

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the October 20, 2020 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

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

Approval of Agenda

Ed Bailey 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. August 18, 2020 – Regular Meeting
- b. September 17, 2020 – Special Meeting
- c. September 22, 2020 – Regular Meeting

Carol Bufithis made a motion, second by Ed Bailey, to approve the minutes of the August 18, 2020 Regular Meeting, September 17, 2020 Special Meeting and the September 22, 2020 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried.

Grant Updates

- a. Community Connectivity Grant
- b. STEAP Grant
- c. Neglected Cemetery Grant

a.) Ed explained that he has applied for the very competitive Community Connectivity Grant for \$450,000.00. This grant would incorporate the town center plan which was created 5 years ago with a total cost of around \$1.1M. The funds applied for would be used for a portion of the total cost to connect our “Civic Center” which includes the Town Hall, Community Center, Library, Church, Cemetery, Day Care, and Fire House

area. Our town is an underserved community when it comes to pedestrian access as we have no sidewalks. Ed noted that in adding sidewalks and crosswalks to the area they must meet all ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements as well as all DOT standards. He went on to thank the town planner and town engineers for help in putting this grant application together.

- b.) The “Small Town Economic Assistance Program” (STEAP) Grant was applied for at the maximum amount of \$128,000 and requires that the town also contribute funds. Ed explained that the town will be matching funds of \$70,000 to go toward rebuilding a culvert at Lake Shore Drive near the beach as well as road improvements in the area where the road is narrow and needs to be widened and straightened out. Total costs are estimated to be around \$200,000 for this project.
- c.) Ed noted that improvements have already begun at the Old North Burial Grounds. The Historical Society has been drawing up plans of what needs to be done to properly care for the cemetery. The Neglected Cemetery Grant will allow for about \$33,000.00 for continued repairs as well as cleaning and resetting of monuments and grave markers. Previous grant funds went towards removal of trees and replacing the fencing. Ed pointed out that Ken Twombly sanded and oiled the large wooden burial ground sign and plans more restoration work on it in the spring.

COVID-19 Update

Ed reported that the infection rate here in Connecticut has risen to 3% as of 10/20, which is troubling. He stated that this increase will likely cause the state to be placed on the Travel Advisory list. Ed felt that the Governor would likely come up with some new rules to avoid this and noted that there has been statements that NY, NJ, and CT all agreed that the advisory doesn't apply to the tri-state area and residents can travel freely between them. Bob read a statement that said that NY residents are being advised to limit non-essential travel to CT due to the increased infection rate in the state. Ed went on to report that there are currently 32 cases in Middlefield and 66 cases in Durham. Numbers have been on the increase statewide however; our area is not as high as many other areas around the state. Ed shared a new multi-color map which uses Yellow, Orange, and Red to depict the number of positive cases town by town. Each color indicates the Phase rules that the town should adhere to. At the time of the meeting Middlefield remained in the gray color on the map and Ed hopes it stays that way. Carol asked who is responsible for making the decision on schools staying open for in person learning and Ed explained that it would be at the discretion of the Health Director and Superintendent of Schools. Ed noted that contact tracing on cases that have recently popped up are occurring due to family transmittal, event transmittal such as gatherings of larger groups, and restaurant transmittal. Bob noted that there was a case at the High School today but the individual had very limited interactions with others and that everyone the person had come into contact with has been notified.

RSD-13 Update

a. Memorial School Tennis Courts

Mr. Yamartino reported that they have been very active in the search for a replacement for the Superintendent of Schools since Kathryn Veronesi announced her resignation. The entire Board of Education has served as the search committee and spent over 30 hours in meetings and interviewing potential candidates. They have narrowed it down to one candidate that they are currently discussing terms of a contract with and hope to have negotiations finalized by the end of the week.

Bob went on to report that they have had one COVID case at the high school as discussed earlier, however, the school district remains in full session in person with the exception of some half days for professional development.

Bob stated that at the start of the school year a new playscape was opened at John Lyman and was happy to report that the new playscape at Memorial School has now opened. The Memorial School Tennis Court project is very near completion as well with nets being installed and lines being painted. Some minor repairs and lighting issues remain but the courts should be opened by weeks end. Bob noted that a family was using the Four-Square courts with their neighbors and felt that the new courts really are a great addition for the kids to be able to play games. Bob pointed out the huge effort put into the project by the schools and towns as well as the work done by the volunteers on the committee. The volunteers included board members, teachers, principals of each of the elementary schools, and parents, as well as Park & Rec Director Hannah Malcolm who all put in time after hours and on weekends. He also noted the work that our town road crew did to take down and remove the old footings at the courts. Discussion continued around putting finishing touches on the project as well as signage to let folks know that the courts are for use by Middlefield & Durham residents only.

November 3rd Election to be held at Memorial School. Election Day Registration will be at Community Center

Mr. Bailey said that the election will be held at Memorial School this year. Those who have not registered to vote and would like to do same day registration will be able to register and cast their vote at the Community Center. Banners and lawn signs will be placed throughout the town and a second press release is set for this Friday. Notices will be published in the Town Times and a mass mailing will be going out to inform residents of the change in venue. Ed went on to say that he did a walk through at Memorial to discuss logistics and that set up will be on Monday November 2nd after the students are dismissed for the day. He did say that Night Lighting at the school could be an issue so Ed plans to either borrow or rent a light tower to be sure the area is safely illuminated.

First Selectman's Report

Ed reiterated that his office has been working hard to prepare for the election with discussions around logistics and communications to the residents. He was pleased with the number of volunteers who will be helping out on election day. Ed noted that the Town Hall continues to operate on an appointment only basis and that has been working well. With COVID cases on the rise he had re-emphasized the importance of adhering to social distancing guidelines, mask wearing and hygiene requirements will all staff a few weeks back.

Ed continued by reporting that a Food Distribution event was held two weeks ago. The Farm to Families program from the department of Agriculture provided 500 pounds of food to be distributed with the help of the Lions Club. He said that another distribution is set for tomorrow at Allyn Brook park in Durham between 11AM and 1PM. This will be the last distribution from this program. Ed noted that food bank donations continue to come in and that residents are using the food bank on a regular basis.

Ed reported that a new online permitting system is in the works for the Building and Land Use department. The system will allow for residents to apply and pay for the various permits needed to complete projects all on line. He explained that he has been working to establish an online system for several years and with the help of the Town Planner over the last 6 months the system is on the verge of being implemented. Ed is excited to get this up and running as it will allow for staff to work more efficiently going forward.

Mr. Bailey has been working with DEEP regarding the ongoing issue of trash in the state of Connecticut. He is working with a group focusing on how we handle trash collection. During a recent meeting they discussed a "Pay Per Throw" program in which people would need to pay for trash disposal based on what they were discarding which would differ greatly from our current sticker system. MIRA is looking to get one of the member towns to participate in a pilot of this type of "Pay Per Throw" programs. The company that runs these programs has offered to assist in conducting the pilot. Ed felt that the biggest hurdle would be people having to learn and get used the new system. He said *if* this program were to be implemented it would greatly change how DMIAAB is operated. Discussion continued around how a program like this would affect residents and the current way the transfer station is used.

Ed continued to say that he is in the process of applying for FEMA reimbursement for COVID expenses and has found that FEMA actually covers very little. He is hoping that the state will pick up the difference. Preliminary expense estimates through June 30th are approximately \$34,000.00 and include expenses such as installation of plexi-glass shields, purchasing PPE, hand sanitizers, as well as cameras and zoom subscriptions.

He stated that the storm assessment has been completed for the tropical storm and the preliminary estimate of \$96,000.00 was submitted to FEMA. Ed said that if FEMA declares CT a disaster area we should get reimbursement up to 75%. He said that Al Rusilowicz is working hard to meet the deadline to submit numbers to the state and FEMA.

Carol requested to discuss an issue that is happening in town. She said that she recently spoke to Hannah Malcolm who contacted her after walking part way up Strickland Road from the park and collected 280 alcohol "Nippers" off the side of the road. Carol inquired as to what could be done, perhaps signs or fines for littering? Ed said that nippers are one of the biggest litter

problems in town. He explained that he is looking into posting signs as there have been other complaints from residents. He went on to say the Cherry Hill Road continues to be a big litter issue because residents who use pick up trucks to bring their garbage to the transfer station don't properly secure the trash and it blows out of the trucks but drivers rarely return to pick it up. Ed said he has reached out to law enforcement to find out the exact fine for littering so that signs can be posted. Carol asked if they could consider having a neighborhood clean-up day for the whole town and Ed agreed that that is a good idea. He went on to acknowledge that there are several volunteer groups and individuals around town who regularly pick up garbage along our roadways. He noted that the town crew also does trash detail.

Discussion continued around the littering issue and what type of signs could be posted and where as well as who would enforce a littering fine and if in fact people would actually observe the no littering rule.

The board finished up the meeting by touching base on the petition that was discussed during public comment at the September 22nd meeting as well as the community read and group talks that were also covered at that meeting.

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 _____