

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the August 18, 2020 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Ed Bailey called the meeting to order. Carol Bufithis, Bob Yamartino, and Ed Bailey were present via zoom.

Approval of Agenda

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

Public Comment

Jim Irish was present via zoom. Megan (unsure of last name) was also present; she read a statement to the people of Middlefield and Rockfall from the Democratic Town Committee regarding racism and systematic oppression asking that we join together to work toward actions to support awareness and create unity in our town. In response Ed shared a letter to the community members of the towns of Durham and Middlefield which was created in conjunction with Laura Francis and Superintendent of Schools Kathryn Serino regarding taking actions toward equity and awareness against racism and violence.

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Selectmen

a. July 21, 2020 – Regular Meeting

Bob Yamartino made a motion, second by Carol Bufithis, to approve the minutes of the July 21, 2020 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried.

Storm Isaias Report

Ed went over details of the storm response and the issues with the outage restoration by Eversource. As of midday Thursday Eversource arrived in town with their work crews. As of Tuesday night, 100% of the town was without power, approximately 9% was restored late that evening on a circuit fed from Middletown. By Thursday approximately 85% remained without power, 1% still off line. Ed explained that he had a liaison with Eversource that he worked closely with to obtain details regarding the outages and restoration process. Ed said that the delayed response was due in part to the amount of damage from this storm which he felt exceeded that damage caused by both hurricanes Sandy and Irene in 2011. He noted that forecasts did not predict the severity of Isaias. Eversource uses a forecasting service provided by UCONN which rated this storm as a "4" or "5" (on a scale of 1-5, 1 being most severe, 5 being least severe) when in actuality this storm was more accurately a "2" storm. Ed has been through severe storms in the past and there is an established plan in which the electrical system is made safe and then crews come in to begin restoration efforts. In this particular storm the established plan was not followed at the direction of the governor who implemented a numbers driven plan which didn't resolve the outages in a timely fashion. By Thursday Eversource insisted that they proceed under the normal established plan of restoration. Ed felt that this is what caused the delay in restoration response by 48 hours. He explained that the former chairman of the Public Utility Regulatory Authority, which oversees Eversource, is now the commissioner of DEEP and that in his opinion, all of these agencies are covering for each other when it comes to the issues with the storm response and restoration process. He went on to say that we have never experienced this type of trouble with getting restoration response in our town because the established response plan was always followed. Ed feels that the state government interfered with the plan and disrupted efficient restoration.

Ed reported that the Community Center was opened with emergency generator power on Wednesday in order to open the Cooling Center to residents. Approximately 200 people took advantage of this service. 1000 MRE's were brought in by the states Emergency Management team and about 300 were distributed.

Ed noted that the town crew did a great job working with the Eversource crews hauling away debris and downed trees. He explained that several roads were blocked due to downed trees, poles, and power lines including Baileyville, Long Hill, and Mack Rd.

Everbridge updates were sent out to residents who signed up to provide details of the restoration process. Ed plans to do a mailing to encourage residents to sign up for this notification service. Bob noted that it might have been helpful to have an electronic sign on the town green to notify residents of important information and updates and asked if this was in this year's budget. Ed replied that a sign was not in this year's budget as there was no plan in place for it but went on to say that generators were in the budget and were placed at the Town Hall, Town Garage, and at our cell tower complex. Jim Irish asked if there was any way to get emergency power locally to the lights at route 66 and Baileyville because of the dangerous situation there without traffic lights. Ed responded that it was absolutely terrible that the DOT

and State did nothing to control traffic in that area and that he had requested an emergency generator for the lights but the DOT refused. Ed discussed this issue with the State Police during an emergency management meeting and was told it is not up to the town to place stop signs at the intersections as these are state roads.

RSD-13 Update

Mr. Bailey noted the great work and efforts the Board of Education members have been putting in ahead of the start of the new school year. Bob explained that students will return to school under the Hybrid model in which students with last names A-L will attend in person classes on Monday's and Tuesday's while students with last names M-Z attend in person classes Thursday's and Friday's. Wednesday's will be for distance learning and allow time for the school's to be disinfected. The board spent a lot of time last week discussing fall sports and were very close to voting on cancelling football and possibly all fall sports despite the CIAC recommendation to have all sports resume on a delayed schedule. Mr. Yamartino noted that football is considered a higher risk sport. He went on to say that the Board of Education will discuss this issue at their next meeting and possibly vote to cancel football and other fall sports. Ed added that the CIAC is meeting on Thursday with the Public Health department for further guidance. Bob stated that the policy committee is also meeting to discuss mask policies that need to be implemented at the schools which will in turn make the policies enforceable. Bob noted that there is so much to take into consideration when it comes to athletes and how they interact with each other and others outside of sports as well as the impact those interactions could have on the spread of COVID.

COVID-19 Update

Ed reported that cases are on the decline in Connecticut with 4 currently hospitalized in Middlesex County. He noted that we have had a slight uptick in cases in Middlefield from 18 to 20 cases including 1 currently active case that he knows of. He said the increase could be due to reporting issues. Durham is currently at 45 cases with 3 deaths. 31 states are on the travel advisory list which requires quarantine. CT DPH issued a change in their assumption, previously they said that if a person became sick, they should assume that they have COVID. They now are saying that if someone becomes sick, they do not need to assume it is COVID. Bob noted that Connecticut has one of the lowest infection rates in the country. Ed reiterated that reporting issues continue to be a challenge for accurate statistics, however, we are in a much better position than we have been in months.

Review of Recent Governor Executive Orders

Ed summarized and Executive Order regarding face masks. Any person in a public place indoors or outdoors who does not maintain safe social distance of approximately six feet shall cover their mouth and nose with a mask or cloth face covering. In addition, individuals shall use a mask or cloth face covering when using a taxi, livery, car or other ride share services and any public transportation. If someone declines to wear a face mask for medical reasons, they must be able to provide written documentation from a licensed medical provider or state agency.

First Selectman's Report

Ed reported that brush pick up has already begun and will run through August 28th. Notices were published in the Town Times, on the town website, and via Everbridge messages. With the permission of the Durham Fair Association brush is being deposited at Strickland Farm on Cherry Hill Rd. The general public is not authorized to drop brush at this site and the driveway in to the property has been blocked off. The brush at the location will be ground up and trucked out by the town crew. Ed explained that he will be putting together a plan with Emergency Management and DMIAAB to follow in the event of another major storm which will detail where to stage brush and storm debris. Ed discussed possible staging locations including schools, open space at Lyman Farms or Strickland Rd, and possibly the parking area at Peckham Park. Discussion continued around storm damage and the many trees that came down in the storm.

Ed continued his report saying that the issues at Wadsworth Falls have improved with a reduction in visitors. The park was closed after the tropical storm for safety inspection. He explained that his goal after years of issues at the park is the maintain continued engagement with DEEP. Ed noted the great work done by the group Friends of Wadsworth Falls and the benefit of having a park ranger on site to guide people to follow the posted rules.

In conclusion Ed explained that there will be emergency funding coming from FEMA to assist with storm related costs such as town crew overtime, chipping and disposal of debris, as well as fuel costs for the generators used during the outages.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM

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 _____