

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the June 5, 2023 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Bob Yamartino called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Carol Bufithis and Jim Irish were present.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Carol Bufithis made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to approve the agenda, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Public Communications

Bob Yamartino received a couple of comments from people, mostly regarding the use of motorbikes and quads, with many appreciating the fact that they have addressed the issue.

Jim Irish noted that it was a problem when skateboarders were on the sidewalks, but the town gave them a place to skateboard and that worked. Now, the dirt bikers are on the roadways and Mr. Irish thought that something similar could be done for them, such as allowing them to use town property. He will bring this issue up at the Middlefield's Future meeting. Carol Bufithis agreed with that suggestion. Bob Yamartino noted that they do that type of thing on private property in Vermont and New Hampshire, but there are fees and insurance. He agreed to talk about this at the meeting, but it is a complicated issue.

Lease/Land Management Agreement

- a. Strickland Road
- b. Hubbard Street

Bob Yamartino explained that the land management agreement that was signed last year with Dave Footit to mow properties on Strickland Road and Hubbard Street is up for renewal. Last year, they had agreed to no mowing prior to July 15th. Mr. Footit is now asking to extend the lease from one year to five years based on the investment he makes into the properties.

Carol Bufithis reviewed that she had not agreed to July 15th and would also not be comfortable with a five-year lease because this remains a controversial issue in town. Mr. Yamartino added that if they pushed the date out later than July 15th, there will be no agreement. Jim Irish agreed that there is some contention around this subject and would be hesitant about a five-year lease. He felt that they should sign a one-year lease for this year and have the discussion in a broader fashion next year.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Bob Yamartino, to approve the Strickland Road and Hubbard Street lease/land management agreements as presented for one year and further to propose further discussion regarding extended leases next year at public hearing. Motion carried unanimously.

Cell Tower Lease Fund

Bob Yamartino explained that they are not yet ready to go to a public meeting on this issue, but summarized that the company that is leasing the cell tower would like an extended lease. They would also like to prepay all of the rent up-front. Given the magnitude of the amount of money involved and the term of the lease, the Board of Selectmen, in consultation with the Board of Finance, has agreed to bring this to a town meeting for a vote. If the money is placed in the General Fund, it can all be spent in one year as opposed to over the 50-year life. In discussion with the Finance Director and the auditor, the town has the ability to set up a standalone fund. In the past, the First Selectman's office has set up funds at the discretion of the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Yamartino would like this fund established with specific details about how it is established and how the money is dispersed from it.

Mr. Yamartino has started to work on a schedule of when the funds would be dispersed, but wanted to work with the Board of Finance to finalize that. He also explained that the funds could only be invested in the most conservative bonds, CDs and money markets. Only the pension fund or capital/non-recurring can be invested in equities. Mr. Irish felt that this would be a solid approach to the disposition of what will likely be a large amount of money.

Marianne Corona asked them to be sure that the fire department does not have to pay anything to use the tower. Mr. Yamartino explained that that is all covered in the lease.

Bob Yamartino asked if the board wanted to add anything about changing the disbursements and there was discussion about who would be able to change the disbursement schedule. It was

agreed that it is a budget item and doesn't need to be included in the motion. Mr. Yamartino explained that this fund will be a standalone fund and not part of the General Fund.

Bob Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to establish the Cell Tower Lease Fund for the purpose of receiving funds from the cell tower ground lease and provide ongoing revenue to the town. Once the lease is executed and the funds have been transferred into the Cell Tower Lease Fund, each year funds will be transferred from the Cell Tower Lease Fund into the General Fund. The amount to be transferred from the Cell Tower Lease Fund into the General Fund will be the greater of a predetermined fixed scheduled amount or a percentage of the fund earnings. Motion carried unanimously.

Joint Meeting June 20th for "Middlefield's Future" - plan agenda/notifications

Jim Irish had drafted a letter to each board and commission member, asking for feedback about projects they would like to see happen. He will also attach a list of possible projects. It was suggested to send the letter to Nathan Jacobson as well as Robin Newton and others. Mr. Irish then went through the initial list of potential projects, including sidewalks, Lake Beseck, trolley trail, sewer lines, bus line, solar energy, development of town land, Lyman School reuse, Reedy property purchase if and when available, community septic, town properties at Lake Beseck, tourism boost ideas, Peckham pavilion refurbishment, paving of walking paths, possible membership to Camp Nerden swimming pool, two-family housing, zoning modifications, collector road improvements, culvert repairs, Lake Road, surge tank on King Road, Lake Beseck pondweed and algae, land for dirt bike recreation and possible farmer's market at Peckham.

Bob Yamartino would like to see them talk about protection/acquisition of open space and any other projects that could help to protect the watershed area of the Coginchaug Greenway.

Mr. Irish also read his proposed agenda which included a welcome by Bob Yamartino and background of the meeting, the need for champions and initial project thoughts. Mr. Irish would present the list of possible projects and then get feedback and ideas. He thought they may want to poll the different commissions for their ideas and comments or maybe break into small groups. Mr. Irish feels the meeting could go over an hour and 15 minutes, but Mr. Yamartino felt there could be a one-minute welcome and three minutes for the background. Since the letters will have gone out with the list of potential projects, Ms. Bufithis felt that the attendees will have already reviewed it. Bob Yamartino would rather see a more comprehensive list come out of the meeting and hopefully get people to sign on to individual projects. Ms. Bufithis felt that the second meeting could be used to solicit champions and prioritization.

Bob Yamartino felt that waste disposal and recycling needs to be added to the list as does clean energy opportunities and charging stations. He would also like to see bike routes added to the list. Carol Bufithis summarized that the purpose of this first meeting is to review the proposed list and for people to add other ideas and she felt that will take up the majority of the meeting.

Mr. Yamartino also asked Mr. Irish to put Emergency Management under the Lake Beseck second access road.

Bob Yamartino asked Marianne Corona if the town has ever held a meeting with every board and commission to discuss projects for the entire town and Mrs. Corona reminded everyone about Lyman's being an 1100-acre farm, 45 holes of golf, the pick-your-own in the orchards and the farm market. Zygo is the town's largest taxpayer, the power company is second and Lyman's is the third and she felt that the town needs to protect and consider them first. Jim Irish explained that they are not dealing with details at the moment, but just get a list of ideas. Mr. Yamartino had asked if the town had ever tried this before and Mrs. Corona explained that Planning and Zoning did that years ago, but not with every board and commission.

Bob Yamartino and Carol Bufithis thanked Jim Irish for his hard work on this.

Finance Director's Proclamation

Bob Yamartino reported that there was a going away party for Al Rusilowicz and Barbara-Jean DiMauro recognizing their years of service to the town. A proclamation was read at the party. Mr. Yamartino read the following proclamation into the record: Be it known that the Citizens of Middlefield and Rockfall hereby recognize and applaud Al Rusilowicz as an invaluable asset to our town as Finance Director for over six years; and Whereas, Al Rusilowicz knows all the information for everything town related, and; Whereas, Al Rusilowicz' leaving means it "suck for us," and; Whereas, Al Rusilowicz will be back in Middlefield after he is sent to Suffield's HR for the 5th time, and; Whereas, Al Rusilowicz' dedication will be missed terribly, difficult to part with, and impossible to forget; and Now, Therefore, the Board of Selectmen, declare this day, the 2nd of June, 2023, and each and every day until his inevitable return as Al Rusilowicz Day! Signed, Robert C. Yamartino, First Selectman, Carol L. Bufithis, Selectwoman, James R. Irish, Selectman.

Mr. Yamartino added that this was not a normal proclamation because Mr. Rusilowicz is not a normal employee. Everyone is comfortable with Mr. Rusilowicz and will miss him greatly.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Carol Bufithis, to approve the Proclamation for Al Rusilowicz, Finance Director, as read into the record (and attached). Motion carried unanimously.

The proclamation for Barbara-Jean DiMauro will be read into the record at the next meeting.

Finance Director Search Update

Bob Yamartino reported that the interview committee received numerous resumes and conducted interviews. An offer letter has been made and accepted by Beth Moncata, the current Finance

Director for the Town of Durham. Ms. Moncata has submitted her resignation to Durham and will start in Middlefield in a couple of weeks. Al Rusilowicz will meet with her several times before leaving. Jim Irish added that he was blown away with the list of systems she knows as well as the people that a Finance Director needs to interact with. Carol Bufithis felt that the town could not be luckier.

Notice of recent appointments - description of remaining openings/appointments

Mr. Yamartino explained that they will be interviewing people and making appointments at the next meeting. They met with a candidate tonight and will meet with three more on Thursday as well.

Mr. Irish asked if they ever reappointed people whose terms were up. He noted that there is one vacancy on the Conservation Commission and three members whose terms were over on 12/31/22. He felt that they need to make reappointments as well. Ms. Bufithis mentioned that Inland Wetlands and the Conservation Commission will be the next two that she will work on.

Selectmen/Selectwoman Reports

a. Other

Jim Irish stated that his wife went by Ed Bailey's memorial and someone has stolen the Middlefield medallion out of the center.

Jennifer Brochu asked who the potential candidates are for Planning and Zoning. Bob Yamartino explained that they interview people who are interested in being appointed and they will notify the public of any appointments. Ms. Brochu asked if who was seeking a seat was a secret and Mr. Yamartino explained that it may be awkward to interview in public and an embarrassment if the Board of Selectmen say no to someone. Ms. Bufithis added that she wouldn't want it to be public knowledge if she was the one considering it. Mr. Yamartino added that, in the past, the First Selectman just announced the appointees without the boards and commissions even knowing and now they interview everyone and include the chairman of the board or commission.

Ms. Brochu felt that if people are going to represent the town, they should be transparent. She found it interesting that the townspeople don't know who is asking for the positions. Marianne Corona felt that Planning and Zoning is very important to the town and agreed with Ms. Brochu. Mr. Yamartino explained that the Town Charter prescribes appointments to board and commissions by either general election (Boards of Finance and Selectmen), the Board of Selectmen makes appointments to a number of other boards and commissions without public input and by the town's legislature (town meeting) which includes Board of Education and DMIAAB.

Bob Yamartino added that the Board of Selectmen have been soliciting volunteers to fill the vacant positions. Seven people came forward for three positions on Park and Rec. He added that the public can always provide comments at the meeting when people are being appointed. Jim Irish added that all boards and commissions need to have balance and minority representation politically, by charter and state statute.

Marianne Corona asked if they plan to have a representative from Lyman's and Jim Irish explained that they can ask John Lyman if he'd like to participate or send a representative. Bob Yamartino added that he and John Lyman speak periodically about things going on in town. Mr. Lyman is also on the board of directors of the Federated Church and the Cemetery Association and is aware of the vacancies on the boards and commissions.

Carol Bufithis reported that the Sustainable CT group is working on stuff again and focused. They will be having a couple of interns provided by Sustainable CT as well.

Bob Yamartino reported that they are actively seeking to have the Shoreline Transit District get bus routes in town. There is an initiative in the legislature that says if you have a bus route in your town and don't meet the requirements for affordable housing, you are in jeopardy of not getting grants. Getting bus routes in town may be a problem and Jim Irish added that they need to be very conscious about aggressively going after the bus route. Mr. Yamartino suggested going after maybe more of an Uber model.

Adjournment

Carol Bufithis made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First