Town of Middletown Springs
Town Meeting Informational Meeting
Held Virtually on Monday March 1, 2021
Start time: 6:30pm | Unapproved Minutes

Selectboard chair, Terry Redfield called the meeting to order at 6:30pm and turned the meeting over to the town moderator, Kimberly Bushnell. Kimberly welcomed everyone to our first ever virtual Town Informational Meeting. She started with some thanks - first to Meredith Morgan and Beth Miller for helping her with the technology behind the scenes, and secondly the BCA sub-committee of Leslie Silver, Elizabeth Cooper, and Patty Kenyon for their help in prepping for this meeting. Housekeeping announcements, online pledge will play, Representative Sally Achey will speak first with an update from the state legislature. Kimberly went through instructions for speaking and asking questions during a virtual meeting.

Kimberly played the pledge to officially start the meeting. At the conclusion of the pledge, Sally gave an update to the participants. Statehouse session is being held entirely remotely. Session is focused on helping the state recover from the current pandemic. Sally reviewed some of the specific items that they are working on, one being reliable, affordable, broadband for all Vermonters. Broadband is more essential now than ever. There is a significant amount of money assigned to try to that goal, the technology committee, which Sally sits on, has written a bill to address this issue.

Some of the other issues they've been working on with pandemic assistance money are upgrading computer systems across the state, weatherization programs and so forth.

Kimberly opened the floor to questions for Sally before she needs to go to her next town meeting.

Carl Haynes asked if there's been any discussion at the statehouse on addressing the CLA in regard to the unusually high volume of sales this past year as well as the property value increases.

Sally replied that the state and the board of listers are working on the issue and will be holding meetings to try to decide how to address the unusual volume throughout.

No other questions for Sally.

The moderator read the warning for 2021 Town Meeting. Polls will be open tomorrow from 7am to 7pm.

1. To elect Town Officers as provided by Vermont Law.

   No questions or comments.

2. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs accept the report prepared by the Town Auditors?

Juanita Burch Clay speaking for the auditors, Tracy Weatherhogg, Sarah Grimm and Juanita. The auditors encourage everyone to read their report, look at their minutes on the town website and contact them with any questions. Nita talked a bit about the outside audit and their recommendations for the town. The auditors feel that the town is moving forward well taking on the recommendations and suggestions. She also brought up the town's several trust funds and had some comments about the Copeland Cemetery fund in particular. The auditors have not gotten a report from those trustees in two years, if that continues the auditors may suggest the town take a closer look at those funds to ensure the transparency needed and expected.

Nita also mentioned that John Weatherhogg has agreed to run as a write-in candidate for the position of Trustees of Public Monies and encouraged people to cast their vote for John tomorrow.

No questions for the Auditors.

3. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs appropriate $351,597 for the **general operation** of the town, the sum of $270,897 to be raised by taxes on the 2021 Grand List of the Town of Middletown Springs for the fiscal year of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022?

   Sarah Grimm, auditor for the town, one of her jobs is to sit in on the budget meetings of the town. She received a flyer in the mail signed by Carl Haynes, a member of the selectboard, which addressed items that she had not seen taken up at the budget meetings. She asked that Carl or other board members in favor of the stance on the flyer to speak to those issues.

   Carl answered that the money items had been approved in the past as separate items. Carl wished that the separate money items should be voted on separately. He advocated to have these items voted on separately and if the budget got voted down at town meeting, the town could potentially have the option of voting on these items separately.

   Patty Kenyon explained the board's process and reasoning for including the items in the general budget. Basically, saying that these projects we are setting aside money for are desperately needed and it's the board's feeling that putting money aside for them each year is our best chance to see them come to fruition.

   Neil weighed in that there are two ways to do this planning. Matching the money you put away each year as closely as possible to the eventual payment you might have for a completed building so that the taxpayers are not hit with a big increase at once for a payment, the other way is as Carl is suggesting. Put a project out and deal with it at that time. Neil is on the fence personally in regard to which approach is best.

   Terry weighed in that he was in favor of putting money aside. He went through a brief history of the town voting on most of these items separately for a number of years and after that adding them into the regular budget after the voters had approved them once of more. He feels it's prudent to continue this practice moving forward.

   No other questions.

4. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs appropriate $450,300 for **the care and maintenance of highways**, the sum of $319,050 to be raised by taxes on the 2021 Grand List of the Town of Middletown Springs for the fiscal year of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022?

   Robin Chesnut-Tangerman asked about the $140,000 paving grant in the budget. How will that be or was that used.

   Terry answered that this grant was last year and is what we paved 140 West toward Poultney with.

   No other questions.

5. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to fund the **Municipal Tax Stabilization Reserve Fund** with any surplus **up to $10,000** from the current fiscal year General Fund budget, to be used to reduce unanticipated tax increases due to general fund cost overruns?

   Patty Kenyon gave an overview of why this is on the ballot and how it helps us to keep our taxes from yo-yoing from year to year. We actually used all of what we had in reserve to allay a highway shortage in June of 2020. This article will put some money back into that fund if we have a surplus at the end of 2021.

   Jenny Talke Munyak spoke to clarify the use of the tax stabilization in June of 2020 and what the impact would have been on your current taxes.

   Herb Childress thanked Patty for having the idea for this fund a few years ago, he thinks it a great idea. He also wondered if there was a limit set for this fund or any planning around that.

   Patty responded that currently there is not a limit, but it is certainly something that we could take up in the future. But basically, right now it's up to the current Selectboard, if they feel they have enough money in this fund, they can simply not put the article on the warning. There's no intention to sock away a ton of money, it's just a way to try to create some stability.

   Neil added to the conversation that every $10,000 affects your tax rate by a penny, so it's not a massive difference but more of a subtle impact.

   No other questions.

6. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to fund the **Reserve Fund for Town Municipal Faciliti**es with any **non-allocated** General Fund surplus from the current fiscal year?

   Sarah Grimm not sure it's the right place for this question, general fund budget has a highway grant for $40,000 as income and is offset in the highway expenses. So, would any of that unused money go into this fund?

   Patty answered that highway money has to be used toward highway expenditures. So, no surplus from highway will ever be used to reduce the general fund tax burden. This question maybe should be addressed under Article 7 which is focused on a highway fund.

No other questions.

7. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to fund the **Reserve Fund for Equipment** with any surplus **up to $20,000** from the current fiscal year **Highway Fund** surplus?

   Patty explained the impetus for putting this item on the warning. This fund is intended to specifically add $20,000 into our equipment fund. We had to quickly buy a new truck this year, we were a year early on our replacement schedule. Which means this year we will have two large payments and we've only budgeted for one of these payments. We would use any surplus this year to build that fund to cover that extra payment.

   No other questions.

8. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to expend **$24,750** to contract with the **Rutland County Sheriff's Department**, to provide law enforcement coverage for the Town?

   Jenny Talke Munyak - asked the selectboard what types of stuff is covered under our contract with the sheriff's department.

   Terry answered that when we added more coverage with the sheriff - one was the four corners in town - policing the lack of people stopping at the 4-way stop. The other was to have the sheriff be visible on all the roads throughout town, so that people on the backroads could feel more protected as we had been having a rash of burglaries in town, thirdly was speed control. We usually have a meeting each year to talk about what our priorities are, we didn't have that meeting last year, but are planning to make that happen for this year if the article passes.

   George Gonda asked how many hours a week/month this gets us.

   Terry answered that equates to 10 hours per week. This gives us one full time equivalent officer between the towns of Ira, Tinmouth, Danby and Middletown.

   Nora asked if we have gotten any feedback on the coverage in town.

   Neil pointed Nora to page 10 of the Town Report, that information is there.

   No other questions.

9. Shall the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$79,500** for the **Middletown Springs Volunteer Fire Department** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with fire protection and emergency response services?

   Neil reported that the Fire Department budget was level funded. Same as last year.

   No questions.

10. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$1,500** for the support and general operation of the **Pleasant View Cemetery Association** determining that it provides preservation and maintenance of the cemetery?

    Robin would like to move to combine all remaining articles into a single discussion.

Kimberly said yes but would like to finish this item then combine the remainder.

Robin agreed.

Juanita Burch Clay asked why the Pleasant View Cemetery has not used the Copeland Memorial Cemetery Fund and not made a report. This fund seems like it could take the place of this funding article.

Terry responded that he was not that familiar with the Copeland Cemetery Fund in terms of their reporting and their current disposition, but he can speak to the Pleasant View Cemetery Association and their needs and finances. His knowledge is that $100,000 is what is in the Copeland Fund, that amount is not nearly enough to sustain the cemetery in terms of their yearly maintenance needs. Much of the work done in the cemetery is volunteer. The help from the town is crucial to keeping the cemetery going.

Juanita responded that the Copeland fund was designed to help to support this cemetery and she believes that if we had a better sense of what was going on with the fund we might be able to eliminate the need for this $1500.

Kimberly restated Robin's earlier motion to combine articles 11 through 37. Jon Mathewson, seconded. Because we are in a virtual meeting, we cannot vote.

Because of that technicality, the moderator decided she was going to combine articles 11 through 37, and asked if there are there any objections to moving forward in that manner. Hearing no objections, the articles will be address in combination.

11. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$7,450** for the support of **Poultney Rescue Squad** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with emergency life support and transport services?

    Sarah Grimm asked if someone on the Selectboard could speak to what is going on with the Middletown Springs First Response.

    Patty responded that the Middletown Springs First Response is not associated with the Selectboard. Carl Haynes is certainly qualified to speak to this question as the former president of the First Response.

    Carl talked about the issue with Poultney Rescue dropping the insurance on the Middletown Springs First Response vehicle and worker's comp coverage. The MSFR had asked the town about taking up coverage and making the organization part of the town when they first learned there was an issue with Poultney. The town looked into it last year and seemed amenable, but this year the town was unwilling to take on the insurance. So, as of the first of July the First Response ceased to exist because of lack of insurance.

Patty responded to clarify some of what Carl said in regard to the Selecboard's position. The selectboard was presented with this issue 2 years ago, at that time we got a price for the insurance and then nothing happened. We never said that taking on the First Response shouldn't be a problem, we wanted to find out the basic cost and then move to the next step of the process. So, the next step was investigating what it would mean to take on the First Response as part of town government. To that end we consulted with the town's lawyer. What we found out was, if we take on the First Response as a town entity we would then be responsible to make sure that all their licenses and their volunteers were certified and had all the training necessary to perform their duties. It's a lot more complicated than just adding them to our insurance policy. The town would then be responsible for everything that is entailed in running a rescue squad. The board didn't feel we had the experience or capacity to oversee a municipal rescue squad. We encouraged the rescue squad members to explore what they might need to continue on their own, that didn't happen.

Terry weighed in that we'd need to create another department of the town. It would be a huge undertaking. In his opinion a rescue squad is better suited to be a part of the Fire Department as that relationship seemed to be a better fit.

George Gonda explained that there were discussions about rolling the first response into the fire department but that would require an entirely new license and a whole different training protocol.

Joy Ray asked if Poultney was willing to maintain the First Response if the town paid the insurance?

Carl responded that no, they were not willing to keep the organization. Poultney has since severed ties with the volunteers in Middletown Springs, so they are no longer members which severs all ties between the two entities.

Neil hopes that in the future we could get something going again for the residents of the town. Would like for us to keep working on it.

Mary Lamson asked what does this mean for our emergency medical needs in Middletown Springs?

Kevin Eaton replied that Poultney Rescue still covers this area, but there are no local folks to respond to events more quickly.

Melissa added that when she's thinking about how to vote, we want to vote yes on article 11 so that we can ensure that we have coverage from Poultney.

Neil clarified that the vote doesn't change whether they come or not, it just solidifies our partnership with them.

Rosemary Moser wanted clarification - if there's a medical emergency the fire department doesn't respond?

Kevin answered that is correct, unless it's a full cardiac arrest, then all agencies are called out.

Heather stated that the fire department will also come out for a lift and assist call to help getting a patient into an ambulance or other similar situation.

George Gonda replied that the fire department will respond as an emergency responder and work in concert, for example a tree down, or a car accident - during those events the two agencies work in concert with each other.

Deb House weighed in that there were only three members of MSFR and all of those people have regular jobs, so it's not as if someone is always in town and waiting to respond to an emergency right now.

No more questions on 11.

Elizabeth Cooper asked about the protocols for putting an agency on the appropriation's list?

Terry answered that each agency sends a request to the Selectboard for inclusion on the town warning. The Selectboard did make a motion after this year's flood of new appropriations to require new agencies (those not supported by taxpayers in the past) to bring their request along with a petition signed by the prerequisite number of registered voters to appear on the warning in the future. So, moving forward it will take a little bit more work for an organization to get their request on the ballot.

12. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$1,500** for the support of the **Rutland Area Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with home and community health services?

13. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$50** for the support of the **Vermont Green-Up Day** determining that the program serves the residents of the town by provisioning and organizing Green Up Day?

    Specifically, Elizabeth would like to speak to Vermont Green Up Day - Article 13 - As the chair of this event for the past few years, she wants everyone to know that $50 goes to Green Up Vermont to help with supplies for Green Up day events.

    No more questions on article 13.

14. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$867** for the support of **Community Care Network/Rutland Mental Health Services** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with counseling, substance abuse and emergency services?

15. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$750** for the support of the **Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with meal support, case management, information and other assistance?

16. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$200** for the support of the **Bennington/Rutland Opportunity Center (BROC)** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with assistance to persons living in poverty?

17. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$100** for the **Vermont Center for Independent Living** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with services including Meals on Wheels and home handicap access?
18. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$100** for the support of **Vermont Rural Fire Protection Task Force** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with road and fire protection grant programs including the Better Back Roads grants and dry-hydrant grants?

    Robin Chesnut-Tangerman weighed in on Article 18. This function funds dry hydrants in town and would like to put in a plug for it.

    No more questions for article 18.
19. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$375** for the support of the **Rutland Regional Ambulance Service** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with emergency life support and transport services?
20. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$200** for the support of the **NewStory Center** (formerly Rutland County Women's Network & Shelter) determining that the program serves the residents of the town with a crisis hot line, domestic violence and rape-survivor assistance?
21. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$125** for the support of **Rutland County Humane Society** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with care for neglected, abused and surrendered animals?
22. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$200** for the support of **RSVP and The Volunteer Center** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with volunteering opportunities and services such as bone building classes?
23. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$500** for the support of the **Poultney-Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with assistance to preserve natural resources?
24. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$400** for the support of the **NeighborWorks of Western Vermont** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with home-buyer education and energy efficiency services?
25. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$500** for the support of **ARC (Advocacy-Resources-Community)** determining that it provides service to residents with developmental disabilities?
26. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$400** for the support of **Rutland County Parent/Child Center** determining that it provides child care and recreational services to residents with younger children?

27. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$300** for the support of the **Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired** determining that it provides service to residents with vision loss?

28. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$250** for the support of the **American Red Cross of New Hampshire and Vermont** determining that it provides emergency services to residents of the town?

29. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$200** for the support of **Mentor Connector** determining that it enhances self-esteem and in-depth training?

30. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$400** for the support of **Child First Advocacy Center** determining that the program serves the residents of the town in the discovery, intervention, treatment and prevention of child sexual abuse, severe physical abuse and children affected by violence?

31. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$745** for the support of the **Regional Marketing Initiative**, a collaboration of the Rutland Regional Chamber of Commerce, Rutland Economic Development Corp., and municipalities around Rutland County, the goal of which is to grow the economy in our region, and determining that the program serves the residents of the town in a regionally funded marketing effort to support the town's and region's economy?

32. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$150** for the support of **Front Porch Forum** determining that it provides communication services to the town's and region's residents?

    Also, Elizabeth wanted to ask about article 32 - Front Porch Forum - FPF is not a non-profit organization.

    Patty replied that it's on there by specific request by herself as she felt it was an important function to support and every year, they asked the town to send them a $150 donation. She initially wanted to let the voters decide, so added it as an article to give the townspeople a chance to decide.

    No more questions on article 32.

33. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$250** for the support of **Big Heavy World** determining that it provides support for Vermont's musicians and music education?

34. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$250** for the support of **Vermont Family Network** determining that it provides support for Vermont families of children with special needs?

35. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$350** for the support of **Habitat for Humanity Rutland County** determining that it provides support for our community by creating affordable and decent housing, lifting up one family at a time?

36. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$250** for the support of **Rutland County Restorative Justice Center** determining that it provides support for community members in responding to the needs of crime victims, the community, and those who violated the law, holding the latter accountable in a manner that promotes responsible and restorative behavior?
37. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **$500** for the support of **Vermont Farmers Food Center** determining that it provides support for community access and availability of locally produced food in the Rutland Region through education, expanding markets, and aggregation and distribution of locally produced and value-added agricultural products?
38. To transact any other business proper to be before said meeting.

    Rosemary reported after reviewing last year's town report it appears that last year's results were reported in the report inaccurately. Would be great to have a correction posted on the town's website to reflect the issues accurately.

    Patty, the board will work on getting a correction posted to address this error.

    Robin asked about the signing of the town warning. Was the missing signature purposeful or a function of absence at a meeting.

    Carl reported that he chose not to sign the warning because he disagreed with including the building items in the general budget.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:30pm - two hours in.

Respectfully submitted,

Patty Kenyon, Selectboard Clerk

3/24/2021 - Minutes approved by the Town Moderator - Kimberly Bushnell
3/25/2021 - Minutes approved by the Selectboard - Terry Redfield, Chair

Attest: Patty Kenyon - Town Clerk 3/26/2021