

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the January 19, 2021 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Mr. Bailey called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM. Carol Bufithis and Bob Yamartino were present.

Approval of Agenda

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

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Selectmen

- a. November 17, 2020 – Regular Meeting

Carol Bufithis made motion, second by Bob Yamartino, to approve the minutes of the November 17, 2020 Regular Meeting. Motion carried.

COVID-19 update with Director of Health, Shane Lockwood

Ed introduced Shane Lockwood and commended him on his handling of the constant chaotic changes surround the response to COVID-19.

Shane reported that he would cover two topics, the vaccine in general and how it is distributed to our level and then the priority groups as they have caused quite a bit of confusion.

Shane began by saying that most people look at the COVID vaccine as they do the flu vaccine in the way that we would normally hold flu clinics and distribute flu shots. Health Departments can order up doses of flu shots and hold events to distribute the shots to the community. The COVID vaccine is completely different in that it is not available to smaller providers. The vaccine is manufactured and allocated to Governments worldwide for distribution. Getting the vaccine

distributed is very difficult as we are trying to vaccinate the whole world at once. With the flu vaccine there isn't so many people at once since the flu season happens during one half of the year in the Northern Hemisphere and then the other half of the year in the Southern Hemisphere. Every week, Shane explained, an allocation is given to the United States which is then allocated to the States for further distribution down to the local level. Connecticut is about 1.3% of the US Population so we receive about 1.3% of the allocation which is then distributed to Health Districts. Shane noted that the distribution to local Health Districts seems to have little rhyme or reason. He explained that they place an order by noon on Wednesday weekly for how many doses they require and are then notified the following Monday whether or not they will receive the vaccine making it very difficult to plan clinics, not knowing if they would have the supply. Another issue is that upon receipt of the vaccine shipment they must make sure that the shipment is under temperature control. The product contains a thermometer and must remain frozen. Shane cited some instances where the shipments arrived that were out of temperature and had to be discarded. All of these factors make distribution very difficult. Shane felt that over time this will improve as the vaccine is made available to more providers like pharmacies and doctors in local communities where people are used to going for medical attention. Our Health District was able to vaccinate people in the 1A category which included Health Care Workers and members of our Fire Department as they are Medical First Responders and respond to medical related calls in our town. Shane thanked Middlesex Hospital and Hartford Health Care for their assistance in getting those vaccines done.

Shane continued by describing the 1B group which will consist of people 75 and older. The 75 and older group accounts for 7% of Connecticut's population but also resulted in 80% of deaths related to COVID which is why vaccinating this group is a priority.

There was some confusion at the State level as all groups included in the 1B group were listed on the state website but Shane reiterated that at this time only those 75 and older are eligible. Shane felt that this age group will remain a priority until at least early February when he thinks the range will expand to include those 65 and older. His rough estimate is that by early March Essential Workers will be included as well as those with underlying medical conditions. Shane felt that that phase could last for an extended period as that is a broad group. Following that phase would be the General Public. Ed asked Shane to speak on Case Load.

Shane reported that there was a large increase in cases throughout the fall which was largely expected. The uptick in cases from October to November went from 200 to 800 in our Plainville Southington Health District during that period. Numbers dropped to about 675 in December and Shane figures it should remain about the same through January. He hopes that with continued diligence with wearing masks and staying home when sick that numbers will continue to decline. He said the question he is asked most often is do we still have to wear a mask once we've been vaccinated and the answer is "Yes". He explained that the vaccine protects you but it is unclear how the vaccine impacts those around you. Masks will be around for a while and Shane feels that they help. Ed asked about how the Flu Season has been going

and if there have been many reported cases. Shane said this season has been very manageable. He said that every year the Health District reminds people to wash their hands, cover their coughs, and stay home when sick and it seems that this year people are really doing it.

Ed then shared slides depicting cases across the state at different time frames, and reported daily stats since the start of the pandemic: Middlefield has had a total of 173 cases and 0 deaths. As a contrast, Durham has had 409 cases and 3 deaths. As part of our Health District, Southington has had 2401 cases and 67 deaths while Plainville has had 957 cases and 19 deaths.

Bob took a moment to thank the Plainville Southington Health district for their support to Durham even though they are not actually in the Health District. Discussion continued around the Health District and the wonderful resource they have been before and during the Pandemic.

Reduction in Health District 2021 Fees to Permitted Restaurants and Businesses

Shane was pleased to announce a reduction in permitting fees for the 600-700 businesses that are licensed through our district. Knowing how difficult this past year has been on these businesses the board voted to reduce the fees by 50%. Normally the fees range between \$100-\$300 on average so this equates to a nice savings. Shane explained that this will result in a loss to the District however, they do maintain reserves and felt this was a good way to give back to the local businesses in the community.

Carol and Ed also thanked Shane for his hard work and support with the Health District.

Regional School District 13 Update

Bob reported that there continues to be cases of COVID popping up through out the district which in turn have resulted in isolation of students and staff. Dr. Schuch is officially on board and beginning to get situated in his new role. He has been attending meetings and participating in the Budget process. Ed stated that he plans to invite Dr. Schuch to join a Board of Selectmen meeting in the near future to introduce him to the board.

Town Financial Outlook and FY22 Budget

Mr. Bailey reported that budget preparations are underway for the upcoming fiscal year. During a recent meeting of the CT Council of Small Towns there was some reassurance from the Governor in regards to ECS Funding not sustaining any impact and state funding to towns should stay at the same level it is now with the upcoming State Budget. Ed spoke of the state budget deficit which has been reduced so things aren't quite as dire on the revenue side. Funding from the Federal Government will continue to be a help to the state.

Tax collection for the Town was above normal for the end of December at 68%. January collections could be impacted due to the long-range effects of the pandemic.

Ed continues to work on his budget which will be presented in March. His goal is to have no tax increase but the cost of benefits and school expenses do pose challenges.

The town has finally received 100% of the Town Aid Road Funds for this fiscal year which was a long time coming. Ed and Al Rusilowicz had to work on a very short deadline to submit figures to the state for COVID related expenses. Those funds have been reimbursed totaling \$39,471.00. The Secretary of the State's office has paid a grant to cover half the costs of new computers as well as reimbursed \$4,316.00 for COVID related election expenses. Discussion continued around other reimbursements when it comes to school programs and COVID related expenses.

Bob noted that the Korn School boiler system had 2 significant leaks one of which could not be repaired. He explained that all the pipes in the school had to be drained and that the building is now considered by the insurance carrier to be an abandoned building. Citing the costs to maintain the insurance and upkeep of the building Bob advocated for the building to be demolished. The discussion continued around the costs to upgrade John Lyman School and the desire to bring the community to a vote as to whether the school should be closed and sold or invest in renovations to bring the school up to date. Both Ed and Bob agreed that outlining the costs of either option would be important for townspeople to make an informed decision.

Tax Refunds

Mr. Bailey shared a screen shot of the listing of tax refunds to be approved and read the list into record.

Carol Bufithis made motion, second by Bob Yamartino, to approve the tax refunds as read into record and attached. Motion carried.

First Selectman's Report

Mr. Bailey presented the group with a 2020 Year End Real Estate Transaction Report for the town of Middlefield and reviewed the following stats:

Houses Sold: 62 vs 52 in 2019

Days on Market: 27 vs 54 days in 2019

Selling Price: \$280,000 vs \$240,000 in 2019

Ratio between asking price and selling price increased by 2.9% meaning more sellers got their asking price.

Inventory of houses for sale at the end of 2020 was 12 vs 23 in 2019

Ed then explained that the town of Middlefield will be having a Physical Revaluation this spring and a Request for Proposal will be going out for a contract for Reval Services. The Reval will be for the October 2021 Grand List and he said that the increased sales numbers he reviewed could contribute to an increase in home values.

Ed then reviewed some of the many Legislative meetings he has been attending, including a cost annual meeting, CCM Legislative meeting, and a Chamber of Commerce Legislative Meeting. He explained that a major focus for him has been on legislation regarding Regional School Districts because he feels that Regional School Districts are typically not treated fairly. Ed discussed the top three goals he would like to see with legislation on Regional School Districts.

- To Ensure School Districts include Finance Boards consisting of representatives from member towns to provide input on local budgetary issues
- To allow the use of a 5-year rolling average for determining the average daily membership in a Regional School District for calculating member town allocations
- To provide towns with Regional School Districts a greater oversight of collective bargaining agreements by requiring that such agreements be approved by each local governing body.

Ed explained that the 5-year rolling average for determining the daily membership in the schools would be a big benefit to towns with Regional School Districts as a minor swing in population can cause a major impact on the MIL rate.

Discussion continued around these goals and other legislative items put forward by CCM regarding special education funding.

In closing Ed spoke about MERA, the trash to energy plant in Hartford. He explained that he and Carol have been attending meetings for the CT Coalition of Sustainable Management Material. Ed has participated in the group focusing on “pay to throw” option while Carol has been involved with the composting group. Both are focused on how to control the amount of waste being processed. Ed noted that the MERA plant will be going through an orderly closure as of July 1, 2022 at which time our trash will be shipped out of state. Discussion continued around transfer stations and trash shipping costs as well as different recycling option for all types of materials and incentivizing people to participate.

Adjournment

Bob Yamartino made a motion, second by Carol Bufithis, 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 _____