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
REGULAR MEETING
Tuesday, January 21, 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. The Higher Collective owner Sophie Bowater*. MVFD President Jeff Koonz. Budget Committee Chair Mark Harris and member Elias Gardner.* CVRPC Planner Brian Voigt*. MCC Chair Adrienne Magida* and Brook Road residents Jennifer Tuttle*, Kathy Biggam* and JJ Vandette.* 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 agenda was amended to include an access permit approval on East Bear Swamp Road.

MOTION: Zara moved, and Vic seconded approving the minutes for the January 7, 2025, regular meeting and the January 14, 2025, special Select Board meeting. The motion passed. The minutes were signed by those present.

MOTION: Zara moved, and Vic seconded approving the agenda for the January 21, 2025, regular meeting. The motion passed.

Appointing Liz Scharf to Serve as Ethics Commission Liaison

MOTION: Randy nominated Liz and Zara seconded naming Chair Liz Scharf as Town liaison to the Ethics Commission. The motion passed.

Highway Report – Kenworth Truck, FEMA & Hughes Access Permit

(Weekly highway report below.) Eric said he's contesting a $14,000 repair bill on the Kenworth truck. Liz noted another town had a similar issue. She asked if the road crew needs to be trained on how to drive these trucks. Eric said that's in the plan to be proactive. Randy noted the repair eats up one third to one half of budgeted repairs for FY25. Vic said the crew has been trained on how to drive this heavy equipment. Eric said he hopes to add more classes this summer.

FEMA Update: Zara said there was a deadline last Friday for requests for information on various projects. Now the PDM is simplifying the projects, combining roads and culverts. Brook Road is obligated for approximately $152,000. Dirt Tech projects tend to be approved first. The Town has been invited to apply for a Great Brook resiliency scoping study grant. She credited Mike Kline for getting grants to study how this road possibly can be saved.

U.S. Senator Peter Welch's office is working on getting FEMA money released to the town, Zara said. Randy asked about the efforts to improve the area around the bridge to McCullough Hill. Eric said he needs to reapply for the permit to clear around the bridge in Great Brook.

MOTION: Vic moved and Zara seconded approving a driveway permit for John & Jacqueline Hughes on East Bear Swamp Road, slightly north of Bushey Road. The motion passed and Liz signed the permit.

MVFD Monthly Meeting

Jeff delivered a monthly report. The new heating system is in and the bay is 60 degrees. In the meantime, the department used space heaters so no lines would freeze. The rescue vehicle sold for $3,500. The MVFD responded to a structure fire in Berlin today at an off-the-grid home. Jeff warned again about the flammability of lithium batteries. No matter the size, if the battery is smoking, get it out of the house. Even name-brand battery packs can catch on fire. Put electrical tape over the poles of 9V batteries when you recycle them.

Approving the FY24 Audit by Batchelder Associates

MOTION: Vic moved, and Peter seconded approving the FY24 audit report conducted by Batchelder Associates. The motion passed. Cheryl noted that the Batchelder billed them for $5,000 less than quoted, largely because Cheryl did so much footwork getting the documents in order.

Treasurer Report

Cheryl said a Community Bank loan with a principal of $2,062,000 to pay for flood repairs is coming due in February with an interest payment of $81,313.59. While the bank said it could not extend the loan, Cheryl said the Town can take out a new line of credit and pay off the old line of credit. The Board discussed going for a bond and decided to wait on the hope FEMA will start paying for long-completed projects, so the money won't be needed. If they need to raise funds, the Board will warn a special Town Meeting for that purpose, Liz said.

March 4, 2025, Town Meeting Warning, Proposed FY26 Budget of $2,026,928

The Board reviewed the budget that was drafted at the January 14, 2025, special meeting. Liz and Cheryl discussed how she will need 40 hours instead of 32 hours if Cheryl is elected as Town Clerk, Treasurer and Collector of Delinquent Taxes. That would put the budget increase over 10%. Liz suggested removing $3,500 from the Town Hall repairs line item since there is a contribution to the Town Hall fund and cutting money from the web design line. It was $20,000 and from talking to other towns, Sarah suggested $10,000. Zara suggested a salary range for new Town employees based on experience. The Board added $6,600 for a highway software program that would track road maintenance and increased the allocation for legal services to $7,500.

Mark noted the special articles are a 50% decrease this year because expensive special articles were on the Warning last year. Sarah said she never received requests from People's Health and Wellness or the VT Rural Fire Protection program.

MOTION: Randy moved, and Vic seconded approving the Warning for the March 4, 2025 Town Meeting with a proposed FY26 budget of $2,020,328*. The motion passed and members present signed the Warning.

A minor mathematical error due to a spreadsheet formula was discovered the following day. To correct this, the Board held an Emergency Select Board meeting attended by Liz, Vic and Zara at 3:17 PM on January 22, 2025. Budget Committee chair Mark Harris was made aware. The Board confirmed and approved a correct FY26 budget total of **$2,026,928 by a motion that Vic moved, and Zara seconded. This brought the FY26 budget increase to 9.81%. The meeting adjourned at 3:20 PM.*

Moving Forward with Four Emergency Watershed Projects

Brian Voigt said that Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) reviewed 15 properties that applied for help through the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) and approved four sites for mitigation. All but one site are on Brook Road. Funding has been set aside for the projects. However, the program will be run differently than the 2023-flood projects. Instead of soliciting engineers to draft the improvements, the NRCS will conduct the engineering design. Also, the Town road crew may be permitted to do some of the construction and bill the NRCS. In addition, it's unlikely the program will be fully paid by federal/state funds. Instead, the sponsor will be on the hook for 25%. Since the Town is, technically, the sponsor, this cost would be passed on to the property owners in the program, Brian said.

Adrienne noted that neither the Town nor the benefitting property owners have to make a decision on whether to join the program until the contract has been signed. Brian noted that for some of these property owners, 25% could be a substantial amount. Landowners have until

the projects go out to bid to change their minds. Randy stressed that the expectation is that the owner will pick up the 25%. Brian admitted it's tricky and proposed allowing the landowner to put money in an escrow account or perhaps they can seek a low-interest loan. He said this will be a conversation to have over the next couple of months.
Randy about the stage of the process and cost estimate. Brian said there are no cost estimates yet, but bids will be put out at the end of March. Liz wondered if the state Legislature could budget to offset some of the 25% costs. Vic spoke against using the road crew on these projects for a variety of reasons including the crew's heavy summer schedule.
Kate Biggam, an approved applicant, said she's grateful for this program since it was terrifying when water came so close to her house in the 2024 flood. She said the project is a big financial responsibility and she appreciated any help. Jennifer, another applicant, said she would appreciate financial help since she's already outlaid significant money in repairs. JJ thanked the Board for considering sponsoring the project and added that even though his project might be the smallest, 25% is still a lot of money. The other approved applicant is Carole Picard on Brook Road.
MOTION: Zara moved and Vic seconded going forward with the EWP projects for four landowners on Brook and Center roads. The motion passed. Brian said he would send the application to Liz this week for her signature.

OTHER BUSINESS

MOTION: Randy moved and Vic seconded approving and Indoor Cultivator Tier 1 Small Cultivator license renewal for the Higher Collective's indoor cannabis-growing facility on Guilmette Road. (This item was addressed at 5:24 PM to accommodate owner Sophie Bowater's schedule.)

All orders were signed.

The meeting adjourned at 6:48 PM.

THE ABOVE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS A WARNED AGENDA ITEM AT A REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD ON FEBRUARY 4, 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

Bimonthly Road Report
1/7/2025-1/21/2025

Equipment

Kenworth- The truck is back (Still waiting to hear back from Eaton on help with the bill) as of today 1/21/25 the request was pushed higher up the chain.
International- Running no issues
Freightliner- Running and no problems at this time
Grader- Running no issues
Excavator- Running and no issues

Road Work/Issues

Keeping up with winter weather