Select Board Members
_x_Liz Scharf, Chair
_x_Zara Vincent, Vice Chair via Zoom
_x_ Stacey Skadberg
_x_ Larry Rooney
_x_ Paul Cerminara via Zoom

Middlesex Special Select Board Meeting
5:00 PM
Tuesday January 13, 2026
Middlesex Town Hall and via Zoom*
5 Church Street
Middlesex, Vermont 05602
(802) 223-5915
Meeting Minutes

Attending: Carol Maloney, Cheryl Grandfield, Brenda Edelschik, Dorinda Crowell, Mark Harris, Matt Rkiouak, Shelly Desjardin, Samantha Beaudoin, Brenda Edelschick, Brigid Browning Via Zoom: Dave Delcour (Times Argus), Sandra Levine, Sean McVeigh

5:00

- **Call to order and welcome guests**
  - Liz read Robert Frost poem – "A Time to Talk"

- **Approve minutes of the January 6, 2026 regular Select Board meeting**

Motion: Larry moved, Stacey seconded, motion approved

- **Approve agenda for Tuesday January 13, 2026 and consider amendments to the agenda**

Motion: Paul moved, Stacey seconded, motion approved

5:05

- **Budget overview review**
  - Drafts 3A and 3B of Town of Middlesex budget distributed
  - Dorinda described each – Differences only in the positions (specific positions and number of hours differ) and salaries (3% COLA)
    - Version A: Includes town administrator at full time, no note taker, and no FEMA/special projects coordinator; office staff – town clerk 32 hours/week, Asst TC for 8 hours/week, treasurer for 32 hours/week, and Asst. treasurer for 64 hrs for year (to cover treasurer vacation time)
    - Version B: Special projects coord. (10 hrs/week), town admin for 8 hours/week, no note taker, town clerk 32 hours/week, Asst. TC at 32 hours/week, treasurer for 32 hours/week, and total of 64 hours for asst. treasurer (as in Version A)
      - Impact to the town between the two options is not significant
      - Both versions reduced attorney fees by $20,000 from previous version
    - Budget committee has gone through to make all cuts they think are reasonable
    - No funds for tax abatements – Cheryl advises budgeting at least $3,000 in case of request for abatement so this was included in each version
      - $20,000 included for computer maintenance and purchases
      - $60,000 for flood disaster interest payments
      - $20,000 is 1 percent so shaving off a few hundred here and there will not appreciably impact the increase
      - $3,000 added back in in case of abatement request
  - Mark thinks there is so much frustration about increases in property taxes
    - The median income in Middlesex is high – in top 15 or 20 communities of state
    - In his opinion the town isn't serving all the citizens
    - Looked in depth at both budgets and found increase negligible
    - Advocates for budget A because town needs to invest in strategic staffing; needs to procure grants – town is missing funding opportunities
    - Wants town to get most concise message about the budget and ran through some messaging points:
      - 3.6% of 2027 increase as laid out in Budget A is hiring a new town administrator
      - Health/medical increase for employees accounts for another 4.7% of the increase
        - *Those two items account for 8.3% increase*
      - Winter sand situation adds another 3.7%
        - In 2022 and for five years the cost of sand was very low
        - Town road crew found that the sand pit had five years of usable sand in a local pit after additional digging
        - Total savings over that 4-5 years was significant; estimate of $150,000-200,000 cumulative savings

Draft

            - Need to purchase sand in the coming year which accounts for the increase
        - Those 3 items (town administrator, health/medical increases, and sand) account for 12% of the Budget A increase
        - Legal fees add another 1%
        - *Total of 13% for those four items*
    - Asset inventory included replacing town hall septic system for $30,000-40,000
        - That work has not been done
        - Some big purchases coming in next few years with truck purchases
        - May make sense to kick the septic system cost to 2028 if system is not out of compliance or failing

- Select board members discussed their perspectives – each commented on their budget preference and reasons
    - **Zara** – hopes to have full time administrator; doesn't want to see TC asst. being reduced in hours
    - **Larry** – prefers Budget A with town administrator; doesn't like that different people are doing different projects; would like assistant to be more than 8 hours per week; having a grant-focused position could save town funds down the road
        - Dorinda reminded folks that Sarah used to have only ½ time for town clerk so Budgets A and B both include 32 hours for that position; total hours for town's business is more than currently funded; town administrator can fill in as Asst. TC when needed; town administrator will do a lot of the work Sarah Merriman used to do
    - **Stacey** – Asked what the budget would translate into for tax rate for property owners; endorses Budget A with town administrator; it's essential in consolidating and coordinating all the volunteer and paid work being done on behalf of the town; can't understate that importance
        - If SB is to adopt town administrator budget, they can select person to demonstrate they bring value toward the cost of the position; expectation is that the position is that they pay for themselves; demonstrate added value to the town
    - Liz responded that Kari Bradley in Calais doesn't believe he has brought in funds to pay for his position; doesn't want that to be in the solicitation and doesn't want to set that expectation; the position is needed; they can add funds to the town by obtaining grants but doesn't want that to be a prerequisite
    - Matt looked back at town history and found in 2020-2022 there was $40,000 for a grant manager and that work ended up being rolled into an Asst. TC position; looks like there was too much work for the position to manage that on top of their regular work
        - By including a town administrator in 2027 budget the board is restoring the capacity for that work; grant management is one portion but will not be the full job responsibility
        - Larry – It's important to note that town is not just bringing that same position recommended in 2020 but adding more capacity and higher skill level with commitment to town administrator as opposed to an Asst. TC
    - **Paul** – He's trying to view this as both tax payer and board member; need to look at long term benefits and costs; likes Budget A for the continuity it will offer for volunteers, town employees, SB, and everyone working for the town; could reduce burnout; board needs to come up with clear duties and measureable responsibilities; benefit has to be demonstrable; wants board to hold itself accountable to town to get what town is paying for

    - Liz mentioned that Sarah Merriman looked at Calais' town administrator job description and added some things to it; Liz thinks having a draft document that describes some of the town administrator position would be helpful for town meeting

    - **Liz** – Prefers Budget A – the difference is minimal between two budgets and Budget B doesn't provide adequate staffing; risks people burning out or not having time to do the work; doesn't see scenario where town responsibilities will get easier or reduced; need someone with municipal experience; could save legal fees as she is spending lots of time with town attorney on various issues

<u>Motion: Approve budget of $2,293,702.87 for 2027 for Town of Middlesex – before special articles</u>

- **Larry moved, Stacey seconded; motion approved**

Draft

6:12

- **Discussion of changing Town Clerk position into an appointed position**
  - Liz talked with town attorney – reason to make this change is a fear no one would run for the position – requires someone who lies in town to run for the position; appointed position means town can hire from outside the town
    - This can only be done by floor vote at town meeting
    - If passes, elected clerk's term would end at 45 calendar days or when select board appoints someone else to fill the position; term of appointment can be any period of time – could mimic elected term of 3 years
  - Point of appointing – control over competency – allows the board to do the job and fire if they're not competent; go outside town of Middlesex to attract candidate
  - Several people pointed to benefits of moving the position to appointed one rather than elected; also discussed concerns about statutory requirements and not wanting town select board or town administrator to burden them with additional work outside of mandated responsibilities
  - Some towns are making other town positions appointed rather than elected; may make sense for MDX
  - Paul likes the benefits of opening up the position to non-Middlesex residents
  - Zara mentioned that elected people don't have to share their resumes but candidates for hire have to be vetted; also likes to add town treasurer
  - Stacey said if consensus is to put both positions to the town, the best thing to do is call Cheryl after the meeting to let her know as a courtesy
  - Deadline for approving language for town warning is next Tuesday
  - Liz proposed putting language fine-tuned and ready for review and signing – suggests she warn a very short meeting before Tuesday – 9:30 on Friday to discuss changing treasurer's position to appointed

Motion: Add language to the 2026 town warning pertaining to change town clerk to appointed position with a three year term, and with the option of hiring outside the Town of Middlesex

- **Zara moved, Larry seconded; motion approved**

6:44

OTHER BUSINESS

- **Orders if any –** none
- **Correspondence –** Zara received a few responses to her FPF posting that she forwarded to clerk
- **Any other matters that come before the Board**
  - Paul thanked budget committee and everyone who helped put the budget together

7:45

Motion: Adjourn

- **Larry moved, Stacey seconded, motion approved**

THE ABOVE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2026 SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX SELECT BOARD WERE APPROVED ON JANUARY 20, 2026.

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LIZ SCHARF, CHAIR

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ZARA VINCENT, VICE CHAIR

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LAWRENCE ROONEY

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PAUL CERMINARA

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STACEY SKADBERG

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