordinance.
Sandy said the PC will be mailing a survey to residents of the Village and on Route 2 near Welch Park seeking their input on the possibility of municipal water from the old Colby Property now owned by the Galaxy of Yes.

Other Requests

The Board reviewed a request from the MCC for $500 and a contribution of $5,000 to the Conservation Fund. This is an annual line item on the Town warning. The CVRPC is requesting $2,455.02 in dues which averages to $1.38 per resident. The Board will discuss the possibility of hiring a Town Administrator at its December 17th meeting when Town Moderator Susan Clark will be available.
The Board also discussed the need to plan for the Town's match on 2024 FEMA projects and how to budget for that. Mark said planning for a disaster is a crap shoot and Liz added the Board doesn't want to hold onto taxpayer's money for no reason. Borrow or save for a FEMA match/disaster? That's the question.

Cheryl noted the Vermont Bond Bank's rates vary, though they offered a 0.5% interest rate on the $1 million just approved for the Town to cover flood expenses.
As for the Town Administrator, Dorinda said the Board first needs to address inadequate staffing in the office. Cheryl, for example, started as a bookkeeper/assistant Town Clerk. Now, she's the Treasurer and bookkeeper. If something happens to her, there's no one trained to step in. Meanwhile, there's no dedicated assistant Town Clerk, unlike in the past when an assistant came in two days a week. Dorinda called the staffing situation a potential disaster.

Treasurer's Report – Vermont Bond Bank Loan for $1 million

MOTION: Zara moved to authorize the Treasurer to sign a commitment letter with the Vermont Bond Bank to borrow $1,000,000 at 0.5% interest. Vic seconded. The motion passed.
Cheryl said closing should be by December 16th.
MOTION: Zara moved to authorize Dorinda Crowell as Assistant Town Clerk to sign the loan documents from the Vermont Bond Bank on the Town Clerk's behalf if she's not available to sign. Vic seconded. The motion passed.

Denying the WCUUSD's Request to Mail School Ballots to Voters

The Board reviewed a letter from WCUUSD Chair Flor Diaz asking for the Board to allow annual WCUUSD school ballots to be mailed to all active, not challenged voters in 2025. Chris noted the Board has approved this for several years running and there will be no cost to the Town. (All Select Boards in the five towns of the school district must approve this mass mailing for it to occur.)
Addressing the Board as Town Clerk, Sarah spoke against mass mailing school ballots for two reasons. In Middlesex, the annual Town Meeting ballot contains only Town officers or certain questions. During COVID when in-person meetings were suspended voters were able to vote the entire warning by Australian ballot. When the in-person Town Meeting resumed in March and voting on the budget and special articles, etc. was from the floor, many voters were confused as to why they automatically received school ballots but not Town ballots. A large number either destroyed their ballots or left them at home. Secondly, Sarah said the WCUUSD lost voter trust when they didn't mail ballots to all voters for the budget revote in the spring of 2024 after the budget was defeated by voters receiving all the ballots in March. The office dealt with many angry voters who felt deceived.
Dorinda, who is also a JP and an assistant election official, confirmed that relatively few voters returned their school ballots by mail and called the office to complain about not getting a Town ballot. Peter said either mail out all the ballots or don't mail out any ballots so it's handled consistently. Vic said the claim of no cost isn't accurate since the mailing is still being paid by the tax payers. It's just the left pocket vs. the right pocket.
MOTION: Peter moved not to agree to have the WCUUSD ballots mailed to all active, not-challenged voters. Vic seconded. The motion passed. Liz was not present.

OTHER BUSINESS

All orders were signed.

The Board reviewed the Memorandum of Understanding from the City of Montpelier for ambulance services at the following rates: July 15, 2025, $53,370.00, December 15, 2025, $53,370.00, July 15, 2026, $57,817.50, December 15, 2026, $57,817.50, a significant increase over the current contract. The Board decided it was too soon to explore other options, again, if they even exist.
MOTION: Zara moved to approve the MOU with Montpelier for ambulance services until FY27. Peter seconded and amended the motion to authorize the Chair to sign. The motion passed and Liz signed the MOU.

Vic asked why Dirt Tech was charging for a staging area since that was supposed to be built into their bids at a certain percentage. The Board asked the Treasurer to seek clarity.

The meeting adjourned at 6:51 PM.

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD ON DECEMBER 17, 2024.

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LIZ SCHARF, CHAIR

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RANDY DRURY, VICE CHAIR

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VIC DWIRE

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PETER HOOD

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ZARA VINCENT

DRAFT

Bimonthly Road Report
11/12/2024-12/3/2024

Equipment
Kenworth- Running and no issues
International- Running no issues
Freightliner- Running, posable issue with the engine fan runs hot at times. Looking into it.
Grader- Running no issues
Excavator- Running and no issues
Road Work/Issues
Keeping up with winter weather
Working on the salt shed roof hope to have it finished the first part of next week.
Patching was completed on Shaddy Rill Rd. They filled the bigger holes still some could be fill but ran out of weather.
Did some repairs to the plow for the international. New Pins, trip spring and a new nose piece on the cutting edge.