

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the July 6, 2020 Regular Meeting

Please note: most of this Zoom meeting did not record. The recording begins at the tail end of the RSD-13 Update/ beginning of the First Selectman's Report with discussion around how to better communicate with residents and provide important information regarding several issues in town including Wadsworth Falls and Lake Beseck.

Call to Order

Ed Bailey, Carol Bufithis, and Bob Yamartino were present. Jim Irish, Chairman of the Board of Finance was also in attendance.

Approval of Agenda

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

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Selectmen

- a. June 16, 2020 – Regular Meeting

Bob Yamartino made a motion, second by Carol Bufithis, to approve the minutes of the June 16, 2020 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried.

Appointments (Correction to June 16th, 2020)

Planning & Zoning Commission

- i. Kenneth Hinsch (alt to member) Term 01/01/2020 – 12/31/2022 – Fill Expired Term (Howard)
- ii. Paul Pizzo (alt to member) Term 01/01/2020 – 12/31/2022 – Fill Expired Term (Boyle)
- iii. William Warner – Alternate to Fill Vacant Term – 01/01/2018 – 12/31/2020

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

First Selectman's Report

In regards to offering better communication to residents Ed said he would like to have an electronic sign positioned on the Town Green and agreed with fellow board members that posting letters in the Town Times would be another good option.

Ed reported that he met with the leader of a Facebook Group named "Save Wadsworth Falls" at which meeting Ed suggested changing the group name as the word "Save" could be misinterpreted, possibly meaning "save" it from what or "save" it for whom". The leader agreed and happily changed the group name to "Friends of Wadsworth Falls". Ed continued, saying that he has met with members of several State agencies including the DEEP Commissioner, Chief of Outdoor Recreation, State Parks Director, as well as Colonel Lewis of the ENCON Police. During the meeting it was discovered that Alcohol is permitted at the park but the commissioner can place a temporary order banning alcohol on premises for 90 days. The order was placed banning alcohol at Wadsworth. Ed reported that ENCON Police will be stepping up patrolling of the park, however, there are a limited number of officers for the whole state. In our area, the Eastern District, there are only about 2 officers for the whole District. Sadly, the state is short handed for Park Rangers and Seasonal Workers. Parking for the 4th of July Holiday was managed. Signs have been posted at both corners of Whisper Winds & Hubbard Street as well as Wallace Way stating "No Access to Wadsworth Falls". Additional signs designating "Tow Away Zone" have been posted along Cherry Hill. Because of an incident where people were parking perpendicular to Main Street on private property Ed spoke to the property owner and suggested posting "No Trespassing" signs. Tickets were being issued to people parking illegally. Ed stated that since the second week of June there have been a few issues at the Lake Beseck Beach. Ed reached out to Park and Rec Director, Hannah Malcolm, about putting someone at the beach every day to control the gate and added additional hours for the gate person to be there. Ed will work with the Board of Finance to obtain additional funds to secure the beach area on a daily basis. This past Saturday there were approximately 60 people at the beach and Ed noted that there was no issue with social distancing, however, the lifeguard can't be responsible for pass checking when they need to be paying attention to swimmers. Ed felt there is a need for an additional person to man the gate. Six temporary concrete barriers have been installed at the north end of the lake because of a recent issue where about 8 cars were parked along the road with people barbecuing. Ed explained that he has gotten both compliments and complaints regarding the barriers but he has explained to those with concerns that the barriers are temporary and they are planning to remove them at the end of the season. Ed wanted to avoid putting up a costly permanent guardrail which would ultimately block a key access point to the lake for maintenance especially when the lake is drained in the winter months. Ed pointed out that Park and Rec recently met and that he had the commission institute Emergency Rules for the Dog Park because they've been having issues there as well. Signs will be posted to state "No Picnicking" as well as "No Motorized Vehicles" which includes trail bikes and quads. The chain that restricts access to the property has been repeatedly cut and replaced

but if this continues to happen another means to secure the King Property will need to be implemented. These issues have been overwhelming to deal with, Ed explained. Due to COVID people have been looking for things to do and he also noted that Powder Ridge has sustained some damage from individuals on motorized vehicles who accessed the property illegally. Carol noted that she has heard complaints about people gathering on King Road at the Lake Beseck Dam and asked if signage was in place at this area. Ed said that there have been swimmers there and when he questioned DEEP their response was that there are posted signs however, when Ed checked for signage, he saw that they had been removed. He did request more signs. ENCON Police and Troop F have been patrolling “hot-spots” such as King Road and the Boat Launch. Ed continued saying that DEEP staff and all State Parks have been under more stress than ever before with an unprecedented number of park closures for overcrowding. Ed has observed numerous people walking along Main Street to and from the falls area as well as illegal parking. At his meeting with DEEP they talked about airing Public Service Announcements for the boroughs of New York to inform people just how overwhelmed State Parks are and that if people choose to visit, they may not have a pleasant experience.

The “Friends of Wadsworth” Group did a couple of clean up days to help remove some of the waste left behind by visitors. Ed noted that ENCON Police have been told not to issue citations for violators due to the current social climate. Discussion continued around towing illegally parked cars and the impact that would have on future visitors, specifically if a person gets towed and posts to social media about the cost they incurred and the bad experience in general. Ed said that his position on the problems that continue at the park is if the State can’t manage the property then it needs to be closed. Unfortunately, the state adamantly opposes a closure. Since the state will not close down the park Ed has been working on a few different ideas to handle the overload of visitors, one possibility being to close Cherry Hill Rd and establish a detour which would ultimately make getting to the parking area at the falls impossible. Police would have to be on site of the road closure and could be costly and may not be possible. Ed is also advocating for the pond on the Middletown side of the park to be filled and the beach opened because the visitors who park in the larger parking area in Middletown eventually end up at the falls area on foot.

Ed continued his report saying that Middletown Area Transit / Middletown Regional Transportation District are moving forward on merging with Nine Town Transit which serves lower Middlesex County. Ed is on the board to negotiate the contract with Connecticut Department of Transportation.

Mr. Bailey also reported that Memorial School is undergoing some renovations which could impact our use of the facility as an emergency shelter. He is working with the Emergency Management Director to be sure we have a plan in place.

Ed has learned that the state has an adopt a park program and is planning to encourage the “Friends of Wadsworth” Group to join as volunteers and engage themselves with the Parks Department of DEEP in an effort to mitigate some the ongoing issues.

Discussion again continued around how to handle the myriad of issues that continue at the falls including closing the park, towing, filling parking spaces at the falls with the cars of residents very early on weekend mornings, and possibly implementing a time limit for visitors to park at the falls lot. Bob also suggested seeking an injunction from the courts to force the park to be

closed for several reasons, specifically the lack of social distancing and that the behavior is contrary to the governor's orders regarding COVID-19; the sheer financial burden to our town and the environmental burden to the park. Ed suggested that the Board of Selectmen compose a resolution to submit to the Commissioner about the conditions at the park. He explained that he continues to forward posts about the conditions from Facebook to the Commissioner and Staff.

Adjournment

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

Respectfully submitted,

Tonya Hogan

Tonya Hogan
Assistant Town Clerk

Minutes Approved _____

Confirmed by _____