

Received 8/21/2023
10:20am
Tonya Hogan, TC

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the August 7, 2023 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Bob Yamartino called the regular meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Carol Bufithis and Jim Irish were present.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Carol Bufithis made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to approve the agenda, as presented.

Bob Yamartino asked to add Charter Revision as item 6.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Carol Bufithis, to approve the agenda, as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

Michael Skelps asked if the board was aware of the recent issue with Durham-Middlefield Youth and Family Services and Mr. Yamartino stated that he has been in contact with their director. The employee is no longer employed by DMYFS. They did do a background check and looked at social media (but not TikTok). In the director's defense, the employee used a pseudonym on TikTok. Mr. Yamartino has had discussions with the Finance Director and Park and Rec about hiring practices as well.

Public Communications

Bob Yamartino has received a request about using a single line instead of a double line on West Street because people get too close to the edge when walking. It has also been suggested to get a speed bump installed on that road, but Mr. Yamartino would like to get the Resident Trooper to patrol the area first.

Mr. Yamartino has also received a complaint about feral cats on a resident's property and the neighbor feeding them. The Animal Control Officer spoke to both parties. Mr. Yamartino added that if people are feeding feral cats, they are the owner of the cats and can be subject to fines. If no one owns the cats, the Animal Control Officer has the right to remove them and put them up for adoption.

Charter Revision

Bob Yamartino explained that, after reviewing the document, the board has simplified language on the bottom of page five. They also discussed text on page 10, regarding real property, which shall require approval at a town meeting. On page 14, they deleted the term limits section and added that terms shall continue until a successor is appointed as that is what is currently being done. They felt it would be the Board of Selectmen's responsibility to not reappoint people who are not serving properly. On page 19, they changed wording from "Board of Selectmen" to "First Selectman" as that is who does contracting. They simplified the language on when a Town Meeting will be held on page 22. On page 29, they removed the language about lapsing appropriations.

Mr. Yamartino wanted to discuss the language about the budget on page 25 that said that the legislative body at a town meeting can increase the budget by 1 percent, with no restrictions on how much the budget can be decreased. Mr. Yamartino was concerned that a group of people could actually defund a budget item and remove an entire service to the town. The Board of Selectmen felt that they should not have the ability to completely stop an expenditure. Mr. Yamartino asked if the board wanted the language to be an overall net change as it is worded now or to actually add an amount. Jim Irish felt it would be reasonable to have it read that it cannot be increased or decreased by more than 1 percent. Carol Bufithis felt that \$50,000 is too much money for a decision to be made in a town meeting, but Mr. Yamartino did not agree as it would take a two-thirds vote to make a change. He also felt that it would have to go to referendum if the public is recommending more than that. It was suggested to change the language to general government budget or any line item. Bob Yamartino felt 1 percent would be okay, but understood what Carol Bufithis was saying. Jim Irish suggested that the Charter Revision Commission make a final recommendation. Michael Skelps felt that the thought process was to empower the townspeople at the town meeting, but understood the concern and will express that to the commission.

Bob Yamartino noted that Michael Skelps, chair of the Board of Finance and member of the Charter Revision Commission, was present at tonight's meeting and three members of the Board of Finance are also on the Charter Revision Commission so they will understand this issue.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Carol Bufithis, to send these suggested recommendations and revisions back to the Charter Revision Commission for their consideration. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes of Selectmen Meetings

- a. June 12, 2023 - special meeting

- b. July 18, 2023 - regular meeting

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Carol Bufithis, to approve the above-listed minutes, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Boards and Commissions

- a. Inland Wetlands
- b. Other

Carol Bufithis suggested tabling this discussion until sometime in September.

Open Positions

- a. Accounts Payable

Mr. Yamartino reported that they are starting the interview process next week.

- b. Building Official

The town has received several applications for this position and Jerry Russ will continue to operate on a temporary capacity.

- c. Zoning Enforcement Officer

Bob Yamartino reported that they have renewed their agreement with Tyche and they will handle this position.

- d. Facilities Manager

Mr. Yamartino will start to look for facilities management companies for this.

“Middlefield’s Future” - survey results to date

Jim Irish reported that they received 283 responses to date and they are evaluating the top ideas. He reviewed a document showing preference of agree/strongly agree divided by disagree/strongly disagree, taking out neutral responses. He also showed the neutral percentages. They also looked at net promoter score which is a ratio of agree or strongly agree divided by all other responses. At the very bottom of the list are things that 70 percent of the people didn't like. Mr. Irish noted that there is not much difference between the very top of the list and the very bottom.

Mr. Irish also had a list of which commissions would have roles in which projects. He has just begun looking at the roughly 100 written comments with many people talking about multiple ideas. There is an overwhelming number that said they liked the town rural and agricultural and

to not turn it into Middletown or Meriden. Establishing an overall vision for Middlefield's future was twice as popular as any other item.

Bob Yamartino also noted that there was a series of questions when people first signed in to the survey and 40 members of boards and commissions responded to the survey. Mr. Yamartino did not personally respond. He asked if Mr. Irish responded and was told that the survey was anonymous so he did not need to tell him that. Carol Bufithis stated that she had been encouraged by both Mr. Yamartino and Mr. Irish to fill it out. Mr. Yamartino summarized that they can now say that the leaders of the community responded to the survey and Mr. Irish showed the response types, showing that 14 percent of the respondents were boards and commission members.

Carol Bufithis thanked Jim Irish for all of the work he has put into this.

Selectmen/Selectwoman Reports

a. Community Connectivity Grant Application

Jim Irish displayed a drawing of the new sidewalk plan that was forwarded to the State of Connecticut on July 21st to see if they could get money to fully fund sidewalks and he reviewed the location of the proposed sidewalks. The construction cost estimate with contingency is just over \$800,000 and the grant has a maximum amount of \$800,000.

b. Need for Affordable Housing Committee?

Jim Irish reported that he had a discussion with Robin Newton, the town planner, and she basically said that the town doesn't really have an infrastructure that can handle affordable housing. No one will submit an application for affordable housing on a septic system. An Affordable Housing committee would need to be formed to respond to the state statute but it would be unlikely that the town would get any proposal for that due to the infrastructure.

Carol Bufithis had two people who were interested and she will reach out to both of them. Robin Newton will review the affordable housing plan and give them recommendations.

c. Draft Anti-Blight Ordinance status

Jim Irish reported that they looked at Meriden's and Hamden's plans which are both fairly small documents. The biggest issue with a blight ordinance is defining blight. They will look at these plans with the Planning and Zoning commission and town planner. Bob Yamartino noted that people were very interested in this on the survey. Both Meriden and Hamden state that any one of a number of conditions can constitute blight, but there is some flexibility about letting residents know and giving them time. Robin Newton also noted that there are programs to offer help to low-income or elderly residents with blight.

d. Lake Shore Drive Culvert Status

Bob Yamartino reported that work is continuing and it will definitely be completed within the required time frame. Jim Irish showed a picture of its current status and the road is almost ready for repaving. Mr. Yamartino also pointed out the white pipes where the tank is located to provide water up Kickapoo but keep the road open. The contract calls for completion by September 30th, but Mr. Yamartino felt it would be prior to that.

e. Other

None.

Adjournment

Carol Bufithis made a motion, seconded by Jim Irish, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:58 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First