

Received 10/11/2023
11:06 am
Tonya Hogan, TC

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the October 2, 2023 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

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

Route 147/Baileyville Road Detour - Jesse Romano, CT DOT

Bob Yamartino reviewed that sometime back in May or June, a notice was received that there was an emergency order for the repair of the retaining wall at the stream that goes under the trestle on Route 147. Part of the work was that the DOT would come out during the summer and take core samples of the foundation as well as soil samples. At that time, they closed one lane and took the samples. It had been anticipated that that would be how the construction would go as well. However, when the soil samples came back, it was weak enough that it would require excavation from the edge of the river to the center of 147 which would mean full closure. The town was notified that that was happening and put up an electronic sign saying that. State policy is that they cannot divert traffic from a state road onto a local road, so the detour signs are saying that all traffic will be detoured down to 157, beginning at Route 66 in Middletown.

Mr. Yamartino added that the local roads will be open, including Baileyville Road and Long Hill Road, but the lower portion of Long Hill Road will be closed. West Street, Powder Hill Road, Way Road, Mack Road and Jackson Hill Road will all be open. This closure will affect a couple of the town's businesses, including those on Baileyville Road, which is not a good thing. Powder Ridge and Lyman Orchards will also be affected. Mr. Yamartino met with Jesse

Romano about some potential mitigation plans and discussed the possibility of a detour sign on Route 91. They also talked about additional signage on West Street as he believes that road will take the brunt of the traffic.

Jesse Romano explained that they were limited in what they can do and the town should alert the Resident Troopers. Jim Irish suggested a CMS board on 147 directing people to Powder Ridge, but Mr. Romano noted that they cannot promote businesses on a message board. He will reach out to everyone about updating the GPS apps to help with the detour. Mr. Irish asked him to verify that the actual barricade for the closure will be south of West Street on 147. Mr. Romano explained that West Street will be the soft closure point with full closure at Long Hill Road.

Carol Bufithis stated that people who live on the local roads do not want the extra traffic. She then reviewed the businesses on Baileyville Road and asked if they can add wording about the road being open for local businesses. Kim Terrill, from Baileyville Bake Shop, noted that October through December is the most critical season for retail businesses. She felt that a road closure or detour sign that directs traffic away from their businesses is devastating in the fourth quarter. Jesse Romano explained that the road closure signs will be after West Street and the signs on Route 147 at 66 will only say road work ahead.

Bob Perrotti, from Perrotti's Country Barn, stated that they do 55 to 65 percent of their annual gross during the fourth quarter. He has a tremendous amount of patrons who come from out of town and is relieved to hear that there will be no road closure signs on 147 by 66. Mr. Romano will try to see if they can get signage about local businesses being open.

Bob Yamartino added that they have had discussions in the past about getting another message board and possibly they could put on 147 stating local businesses are open. They will also look into renting a machine or possibly a rent-to-own contract. Carol Bufithis asked if it would be possible for the town to get some loaner message boards from the state and Mr. Romano stated that they work through a contractor, so they wouldn't have loaners. He will, however, let the contractor know the town may be looking for some. Bob Yamartino has also reached out to the Troop F barracks to see if any surrounding communities have some available. CMS boards can only flash two messages and are limited on the number of letters. The type of sign the town would purchase or rent would allow a lot more.

Mr. Yamartino added that they were looking for two of the CMS boards to put on West Street warning people to drive slow through the residential neighborhood. He also reviewed with the Resident Trooper that they need to focus on the feeder roads through this construction. He also asked for more attention from the roaming trooper to patrol 66 by the entrances to the feeder roads.

A member of the public asked if it could be postponed until January and Jesse Romano explained that they can't pave in January. He agreed that this is not an ideal situation, but it is not a regularly scheduled construction job and has been deemed an emergency project by the Commissioner. Mr. Yamartino reported that he had a request from John Lyman who asked if construction could start after October 9, 2023 as that is their busiest day. Mr. Romano agreed that construction will start on October 10th and they will update the message boards.

A member of the public who lives on the triangle asked if they had done a survey of the traffic coming down and going up 147 at the actual spot. Mr. Romano stated that he is not aware that that has been done. She felt that there is a tremendous amount of tractor trailers that go through there and she wondered what would happen when they get to where the road is closed on 147 near West Street. Mr. Romano stated that there will be signage giving distance before the road closure. Bob Yamartino asked if they could get a “no through trucks” sign to keep trucks off West Street. He believed that he is not allowed to put that type of signage on feeder roads or a state road and Mr. Romano will look into that but mentioned that, if they put up a sign, it has to be a construction sign. A member of the public noted that there is already a “no through truck” sign on West Street but it is not enforced. Jim Irish thought those signs would be good at 147 at 66 and 147 at 157 and could keep the big trucks from the closure.

Carol Bufithis added that she lives in the area as well and it is a main thoroughfare. Jesse Romano acknowledged that and noted that they will have detour signs on 66 to direct trucks around the area.

A member of the public noted that the soil samples said that the road is unstable, but the foundations of the trestle are there as well. She asked if they were studied and if they were stable. Mr. Romano explained that they will not touch anything on the railroad abutments. The core samples dictated that they needed a new design for the wall and a little more excavation than they had anticipated. Another member of the public asked if the triangle itself will be open and Mr. Romano stated that he is meeting with the contractor this week to discuss that. They will be starting at the triangle end of the wall and they will certainly make arrangements with the houses in that area. The member of the public felt that it is very important that it is clear to people that they cannot turn onto 147 off of Main Street. She wanted to be on the record saying that if the soil underneath the road is compromised, she has concerns about the soil under the trestle foundations being compromised as well.

Eric, one of the design engineers, explained that the bedrock dropped off as they moved east and the material on top of the bedrock is a dense clay type of material to bear a wall. The old dry stack wall did pretty well, but the new wall will be a double wall and cannot move. Eric added that railroad trestles are inspected on a regular basis and is the responsibility of the DOT. They did multiple things to not jeopardize the trestle. He did not feel that the bridge should be a worry to anyone at all.

Bob Yamartino stated that part of the construction is to build a cofferdam and then pipes. He asked if they were aware that the draw-down of Lake Beseck starts next week and that DEEP will open the valve to increase the water flow to the river. Eric had no idea of that, but did note that everyone is aware of this project. Mr. Yamartino explained that the flow will be above normal during the draw-down and thought that they may want to ask DEEP to start early.

Mr. Yamartino also had a discussion with the Director of Public Works and they feel there may be some projects around town where they could use the brownstone. Jesse Romano will let the contractor know that.

A member of the public asked how the water will be diverted and it was explained that the water will go into a bypass pipe. The member of the public noted that ever since the bridge repair in 1993, the water has been kind of directed right into his backyard. They did have terrible flooding after that and it was modified a bit in 2000. Eric explained that there will be both an upstream and a downstream cofferdam just outside of their work limits. Jesse Romano added that people from DOT have walked that area. Eric noted that they can take a look at it to hopefully get incorporated into when the bridge gets rehabbed.

Ken Twombly, from 45 West Street, felt that West Street will take a beating from this traffic and he is afraid someone will get killed while walking on the road. He urged them to do something to preserve West Street. Bob Yamartino felt that they could make all of West Street or the portion up to Long Hill one way which would reduce the amount of traffic, but he wasn't sure if there was more traffic in the morning or the evening. Mr. Yamartino would like to get a traffic expert to look at the intersections at Powder Hill, Way Road and High Street. He asked if there was a way to get someone to come out and tell them what to do on West Street. Jesse Romano explained that they did look at that when developing the detour. Mr. Yamartino has concerns about the neighbors in that area. Carol Bufithis added that if West Street is one way, they still can't go down Long Hill Road and that would take all traffic up through the orchard. Another member of the public felt that there would be repercussions long after the road is open again. He suggested closing the road at 147 and Powder Hill so traffic would have to go to Jackson Hill and Mack Road or around Powder Ridge. Local people will know how to go around. Carol Bufithis felt that was a good idea, especially for the trucks. Another member of the public felt that they should ask the people who live on Powder Hill Road what they would think of that.

Carol Bufithis felt that nobody is going to be happy, but the bottom line is Powder Hill Road is used to much more traffic.

Ed Waldner, from Baileyville Road, asked if the pipe that goes under the road at the bottom of Long Hill Road will be replaced. At one point, a contractor put a guardrail through that pipe that caused flooding in his basement. Eric stated that they did a video inspection of that pipe and found no issues. Mr. Waldner has photos of this, with the beam right through the pipe which creates a dam and causes water to jump the curb and into his house. Eric explained that the structural integrity of the pipe is good and it's totally clear, but the last little bit of it will be replaced near the wall. Jesse Romano brought some pictures of the pipe.

Bob Yamartino asked if anyone would have any objection to moving the soft closure from just below West Street to just below Powder Hill for southbound traffic on Baileyville Road. John Lyman would have the same concerns that everyone else has about their street. He thought that they should try to diffuse traffic in different directions at several points.

Bob Yamartino reiterated his request for a traffic expert to give them some recommendations. A member of the public felt that making West Street one way would keep people from the businesses on Baileyville Road and could create confusion. A member of the public suggested that local businesses put up their own signs saying that they're open, but it was noted that those signs would be taken down if they're on a state road as they are supposed to be permitted.

Carol Bufithis asked what the signage will say at Guida's. Jesse Romano explained that those signs will say that route 147 is closed three miles ahead and road work ahead. Ms. Bufithis asked if the road work ahead sign could also say local businesses open. Mr. Romano reiterated that he will look into adding that.

Kim Terrill asked about GPS signals being rerouted and Mr. Romano explained that the GPS would get people around the closure. He added that they will push that all of the apps get updated as soon as possible to show that. Mr. Romano reviewed that the signs on Route 66 East will say Route 147 closed three miles ahead - local traffic only. There will be detour signs as well. Those signs will go out to Main Street and Route 66 once the construction starts.

A member of the public felt that a sign saying closed three miles ahead will give someone doubt and asked if they could say that local businesses are open. Mr. Romano understood and will look into that. A member of the public asked if the signs need to say local traffic only and Mr. Romano confirmed that they do. He did not feel that it will be possible to have a detour sign on 91 N and hopes that GPS will assist in that. Mr. Yamartino would rather people got off 91 N at Route 68 instead of Route 66. Mr. Romano continues to work with the apps.

Carol Bufithis didn't feel that John Lyman is happy about this and he confirmed that nobody is happy as it's the busiest time of the year. He felt that local traffic only is a lot different than local businesses open. Mr. Romano explained that the signs do need to say local traffic only. Mr. Lyman felt that people who were trying to get home know that they can and the message will really be to out-of-towners. He felt that that message would be negative. Bob Yamartino felt that they needed to have no through trucks.

Ms. Bufithis asked for clarification one more time of what the sign on Route 66 would say. Jesse Romano explained that the first sign will say detour ahead. The second sign will say Route 147 closed three miles ahead - local traffic only. The next sign will say detour south 147 with an arrow pointing straight down Route 66. Ms. Bufithis didn't feel that worked as it doesn't say anything local business and Mr. Romano added that they were talking about adding signage for that. He explained that he has to run this by traffic to know exactly.

A member of the public asked if there will be a sign at the base of Powder Hill Road at 147 and Bob Yamartino noted that they discussed it, but there has been no decision. Carol Bufithis asked who makes that decision and Mr. Yamartino stated that they can make a recommendation to DOT. He again asked if there were any strenuous objections to that.

Jesse Romano reviewed that the first sign will be Route 147 closed at the intersection of Route 157. There will be construction ahead and road work ahead signs as you approach West Street and, after West Street, it will be road closed ahead. It may be possible to shift that to Powder Hill Road. They felt that would be a reasonable request if that is what the town wants. Bob Yamartino then asked if anyone in the room had any objections. The benefit of that would be to try to reduce the traffic on West Street by shifting it to Powder Hill and Way Road, though people may still go down Long Hill Road to West Street. Carol Bufithis noted that if they push the traffic to West Street and people need to turn around, there is no place to do that. It was

reviewed that the state cannot divert traffic to a non-state road, but they can say the road ahead is closed.

Bob Yamartino summarized that they will make the recommendation that the soft closure goes up to Powder Hill Road and would also like No Through Truck signs. He also asked Jesse Romano to reach out to traffic about the intersection of Powder Hill Road and Baileyville Road which is very dangerous as is West Street at Baileyville Road. He also asked for a recommendation about making any of the roads one way during the construction. Ken Twombly also suggested installing a stop sign to create a three-way stop. He volunteered to have a sign put in his yard at 45 West Street.

Ed Waldner, who lives right at the construction site, felt that it will be an annoyance, however having watched that road wash out over the last four decades, he thinks it's a good thing and they should get it done.

A member of the public recalled a traffic study that was done on Route 147 and thought it was around 3,500 per day. Mr. Romano reviewed that West Street is a concern. Adding a message board stating something like 25 mph strictly enforced. Bob Yamartino explained that they are replacing the batteries in the speed signs and relocating the one that is on Cherry Hill over to Peters Lane. They may think about moving it to Mack Road instead. Mr. Romano asked exactly what everyone wants for signage about the businesses and it was explained that anywhere they say something is closed, they would want something saying the businesses are open.

Bob Yamartino thanked both gentlemen from the DOT for coming and providing explanations tonight. Carol Bufithis thanked everyone for attending.

There was a break at this point in the meeting.

Bob Yamartino felt there was good resolution with the plan and they will keep an eye on it moving forward. Jim Irish added that they do need to be sure there is an additional sign about local businesses.

Public Communications

Bob Yamartino reported that he has had some people call about trimming tree branches. He explained that Public Works has been down a man for almost three months and efforts have been made to hire someone on a part-time basis. They do have to provide a job for the employee when he returns to work, but they may look at adding another permanent position. Public Works is keeping up with a lot of the requests, but the timing is moving out to two or three weeks instead of the usual one-week turnaround.

Approval of Minutes of Selectmen Meetings

- a. September 5, 2023 - regular meeting
- b. September 19, 2023 - regular meeting

Jim Irish pointed out that times were missing at the end of the September 5, 2023 meeting and Bob Yamartino noted that the Board of Selectmen returned from executive session at 9:34 PM. No motions were made, no votes were taken. Carol Bufithis made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Jim Irish. The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 PM.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Carol Bufithis, to approve the minutes of the September 5, 2023 and September 19, 2023 regular meetings, as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

Charter Revision

a. Communication and publicity

Jim Irish reported that Judi Rand has a complete, redlined version of all the proposed changes to the Charter. He asked Tonya Hogan to post it on the website with the explanatory text in place of what is there now. Jim Irish also showed a draft of the mailer and reviewed it for the board. A QR code to the news item on the website will also be provided in the mailer and the news item will have links to both the revised charter and the explanatory text.

Carol Bufithis felt that the mailer was very thorough and noted that people have been asking why they would change the process of the Town Clerk and the Tax Collector. Jim Irish directed her to the explanatory text.

Bob Yamartino reviewed that when they had a referendum question about closing John Lyman School, the text could only be factual and not advocacy. He asked to have Matt Willis review this before it is sent out. Mr. Yamartino will ask Judi Rand to reach out to CCM about printing the mailer.

Community Center Rental Fees

Jim Irish provided the rental fees for Peckham Park and showed that it was a lot more with bathrooms and the kitchen was an add-on as well. The rates are higher than what they had thought. Carol Bufithis felt that those numbers were high for the Community Center. Bob Yamartino explained that the rates are higher for bathrooms and kitchen because they are professionally cleaned.

Mr. Yamartino reviewed that group 3 charges for the Community Center would be \$25 for a meeting room, \$25 for the kitchen and \$100 for the auditorium. Carol Bufithis asked if this could be tabled until next meeting as she would like to be out of the meeting by 9:00, 9:15 tonight. It was agreed to table this agenda item.

“Middlefield’s Future” - update

Bob Yamartino reviewed that the meeting was held last Thursday and there are a lot of people committed to this. The board’s ability to communicate was put under the spotlight and is one of the top things they need to address. He stated that, if he were to be reelected, he would commit to having the Board of Selectmen work with the other boards and commissions to provide a

newsletter every two months that will be mailed to every household. He acknowledged that it will cost to do this, but felt it would be money well-spent.

Jim Irish reviewed that they talked about communication and felt that there were a lot of print and media that they are not making use of. Chris Champagne provided some comments on Airbnb rentals. Two people volunteered for the draft of the vision. There were questions about the Farmer's Market and they need to find a champion for the Christmas Market, if that is to happen. Affordable Housing was discussed and a commission member was disappointed that a committee hasn't been formed. Mr. Irish explained why he felt that the committee should not be formed, but she aggressively stated that they could find a committee to work around the obstacles. He suggested that a Housing committee be formed to engage with RiverCOG Housing Committee and all of the other towns who have them. He noted that there were several people with backgrounds and experience in this. Carol Bufithis is very supportive of that.

Carol Bufithis talked with several people who all felt that it would be too much to have a Farmer's Market in Middlefield as well as Durham. Jim Irish also felt it would be excessive. Bob Yamartino wondered if Lyman Farm would want to sponsor it. Ms. Bufithis suggested they talk to the local farmers before going any further.

Reallocate ARPA Funding to completely fund the Lake Shore Drive culvert

Bob Yamartino asked to table this item until the next meeting.

Jim Irish felt that there were other things that haven't even been asked for yet. Carol Bufithis added that, now that Durham is going to have some leadership, they may very well have some interest in doing projects. Ms. Bufithis asked to not move the money right now.

Resolution to Approve the 2022 STEAP Grant

Jim Irish explained that this resolution had been mislabeled and the certification document will need to be signed by Tonya Hogan that this motion was passed tonight.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Carol Bufithis, to amend this item of the agenda to read: Resolution to Approve the 2023 DEMHS Authorization. Motion carried unanimously.

Bob Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to authorize the resolution, resolving that the Town of Middlefield may enter into with and deliver to the State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security any and all documents which it deems to be necessary or appropriate; and further resolving that Robert C. Yamartino, as First Selectman of the Town of Middlefield, is authorized and directed to execute and deliver any and all documents on behalf of the Town of Middlefield, and to do and perform all acts and things which he deems to be necessary or appropriate to carry out the terms of such documents, including, but not limited to, executing and delivering all agreements and documents contemplated by such documents. Motion carried unanimously.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Carol Bufithis, to authorize the First Selectman to participate in any and all grant applications as presented by the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), including the Connecticut Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS), the Lower Connecticut River Council of Governments (Fiduciary), and Region 2 Regional Emergency Planning Team (Region 2 REPT) as per the Authorizing Resolution dated October 2, 2023. Motion carried unanimously.

Selectmen/Selectwoman Reports

Jim Irish noted that he has sent letters to both the Vision Committee and the Historical Society to move ahead with their projects because those projects were top-rated.

Bob Yamartino reviewed that an employee in the Public Works Department went out with an injury two months ago. The problem is that they don't know when the employee will return. Mr. Yamartino has also made some organizational changes in the department and, through negotiation with the union, he wrote a new job description for a Lead Maintainer who will fill in for the Public Works Director. This position will require that he takes a course directly related to his position as a lead and conduct at least one training program per year as well as maintain SDSs. Carol Bufithis asked if this position will be filled by someone who is already employed and Mr. Yamartino explained that Mike Foley has promoted to the position.

There is already a maintainer mechanic position, but the job description and pay scale is not commensurate with the responsibilities of the position. They edited the job description and then promoted Mike Olszewski to that position. That job now requires that he takes a course directly related to the maintenance of vehicles and gets training each year to hopefully certify him to do work that is currently sent out. Bob Yamartino added that this process began in July and they will be paid retroactively to that time. Carol Bufithis hoped this would increase morale as well.

Jim Irish would like Beth Moncata to provide a copy of the variance analysis to the Board of Selectmen as well to be sure they are not spending money that will create a situation. Bob Yamartino added that he wanted to see more details on the budget, including salaries, and he asked Beth Moncata to provide that to each of the selectmen.

Mr. Yamartino added that he is still waiting to hear where SBA is on the cell tower so the town can collect their money. He is also moving forward on signing the contract for the boiler for the Community Center. He has two quotes in right now and is waiting on a third, but he may have to sign the contract before the third quote is in.

Jim Irish noted that the election has increased dialogue in the community and he has noticed that there are people who are interested in seeing qualifications.

Adjournment

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First