

**MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN**  
*405 Main Street*  
*Middlefield, Connecticut 06455*

Minutes of the May 16, 2023 Special Joint Meeting  
Middlefield Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and Firehouse Building Committee

Call to Order

Bob Yamartino called the special joint meeting to order at 6:36 PM. Bob Yamartino, Jim Irish, Carol Bufithis, Kevin Boyle, Melissa Kowal, Paul Pizzo, Steven Tyc, Ryan Colwell and Bruce Villwock were present. Scott Mangiagli, from Kaestle Boos Associates, was present as well. Two members of the public were present via Zoom.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

***Bob Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to approve the agenda, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.***

Firehouse Building Committee - Presentation of Phase 1

Paul Pizzo reviewed that the Firehouse Building Committee was created on January 12, 2021 to provide a plan of short-term and long-term capital needs of the fire department, including a plan for physical rehabilitation and expansion of the facility. The committee has been meeting twice a month since that time. They have acquired a design firm and a construction manager to assist.

Mr. Pizzo introduced Steven Tyc to review the existing conditions. Mr. Tyc began by reviewing the organization of the fire department, including seven line officers (with two of those positions open) and 16 staff positions. He reviewed that the fire company is fully volunteer. The station is not normally staffed and there is no municipal water which requires special apparatus. He explained that there is an average of 45 minutes' worth of work to be done after each call to get all the equipment back in service. Mr. Tyc went on to explain how important training is to the organization. A new firefighter requires about 280 hours of training and there are also weekly training held every Monday night. There is OSHA-mandated training, interior firefighting training and emergency medical training. People voluntarily take additional certification training as well. Middlefield does have their own training facility behind the Town Hall.

Mr. Tyc then reviewed the current apparatus, including two engines, one tanker truck, a rescue truck, a brush tanker, two utility trucks, a boat, the fire chief's vehicle, a trailer for the UTV and ATV, and a trailer for traffic resources. The last three vehicles are not currently stored at the firehouse. Bob Yamartino added that there is also an emergency management trailer.

Mr. Tyc then reviewed the operations of the fire department, starting back in the 1970s until now. Calls have constantly increased while membership has constantly decreased. There are around 35 members currently and they are working to recruit new members. The fire department responds to a number of different issues. In 2022, they averaged 11 firefighters per call with an average response time of 6:11. They are very proud to provide that level of service.

Bob Yamartino asked about mutual aid and Steven Tyc felt it was probably around 20, with the majority of calls directly servicing Middlefield.

Steven Tyc showed a slide of the original firehouse in the 1930s, a two-story building with two bays. A one-bay addition was added in 1959 which was built by members. In the 1960s, the fire department acquired a generator from World War II and a room was built behind the current bays. A two-bay addition was added in 1969, now totaling five bays to house six apparatus. In 1984, the generator was replaced and a new generator room was added and that generator still stands there today. The last addition was done in 1985-1986, leveling out all of the bays. It is now a two-story building, with four bays (two double bays to the east). It was designed to house eight apparatus and the boat. Mr. Tyc noted that this last addition was designed in 1981 with the expectation of meeting the needs of the fire department for the next 25 years and had the ability to convert an area to sleeping quarters. The firehouse today still has four bays, lowered floors and houses 11 pieces of apparatus and equipment.

Looking at the site, it is centrally located. The committee has looked at the positioning of the building as well as intersection concerns. There is easy access to Jackson Hill Road and Main Street. All members respond to the firehouse before responding to the fire itself. There are industry standards that dictate location.

Steven Tyc then went on to compare apparatus from the 1960s to today. Trucks are wider, longer and taller. They carry more people, more water and more equipment. Four of the current bays have 10-foot doors which is an issue when purchasing new trucks. Length and height restrictions make it difficult. There is barely any clearance around the trucks in the bays.

Reporting and documentation has increased over the years, including fire and medical reports, training documentation, maintenance records, grant writing and record storage. Storage space became a real issue during COVID. They have off-site storage at the police station, an exterior shed and record storage is continually growing.

Steven Tyc then reviewed codes and standards. Operational standards come from two big players, OSHA and NFPA, but CONN-OSHA and ISO contribute as well. Looking at firematic space, this includes functional areas that support the firefighting operation. This includes the air compressor and fill station, air pack servicing station and cleaning, gear laundry and hose and equipment cleaning.

NFPA standards require fitness training as well. They hold a weekly boot camp on Monday nights. They would like to incorporate a fitness facility into the new firehouse to promote strength and cardio training. A benefit of that would be to have people at the firehouse on a regular basis.

Emergency management operations would be included in the building as well. Staffing is sometimes required during storms and the meeting room has previously been used as sleeping quarters. They use the kitchen to feed town personnel and the ambulance is housed there during snowstorms. It also serves as a central communications point.

The committee found that the firehouse needs to be a class IV structure, meant to withstand a natural disaster. The current structure does have masonry walls that do not meet the standards for seismic and wind resistance.

Firefighter cancer is the most dangerous threat to firefighters' health and safety today. It is the leading cause of line-of-duty deaths. They are trying to address these issues in the day-to-day operations. There is pending legislation recognizing job-related cancer for firefighters for workers' compensation claims. In terms of mitigation, washing turnout gear in a separate facility, storage of turnout gear, personnel decontamination and keeping functional spaces separate within the firehouse.

The committee has created an informational website ([http://middlefieldct.org/255/Firehouse - Building-Committee](http://middlefieldct.org/255/Firehouse-Building-Committee)) which shows the full needs assessment, space and usage analysis, environmental study and haz-mat report.

Peter Tyc explained that the plans being presented tonight are 50-year plans for the firehouse, but it is hard to predict that with 100 percent certainty. He thanked all of the committee members for their valuable insight and suggestions. Kaestle Boos Architectural firm is one of the best for fire stations. They brought on Mitchell Associates, a leading designer for fire stations known around the country. He explained that their goal is to remain a volunteer organization, but they have to look at the possibility of that ending at some point. Many fire companies are already moving to paid staffing due to a lack of volunteers. Many towns in the area are considering upgrades to their fire stations. Inclusion of emergency management operations is an item of importance. While cancer is the leading cause of firefighter deaths, it is followed by suicide and cardiac events. Firefighters must be protected. He encouraged everyone to look at this as a long-term

investment in the town's future. He thanked everyone for their time and effort on behalf of the members of the fire company.

Paul Pizzo then introduced Scott Mangiagli, from Kaestle Boos Associates, who was charged with coming up with three different options, one to renovate in place with an addition, another to raze the building and build an entirely new structure and the third option to keep the building intact.

Scott Mangiagli reviewed the different consultants involved in the project. Gilbane was hired as an estimator. They took a look at the existing facility last year and found that it was in fair shape for its age. Electrical, mechanical and ventilation are beyond their useful life. There are no sprinklers because of the lack of municipal water. The facility is a little over 9,000 sq.ft. He reviewed the site location and various outbuildings. There is parking for about 28 vehicles on the east side and they were not able to accommodate much more than that. There is a septic field between the firehouse and the community center. The water supply comes from the west.

Mr. Mangiagli then reviewed the existing building, including six bays, mechanical rooms, squad room, toilets, meeting room, kitchen and chief's office. The roof has fairly no pitch and they did find leaks.

Looking at option one, Mr. Mangiagli explained that Bob Mitchell went through the program with the chief and they went through several iterations of the design. The intent was to keep the community center intact and use Town Hall Road as the access road. The first design option was the construction of a new facility which presents difficulty with phasing in the project. The site is laid out as it is now, keeping the community center separate. The proposal does not include the church property south of the building.

Reviewing the floor plan of the proposed building, the apparatus bays are on the right and the firehouse on the left. This provides six bays for apparatus, a fitness facility, bunk rooms and community meeting room. There is an area for firematics, including laundry, decontamination and turnout gear. The second floor contains more of a training area and general offices. Mr. Mangiagli explained that it may look like a lot of room, but it is really the bare minimum. The apparatus bay itself is over 8,000 sq.ft., with the entire building being 9,500 sq.ft.

Mr. Mangiagli explained that, because the flat roof created so many problems, they have designed this option with pitched roofs with some areas having flat roofs. The building is proposed to be constructed of brick.

Moving on to option two, Mr. Mangiagli reviewed that the only way to make it work was to have the apparatus on the east side. Everything is generally the same and the aprons are as small as possible, but certain trucks will have to be parked in a certain space due to turn radius. They proposed to gut the existing building and found that to be a bit more invasive. On the west side,

there is a single-story building, but they would want to put a second story on so they proposed removing the existing addition and putting a new two-story structure. On the east side, they also want to add a second story.

Mr. Mangiagli then reviewed the floor plan of option two. Essentially, everything will be gutted and will include the firematics, exercise facility, meeting rooms, offices and a radio room. An elevator will be added as well. The upper level will contain bunk rooms, bathrooms, offices, meeting/training rooms and the EOC.

Option three was basically to think about how to make it less expensive. Costs have skyrocketed over the past few years. They worked to remove everything they possibly could to get it to a particular price point while maintaining safety. They tried to keep things as simple as possible, with minimal modifications to the existing building. They did want to remove the two high bays. A retaining wall will be added as well due to the grading. The floor plan looks identical in terms of the apparatus bays on the west. There will be two mechanical and electrical rooms and it does include an exercise room at the rear of the building.

Options one and two are upwards of 29,000 sq.ft. compared to the 9,500 sq.ft. The third option is around 22,000 sq.ft and includes five bays instead of six. The upper level of option three is essentially the same and did not require an elevator, but one was added to allow for the best access for handicapped individuals because the meeting room is still upstairs. Mr. Mangiagli added that there is a premium to gable roofs, so they tried to pare that down as much as possible in option three.

Mr. Mangiagli then went on to pricing estimates. Option one and option two estimates were originally done by their estimator around September of 2022. They were using escalation rates of 5 percent and they were seeing as high as 8 to 9 percent, but it has come down since then. Option one is 28,786 sq.ft. and the construction costs for the building itself are \$16.6 million. When you add the CM and other fees, essential construction costs are estimated at \$19.1 million. Gilbane has redone this estimate and these are their numbers. Overall, the new construction for option one would be \$23.9 million or \$830.66/square foot. The building itself is at \$664.53/square foot. A new septic system and other site work will be needed as well.

Looking at option two, the estimates on this were not redone by Gilbane. This option is the addition and renovations and is just shy of 29,000 sq.ft. Construction costs for this option are \$20.5 million and overall costs would be \$25.6 million or \$713.37/sq.ft. for construction costs and \$891.71/sq.ft. overall.

Moving to option three, this building would be 22,000 sq.ft. Construction costs would be \$15.159 million and overall costs at \$18.95 million, or \$688.15/sq.ft. for construction and \$860.19/sq.ft. overall.

Paul Pizzo reviewed that between 2021 and 2023, the costs per square foot have gone from \$400 to \$800. The committee felt that the only way to bring the cost down would be to reduce the square footage. They felt that they have reduced the square footage as much as they would like. They are looking at option 3 because it is the least expensive, but still does what they need it to do. They are looking for a response from the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen as to what they suggest they do next. He asked if the board members would like them to move this presentation to a public hearing or if they had other options. They know that they will be getting some federal grant money, but don't know how much more is available. Mr. Pizzo felt that they needed to know what this project would cost the average taxpayer.

Bob Yamartino thanked everyone for their time and efforts to get the project to this point. He asked Chief Tyc if the three options meet the requirements of the fire company for the future and Chief Tyc stated that they did, but he didn't know how far into the future. Paul Pizzo added, unfortunately, prices are not coming down substantially. Materials are coming down a bit, but labor is not. Mr. Yamartino would like to see a view of the present equipment in the current building to show comparisons before going to the public. He acknowledged that the current facility is not big enough to house the equipment and do the work they need to do. Mr. Pizzo wondered if it was even worth putting more time into options that they know they will not select.

Mr. Yamartino added that the Board of Selectmen will be holding a meeting of all the boards and commissions to discuss future projects and he felt that a project of this significance will certainly be part of that.

Jim Irish prepared a spreadsheet looking at what the town can afford. He did an analysis looking at the baseline of the 2023-2024 budget. The average taxpayer has a tax burden of \$6,244 today. Looking at different levels of debt, the spreadsheet showed the tax burden per household and the increment on the mill rate for each level of investment. Mr. Irish showed the figures using both a 6 percent bond and an 8 percent bond for 20 years. He reviewed the differences between \$8, 10, 12, 15 and 25 million at both 6 percent and 8 percent. Mr. Irish also noted that the town will have a likely obligation for restructuring the school district, with current plans to significantly modify Memorial School being discussed, closing Lyman and slightly modifying Brewster. Right now, the number is for a \$74 million renovation at Memorial. The state will hopefully reimburse around 50 percent and a \$13 million bonding would result in a 2.22 mill increase to Middlefield. This would be on top of whatever the town does with the firehouse.

Mr. Irish summarized that they will be asking the taxpayers to ante up 4 or 5 mills extra over the next few years which will be a hard sell. He then went over the fire department's contributions to the current budget, with \$188,000 of expenses, \$280,000 capital and \$50,000 debt funding for leased equipment, for a total of just over \$500,000. Currently, that is just barely less than 1 mill which is 3.5 percent of the town's mill rate. With the proposed bonding numbers at 6 percent, that 3.5 percent goes up to nearly 8 percent to nearly 16 percent of the town's mill rate. Taking the school district out of the picture, the town's mill rate is more around 6.

Mr. Pizzo added that they are expecting roughly \$3 million in grants and if they bond \$15 million, the question would be does the average taxpayer want to pay \$500 a year over the next 20 years to create a firehouse for the next 50 years. They are being told there is more grant money available.

Bob Yamartino added that there are cost offsets with the school district renovations that could offer \$4 to \$5 million in savings, so the town would not see the total impact. The thing Mr. Yamartino likes best about option 3 is that it could be a phased project. He would want to see a presentation to the public that includes what each phase would include and what grants may be available for each phase. Mr. Pizzo felt that the new addition would be 70 to 75 percent of the total and felt that they should do as much as they can in the next six months to get as much grant money as possible.

Bob Yamartino felt it may be time to send a letter to Rosa DeLauro asking if she would be willing to get Middlefield qualified to get USDA grants. Mr. Yamartino if the presentations can be condensed down to perhaps 10 pages to send to Middlefield's representatives.

Mr. Yamartino asked how the members of the Board of Finance felt about this and Melissa Kowal explained that she is well aware of the needs of the firehouse. She felt that the town needs to provide the volunteers with the best equipment that they can. She did feel it was disappointing that the cost per square foot has doubled, but the need is there. Mrs. Kowal would be behind going to the legislators to try to get funding. She felt that there is a lot of misinformation out on social media. She felt that they need to work to come up with as many ways as possible to find funding. Mr. Pizzo asked if it made sense to take a few months to find additional funding before bringing the project to the public.

Kevin Boyle sits on both the Firehouse Building Committee and the Board of Finance and felt that the FBC has cut the project down to bare bones. He would like to keep the design for the volunteers and go and get money elsewhere. Mr. Boyle felt that there is both state and federal money available. He agreed that it would be best to pause the project and go fishing for funding.

Michael Skelps, chair of the Board of Finance, commented online that he supports the project, but they will need some time to digest it. He anticipated that it will be a very tough sell to the townspeople and grants will be critical to the success of the project. Carol Bufithis agreed that all of the ideas are great, but they need to handle it now. Mr. Boyle added that they will need significant numbers as price escalation and inflation are working against them.

Bob Yamartino stated that the fire company historically has done a great job getting grant money. He asked if they should contract with a professional to identify everything available or if it can be done in-house within the time frame. Pete Tyc had professional help with prior grants, but he really focused on FEMA grants. He will check to see if he can help with this project. The

state has bonding money and Chief Tyc has commitments from the two state senators to sit down to discuss this. Senator Blumenthal has also expressed interest. Grants really require shovel-ready numbers, so it is hard to speculate at this point. Chief Tyc is not opposed to looking for grants and has a lot of good people to help, but he would need a solid plan that everyone agrees on.

Bob Yamartino felt that they have the plan and it is option 3 for \$19 million, with a scaled down presentation to hand to the legislators. Chief Tyc stated that the fire company will work on grants, but they will need help. He felt that they should all divide and conquer. Melissa Kowal felt that once they have the condensed presentation, they can all hand them out to everyone. She thought there should be meetings in the upcoming weeks to talk about who will contact which people. It was felt that the presentation could be ready in the next few weeks and they can meet again.

Paul Pizzo then asked, as a taxpayer in town, what else will be coming down the pipe. He hoped that the Board of Selectmen could prepare a plan of what is coming in the future. Bob Yamartino explained that the first meeting they are having with everyone is on June 20, 2023 and the Firehouse Building Committee will be invited to participate. They will present a master list at that meeting. Mr. Pizzo felt it might make sense to prepare a larger package to present to the townspeople. Jim Irish felt that the firehouse is one of the top priorities and would like to move forward with it. He would like to see it incorporated into the broad picture, but not to wait for that. Mr. Pizzo would just like to see the townspeople be able to plan their futures.

Paul Pizzo summarized the next steps. They will have the condensed plan in a week or two and they will solicit legislators. He asked if the Boards of Selectman and Finance are endorsing option 3, are they willing to advance further funding to provide more design details to be shovel ready. They would need to execute a contract for the design. Scott Mangiagli explained that it will take seven to nine months for a final design, but agreed it could be done quicker. Kevin Boyle felt that they could authorize Mr. Mangiagli to start the design while they are searching for grants. Paul Pizzo explained that the fee for that is around 5 percent of construction. Bob Yamartino summarized that it would be around \$325,000 and that would require a town meeting.

It was then agreed to meet during the next scheduled FBC meeting on June 7, 2023 with hopefully a completed executive summary. Mrs. Kowal suggested meeting earlier to avoid any further delays and they will try to schedule the meeting for May 30<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup>.

Bruce Villwock asked how vacant land and business properties would impact the spreadsheet. Bob Yamartino explained that they did the spreadsheet that way to show how it would affect the average homeowner.

#### Public Comment



None.

Adjournment

***Bob Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Melissa Kowal, to adjourn the special joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and Firehouse Building Committee. Motion carried unanimously.***

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First