

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the March 19, 2019 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Ed Bailey called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM. Ed Bailey, Dave Burgess and Bob Yamartino were present.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Ed Bailey asked to add item 9A after Selectman's report to approve tax refunds. Bob Yamartino asked to move the Fire Department ahead of Public Comment and the Budget Presentation before Approval of Minutes.

Bob Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dave Burgess, to approve the agenda, as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

Middlefield Volunteer Fire Department - Building Committee Presentation

Chief Peter Tyc explained that the Fire Department has had a long-range planning committee in place for about four years and their goal is to look to the future of the department, personnel, building and facilities. The last renovation of the fire house was in 1985. The Fire Department has spoken to the Board of Finance about several issues, but they are now looking for direction.

Bruce Villwock, chairman of the long-range planning committee, was present with several members of the committee. He explained that the first section of the fire house was built in the 1930s. Section B was added on by members back in the 1950s. Section C was added in 1968 and major renovation and an addition was done on section D in 1985/1986.

Mr. Villwock had a list of both long- and short-term needs, including floors, and they have 2017 prices for installing a wood laminate floor upstairs at \$16,400 and \$4,600 in the squad room downstairs. The next issue is air conditioning. A grant was issued to a contractor for \$5,000 to put air conditioning upstairs. The contractor went out of business and the air conditioners are still in the walls, with the piping laying out on the roof. It was not sized right and is probably no

good now. Moving to the furnace which was installed in 1985/1986, it burns 5 gallons of oil per hour and is very inefficient. The generator is from approximately 1984 and had been installed prior to the renovations. It too should be replaced with an outside, self-contained unit at a cost of about \$44,000. The capital expenditures account has \$12,760 for that item. Generators are usually replaced on hours, but age comes into play with replacement parts. The alarm system needs to be upgraded and is currently run over phone lines which is expensive on a monthly basis. Mr. Bailey stated that the Community Center is a on wireless system and they are switching over Town Hall as well, so he felt there was no reason why that couldn't be done.

Moving to the driveway and parking lot, it is starting to break up and has been there since the 80s. An overlay cannot be done in many areas because the grade is only slightly below the level of the parking lot. The roof was looked at last year and it appears to be in good shape, but will warrant replacement in the next five years. There are some soft spots still existing, but no leaks. It is expected that a new roof will cost about \$197,000. The upstairs windows were replaced in the late 70s, early 80s on the original section. They are starting to split and open up.

Some repointing of the west side of the fire house and the entire surface was waterproofed several years ago at a cost of \$18,670. The rest of the fire house needs maintenance done on the masonry work.

The fire company has run into problems finding a new truck that will fit into the fire house because of the size of trucks. The length is also a big issue. The last truck had issues with height and the truck was built to specifications for height and length. Mr. Villwock reviewed pictures he had supplied and explained that there is only 40" of clearance to get into the trucks when 42" is required. Another picture shows the distance between the trucks of only 40". He also showed the measurements between the front of the trucks and the doors and explained that they have to backed into the specific spaces in order to fit. He explained that the cab in a new rescue truck will add another foot to the length. Engine 2 is supposed to be replaced in 2022 and that truck already compromises the entryway. He reviewed all of the pictures and explained the distances between the trucks and walls as well as height issues.

Mr. Villwock stated that they had an engineer come in talk about possibilities with the building itself. They received a very comprehensive report and overall the building is in fairly decent condition, but not much can be done to enlarge it due to seismic requirements. Mr. Villwock stated that some money has already been set aside for the roof. He noted that the intent of the last renovation in 1985/1986 was to last 20 years and they've gotten 33 years out of that. Mr. Villwock explained that they do everything possible to keep the costs down.

Chief Tyc went on to explain that they are basically here tonight to make everyone aware of the situation and are not looking for answers tonight. He mentioned that they have to pay extra money for trucks to get them to fit into the building. The committee is looking for some direction.

Dave Burgess felt that it was a compelling report and they are doing good work. He feels that the building is becoming obsolete and there are issues of health and safety. Chief Tyc also stated that if this were any other building in town, he would have issues with a lot of it as the fire marshal. Mr. Burgess also didn't want to put good money into a bad project and maybe a new fire house is necessary. Mr. Villwock did note that the physical location of the fire house is ideal as it is within five miles of any place in town.

Ed Bailey stated that the Board of Finance has allocated funds to the capital plan for town structures and it will be important to have the building inspected to gather more data, including costs of deferred maintenance and how much investment is needed short-term. He explained that he will be giving a budget presentation tonight and the town will be short \$1 million in state money in eight years. Dave Burgess stated that he would rather see other projects put off and the focus be on the fire house because of health and safety concerns. The fire company will also present this information to the Board of Finance.

Bob Yamartino found it interesting that it would cost more to do the roof in one shot than it would to do it piecemeal. To break it up into pieces, they would be able to avoid prevailing wages. Mr. Yamartino agreed that they needed a lot more data about timing and total costs, but he didn't feel it should be looked at in isolation. He also noted that the town already has more building space than it needs and there has been some mention of bringing all of the Town Hall functions under one roof. Mr. Yamartino felt this may be an opportunity to look at all of the buildings as a whole to see if something can be done differently. Mr. Bailey agreed that everything should be looked as a whole.

First Selectman's FY20 Budget Presentation

Ed Bailey began his Powerpoint presentation with highlights from the budget and explained that the total town budget being proposed this year reflects a reduction of \$41,000-plus from the current fiscal year. Capital and nonrecurring funding has been increased by just over \$107,000. School cost allocation decreases by \$233,000 and change. Education Cost Sharing grant has been reduced by \$151,441. The teacher retirement costs that have been mandated by the state are \$39,353.

This proposed budget has a mill rate decrease from 34.49 to 33.37, a decrease of 1.12 mills. Taxable Grand List has increased 2.33 percent, primarily due to Eversource installing metal high voltage towers. The town has also had about eight new houses this year, but no big housing projects are under construction. In contrast, Durham has had a .98 percent decrease in their Grand List because one business left town. The average homeowner will see a decrease of \$181 on their property taxes. The undesignated fund balance will be maintained at 14 percent.

Mr. Bailey then reviewed the mill rate history that had been creeping up for a while, declined in FY16 and 17, then up in FY18 because of revaluation. The overall trend is downward. Mr. Yamartino asked how they can state that it has remained steady other than the revaluation year. He believes that the Town of Middlefield has had a really good story with the mill rate and taxes, but this doesn't show it. Mr. Bailey felt that the mill rate has remained within a reasonable range. There was discussion about the values of all houses changing with revaluation.

Revaluation was last done in 2017/2018, based on the October, 2016 Grand List, and will be due again in October, 2021.

Mr. Bailey reviewed the history of the taxable Grand List, showing an upward trend over time with a drop in property values in 2018. We are now up almost \$20 million over FY18. The undesignated fund was at 9 percent in FY14 and is estimated to be 15 percent at the end of this fiscal year. Next year, it will be around 14 percent. The Board of Finance adopted a policy to have the fund balance remain at 12.5 to 17 percent. The CCM (Connecticut Council of Municipalities) target recommendation is now 15 percent primarily due to the state government's finances.

Mr. Bailey reviewed that \$11.95 million of the budget is for educational expenses (71 percent) and the town's portion is \$4.9 million (29 percent). Looking at the history of total town expenditures, the school budget has remained fairly stable and the town expenses went up slightly in FY14 for the financing of Powder Ridge, but have remained pretty steady over the last five to six years. The school budget went down last year, but Middlefield's share went up by more than \$320,000. It goes down this year. Mr. Yamartino would like to see that information in a normalized line graph.

Mr. Bailey went on to review that the town's capital fund is just below 5 percent of the total budget and he thought that is approaching the statutory limit of what is allowed in capital. This year, Mr. Bailey is proposing a \$107,000 increase in capital.

Of the town-only budget, human resources makes up 39 percent. Public works is 4 percent, debt service is 10 percent, emergency services 4 percent, administration 3 percent, central services and insurance 8 percent, outside agencies 12 percent, park and rec 1 percent, professional services 2 percent and capital fund is 16 percent and 3 percent of odds and ends.

Reviewing the non-tax revenue over time, the total funds received from the State of Connecticut dropped dramatically in FY17-18, a slight bump up in FY19 and the downward trend continues in FY20. The ECS continues to decrease with a reduction of \$151,000 in FY20. The State is also mandating the Teachers' Retirement Benefit this year which is 25 percent of the benefit to be assumed by the towns directly, not by the school district. This is calculated by the benefit amount plus a percent of the teachers' wages above the state average. The district's teachers get paid about 6 percent above the state average, therefore the towns will pay 31 percent, for a total

of \$120,621 to be phased in over three years with the FY20 cost being \$38,237 and FY21 being over \$81,000. By 2028, it is projected that the town will be minus \$928,000 in state funding and payments to the state.

Another state impact on the town budget is the municipal employee retirement system (MERS). The town's contribution will increase from 11.74 percent to 22.4 percent of payroll, phased in over five years. The FY20 contribution goes from the 11.74 percent to 14.4 percent of payroll. The employee contribution is static at 2.5 percent of payroll, by state statute. There is legislation pending to increase the employees' contribution by 2 percent a year over the next two years, however there is huge push-back from the labor unions. Mr. Bailey stated that the town's collective bargaining agreements clearly state that changes are allowed to employee contributions should the legislature change the statute.

Reviewing the larger items in the operating budget, Mr. Bailey pointed out that the Zoning Enforcement Officer has increased hours and the Town Planner is a contract position. Geoff Colegrove will be retiring and Middlefield will share a Town Planner with Durham. A new part-time Assessor was hired with an increase in the budget line. Summer camp payroll is increasing and is basically a pass-through. CNR should read \$107,125, including an asset plan for the Town Hall and Community Center. Teacher Retirement Benefit cost is \$31,000 and change and then the excess of average is \$7,600.

Decreases include labor counsel, health and life insurance, state-mandated renters' rebate, snow removal expense, police payroll and overtime, Planning and Zoning Commission and the RSD13 shift in enrollment.

In summary, Mr. Bailey explained that municipal expenses have increased by \$153,000, net educational expenses have decreased by \$192,000, with a total decrease of \$41,000. Total revenue has increased by \$34,000, including interest income and the possible sale of some property. In total, there will be a mill rate reduction of 1.12 mills.

Mr. Bailey reviewed that they have continued to improve all aspects of town spending, labor contracts have been negotiated very successfully, the town joined the Plainville-Southington Health District, continued to build out the IT network, implemented the new accounting and payroll system and there is a capital improvement plan for some of the town buildings. In FY20, the new full-time Town Planner position has been created and will be shared with Durham. Mr. Bailey explained that Middlefield's share of the cost of the Town Planner position will be \$60,000. The Town Planner works with the Planning and Zoning Commission primarily and would be a staff member. The Town Planner helps to determine feasibility and likelihood of projects. That person would also be the Economic Development coordinator in Middlefield and would also help with P&Z enforcement. Mr. Bailey explained that Geoff Colegrove has worked for the town for close to 40 years and can answer almost any question posed to him. Mr. Bailey

thought Mr. Colegrove worked maybe 10 hours a week now. Several projects were mentioned as possibilities for the Town Planner to work on.

Mr. Bailey is also proposing doing a pavement survey and having a part-time facilities manager who will coordinate and plan work on the town's buildings. He mentioned that an RFP is being prepared for landscaping services and hoped that the facilities manager would take care of that. He reviewed some of the problems with the roads, including surfaces and drainage. Mr. Bailey also explained that the town has about 33 miles of town roads. Mr. Bailey is also proposing to wrap up the LED streetlamp project and LED lighting replacement in town buildings. He also mentioned how bad the windows are in the Community Center.

Some changes were already made to the proposed budget that came out on March 1st, with health insurance decreasing by \$28,000, DMIAAB has decreased by \$5,865 and they expect that the RSD13 budget will be decreased as well due to health benefits savings. He would also like to add \$3,500 for upkeep of the Old North Burial Ground. He did obtain a Neglected Cemeteries grant from the State of Connecticut and the Historical Society agreed to take the lead on this.

Bob Yamartino asked Ed Bailey if he would provide definitive numbers of the projected savings in health benefits and Mr. Bailey did not want to do that as it is still being negotiated. Mr. Bailey asked Mr. Yamartino to not reveal any details other than what the Superintendent may speak about as they have agreed that they were not going to speak about this. Mr. Yamartino will recommend that the Board of Education not vote on their budget until final health benefits numbers are received. He will also encourage the Board to reduce their budget closer to the MBR.

Jim Irish will meet with Al Rusilowicz on the details of any changes, including capital and the school numbers. Ed Bailey stated that he is still working on a Park and Rec capital plan. Bob Yamartino suggested contacting the legislators to increase the percentage allowed for capital and also suggested looking at some of the line items in capital to see if they can be moved to operating. Mr. Bailey noted several increases in the capital plan, including the Town Hall, Community Center and putting some money aside for new P&Z regulations as well as park improvements.

Public Comment

None.

Regional School District 13 Update

Bob Yamartino reported that the Board of Education has reviewed the Superintendent's budget and a couple of issues have come up, including the Latin program and ABA. Many on the board do not feel it is beneficial to eliminate a language without a substitute language in its place. The

proposal for ABA is to reduce many of the staff to part-time employees. The students that are being helped by ABA are probably the most fragile in the district. Mr. Yamartino explained the roles of the coaches and interventionists and noted that he has asked for further details on how many coaches and interventionists there are. Dave Burgess asked how many teachers work in the district and Bob Yamartino felt that total staff was about 300, but did not have that number readily available. There was continued discussion about the role of coaches and interventionists.

Mr. Yamartino also reported that the district's per student costs are in the top 20 percent of the DRG, but achievement scores are in the middle. One of the goals of the Board of Education is to get achievement up and coaches are helping to get there.

Selectman's Report

Ed Bailey reported that he has spent a considerable amount of time at the Council of Small Towns meetings and CCM meetings dealing with legislative issues that directly affect towns. He also mentioned that signs will be put up around town urging people to take their keys, remove their valuables and lock their vehicles. Mr. Bailey stated that there doesn't seem to be as many break-ins, but they are still happening.

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Selectmen Meetings

A. December 18, 2018 regular meeting

Bob Yamartino asked if the grant has come through for Valley Shore and Ed Bailey confirmed that it has. Essex is the lead town on that grant and they will disperse the funds.

Dave Burgess made a motion, seconded by Ed Bailey, to approve the minutes of the December 18, 2018 regular meeting. Motion carried, with Dave Burgess abstaining.

B. January 22, 2019 regular meeting

C. February 19, 2019 regular meeting

D. March 5, 2019 special meeting

Minutes were not yet available for the January through March meetings.

Approval of Tax Refunds

Ed Bailey reviewed that the list of tax refunds were available for the Board members.

Ed Bailey made a motion, seconded by Dave Burgess, to approve the following list of tax refunds: Alan and Patricia Brayshaw, \$17.48, \$84.49, \$146.13, \$100.99; Francine and Stephen Champagne, \$22.37; Querologic, \$2,433.27; Susan Herberger, \$166.21; Justin

Jenning, \$1,025.91; JP Morgan Chase, \$181.94; Rich Stacey, \$126.27; Mildred Simonazzi, \$100; and Wells Fargo, \$34.43. Motion carried unanimously.

Dave Burgess reminded Ed Bailey about the solar panels and net metering. Mr. Bailey stated that there have been discussions about that at CCM and COST meetings and both organizations have put out favorable positions on that. Bob Yamartino stated that the utilities have said that they took the time and expense to run power lines to the individual houses and that overhead needs to be covered somehow.

Adjournment

Ed Bailey made a motion, seconded by Dave Burgess, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First

Minutes Approved _____

Confirmed by _____