

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

Minutes of the February 16, 2021 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Ed called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM. Ed Bailey, Carol Bufithis, and Bob Yamartino were present.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Bailey recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda

Add item 9.a. Possible Purchase of 385 Jackson Hill Road.

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

Public Comment

Jim Irish was present. There was no public comment.

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Selectmen

a. December 22, 2020 – Regular Meeting

There was some discussion around the response to Mr. Vasel's letter and Public comment at the December 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

Carol noted that Charles Vasel's name was spelled incorrectly in the Public Comments section of the December 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting however, the spelling was taken directly from the letter that Mr. Vasel sent to Town Hall employees and members of the Board of Selectmen so this change was not made.

***Carol Bufithis made a motion, second by Ed Bailey, to approve the minutes of the December 22, 2020 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. (Bob abstained as he was not present at the meeting.) Motion Carried.***

b. January 19, 2021 – Regular Meeting

***Ed Bailey made a motion, second by Bob Yamartino, to table approval of the minutes of the January 19, 2021 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried.***

COVID-19 Update

As a follow up to Shane Lockwood's extensive report at the last meeting Ed explained that people 65 and older are now eligible to receive the vaccine however, distribution and supply continues to be an issue. Ed noted that if you are able to be flexible with where you go to receive the vaccine it is easier. He said that he will be going for his vaccine in Hartford. Free round-trip transportation is being offered by Middletown Area Transit as well as Estuary Transit on the Shoreline to bring seniors for COVID testing and vaccine appointments. Ed has been using social media, email, and the senior newsletter to get this information out to the public. Members of the board discussed what age group are considered "seniors", who are eligible for the senior meals provided by the senior center as well as usage of the Senior Bus. Bob suggested that the newsletter be sent to residents aged 55 and older.

Ed reported that our infection rate has dropped to about 3.5% and hospitalizations have decreased as well. In his many discussions with Shane Lockwood there was some indication that the Federal Government is predicting a third wave in March with the potential of being worse than the first two waves. Ed felt that there was little to support this and suggested that perhaps it could have been put out there so that in the event that it doesn't happen they can say that we are doing things right. Carol added that she was recently on a Zoom call with Dr. Anthony Fauci. During the meeting Dr. Fauci covered many topics, one being "booster" shots and the need for a booster when it comes to the South African Variant of COVID. Dr. Fauci explained that the current vaccines work just fine with the other variants of the virus.

RSD-13 Update

Mr. Bailey noted that the joint meeting with the Board of Finance and Dr. Schuch went very well and he hopes to have another joint meeting in the near future.

Mr. Yamartino reported that a policy for diversity and inclusion has been developed and is in its final review stages. The Policy Committee will be reviewing the policy and will then make their recommendation on adopting and making it a Board Policy.

The Board of Education has had a preliminary high-level overview of the Budget presentation. The Gross Budget is coming in under last year by about 1%; Net Budget is coming in at a little over 3% more than it was last year. Bob explained that enrollment has shifted to Durham and the state ECS funding has come in as well which means a Net effect of about \$252K to Middlefield and approximately \$1.5M to Durham. He went on to explain that the primary driver to the Net is the allocation of about \$2M from the surplus to last year's budget in order to come in at a Net Zero. Bob felt that they were presented with a responsible budget. He noted that there may be stimulus funds from the "Elementary and Secondary School Emergency

Relief" (ESSER) Fund which could help offset some future expenses. Unfortunately, he said, the funds could not be used for past expenses.

The Educational Resource Committee along with the Utilization Committee have been looking at the potential closing of John Lyman School. Bob stated that we are at a point that we really either need to invest in the needed improvements or shut it down; we can't continue to put it off, taxpayers will need to make the decision. The Meriden Hills Baptist Church has expressed serious interest in taking over the school and have requested a tour of the facility. If we put off making a decision on the school, we could potentially lose the opportunity to transfer the property to the Baptist Church to be used as a K-12 school. Discussion continued around the logistics involved with the school closure and potential sale of the property.

Bob continued his report by stating that the Board of Ed voted on a resolution that they will go forward with the demolition of Korn School unless the board is notified by the end of March that the Town of Durham will absorb all expenses related to the operation of the building by July 1<sup>st</sup> due to the budgetary implications. The selectmen continued to discuss options to cover costs of demolition as well as the costs, bonding, and possibilities for moving students around the district in the event that John Lyman is closed.

#### FY20 Town Audit Review

The Preliminary Audit will be reviewed by the Board of Finance and Auditors on Thursday at the Board of Finance meeting. Ed shared a screen shot of the General Fund balance which is \$3.478M or 21% of our current budget. Tax collections are above expectations and Ed said he expects that percentage to remain. Bob noted that the percentage guidelines are 15-18% which Jim Irish confirmed. Jim noted that our current percentage is on the higher side in anticipation of uncertainty over COVID, Fire Department Building Expenses, Road Work, School Budget increase and the possible decline in ECS Funding. Bob suggested that if some of those additional funds are intended to be used specifically for the Fire Department Building then they should be transferred to the Capital Non-Recurring Fund.

Based on the numbers that Ed presented from the audit report the town is in a good position and has monies that we can allocate for various projects going forward.

#### FY22 Budget Discussion

Ed and Al Rusilowicz continue to work on putting together the FY-22 Budget. There are increases in the preliminary numbers for the school budget, as Bob reported, as well as increased medical insurance costs. Ed noted that there are some increased costs in some departments such as the GIS Mapping as well as the online permitting system for Building department. Labor contract negotiations should begin in the near future.

Mr. Bailey said that he feels more confident in the budget at this time and is reasonably optimistic that the MIL Rate can be maintained at the level it is now. He will have his budget presentation ready on March 1<sup>st</sup> and will review it in a joint meeting with the Board of Finance and Board of Selectmen.

Bob thanked both Ed and Jim Irish for their efforts over the years with maintaining a fiscally responsible budget.

#### Possible Purchase of 385 Jackson Hill Road

385 Jackson Hill Road is the corner lot at Mack Road and Jackson Hill Rd and abuts Town Hall. It is currently owned by the Augur family and they are in the process of the cleaning out the house and putting it on the market. The asking price is around \$127,000.00 as the house is in rough shape and on the smaller side. Ed said that in talking with various people it appears to be a valuable piece of property for the town to acquire for future use as it is a corner lot and contiguous to Town Hall property. Ed feels that this is a very reasonable price and plans to move forward with making an offer – pending approval of the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance, and town meeting to allocate funds for the purchase. Although Ed was not able to give an immediate description of what the property would be used for it would be a very good opportunity to increase our frontage on Jackson Hill Road and open a number of possibilities for use in the future. Carol agreed that this would be a good opportunity for the town. Citing other land acquisitions around town including the Pogmore Farm, Bob felt he would like to see what the ultimate plan might be for all of these properties. While he is not on the Firehouse Building Committee, Bob suggested the relocation of the Fire Department to the Town Hall as there is already the maintenance garage that could be continued into a garage to house the large Fire Trucks and the current Town Hall could then be used as offices for the Fire Department, Police and Emergency Services. The Fire Department Building could then be used as the Town Hall or Town Offices could be combined at the Community Center. Bob went on to say that even if none of these things were to happen and we still acquired 385 Jackson Hill there would always be the option of resale if zoning regulations allowed. Bob noted that resolutions going forward should include the cost of either renovating the current house as well as the cost of demolition.

In the interest of time, as the family plans to put the house on the market, Ed explained that his focus right now is on the acquisition of the property and if the family is agreeable then we could vet this out with the necessary boards and hold a Town Meeting.

#### Resolutions for the DEMHS (Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security) Region II – Security Grant Program for FY19 & FY20

Mr. Bailey read the Authorizing Resolution in to record and explained that it authorizes him to enter into agreements, such as Federal and State grants, with the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.

*Resolved, that the Middlefield, Connecticut, Board of Selectmen 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 Resolved, that Edward P. Bailey as First Selectman of the Middlefield, Connecticut, Board of Selectmen, is authorized and directed to execute and deliver*

*any and all documents on behalf of the Middlefield, Connecticut, Board of Selectmen 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.*

***Carol Bufithis made motion, second by Bob Yamartino, to approve the Authorizing Resolution. Motion Carried.***

***Bob Yamartino made motion, second by Carol Bufithis, that the First Selectman is authorized 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 Region2 Regional Emergency Planning Team (Region 2 REPT) as per the Authorizing Resolution dated February 16, 2021. Motion Carried***

#### Health Enhancement Community (HEC) - Discussion

Ed wanted to make the Board aware that the Health Enhancement Community, founded by Dr. Mike Kalinowski, has been working to address the issue of nourishment and food insecurity in the local community. The program has recently partnered with the “Abundance” App which can be used by the public to identify food resources and other services in their area. The pandemic has contributed to many people needing food assistance in our community. Ed felt that this resource would be a great way to connect the public with the resources they need and really assist people struggling with food insecurity. He plans to get Middlefield involved with using this service as it becomes available.

#### Appointments

- a. Planning and Zoning Commission
  - i. Jay Brown – 1/1/2021 to 12/31/2023 Member, Term 2/3
  - ii. Eric Ekblade – 1/1/2021 to 12/31/2023 Member, Term 2/3
  - iii. William Warner – 1/1/2021 to 12/31/2023 Alternate, Term 1/3
- b. Zoning Board of Appeals
  - i. Michael Olszewski – 5/1/2020 to 4/30/2025 Alternate, Term 1/3
  - ii. Charles Augur – 5/1/2020 to 4/30/2025 Member, Term 2/3
- c. Middlefield Housing Authority
  - i. Barbara Jean DiMauro – 10/1/2020 to 9/30/2025 Member, Term 2/3

***Bob Yamartino made a motion, second by Carol Bufithis, to approve the appointments as noted. Motion carried.***

## First Selectman's Report; Legislative Issues Affecting Municipalities

Mr. Bailey spoke again on some of the legislative issues affecting municipalities, reviewing his desire to have our Annual Assessment based on a 3-to-5-year average rather than yearly. This would smooth out the sometimes-sharp increases in our assessment making budget planning more stable. He also touched on the wish to give more authority to the school Finance Committee when it comes to the school budget.

Bob noted that our finance committee does have budget review as an agenda item for an upcoming meeting and he felt that this was a step in the right direction. Bob went to say that he thought it could be possible to adopt the Annual Assessment Average option either by charter change or via referendum. Ed replied that that was a good suggestion and would like to get a legal opinion on that as it could be regulated by State Statute.

Ed explained that the Governor's Budget was released and indicates that funding to municipalities will remain flat over FY21-22 and FY22-23, there will be no reduction in grants or ECS funding which is great news. ECS Funding amounts to \$1.84M a year for the next two years.

Mr. Bailey met with the Town Planner and the Affordable Housing Plan Consultants for a preliminary look at demographics and housing affordability in Middlefield. They also did a survey review regarding the community's feelings on affordable housing which 176 people participated in. That data will be compiled for further review at an upcoming Board of Selectmen meeting to explore future needs for Affordable Housing in Middlefield.

Carol is part of the Durham & Middlefield Racial Justice Team who are organizing events that will take place over the next year. "Community Conversations" will take place monthly and will involve either a book, film, pod cast, or speaker. An event taking place on February 25<sup>th</sup> will be sponsored by Levi Coe Library, followed by an event on March 11<sup>th</sup> sponsored by Durham Public Library. The Durham & Middlefield Racial Justice Team plans to apply for grant funds in order to pay for speakers to join Community Conversations. Carol said that the group is hoping for many people in our communities to participate in these events and have been getting the word out via the town website as well as social media.

In closing, Ed briefly noted that the MERA Board will be meeting next week to set the tipping fee to which Ed expects a hefty increase.

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_