

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the May 4, 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 was also in attendance.

Approval of Agenda

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

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Selectmen

- a. April 21, 2020 – Regular Meeting

Minutes were unavailable at the time of the meeting.

Resolution regarding Old Indian Train – Drinking Water State Revolving Fund – Emergency Power Generator Program

Mr. Bailey explained that the town operates a water system in partnership with the town of Durham to serve approximately 10 customers in the area of Old Indian Trail. We have an underground storage tank that is filled from a well and that water is then gravity fed down to the customers, requiring no pump to operate. A major overhaul took place about four years ago to replace the storage tank and make equipment upgrades. Previously the Board of Health issued a citation regarding the condition of the pump house at the site which required a new roof structure and new roof to be installed. Currently the State of Connecticut is requiring all Public Water Supplies to have an emergency generator installed at the site of the water system. We have a portable generator at the site however, it does need to be started manually. Ed stated that there is funding available for this program as long as the town meets the states required criteria. The cost for this project will be approximately \$20,000.00 (shared expense

with Durham). The resolution, needed by the Department of Public Health, allows for the installation of an emergency generator, propane storage, related electrical systems and fencing in accordance with the standards set forth by the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health's Drinking Water Section.

Bob Yamartino made motion, second by Carol Bufithis, to approve the attached Resolution regarding Old Indian Trail water system for funding from the State of Connecticut Drinking Water Revolving Fund – Emergency Generator Program. Motion carried.

COVID-19 Update

Currently there are 13 confirmed cases in Middlefield and no deaths. There are 40 people currently hospitalized in Middlesex County. Ed explained that the state is revamping how they share the statistics. While numbers appear to be declining it more-so looks as though we've reached a plateau. Any positive testing cases are reported to the Department of Public Health. Discussion continued around antibody testing and if those test results are being tracked and if they will be made public. Ed said that he will be distributing masks for business. The state partnered with the CT Business and Industry Association to establish a program for businesses to sign up for free masks for employer and their employees. Emergency Management Director Rob Poturnicki picked up the masks at the distribution location in North Haven and Ed will be providing the masks to those who requested them.

Governor Lamont has determined that the state will begin to reopen on May 20th and he will be providing guidance as to how this will take place. At this time Beauty Salons, Barber Shops, and Restaurants with outdoor seating will be allowed to reopen with proper social distancing. Ed is working to provide temporary zoning regulations that may include an Executive Order to allow for additional outdoor seating and tent installation at our local restaurants. Ed reviewed possibilities for our local restaurants to increase or add outdoor dining areas. He said he is currently waiting for guidance on serving alcoholic beverages in these temporary dining areas.

Ed stated that with guidance from the Health Director the Town Hall is scheduled to return to Full Staff and normal office hours as of May 26th. Plexi glass shields will be installed at the Town Clerk & Tax Collector counter areas as well as in the Land Use Department. Buildings will continue to be closed to the public and operate by appointment only. He expects that staff will continue to seek alternate means to service customer requests such as mail, email, fax, and telephone. Staff will be guided to wear masks in designated areas. He also said that meetings will need to take place at the community center to allow for social distancing. Ed plans to work with the Tax Collector to possibly establish a walk-up Tax Payment window as many of our residents pay their tax bills with cash. The Tax Deferment forms have been finalized and will soon be made available via our town webpage or by mail.

Regarding Summer Camp, Ed said that the state has issued very detailed requirements for how the camp would need to be operated. The park and rec director has created an operating plan however, most municipalities are reporting that they will not be holding a summer camp program. The state issued guidance requires for campers to be kept in groups of 10 with no co-

mingling with the other campers. In the even a child becomes ill the camp would then be closed down for two weeks which poses an issue with providing refunds in that instance. Ed said that he is awaiting further guidance from the Department of Public Health but felt summer camp might not be possible.

The governor is expected to announce whether schools will remain closed for the rest of the school year. Bob stated that there have been councils that have recommended that schools should not reopen at this time. If they did reopen it would require limited hall traffic, staggering dismissals, as well as adding lunch periods to limit students in the cafeteria. Carol said that the camp her daughter runs has decided to move to an online program and suggested that we could possibly do the same.

Ed stated that the Library remains closed and reopening is to be determined.

Ed continued by saying that Wadsworth park was overrun this past weekend and that the DEEP did provide a Park Ranger to manage the situation at Cherry Hill Rd. and turn away cars as needed. Unfortunately, parking did overflow to the St. Colemans church parking lot as well as Hubbard Street and police were on scene to get people moving. The church has since put up traffic cones and signage to stop people from parking in the area. More "No Parking" signs will be added to Hubbard Street as well.

Review of various Executive Orders issued by the Governor that affect municipalities

Ed explained that some conflicting information came from the governor's office last week regarding the authority of the town to forego a town meeting to pass the budget. The Board of Selectmen passed a resolution to authorize the Board of Finance to adopt the budget with a new timeline. On the governor's conference call with towns it was said that if the town wanted to have a town meeting they could do so. The towns all pushed for clarification and it was finally confirmed that contrary to any interpretation of any other executive order the Town shall appoint the budget making authority to adopt the budget. Therefore, the Board of Selectmen's original plan and resolution will stand. Bob asked what we need to do since our town charter requires a town meeting and Ed explained that the only other business that would need to go to town meeting would be appointment to the Board of Education as well as DMIAAB. Terms for several members will be expiring at the end of June and Ed has asked for guidance from the state on how to handle this issue and that guidance has not been received as of yet. Ed said he is trying to come up with some alternate solutions such as possibly extending terms or allowing a temporary term due to the current state of emergency. If larger gatherings are allowed in the near future, we could possibly hold an outdoor town meeting. Ed said that he plans to issue an Executive Order stating that our town meeting is cancelled until further notice due to the global pandemic. Ultimately, we will need to wait for guidance from the governor.

Budget Update

Mr. Bailey said that the Board of Finance made their budget presentation available for preliminary public comment and asked Jim Irish to share his thoughts. Jim reviewed the Board

of Finance figures as compared to those in the Selectmen's proposed budget. Jim said that they're expecting a drop in the tax collection rate to 97.5 which brings down the taxable grand list quite a bit. The Board of Finance proposed Mill Rate would be 32.22. Jim explained that they will be holding a virtual Public Hearing on May 21st via zoom. All Board of Finance workshops that were held on zoom are currently available on our town webpage and Jim has created an email account for the public to email budget questions and comments for the board to review. The email address is: BOFcomments@middlefieldct.org.

Ed pointed out that during the 2009-2010 recession there was a minimal change in our collection rate but what is concerning at this time is our current unemployment rate. As of April 20th, the unemployment rate in Middlefield was 13.4% and the state rate was 15.3%. The week over week rates were quite high at the end of March and into early April but have since started to decline. Reflecting on the recession, the unemployment rate in Middlefield was about 10% at that time.

The discussion continued around different programs that are available to help small businesses during this uncertain economic time.

L.E.D. Streetlight Conversion Update

Ed said that the project is almost complete and Carol reported that she saw a lot of activity with the streetlight contractors in her neighborhood earlier in the day.

RSD-13 Update

Bob provided some details regarding the school budget. He reviewed total expenses which have come in at about \$500,000.00 over last year; 80% of that expense is employee benefits due to the increase in insurance costs and the other 20% equates to salaries. Bob stated that at the requests of the First Selectmen and Chairmen of the Boards of Finance of both Durham and Middlefield the board has come forward with a net zero budget. He said that since they are not educating in the school buildings there has been a cost savings on many things including maintenance, utilities, and transportation. The board took those savings and applied them to next years budget. The estimated surplus of \$616,500 from this year will be used to offset next year giving us a net zero budget. Another item Bob pointed out is that the state has reduced our ECS Funding by \$50,000 and also the enrollment switch means an added expense to Middlefield of about \$60,000. Bob noted that the budget was approved unanimously by the board to be presented to the public at a public hearing scheduled for May 13th. Bob encouraged anyone with strong feelings about adding anything or taking anything away from the budget to join the hearing or let the board know by other means if they are unable to attend the hearing.

First Selectman's Report

Mr. Bailey said that he did cover some topics under earlier agenda items but reported that there have been some great food donations made to our food bank. He said that Jaffaria, the Islamic center on Route 66, held a food drive and donated hundreds of cans of food. Ed also

said that Victory church held another drive as well. We are serving about 30 families from our food bank. Ed said that thankfully people are starting to see unemployment benefits which will hopefully bring some relief. He's very pleased with its success. Ed said that sadly the senior center will remain closed for the foreseeable future as we know our senior population is the most vulnerable. One bright side to the building being closed is that it has provided a great opportunity to complete some much-needed maintenance and repairs that were very difficult to do with the building being open. Ed hopes to have the entire upper level of the building plastered and painted by mid-summer which is a job they've needed to do for many years. They are working on floors and window coverings as well.

Carol asked if the DMIAAB adopted the increase in pricing for individual dump passes and Bob also questioned if the commercial increase was adopted as well. Ed wasn't sure what the DMIAAB commission had finalized but said that he would contact Dom Delvecchio to find out. Discussion continued around the transfer station. New signage was placed at the transfer station as well as hand sanitizing stations. Carol said she continues to drop off gloves from the Lion's Club.

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 _____