

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the November 17, 2020 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Ed Bailey called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM. Ed Bailey, Carol Bufithis, and Bob Yamartino were present. Jim Irish, Chairman of the Board of Finance, and Hannah Malcolm, Director of Parks and Recreation, and Fire Chief Tyc were also present.

Approval of Agenda

Carol Bufithis made a motion, second by Bob Yamartino, to approve the agenda. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Selectmen

- a. October 20, 2020 – Regular Meeting

Ed noted a correction that needed to be made under the “Grant Updates” Section, item “c. Neglected Cemetery Grant”, page 2, the amount should be \$3,300.00 rather than \$33,000.00.

Carol Bufithis made a motion, second by Bob Yamartino, to approve the minutes with the noted correction of the October 20, 2020 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried.

COVID-19 Update

Mr. Bailey stated that Middlefield entered the “Red Zone” several weeks ago with 16 cases per 100,000 people. He reported that the town had 26 cases per 100,000 two weeks ago and that we are currently at 16 cases per 100,000 people. Ed shared a slide showing the latest statistics and a color-coded map showing the increase of cases in town. He explained that the color-coded maps will likely be discontinued as cases are increasing statewide. He reported that

Middlefield has had 56 cases since the start of the pandemic with 12 or 13 cases being confirmed within the last two weeks. Numbers of cases in surrounding towns and throughout the state were also reviewed. Ed explained that he continues to attend conference calls about COVID and noted that the indication from the state level is that they want to keep schools open as long as possible which is exactly what District 13 plans to do. There have been instances in the district of quarantine for some individuals and cohorts. Contact tracing has been successful in isolating people quickly and has also helped to determine that exposure and transmission are typically happening outside of the schools. Ed reported that a town staff member tested positive so some adjustments have been made and some staff members are in quarantine as a precaution but those who came in contact with the positive case have since tested negative. He noted that he has re-emphasized the steps staff should be taking to ensure their health and safety. Ed pointed out that Chief Tyc has been working diligently to keep the members of our Volunteer Fire Department safe by ensuring they are all following safety protocols. He also said that he has been in contact with Laura Francis in Durham as well as RiverCog regarding the upcoming winter weather season and the possibility of Public Works staff becoming infected causing a staff shortage during a weather event which is a major concern. They are working on a plan to be sure Public Works departments will have help should employees be out due to quarantine or infection.

A pop-up COVID testing event was held at the Middlefield Community Center by Hartford Healthcare. The event was free, walk-in, and open to everyone. About 122 people attended and Hartford Healthcare was pleased with the turn out. Ed said they are working on establishing another event in the near future. He then noted various locations around the Middletown area that are available for testing.

RSD-13 Update

Mr. Bailey asked Mr. Yamartino to provide an update on the school district. Bob reported some exciting news: the hiring of a new Superintendent of Schools. Doug Schuch was hired to the role and has been meeting with School Administrators and staff as well as local officials. Dr. Schuch joins us from the Bedford County, Virginia school district.

Bob went on to report that the playscape, tennis, pickle ball, four square, and basketball courts at Memorial School are all up and running and are in great shape. Bob thanked Hannah Malcolm for her help in getting the project done. He noted that the practice boards have been repaired and that signs will be posted to inform people that the courts are for use by residents of Durham and Middlefield only, after school hours. Bob again reviewed the layout of the courts. Discussion continued around the new courts and other recreation options between the open space area on Strickland Rd and Peckham Park.

Ed continued the update by saying that he enjoyed meeting the new Superintendent and that he looks forward to working with him. Bob then reviewed the extensive hiring process the board went through in interviewing and hiring a new candidate.

Jim Irish spoke about sharing the introduction materials from the Board of Education with the Board of Finance and asked if they could meet with Dr. Schuch and also asked how involved Dr. Schuch would be in preparing this year's budget. Bob felt it was a great idea for Dr. Schuch to

meet with the Board of Finance and offered to work with Meg Maloney to set up a meeting in the future. Bob went on to say that Kim Neubig and Bob Moore have already started working on the budget and that when Dr. Schuch comes on board, he will join them working on the budget right away.

Ed asked for a year-to-date Budget outlook from Mr. Yamartino. Bob said that he was unable to attend the last meeting of the Board of Ed however, he noted that there were a couple of over budget line items due to COVID, but otherwise things were looking good. The board has applied to FEMA for reimbursement for COVID related expenses. Bob asked Jim for input as Jim was at the last meeting and Jim didn't see anything problematic of note and went on to mention a few figures.

Town Financial Outlook

Ed and Jim shared a summary for the projected fund balance for year end 6/30/20. The audited fund balance for the undesignated fund as of 6/30/2019 was \$3.1M with the projected balance of \$3.4M as of 6/30/2020 showing a healthy increase. Ed explained that this leaves us with a fund balance of 19.21% as of the date of this meeting and he expects a year end balance in excess of 20%. Board of Finance policy requires a balance between 14-16% and Jim explained that this puts us in a comfortable position for the next year.

Ed went on to say that Tax Collection exceeded projections. He reiterated that we won't likely see the financial impact of the pandemic until Calendar Year 2021. January Tax Collection should provide a good indication of what we need to prepare for in FY22. Bob reiterated that the Board of Education came in with a "Net Zero" Budget by utilizing the surplus that is normally held for the following year so it should be anticipated that there will be an increase in the school budget for next year.

Ed explained that the town audit would likely not be completed until after the first of the year due in part to the logistics of having the audit done remotely.

Carol asked if many residents took advantage of the tax deferral plan and Ed stated that we had very few people that participated in the program and mentioned that no program was available for January.

Ed continued by discussing early steps in preparation for completing next year's budget.

Motion to authorize a TD Bank account for online payments for the new Land Use Department Permitting System

The Land Use Department is in the process of implementing an online permitting system. Ed said that he has been working on getting this system up and running for some time. With the help of town planner, Robin Newton they have finally selected a system that would work very well for our town. The new system would require a separate bank account to process the online payments. Ed said that TD Bank requires a motion from the Board of Selectmen in order for him to open any new town accounts.

Bob Yamartino made motion, second by Carol Bufithis, to Authorize the First Selectman to open an account with TD Bank for the purpose of online payments to the new Land Use Permitting System. Motion carried.

First Selectman's Report

Mr. Bailey began his report with a recap of the activities surrounding the Presidential Election two weeks ago. The election went smoothly with the biggest hurdle being communicating the change in venue from the Community Center to Memorial School with residents. A mailer was sent to residents and banners and signs were posted around town to notify everyone. All voting equipment as well as PPE had to be moved to Memorial school for the election. Ed explained the equipment was brought to the school the night before the election and was completely cleaned up by 9:30 on election night thanks to the help of our Public Works Department and Custodian Jim Lazor. Ed noted the excellent work of all of the volunteer poll workers and said this was a good exercise in the event that we need to hold polling at Memorial again in the future. Carol said she received a letter from the Democratic Town Committee that praised Mr. Bailey for his work on election day.

Ed briefly spoke about placing an ad for temporary help for the Public Works department as a member of the department may be out for some time. Short staff in Public Works is a big concern with the winter months approaching.

As he mentioned earlier, there has been one positive COVID case with staff so protocols have been stepped up. Ed said that he hopes that we won't have wide spread quarantine for staff members. At the start of the pandemic Ed reduced staff in town offices and some individuals worked from home. While there are currently no plans to return to reduced staffing if things should escalate Ed said he is prepared to modify operations. Currently town offices are operating by appointment only and we've learned that most business can be conducted via mail, email, and drop box limiting interactions with the public.

Senior Services continues to provide meal distribution to local seniors once a week with a prepared bag of frozen meals. Around 30 residents are currently using this program. Our food bank continues to receive plenty of donations and is being well patronized. Ed noted that there will be a food round up at the high school on December 5th.

Ed said that he continues to work on a trash initiative program with the state as has Carol. Ed is participating with the cost of trash disposal group such as pay to throw. Carol's focus has been on organic waste composting programs where she has been learning about different composting options. Discussion continued around the different trash disposal programs, options, and solutions that the state and towns are reviewing. Ed concluded his report and invited those in attendance to share any comments or questions.

Carol reminded the board of a discussion at a previous meeting to plan for a community wide Spring Cleanup and offered to help plan the event. Bob went on to remind the group about a possible volunteer appreciation party and also discussed outdoor, socially distanced options to help our community break out of the stir craziness that quarantine has caused everyone. Hannah Malcolm highlighted some of the activities she plans for the upcoming Holiday Tree lighting. Carol reported that she participated in the racial awareness book read with the library

and is hoping to continue having book reads and speakers to educate our community in the upcoming year and hoped to create a schedule with others involved in the group. Bob suggested a community events calendar that residents could refer to for all things happening around Middlefield at a quick glance and Ed felt that that was a very good and attainable idea. In closing Jim Irish wanted to make note of a new Facebook group: Lake Beseck Friends of the Lake to be used to discuss enjoyments about the lake and to post pictures and report any issues and encouraged folks to take a look at the new page. He also wanted to point out that at the last Board of Education Meeting Draya Gohagon, a 10-year-old activist and Rockfall Resident presented the board with a \$500.00 donation for the school district to buy books to education students about racial awareness. She presented a Power Point where she discusses her activities and Jim offered to distribute copies to those in attendance at this meeting.

Adjournment

Carol Bufithis made a motion, second by Bob Yamartino, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Tonya Hogan

Tonya Hogan
Assistant Town Clerk

Minutes Approved _____

Confirmed by _____