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 17, 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, Peter Hood*, Vic Dwire and Zara Vincent (Chair of the Town Roads Subcommittee). Road Foreman/Road Commissioner/MVFD Chief Eric Metivier. Treasurer Cheryl Grandfield. Assistant Treasurer Dorinda Crowell. MVFD President Jeff Koonz. Carl Bailin. Planning Commission Chair Sandy Levine*. Budget Committee Chair Mark Harris and Budget Committee member Elias Gardner. The meeting was recorded by ORCA. (*indicates attended via Zoom)

Call to Order

Liz called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Guests were welcomed.
MOTION: Peter moved, and Zara seconded approving the minutes from the December 3, 2024, Middlesex Select Board meeting. Randy corrected the minutes to show the Treasurer could release the funds to J. Merrill without submitting the invoices to the Select Board for approval after they've been approved by New England Consulting. The motion passed.
MOTION: Zara moved, and Randy seconded approving the revised agenda for the December 17, 2024, Middlesex Select Board meeting.

Highway Department Update

Eric provided an update. He said the Kenworth was in repair. The Road Crew fixed the Freightliner and is still working on the salt-shed roof. Eric confirmed it's a warranty repair.
FEMA Update: Zara said she and Eric met with FEMA twice recently. She said only two more projects on the 2023 flood (4720) were left to complete, though she was shocked when she received questions from FEMA re: projects submitted in September they thought had been cleared for approval. After questioning why the Town was getting interrogated on projects that had been submitted three months ago that they assumed were a done deal, a FEMA project manager responded and said it would be 6-8 weeks before a check would be cut. Eric said the frustration is that the Town is given 15 days to answer such questions that have been sitting in FEMA's que for three months. Zara did say the new FEMA project development manager has been very helpful and
Dirt Tech's staging-area issues: Vic said he didn't like Dirt Tech's response to the Town's questions about billing for a staging area. Liz said she was confused by the whole issue. Cheryl explained that the 2023 flood work did not have line items for staging while the 2024 bills did. Vic said he never would understand why Dirt Tech was allowed to use the Town shed as a staging area. He said Dirt Tech charged the town $100,000 for staging on 2024 work. By using the Town Shed as a staging area, Dirt Tech's trucks put a lot of wear and tear on Shady Rill. He said Connie Slater from Dirt Tech said there was no contract for the 2024 work and therefore could charge the Town for the staging area. Why was Dirt Tech charging the Town for use of Town property? Randy noted the staging costs weren't included in their 2023 proposal because staging was provided by the Town. Vic said all the contractors in the 2023 bids were told they couldn't use the Town properties as staging areas. But then Dirt Tech needed a place to store some culverts for Macey Road and asked to use the Town shed. From there it "snowballed," Eric said. Liz said the bids were "apples to apples." She said the issue is whether Dirt Tech is charging for staging they shouldn't have. Randy said the issue is Dirt Tech is charging the Town for staging when the Town provided the staging. Zara said she's confused as to why Dirt Tech charged for staging on 2023 work and 2024 work when much of those projects were happening simultaneously. Cheryl clarified that Dirt Tech is charging for the material being moved out and the man hours required to move the material, not the actual area. She said Connie's response was that there was nothing in writing with the Town to indicate Dirt Tech couldn't charge for that.
Eric said the bids for the 2024 work haven't gone out because the Town's still waiting for information from the State on some of the projects. Liz said this issue has been resolved. Zara agreed. The work is done and in the future be clear. Liz said the issues was a result of a lack of communication back when Steve Martin was the FEMA coordinator and used his property as a staging area without informing the Select Board. Cheryl explained that if Dirt Tech didn't use Town property, their costs would be higher because they'd have to go to Irasburg for staging. Vic said in 50 years of doing this work, the contractor got his own staging area. Randy said he'd reach out to Dirt Tech for clarification.

MVFD Monthly Meeting

Jeff reviewed stats since the last meeting.
The heating system in the MVFD which has been a concern for some time finally went on the fritz and Jeff said a tech recommended it not be repaired but replaced. Jeff submitted a proposal from Bourne's for a new boiler heating system noting that time was of the essence this time of year. The Board reviewed it. Liz clarified that the heating system was not in the FY25 budget.
MOTION: Zara moved and Peter seconded approving Bourne's proposal to install a new heating system in the MVFD for $12,426.01 and to authorize the Treasurer to release half of that as a deposit. The motion passed.
Jeff said department needed to buy a new thermostat and a sensor has died on one of the gas meters. The MVFD is looking in to other gas meter brands. He said that would come out of the MVFD's budget.
Eric was reelected as Chief and Jeff was reelected as President at the MVFD's annual meeting.
Re: complaints about a Middlesex FAST Squad responder's driving during an emergency call. Jeff said he spoke to the FAST squad member who was driving from Tractor Supply. A driver in front of him didn't see his red light and thought he was being aggressive and put a post on Facebook raising questions. He apologized, though his light was on. She removed the Facebook post. Jeff said members have been instructed not to respond on social media in the future. Jeff introduced Brendan Laroux,

Welch Park Dissolution

Peter said he hadn't seen any of the quit-claim deeds that would result in the dissolution of the Welch Park Association. He said the Town attorney has reviewed and approved them. Peter said one concern was that the Association deed the road to the Town. That was included. Liz reviewed the deeds and the agreement dissolving the Association. Carl Bailin said he hasn't heard from Matt Oates from Benderson, so the dissolution could not be approved because the dissolution requires 100% consent. However, the quit claim transferring ownership of Welch Park Drive from the Association to the Town could be approved since it requires only a majority approval. Peter said the Board can approve the dissolution from the Town's perspective.
MOTION: Peter moved and Vic seconded approving the deed quit claiming Welch Park Drive from the Association to the Town and other documents dissolving Welch Park. The motion passed.

FY26 BUDGET WORKSHOP

Office budget: Sandy said Todd Comen has offered assistance in evaluating the duties of a potential Town Administrator. Cheryl said she discussed the staff structure with the Town's auditor. The two agreed that the Town doesn't need, nor can afford, a Town Administrator. However, the Town does need support staff. The Treasurer needs someone come in two days a week to do payroll and payables the Town Clerk needs someone to come in two days a week to perform Assistant Clerk duties. She suggested perhaps job sharing across towns. She said CVRPC could handle grants, though Liz noted CVRPC is overwhelmed. A Town Administrator would cost $75K-$100K plus benefits. Meanwhile, the Town staff has "the worst health insurance there is." Even if the Town employees have to contribute, they need vision and dental. Liz said health insurance should be looked at and she wasn't considering bringing in a Town Administrator on top of the

current staff structure. Peter said if the Town changes health plans now, it's not in the budget. Randy said employees. Elias said the Town doesn't have to pick the plan; the Town only has to pick the amount of money it's willing to spend. Randy said the employees should have brought this to the Town before now. Peter said he felt like this was putting a gun to the Board's head. Zara said the Board has discussed this before. Cheryl said the proposed plans are less than what the Town is currently paying and would still include an HSA.
Peter noted the problem is that the Town operates on a fiscal year beginning July 1st while the health plans come up for renewal every calendar year.
Mark said as a former BlueCross/BlueShield employee, the health insurance company is in financial trouble because over the last four years they have contributed nothing to reserves. They requested an increase in the high teens for 2025. Then both the Department of Financial Regulation and the Green Mountain Care Board said that's not enough, so add 5% to your rate increase. He said it's premature to pick a plan now. Employees should be given a choice. Either BC/BS or MVP. There aren't many good choices in Vermont, he said, due the low population. MVP undercuts prices and then doesn't pay claims, but if people stopped paying premiums to BC/BS now, they'd be able to pay claims for only two or three months. Mark said it's better to think about next year and the Board needs to determine how much to give each employee for health insurance since it's going to cost more next year.
Dorinda said the Board needs to discuss how much it wants to pay toward health insurance. Elias said his organization is in the same boat as the Town because it operates on a fiscal year and just allocates a certain percentage increase every year. Liz asked when the Board should discuss this. Mark said midyear. Peter said the Town needs to decide what is reasonable to pay and let the employees decide if they want to pay more for a plan.
Dorinda reviewed a proposed budget for the Town offices. Last year the Board approved a 4% payroll increase; she left that as is. Health insurance was based on the current plan at the new rates. She bumped up elections by $500. A big concern are principals on flood-related loans. Interest on loans for road repairs has been about $5,000. Mark asked about principal and interest charges the Town might incur for the flood repairs. Dorinda said hopefully FEMA will come through with money. Randy said the Town won't be allowed to borrow if it has more than $10 million debt. Right now, the Town has $7 million in debt. The Town can either budget for interest or borrow money to pay for the interest. Mark suggested borrowing on low interest instead of including it in the budget.
Cheryl said the Town needs to bill owners of three dogs on French Road that attacked a neighbor for legal fees. Dorinda asked about budgeting for tax abatements now that flood issues are past. Liz noted that the Town as a municipality needs an ADA-approved website this year, per the Department of Justice rules. The Board discussed how much to pay the FEMA coordinator. Zara said she hopes to be done before the July 1st fiscal year.
Before changes, the proposed Town budget is an 8% increase, Dorinda said, though all the numbers aren't in. Liz asked if there are any big-ticket items missing. Dorinda said the Board needs to examine wage increases since they have ripple effects into taxes, etc. Randy asked for a breakdown of wage increases so the Board has a better understanding of the impacts.
Cheryl asked the Board to approve increasing the dog fees. The State is increasing the fees by $2, but the Town would like to increase its fees by $2 or so as well. Liz said she thought that was a good idea.

Rejecting Reconsidering WCUUSD's Request to Mail School Ballots to All Active Not-Challenged Voters

Chris asked the Board to reconsider its December 3rd decision not to approve mailing school ballots to all active, not-challenged voters for the 2025 School Meeting on the basis that mass mailing increases voter participation. He admitted the district dropped the ball by not mailing ballots to all active, not-challenged voters on the budget revote last year after mailing ballots to all voters for the initial vote. He also noted that Berlin's Select Board recently rejected the school district's request which created an issue since all five legislative bodies must approve a mass mailing for it to occur. Chris asked the Board to reconsider and that there would enclosures informing voters they would have to request Town ballots and attend Town Meeting in order to vote on Town issues. Liz read the minutes to remind the Board why they rejected the school district's request. Liz noted voters can request that school ballots be send to them. Zara asked if prior to COVID the school had mass mailed ballots. The Board stood with its prior decision.

OTHER BUSINESS

All Orders were signed.

The meeting adjourned at 7:21 PM.

The Board agreed to include a $500 donation to Front Porch Forum in the FY26 budget.

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD ON JANUARY 7, 2025.

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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