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

Minutes of the September 28, 2023 Special Joint Meeting of Boards and Commissions

Call to Order

Bob Yamartino called the special meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

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.***

Roll Call

Bob Yamartino, Carol Bufithis and Jim Irish were present from the Board of Selectmen. The following were also present: Rick Santos, Beseck Lake Environment Committee; Michael Skelps and Mary Wolak from the Board of Finance; Rob Poturnicki from Charter Revision Committee; two members from DMIAAB; Jen Huddleston and Darin Overton from Economic Development Commission; Nick Tyc and Alice Malcolm from the Firehouse Building Committee; Charlie Zieminski and Rob Poturnicki from Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency; Hannah Malcolm from Parks and Recreation Commission; Susan McNamara and Kathy Weber from Planning and Zoning Commission; Ann Malcolm and Janine Skelps from Registrars of Voters; Rob Poturnicki from Water Pollution Control Authority; Mike Olszewski and another member from Zoning Board of Appeals; Nadine Ernst from Housing Authority; Mike Perry from Senior Center Advisory Board; Anne Olszewski, Tax Collector; Rob Poturnicki, Emergency Management Director; Denise Robidoux and Dave Driver, Economic Development Coordinator.

Welcome and Meeting Expectations

Bob Yamartino reviewed that since their last meeting in June, they have received a lot of feedback. Around 10 percent of the town's registered voters responded to the survey. He thanked everyone that participated in the meetings and the survey. He explained that the Board of Selectmen just can't do all the projects themselves and need help, both prioritizing and completing projects. He would like projects to be shovel-ready so that grants can be obtained when they become available.

Mr. Yamartino noted that they now have the prioritized list from the survey and they would like to ask people to champion specific projects. Whoever takes the lead on projects will get support from other community members and other boards and commissions, including the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance.

### Presentation of Middlefield's Future Survey Results

Jim Irish reviewed that he had sent links to everyone with the presentation.

Mr. Irish noted that the goal of the survey was to get community preferences on the wide variety of project ideas. The survey was out from the end of June until August and took about 20 minutes to complete. Nearly 10 percent of the town's voters responded and they received comments from 116 people. Mr. Irish explained the rating scale and scoring ratios. Anything greater than one represents more votes for doing the project than not doing it.

Jim Irish explained that they pulled out the top 15 projects. The highest scoring project was to establish an overall vision for Middlefield's future. They received a lot of comments about this item, with an overwhelming majority saying they should formalize some words that identify what Middlefield's future could be. They do have a draft as a starting point. Bob Yamartino added that these meetings that include the leadership of the town are the foundation on which to build that vision.

Jim Irish went on to note that the next two highest scoring items were to work on Lake Beseck with regard to the blue/green algae and to develop a town blight ordinance, stating that both of these items were nearly 7:1 in favor of the projects. Moving on, open space was nearly 6:1 in terms of continuing to focus on that. Lake Beseck pondweed eradication was next at nearly 6:1. The Lake Shore Drive culvert repair came in over 5:1 in favor and that project has already been completed. The next item is to update the Community Center at about 5:1. Renovation of the fire house was ranked at 4.5:1. Historical markers were also rated highly at 4:1. Purchasing the town green and exploring a holiday event that would go from Thanksgiving to January were both at almost 4:1.

Having a farmer's market scored well at over 3:1 as did upgrading the pavilion at Peckham Park. Mr. Irish noted that people had very strong opinions about having the question about reuses for

Lyman School on the survey, but the item scored over 3:1. Improving collector roads came in at number 15 and almost 3:1.

Jim Irish also reviewed the proposed favorable projects by category, including town building care and refurbishment, open space preservation/development and economic development. Bob Yamartino added that these are “landslide” items.

Mr. Irish then reviewed the bottom 10 items, with exploring options for a possible magnet school scoring the lowest. The sentiment was to not pursue affordable housing in town. He then explained that he gathered the additional ideas that were submitted and something that came through very strongly was to maintain Middlefield’s rural character. Other comments included comments about traffic and lights. Bob Yamartino gave an update on the construction project and detours at Route 147 and noted that the state DOT will be at Monday’s board meeting. The official detour will be all the way down Route 66 and back up Route 157, but local roads will be open and the town will crack down on speeding on the local roads. He explained that the emergency order was signed by the commissioner on April 28<sup>th</sup> to start the sampling, but they were just notified of the fact that the road has to be completely closed. A question came up about the drawdown of the lake as well.

Getting back to the ideas brought up on the survey, an AirBnb ordinance was also suggested as well as maintenance and improvement of the Public Works garage, Peckham Park and the Community Center. Adding more town events was mentioned, including Old Home Days being brought back. A coupon book for local businesses was also suggested. A number of comments were submitted about adding a grocery store or a Trader Joe’s. There were comments about traffic and speed on Peters Lane.

Jim Irish noted that there were a number of comments about the survey itself, both favorable and unfavorable. Most comments were in the form of a thank you, but the theme in the unfavorable category was a lack of information describing the ideas. All in all, they are very thankful for everybody who responded to the survey and got a lot of good information.

Bob Yamartino added that 40 board and commission members responded to the survey. Their views on these issues aligned closely with the rest of the responses. Jim Irish added that the survey did remain anonymous, even though they could identify board and commission members.

Anne Olszewski added that they had people call Town Hall who were unable to take the survey because they had no access to computers and they were not happy. Jim Irish noted that they will take that into account next time.

Mr. Irish had prepared a ranked order list of the ideas with columns for boards and commissions as well as follow-up suggestions. He emphasized that they need someone to run with each of the projects. Carol Bufithis left the meeting at this point.

It was also suggested to think about which projects are short-term and which are long-term. Starting with the overall vision, Mr. Irish suggested that that be spearheaded by the Board of Selectmen and the Economic Development Commission. Bob Yamartino noted that the EDC has already begun work on a vision statement and Planning and Zoning will have a significant role as will the Plan of Conservation and Development. A member of the public felt that the Conservation Commission might be a good addition to this project. Bob Yamartino asked if anyone would want to volunteer to work on the vision statement and Jen Huddleston stated she would help as a representative of the EDC. A member of Planning and Zoning also volunteered as did a member of the Building committee. Mr. Yamartino wasn't sure a chairman was necessary for this item.

Jim Irish then went on to the next item, blue/green algae at the lake, and noted that they have had discussions with the Lake Beseck Environmental committee and Rick Santos as chairman. Mr. Santos explained that the committee has been working on this for a while and work with most of the other boards and commissions. A member of the public wasn't sure how the WPCA would work on this project.

The blight ordinance was the next item and Mr. Irish has volunteered to work on this. Tom Kilroy was the building inspector in Meriden for over 20 years and has volunteered to work on this as well. A draft is being put together and Mr. Irish has talked with Matt Willis, the town's attorney, who gave some ideas as well. They will have the draft reviewed by commissions and then hold public hearings before it goes to any kind of a vote. A member of the public asked to confirm that there is no blight ordinance already on the books and Mr. Irish confirmed that there is none. There is an ordinance about abandoned vehicles, but nothing about other elements of blight. A member of the public asked if the lack of a blight ordinance is what took the town so long to do something about the tires and Mr. Yamartino stated that was not the case. Nothing prevented the town from doing anything quickly and they moved as quickly as possible, but it was held up in the courts. The Health Department filed criminal cases which have yet to be heard. Mr. Yamartino was disappointed that DEEP never took any action. The member of the public asked if it would have happened quicker had there been a blight ordinance and Mr. Yamartino felt that the procedures would have been the same. Jim Irish added that most blight ordinances deal with the exterior structure and/or property. Another member of the public felt that it was very difficult because the state doesn't enforce things.

Jim Irish went on to review open space and they suggested that the Conservation Commission should own this activity in terms of recommending maintenance actions or acquisition. He reviewed that the Beseck Lake Environmental Committee is already discussing available options for pondweed eradication at the lake. Rick Santos added that they already have a permit to treat the invasives and it will be extended to treat the pondweed. They hope to start treatment next Spring. A member of the public asked about the invasive plants that are in locations other than at the lake. Mr. Irish felt that the Conservation Commission could look at that as well.

Bob Yamartino noted that this is a living, breathing document and other ideas and opportunities will come up. They will not necessarily do a town-wide survey again, but they will continue to look at the list of ideas. A member of the public suggested adding a timing aspect to the items as some are aspirational and others that are more needing to be shovel-ready.

Mr. Yamartino stated that the Lake Shore Drive culvert was completed and the contractor did an excellent job, coming in under budget and early. Jim Irish went on to Community Center updates and reported that the boiler will be replaced. Bob Yamartino is also considering retaining a property management consultant to review the facilities with a professional eye to understand what the buildings need in terms of maintenance. A member of the public recommended CB Richard Ellis or OR&L.

Jim Irish moved on to the firehouse renovation which has been under discussion for a while. The committee has been working hard to move this along. Bob Yamartino added that they have received initial cost estimates which were high and they are going to try to go into a design/build to get more accurate pricing. They have also had multiple meetings with state legislators about getting on the bond list and they are in favor of moving it forward. There is already \$2.2 million in federal funding in place. He added that bonding is usually not approved unless the project is shovel-ready and the town has approved the spending. Money has already been spent on the conceptual design and they now need to move toward the design/build which may require more money.

Jim Irish recommended that everyone take a look at the remainder of the list and asked for volunteers of anyone who would like to champion/chair or participate in any other the other items. Historical markers will be looked at by the Historical Society. Bob Yamartino will keep on top of possibly purchasing the Town Green. Mr. Irish asked if anyone was interested in participating in the Christmas or Holiday Market and Michael Skelps mentioned that they wouldn't want to do that if any of the local businesses are doing it. Another member of the public suggested that the local businesses could participate in the Holiday Market as well. Mr. Skelps felt that this would be better left to nonprofit organizations in town. It was also suggested that the local farms put together a farmers' market if they want one. Bob Yamartino felt that they need someone to approach the nonprofits or the farmers with the idea. Another member of the public suggested asking Lyman's to expand to include more local farms and asking the Chamber of Commerce to participate. Someone else added that Cromwell actually took over their farmers' market last year and it is now a town function.

Moving to Peckham Park pavilion refurbishment, Jim Irish stated that Hannah Malcolm will spearhead this and get some budget numbers of the Board of Finance. Mr. Irish felt that Lyman School should be held in abeyance for a bit while the Board of Education wrestles with what to do with their various properties. Mr. Irish felt that Jay Wickham is in the best position to prioritize what kinds of things would benefit collector roads. A member of the public thought

that the roads were studied and Bob Yamartino confirmed that three studies have actually been done and they can now begin looking for grants to get the work done.

Due to the time, Jim Irish suggested that everyone look at the remainder of the items and let the Board of Selectmen know their thoughts.

#### Member discussions/prioritizations/additional ideas

Jim Irish asked if anyone in the public had additional ideas and asked them to think about offering those ideas within commission meetings or to the Board of Selectmen to add to the list.

Bob Yamartino noted that they had not included the Town Hall which is really under-sized. They are also going to discuss updating some of the other town buildings, including the garage.

#### Next Steps - including scheduling a public hearing

Bob Yamartino stated that they intentionally did not include Public Comment on tonight's agenda because the meeting would be too long and they could get sidetracked, so they were thinking of scheduling a public hearing to share this information with the general public. He asked everyone when they thought the group should get back together again. Michael Skelps asked what they would want to happen before the next meeting. Bob Yamartino felt that they needed to continue to push these items forward and get people to sign on.

Anne Malcolm felt that one of the priorities of the town is the firehouse and they need to start pushing that by letting people know the developments. She felt that it could become a financial issue. She believed that should be a priority over this list of items. A lot of people don't like how the meetings are held behind closed doors, even though they are all on Zoom. Mary Wolak added that there needs to be a better way of communicating what is going on and simply telling people it's on the website is not satisfactory. Jen Huddleston suggested mobilizing the Town Times. Bob Yamartino added that a freelance reporter interviewed him, Jim Irish and Jen Huddleston about this but the article missed the deadline for the Town Times. Bob Yamartino also noted that a mailer will go out to every household regarding the Charter Revision and reviewed some of the proposed changes. Jim Irish added that the proposed changes and reasons for those will also be posted on the town's website. He felt that they need to find ways to more effectively communicate in town. Rob Poturnicki felt that the problem has always been finding people to help.

Bob Yamartino acknowledged that a public hearing is a form of communication, but added that the Charter Revision Commission held a public hearing and no one showed up from the public. The Board of Selectmen held a public hearing on it and only members from the commission actually showed up. He noted that they properly post all of the public hearings. Another member of the public added that she did not recall any notices about charter review. Another

member of the public stated that most people don't read legal notices in the newspaper and felt there are many other ways to communicate the information. Another member of the public felt that Middlefield is not alone in this and that the number of people at both the first meeting about this and tonight's meeting showed that Middlefield is engaged. She also added that 10 percent response to a survey is unheard of and is usually 4 percent or less.

A member of the public noted that the survey asked for an email and wondered if the town could respond to those. Bob Yamartino explained that the survey was confidential and the email address was only to check for duplicates. Michael Olszewski felt that the houses in the 55-and-older communities do not have computers and he added that he doesn't even read the Town Times anymore as it doesn't pertain to Middlefield most of the time. Nadine Ernst explained that the Housing Authority includes a resident commissioner and they need to email the project manager because the resident doesn't use email at all. She agreed that most of the residents don't use a computer and there isn't even one in the community room anymore. Mary Wolak felt that there are different ways to access computers, but someone needs to teach the residents how to use them.

Jim Irish acknowledged the issue of communication and understood that some changes need to be made. Darin Overton suggested that there be one person responsible for posting information for people without a computer. Bob Yamartino explained that the website was specifically designed to meet handicapped accessibility, but is not very user-friendly. He felt that it needs more work.

Bob Yamartino summarized that they need to get communication out, understand what the timing is for some of these projects and then call for another meeting. He thought it may be January before they meet again. Jim Irish thanked everyone for their involvement.

#### Adjournment

***A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the special joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen with Boards and Commissions. Motion carried unanimously.***

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First