

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

Minutes of the December 10, 2020 Regular Meeting via Zoom

Jim Irish called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

Attendance:

Members

Others

X	Irish, Jim	X	Rusilowicz, Al
X	Kowal, Melissa	A	Bailey, Ed
X	Lowry, David	X	Chief Peter Tyc
X	Nick, Joel	X	Bryon Villwock
X	Skelps, Michael	X	Ken Wilson
X	Wolak, Mary	X	Steven Tyc

A=Absent

X=Present

Approval of the Agenda

Melissa Kowal made a motion, seconded by Mary Wolak, to approve the agenda, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes from 11/12/20 Regular Meeting

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Michael Skelps, to approve the minutes from the 11/12/20 regular meeting, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Old Business

A. YTD Revenue and Expenditure Variance Analysis - Al Rusilowicz

Al Rusilowicz began with a review of revenue to date and explained that they are about \$260,000 ahead of last year on taxes and 1.34 percent higher in collections compared to last year. So far, it doesn't seem as if the pandemic has negatively impacted tax collections. The town has received the first quarterly payment of ECS. Land Use is at 62 percent of revenue through October and the Town Clerk's office is at

50 percent. Miscellaneous income is at 116 percent, with a lot of gun permits being sold which is typical during an election year. Mr. Rusilowicz believes that the town will be hard-pressed to hit the budget in Interest income. The town did receive \$4,316 from the Secretary of State's Office to assist with COVID-related election expenses. In summary, the town is at 52 percent of revenue and that doesn't include the Fund Balance.

Dave Lowry joined the meeting at this time.

Moving on to expenditures, Mr. Rusilowicz noted that, generally speaking, everything is right on track. Election expenses will be over budget, but should be offset by the money from the Secretary of State's Office. The town has received \$8,500 from the State of Connecticut for COVID expenses which will help offset some of those as well. FEMA will likely only pay for expenses related to the Fire Department. He does expect the GIS system software to be over budget this year. He was not sure if the system was available to the general public yet and Jim Irish asked if they could have a demo at the January meeting.

Public Works continues to be on track as well. Dave Lowry asked if more overtime is anticipated in Public Works due to the loss of a crew member and Mr. Rusilowicz knew that there was concern about staffing in the event of a snowstorm. At this point, they are accepting applications for the position and he believes the town has engaged a contractor to help with plowing. Mary Wolak asked what account that will be coming out of and Mr. Rusilowicz felt that it would probably fall under storm-related expenses.

Nothing has been spent for the Police Department other than for secretarial work. Fire Department is pretty much on track. Emergency Management has two items over budget due to a rate increase from Everbridge and COVID expenses which is a catch-all account. Moving to Debt Service, Mr. Rusilowicz stated that most of the debt has been paid for the entire year with the exception of the TD Bank loan.

In summary, the expenses are at 36.5 percent but the transfer to capital has not been made yet.

#### B. Middlefield Firehouse Concerns - Fire Department Officers

Chief Peter Tyc explained that the officers had written a letter about their concerns about the future of the firehouse (attached at the end of these minutes). For two years now, there has been talk about forming a committee for the utilization of the firehouse and it has gone nowhere. The roof is leaking and the cost of replacing Engine 2 will probably be higher due to physical constraints. They are struggling with storage in the building as well. Chief Tyc went on to review that the biggest concern is the roof and he reported that the building itself does not meet regulations because it is an unsupported concrete structure. The firehouse has not had an addition completed since 1985 and that was expected to last 20 years. The furnace is also having issues. Looking at the replacement of Engine 2, the length is 27'6" and the new one will have to be that in order to fit in the building. Due to cooling and emission standards, the fire trucks do have to be higher than 10' tall. The tires are out of date and need to be changed (approximately \$3,000). They also found some rust and the springs are shot (approximately \$6,000). The replacement cost of the truck will be at least \$700,000.

Chief Tyc reports that Ed Bailey has promised him that a committee will be formed by the next Selectmen's meeting. Bruce Villwock and Ken Wilson were both present tonight and have done extensive research on these issues. Chief Tyc hoped that those two members of the Fire Department will serve on the committee and thought someone from the Board of Finance should as well.

Chief Tyc also reported that FEMA is coming out with an Aid to Firefighters Grant within the next two weeks. The department's brush truck is approaching 50 years old and is a 2.5-ton truck; however, it carries 1,000 gallons of water and is overloaded. He also noted that the truck is a standard shift and younger members do not know how to drive it. It does not have power steering, nor does it have seatbelts or rollover protection. Chief Tyc feels that it is a liability. FEMA has made brush trucks a priority and they hope to apply for the grant. Their research has shown that a replacement truck will be approximately \$200,000. The problem is that it would have to be stored inside and would take up the whole bay meaning many items having to be stored elsewhere. The grant is a 5 percent matching grant, but would not be happening until after the next budget cycle. The department's grant advisor is pretty well convinced that they can get this truck, but he would like to see the town contribute 25 percent to increase their chances.

Chief Tyc also proposed that he do a video presenting the problems in the firehouse since it is difficult to get together.

Jim Irish has spoken with Ed Bailey about getting a building committee going about a month and a half ago and Mr. Bailey emailed him today explaining that the roll-out of the facilities manager has been limited due to prior commitments, thus the immediate firehouse issues have not been addressed. He noted that the Board of Selectmen will appoint a building committee which will be charged with providing detailed, short-term and long-term capital needs. Mr. Bailey will work with Chief Tyc as to the wording of the charge to this committee and the committee will report to the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance. Mr. Irish agreed that it is time to move this along. He also remembered seeing the pictures of the cramped spaces at the firehouse during the fire department workshop in the last budget cycle.

Chief Tyc reiterated that they are looking for direction and don't want to spend money on something that isn't going to last. Mary Wolak asked when the facilities person will be available and Mr. Irish didn't have the answer to that. Mrs. Wolak felt that they need an overall plan with deadlines and that would require the facilities person to work with the committee. Mr. Irish stated that he would work to get the committee going, regardless of whether the facilities person is available or not.

Chief Tyc also felt that the town will have a paid fire department at some point and living quarters would be necessary. Requirements and standards are changing.

Jim Irish asked about the money required for the grant and Chief Tyc explained that the more the town contributes, the better the chances are to get the grant. Mr. Irish noted that the Fire Department's capital budget is typically around \$300,000 and adding another item at \$50,000 is pretty significant and wondered if the department is really willing to make a priority trade that large. Al Rusilowicz also mentioned that the Fire Department came to the town asking for \$325,000 on very short notice and it was made available and he is a little uncomfortable adding another item like this. Chief Tyc stated that they would not use the \$50,000 if they did not get the grant and the replacement of the truck would move out a couple of years.

Chief Tyc compared this opportunity to the radio system and expressed what a wise move that purchase was. He also stressed the liability of the current brush truck. Discussion continued about the liability associated with the truck and insurance costs. Melissa Kowal appreciates that the Fire Department is looking for grant opportunities and wouldn't mind the gamble since there is such a liability with the truck. She would be in favor of a \$50,000 budget line item toward the grant and also felt that that money would be a good beginning of the line item for future budgeting of replacing that truck. Mrs. Kowal also reminded everyone that the town has a healthy Undesignated Fund and this would be a prudent time to

consider doing this. She also mentioned the drought situations across the country and the need for a brush truck. Mary Wolak agreed with Mrs. Kowal. Joel Nick also agreed, but wasn't sure about the amount.

Jim Irish asked if the grant consultant had expressed the likelihood of getting the grant at other amounts and Chief Tyc explained that he had said those that paid 25 percent seemed to have a favorable review on the majority of grants. He also added that their consultant has a success rate of 75 to 80 percent of obtaining grants and just recently secured a grant for the same type of truck for another department. Chief Tyc is confident in the process right now, but could not guarantee that they would get the grant.

Dave Lowry asked if it would be better to show the goodwill up-front or wait until next year to fund the item. Chief Tyc felt it would be better if they could show that the town will fund the line item but added that it might help if the town didn't have any money as well. He did not feel that FEMA would actually come and check the books. Dave Lowry asked Chief Tyc to check with the grant writer to see which would be better in this particular situation and offered to have a special meeting to make the transfer, if necessary. Jim Irish reminded everyone that it is an amount of money that is above the threshold that the board can commit as new money as well as setting up a new capital line item. Al Rusilowicz explained that it would require a town meeting.

Michael Skelps generally supports the intent to supply the money toward the grant project, but also questioned the overall needs. He would hope to see a plan for the overall expenditures over time. Chief Tyc reminded everyone that the last fire truck sold for \$101,000 and was put back into the town's budget, not the fire department's budget. Chief Tyc also explained that it was not his intent to have the board appropriate money tonight and no money would actually be needed until after July. He noted that he did not want to waste his time if the board did not want to fund the grant.

Al Rusilowicz asked if we would be able to use South District's grant application as a basis for this application and Chief Tyc stated that every department is unique in what they do. This truck would be an all-weather truck and they are looking to expand its uses as well as keep it under the CDL limit so that anyone can drive it. The key factor is usually how it would benefit the community.

Mary Wolak asked if the board needed to make some type of commitment on this and Jim Irish agreed. Al Rusilowicz felt that the Board of Finance could endorse the project. Mr. Irish stated that if the board agreed to move forward, he would be happy to work with Chief Tyc to create a letter with strong enough language to show their commitment. Mr. Irish agreed that grants are a good thing, but asked if the entire amount would need to be funded in FY 2021-2022 or if it could be split over two years. Chief Tyc stated that there would be one year to complete the project from the time of award but felt it would probably take six months to get this truck and not overlap to a second year.

Jim Irish asked the board to consider the intention of putting \$50,000 into the budget next year for the purpose of offering matching funding to a grant for the brush truck. The board agreed and Mr. Irish will write a letter to go with the grant application indicating a \$50,000 matching fund intention. Chief Tyc hopes to have further details for the board's January meeting and thanked everyone.

## New Business

### A. Approval of 2021 Meeting Calendar

Jim Irish reviewed the proposed meeting calendar with meetings on the second Thursday of each month. Workshop meetings are proposed for Tuesdays and Thursdays in March and April. Mr. Irish also included the school district's major budget dates as well, with the budget referendum to be held a week before the town's vote. Joel Nick did mention that Tuesday nights are difficult for him, but did not propose they change any dates.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Joel Nick, to approve the 2021 Meeting Calendar as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

#### B. Update from last night's Board of Education Meeting

Jim Irish reported that the district has had some recent COVID cases and quarantining. He thought that the high school was now fully remote because of the quarantining, but both Joel Nick and Dave Lowry noted that they are back in school. It was also reported that the district finalized negotiations with the support staff, but no details were provided. Blum Shapiro completed their FY 2020 audit through June 30<sup>th</sup> and a copy will be posted at the Town Hall and on the RSD13 website. The year-end surplus for June 30<sup>th</sup> was a little higher than they had originally expected (\$838,000) and \$616,000 of that had been used in the budget. That leaves a very low fund balance available for future budgets and some of the balance may be used for COVID expenses. This will likely mean that RSD13 will not be able to present an even \$ budget - year to year, and Middlefield's education expenses will be going up!

The budget process is underway and Dr. Serino proposed redesigning the budget engagement process, but Mr. Irish wasn't sure what that would mean. Staffing moves have been made and will likely carry over into next year's budget. They have hired a couple of virtual learning proctors to help with that process and have had a temporary human resources person currently working full-time due to Covid demands. This will likely be an added position in the 2022 budget.

Bob Yamartino and Ed Bailey have both suggested that the Board of Finance wait until Dr. Schuch is on board and in CT before meeting with him.

Dr. Serino also presented a list of budget priorities to the Board of Education which Mr. Irish reviewed.

Jim Irish also announced that the Board of Education will be holding a special meeting next Wednesday, December 16th to celebrate Dr. Serino's years of service. Mr. Irish drafted a letter that he would like to send to express his personal point of view and share the thoughts that the full Board of Finance has enjoyed her guidance and leadership. The board agreed to have their names added to the letter and Mr. Irish will ask Bob Moore or Bob Yamartino to read the letter at the meeting.

#### C. First Selectman's Report Email

Jim Irish read from Ed Bailey's email announcing the sudden passing of Jack Handley, who worked for the Public Works department for 32 years and 22 days. Mr. Bailey also reported that Middlefield has had a total of 95 confirmed cases of COVID and no deaths reported. Durham has had 173 confirmed cases. Middlefield's infection rate has been 39 per 100,000 over the past two weeks which Dave Lowry stated works out to essentially two people. Meriden is at 89 per 100,000, Middletown is 46 per 100,000 and Durham is 36 per 100,000. The town is now in "community transmission stage" which makes it difficult to determine where an infection comes from. Two town staff have had COVID-19 and both are currently back at work. No quarantining of other staff had been required.

Vaccines are rolling out and the initial impact on Middlefield will be that EMS people should be inoculated before the end of December. The next phase will likely include all police and fire before mid-January. It is possible that municipal employees will be at the end of that phase. The general public will follow in the next phase. Mary Wolak added that teachers may be included in the phase with police and fire as well. Distribution will occur in small events via doctors and pharmacies.

D. Other

There was some further discussion about the Fire Department and what they would want vs. what they would need. It was felt that a full paid fire department is not going to happen any time soon. Dave Lowry felt that the priority is to have a place to house a “ non-customized” fire truck.

Al Rusilowicz suggested that they appropriate \$25,000 out of contingency this fiscal year and \$25,000 the next year in order to minimize the impact without having a separate meeting. He thought that that would be far better received by the community. Jim Irish added that he hoped that the \$50,000 would come out of the total capital budget for the fire department.

Jim Irish reiterated that he will push at the next Board of Selectmen’s meeting to have the committee move forward.

Adjournment

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Mary Wolak, to adjourn the meeting. Motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:14 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First

**MIDDLEFIELD VOL. FIRE COMPANY Inc.**

*Established 1934*  
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To: Board of Selectman

December 3, 2020

Board of Finance

The Middlefield Fire Company continues to struggle with issues concerning our building. The building has outlived its use. The last building renovation was conducted in 1984 and was expected to last for the next 25 years. It has been discussed with both boards many times about these concerns, the plan for a utilization committee made of members of the Company as well as the public have never materialized. We were told at last year's budget review that this would be a priority in the coming year.

While we can use the current pandemic as an excuse, we believe that we can safely and effectively move forward with this. Zoom meetings have become a way of life in 2020. We have two members of the Company that are working on issues and problems that we now have. These two have formed a list of concerns for today and also some for the future. They have obtained pricing on fast approaching repairs and issues. They are ready to go and have been.

Unfortunately delaying this issue has many long-term effects especially on any financing of any projects. Cost for most things rise between 3-5% each year. A few things to consider are as follows. We have not stated a committee for the replacement of our 2002 engine. This has been delayed because of space limitations of the current bay. The overall length of the vehicle has to be under 27' 6" to allow for access to the only entrance door. This requires the need for a specialize custom truck increasing the cost significantly. It will require us to form a custom plan rather than use a standard drawing of a truck that already has been built. This was also an issue with the tanker replacement and the 10' garage doors. Requirements have changed over the last 20 years and things like pollution controls, required equipment to remain compliant and safety standard all play an important role in apparatus replacement. Lastly every year we delay adds to the cost increase of 3-5%, a considerable cost when we are looking at a \$700,000 price tag.

The roof on the firehouse has been evaluated. We were told in 2018 that the expected life of the flat roof was at most 5 years. Replacement costs have been obtained and we are looking at a bill of over \$250,000. Flat roofs are not favorable to New England's weather and the roof has several leaks that have developed. Replacement of the roof with a peaked type truss roof is an option but it has to be part of the overall a plan has to be in place.

We are currently considering applying for a FEMA grant to replace our 50-year-old converted military truck that is used to fight brush and woods fires. The parameters of the vehicle set forth by FEMA requires a truck that seats 4 and has many added features. This will require the vehicle to be somewhat longer and possibly higher. The bay it is in now has a 10' door as well as storage for various pumps and equipment. We could "make it work" in the short term but the equipment has to be stored someplace. We do not have any CNR funds to replace this and the cost savings for the town will be about \$200,000.

Our chances of success on this appears to be good as the upgrade of safety features such as seat belts, rollover protection and other common safety features do not exist in the present vehicle.

In closing, the taxpayers of Middlefield are facing a significant bill in future repairs to keep the firehouse operational and safe. We the members of the Fire Company want to be proactive in spending money wisely and only once to improve the facility in a manner that has long term effects. The basis of this letter is to make this request a part of the public record again. We need to move forward and face the issues and get them addressed for the future. Please get this committee in place and start the hard tasks of addressing the building issues for the future.

Respectfully submitted

Peter Tyc – Chief

William Konefal – Deputy Chief

Steven Tyc- Assistant Chief

Jeff DiCostanzo- 1<sup>st</sup> Captain

Nicholas Tyc-2<sup>nd</sup> Captain

Brian Dumas 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant

Ken Wilson 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant

Bruce Villwock- Trustee