

Received 9/26/2023
2:52 pm
Tonya Hogan, TC

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the September 19, 2023 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Bob Yamartino called the regular meeting to order at 6:37 PM. Carol Bufithis and Jim Irish were present.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

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

Public Comment

None.

Public Communications

Carol Bufithis noted that people would like the board to provide some background information before they vote on the Town Charter revisions and she suggested that something go in the Town Times. Ms. Bufithis has also been told that people would like to know more about what's happening with the firehouse and the public would like to be more involved in the process. Bob Yamartino reminded everyone that all of the Firehouse Building committee meetings are public meetings and are on Zoom. The minutes are also posted on the website.

Bob Yamartino reported that initial quotes came in for the design at roughly \$30 million. Work has taken place to try to reduce the size and the costs and the last he heard, it is now in the \$15 to \$19 million range. They have secured \$2.2 million in federal funding for the emergency operations center. They have also distributed a package to state representatives looking for additional grant money. They have had discussions with Homeland Security and Emergency Management in Washington, DC about their requirements. They have also talked with the USDA about grant funding and lending. Because Middlefield abuts Meriden, which is a city of

more than 25,000, Middlefield is disqualified from USDA grants. However, Middlefield does qualify for USDA loans which have an interest rate lower than a bond and can go out to 40 years. The Firehouse committee meets tomorrow night and they are looking to switch gears to get quotes on a design/build. The likelihood of the Bond Council bonding the entire amount is low. The process has been ongoing for two years and there's been a lot of conversations with legislators.

Carol Bufithis hoped that they can put this kind of information out to the public and Bob Yamartino agreed to get something on the website. He added that the firehouse/emergency operations center scored very high on the survey.

Charter Revision

a. Communication and publicity

Bob Yamartino reported that the three questions for the referendum have been forwarded to the Secretary of State. The Board of Selectmen agreed that they will put together a communication that will be mailed to every household with a summary of the proposed changes and the questions on the referendum.

Mr. Yamartino explained that the Charter Revision Commission started their process with a public hearing and continued to meet over many months to discuss every aspect of the charter. Ken Twombly, a member of the Charter Revision Commission, was present at tonight's meeting. The commission then held another public hearing when they completed their work and no public showed up. The commission then submitted their final report to the Board of Selectmen who reviewed their recommendations. The Board of Selectmen then held a public hearing with their recommendations and made some specific changes. The commission then considered the proposed changes and sent the report back. The Board of Selectmen then approved the final report and the questions to be sent to the Secretary of State to get the item on the November ballot.

Jim Irish felt that something needs to be posted on the town's website and should be publicized in other ways as well. The Charter Revision Commission wrote a letter summarizing the elements. Mr. Irish felt that they should post a before and after version of the charter. He also suggested creating a list of the proposed changes and the reasons why they are proposed.

Carol Bufithis felt that a mailing should be sent out to the townspeople and Mr. Irish suggested using the letter from the commission. Bob Yamartino hoped to be able to work on this tomorrow.

PUBLIC HEARING - 7:00 PM

West Street Speed Hump

Bob Yamartino reviewed that the notice of the public hearing was posted as a result of receiving a petition signed by a number of residents. It appears that a number of people use West Street as a bypass and traffic is heavy at rush hours. People walking see the speeding cars as a hazard. The question is if and where speed humps should be installed. Mr. Yamartino added that the town has recently chip-sealed the road and will not stripe it. It is thought that a double stripe cuts about a foot out of the middle of the road and drivers will go closer to the edge of the road. They are also going to replace the speed limit signs on the street. They have also installed two speed signs to indicate if a driver is speeding, but a member of the public noted that one of them doesn't seem to be working. Mr. Yamartino also mentioned that they do have cameras that can capture the license plate, but they are not able to issue tickets with that. The two signs on West Street can record the traffic level and speeds at certain times of the day in order to make informed decisions. The town will pay \$2,000/year/sign for this ability.

Mr. Yamartino has also asked the Resident Troopers to spend some time on West Street during rush hour. The trooper on the night shift uses a radar gun and the trooper in the morning sometimes uses it and sometimes doesn't. Both have reported that nobody has been going fast enough over the speed limit to warrant being pulled over.

Jim Irish asked the residents present at the meeting to describe their experience with the traffic.

Kathy Twombly explained that she had jokingly commented about the speed on West Street in response to the survey and other neighbors blew it up from there. She lives just after the railroad tracks and stated that people go around the corner and then floor it. Anthony Rinaldo added that there was an accident on the road recently. There is a big ditch on one side of the road. One of the speed signs is right near his driveway. He added that he is not crazy about speed bumps, but would like to see the speed controlled. He felt that the busy times are between 5:30 and 7:30 AM and then again from 4:30 to 7:00 PM for both cars and people walking. He suggested that the trooper sit in his driveway during those times.

Kathy Twombly added that there are two aspects to this - one being the speed, but the other being people that are on the street that don't need to be there. She asked if a sign could be put up noting that it is not a through street. Bob Yamartino explained that that would not be enforceable. Nobody seemed to be in favor of speed bumps and Mr. Yamartino noted that people slow down for the one at the lake, but then speed up afterwards. Jim Irish stated that they started by painting the speed limits on the road at the lake, then added the types of signs that are on West Street and ended up installing a speed hump. He added that people got angry when it was first installed and would hit their horn as they went over it.

Bob Yamartino added that people would have a choice as to whether to drive over a speed hump on West Street, but don't have a choice on Lake Road. Mr. Yamartino wondered if there was something temporary that could be done as permanent speed humps do hamper Public Works. Ms. Bufithis felt that they could add flashing lights at the signs. It was also suggested to use the speed signs from time to time. Mr. Yamartino did note that he wants to leave the signs there for several weeks.

Bob Yamartino added that while they do receive complaints about people speeding, he has also received complaints that some of the speed limits are too low on some roads. A member of the public asked if they could call in license plate numbers. Mr. Yamartino explained that a ticket cannot be issued by just a plate number. Carol Bufithis summarized that they will gather the information from the speed limit signs, ask the troopers to monitor the area during rush hour times a few times a week and put lines on the speed limit signs. It was agreed to try these things before considering any speed humps.

Bob Yamartino also noted that he has been informed that the culvert has washed out on West Street and is fairly deep. He also mentioned that sidewalks may be a possibility in the future. Another member of the public suggested making West Street one way from Baileyville Road to Long Hill Road. Bob Yamartino felt that West Street at Baileyville Road should be a “no right turn” intersection and a member of the public felt it was dangerous to turn left at that intersection as well.

Carol Bufithis made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to close the public hearing. Motion carried unanimously.

The public hearing adjourned at 7:55 PM.

Community Center Rental Fees

Carol Bufithis asked to clarify that the document was adopted by the Board of Selection in December of 1991 and asked when it stopped being used. Bob Yamartino stated that parts of the policy are still enforced, such as a certificate of insurance. He explained that group 1 is at no charge, group 2 is almost completely no charge and group 3 is minor charges. Mr. Yamartino reviewed that this came to his attention when a private, not-for-profit group asked to use the facility and the policy only addresses nonprofits.

Jim Irish noted that he went online today and was unable to find the rates or an application to use Peckham. Bob Yamartino stated that they did raise the rate at Peckham because they needed to hire a cleaning agency for the park rather than Hannah Malcolm taking her time to do that. He thought that the fee for using Peckham is now more around \$75 or \$100.

Bob Yamartino summarized that if the Board of Selectmen feels this policy should not be enforced, they should vote to remove the policy. If they feel it should be enforced, they should set an appropriate rate. Money from this policy would go into the General Fund. Jim Irish felt it would be appropriate to have a fee for commercial entities, private individuals or groups. He would not want a fee charged for nonprofits or not-for-profits.

Jim Irish asked to table the discussion until they get information from Hannah Malcolm about the rates.

Boards and Commissions

- a. Conservation Commission
- b. Inland Wetlands Commission Members
- c. Other

Carol Bufithis reported that she talked to Robin Heath, chairman of the Conservation Commission, and he would like to step down. Brian Dumas would like to join the Conservation Commission and Kyle Overturf is a possibility. Brian McDermott would like to continue on the commission. Robin Heath did agree to sit in on interviews with the candidates. Bob Yamartino suggested meeting with the candidates on September 25th, before the Conservation Commission meeting. Ms. Bufithis apologized for not realizing they wanted to do the interviews at tonight's meeting, but added that she did not want to attend a meeting on the Monday after the Durham Fair. She suggested they ask the candidates to attend the Board of Selectmen meeting on October 2nd.

Carol Bufithis reported that Nancy Stenick and Rich Uzanski are interested in Inland Wetlands. Vicki Barry is also interested, but Ms. Bufithis wasn't sure if she was interested in Inland Wetlands or Conservation. Jim Irish reported that three people on Zoning Board of Appeals have expressed their desire to continue, however David Glueck has served all three terms and a change in the Charter would be required to reappoint him.

Jim Irish suggested using Zoom for all of the interviews in one night. Bob Yamartino cautioned that they may not really want to be appointing people just before the November election. Ms. Bufithis asked what else the current Board of Selectmen wanted to accomplish before the election. It was generally agreed to table appointments until after the election.

"Middlefield's Future" - meeting objectives and broader publicity of results

Jim Irish felt that the objective of next week's meeting is to share the slide deck of results of the survey and the list of priorities that came out of that. He would be willing to use his presentation as a handout and talking points. Bob Yamartino would like to look at the priorities and see if everyone agrees on them. He would also like to see who would be the champion for the individual priorities. Jim Irish asked everyone to review his suggestions to see if they agree or if they are too prescriptive. Mr. Yamartino felt that it is important to talk about suggestions, not mandates. Mr. Irish had information on the top 20 ideas. Ms. Bufithis added that they should ask if there were any boards or commissions who really wanted to work on a specific project.

Bob Yamartino also felt that Sustainable CT should be added to the list of priorities, but Jim Irish explained that it can't be added to the list as the survey is done. It can be added as part of one of the priorities. Carol Bufithis also felt it was separate from the list and shouldn't be talked about at the meeting. Mr. Yamartino summarized that he felt that Sustainable CT should be a priority for the town and he would like to see the list reflect that. There was also some discussion about revisiting the list at some point in time.

Bob Yamartino added that he is speaking with a writer from the Town Times at 1:20 tomorrow afternoon about "Middlefield's Future." He will email her background documents tonight. Jim

Irish also felt that the current Board of Selectmen should get some recognition for this activity and a mailer might be necessary to highlight the board's accomplishments. He felt that it could provide a QR code to link to a list of accomplishments. He would like the mailer to talk about how grateful they are for everyone's participation as well. Bob Yamartino asked what the purpose of the mailer would be and noted that if it is election-rated, they can't do it. Mr. Irish felt it would be to let more of the community see the results of the survey. Mr. Yamartino felt that a mailer could go out by Friday or Monday and be in everyone's mailbox on Tuesday or Wednesday, with the meeting on Thursday. Mr. Irish's concern would be overflowing the auditorium and Ms. Bufithis was concerned that people don't want to find out about a meeting just a couple of days before it happens. Mr. Irish felt that the discussion at the meeting would be hard to manage if they invited the public.

Bob Yamartino reminded everyone that next week's meeting is open to the public as well and Mr. Irish felt that a restriction on public comment may not go over well. There was discussion about public comment at prior meetings.

Selectmen/Selectwoman Reports

a. Draft Anti-Blight Ordinance status

Jim Irish explained that nothing will happen with this ordinance until after the election. The draft will also go to the Planning and Zoning commission and then to the town's attorney.

b. Lake Shore Drive Culvert Status

Bob Yamartino reported that there are only one or two minor items left on the punch list. Some landscaping will be done in the next few weeks at a cost of around \$20,000. Jim Irish added that there is also \$20,000 of Nathan Jacobson work not yet included, so it may go over but would be within 2 percent of the budget. Once they get final numbers, they can consider tweaking the numbers from the ARPA funding to cover it.

c. HR Consultant Inquiry Results

Jim Irish got recommendations from RiverCOG for Randi Frank and Sheila McKinley-Bell who Mr. Irish spoke to and she stated that she does not do that work. She suggested someone with a certified background in screening and recommended Justifacts in Langsville, Pennsylvania. He also found out that nobody does a code of conduct for vendors, however he then went back and looked at the draft of the Middlefield employee handbook that Al Rusilowicz wrote in 2017, but never got adopted. The current handbook is from about 2013. He highlighted the items that are cause for disciplinary action as well as things relevant to vendors. Bob Yamartino noted that towns often have a code of conduct that employees and contractors must subscribe to. He felt that they should move forward with this. Mr. Yamartino suggested adopting this as an addendum to the handbook and then require contractors to comply with the requirements. It was agreed to review this with Beth Moncata as it is an administrative function that falls under the Board of Selectman's office.

d. Other

Bob Yamartino reported someone made an application to the Land Use Office and asked for it to be expedited, but then became rather hostile in emails. That issue has been handled by the Resident Trooper and they may, in fact, attend the next Planning and Zoning meeting.

Tax Refunds

Bob Yamartino explained that everyone had been given a copy of the proposed tax refunds, totaling \$3,886.72.

Carol Bufithis made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to approve the tax refunds attached as submitted by Anne Olszewski, Middlefield Tax Collector, dated September 12, 2023, totaling \$3,886.72. Motion carried unanimously.

Executive Session

Bob Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to go into Executive Session to discuss a potential real estate acquisition at 9:18 PM. Motion carried unanimously.

The Board of Selectmen returned from Executive Session at _____ PM. No motions were made nor votes taken.

Adjournment

_____ made a motion, seconded by _____, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at _____ PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First