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, January 7, 2025
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. Budget Committee Chair Mark Harris and Budget Committee member Elias Gardner*. Michelle Johnson. Road Crew member Ben Abare. The meeting was recorded by ORCA and Select Board Assistant Sarah Merriman* took the minutes. (*indicates attended via Zoom)

Call to Order

Liz called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Guests were welcomed.
The Board passed over the December 17, 2024 minutes..
MOTION: Vic moved, and Randy seconded approving the revised agenda for the January 7, 2025, Middlesex Select Board meeting.

Peter Announces Resignation from the Select Board

Peter said he's been participating in the Select Board meetings via Zoom anticipating a return to Vermont. Unfortunately, that is unsustainable and he is resigning from the Select Board after 40 years. He thanked the Board for friendship, collaboration and cooperation. Liz said Peter has put in a lot of heart and soul into the town. As a member and chair he has been thoughtful and pragmatic and a good role model for her. Sarah suggested Peter serve until Town Meeting; that way someone can run for two years of his three-year term. Peter agreed to resign effective March 4th. Randy thanked Peter for giving up his time. Zara said she's been doing outreach and it's hard to find people to serve and thanked him for being here during her first year. Vic said he's served with Peter in various capacities for many years and thanked him for his historical knowledge.

FY26 Budget Workshop

The Board reviewed a memo from the Budget Committee about cuts to make in the proposed FY26 budget.
Reappraisal costs: Mark asked about the upcoming townwide reappraisal costs and whether those could be cut. Shelly explained the reappraisal was under contract for $105,000 and those numbers were fixed. The Board discussed this and Cheryl explained that while there is approximately $57,868 in the reappraisal fund to which the State contributes every year. But if the State is now requiring townwide reappraisals every five years, that fund should not be drained. Liz said every year the Town is going to have to contribute $20,000 to the reappraisal fund.
Computer maintenance: Currently budgeted at $40,000. The Budget Committee suggested reducing that by $10,000 since the $40k did not include going to the cloud. Elias said a cloud-based system can be far more affordable than using a physical server. Randy said he would like to make the shift. Cheryl estimate the Town will spend $18,000 by the end of the fiscal year on routine computer maintenance. Mark said the only way the Town will get there is by cutting the budget and forcing the Town to move to the cloud.
MVFD stipends: The Budget Committee suggested reducing this line item by $4,000. Last year, Eric said they spent over $18,000 in stipends. Zara said $22,000 is being conservative. Keep it at $22,000 or increase. The Board decided to keep to $22,000.
Road gravel: Level fund at $40,000 vs. the proposed $80,000. Vic said the cost of material is going up every year, along with the trucking. Eric said the Town needs to keep up with all the work done post flood. Randy said the Town's learned the lessons of deferred maintenance. Zara encouraged the Board to keep the gravel budget because the roads need to be maintained. The Board kept the original amount.
Contracted services: This money was used to patch Shady Rill road at $22,716. Zara said she'd prefer to keep as much of the Town roads intact. The Board agreed to cut contracted services by $10,000. Mark said looking at another double-digit budget increase. The Board needs to take a risk and hope this year won't be as bad as last year. The problem is there's not that much in the budget to cut. Randy agreed. Liz brought up costs that hadn't been anticipated. Cheryl said the Town is tapped on borrowing since FEMA has been so late in its payments. Liz said there might be a time when the Town can't engage in contract services.
Peter asked when the Town could count on the FEMA money. Zara said she has no idea since FEMA's still questioning the September submissions. Peter said it's very difficult to put together a budget for the next year when you're halfway into the current fiscal year. Randy proposed accepting the Budget Committee's recommendation to reduce contracted services from $30,000 to $20,000.
Grant matches. Zara said if the Town is going after grants, then spending $50,000 will save the Town $150,000 for work on Portal Road. Zara said the State has recommended the Town budget a 25% match for work the State will do. This is just for one grant of $200,000, but there will be other grants. The budget committee is recommending cutting that lite item from $50,000 to $25,000. No decision made.
Mark said to get the Town down to a 10% increase, the Board would have to cut $100,000.
Liz brought up payroll. Sarah works 32 hours a week and Cheryl works as Treasurer, bookkeeper and assistant clerk. Zara that's only $130,000 for two people. Liz asked if there's a way to pool resources with other towns in the same situation.
Randy said he wanted to highlight the need to identify the duties and wage of each position and not tie them to specific people.
Board agrees to meet at 6 PM the 14th to discuss the budget.

Health Insurance Plan

The Board discussed the current health insurance for Town employees. Open enrollment, Sarah said, ends January 15th. The Board discussed how employees can choose their own health insurance plans, though they may have to pay more out of their own pockets for certain plans; the Town does not reimburse employees for choosing "cheaper" plans. The Board said employees should be educated about their options. Elias offered to assist on an administrative end.
Ben Abare brought up contracts and asked if this was a change in contracts; Randy said there is no change. Michelle said $981 per employee is cheap. Vic said the health care system is broken and small towns can only do what they can do.

Treasurer's Report

The Board reviewed the FY24 audit which had no findings, though Cheryl said there's a $243,098 deficit due to the floods. Cheryl said the Town will have to conduct a single audit next year due to FEMA money. Liz said auditors are supposed to be changed every few years, though Cheryl said Bonnie was the most affordable. The Board will take up the audit again on January 21st.

Highway Department Update

Vic brought up people pushing snow across their roads and asked about enforcement. Zara asked if it's worth a FPF post. It's a Vermont State Statute, Vic said.
FEMA Update: Zara said there have been lots of requests for information from FEMA and the Town might have to complete extensions. Eric said it's very frustrating. Zara and Vic agreed that FEMA's delays were threatening to bankrupt the town.

Approving the 2025 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan

MOTION: Peter moved and Zara seconded adopting 2025 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. The motion passed and Liz signed the certification.

OTHER BUSINESS

All Orders were signed.

MOTION: Randy Moved and Zara seconded approving a 3rd-class liquor license for the Blacksheep Food Company for a new restaurant at the old Filling Station site on US Route 2. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board discussed the Legislature's requirement that it appoint an "ethics liaison," who would either be a Town employee or a Board member and agreed to take this up at the January 21st meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:08 PM.

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD ON JANUARY 21, 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

DRAFT