

## **Middletown Springs Selectboard • Approved Minutes Regular Meeting • April 8, 2021**

**BOARD PRESENT:** via Zoom; Patty Kenyon, Heather Grier, Robin Chesnut-Tangerman. At the town office; Terry Redfield, Neil Russell.

**TOWN OFFICERS PRESENT:** via Zoom: Deb House - DTC, Sarah Grimm - Auditor, Herb Childress - EMD, Jenny Talke Munyak - Treasurer. At the town office: Bill Reed - Road Commissioner.

**PUBLIC PRESENT:** via Zoom: Mary Hissong, Leslie Silver, Michael Beattie, Jon Mathewson, Melissa Chesnut-Tangerman, Art Castle - Fire Dept, Peter & Aileen Stevenson at 7:16pm, Scott Holliman at 7:16pm, Jaya Holliman at 7:35pm, Meredith Morgan at 7:40pm. At the town office: Ron Masleh.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Terry called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** 3/25/2021 Regular Meeting.

Robin moved to approve minutes of 3/25/2021 as presented, Neil 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor motion carried.

### **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT UPDATE:**

- A. 2021 LEMP Review, Discussion, and Adoption** - Herb reviewed the LEMP with us again. Would like us to share any changes. Discussion about local resources and the genesis of the list of local resources we currently have. We can change that list at any time to add or take off people.

Patty moved to adopt the 2021 Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) as presented, Heather 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor, motion carried.

Herb will bring completed form to the chair to get it signed and sent in.

- B. Public Works Mutual Aid Agreement** - Coordinated by Rutland Regional Planning Commission and covers Rutland County only. This agreement is exactly as presented to us last year. No changes were needed or made.

Robin moved to adopt the 2021 Rutland County Public Works Mutual Aid Agreement, Terry 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor, motion carried.

Herb will complete and bring to Terry for a signature and then will file.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS & GUESTS:** Many people came to make a public comment regarding signs on West Street on a Selectboard member's property.

Scott Holliman stated that he came to express some concerns that he would like to be on public record directed to Selectboard member Neil Russell regarding two plywood signs on his property. He felt confused and dispirited by the messaging put forth on the

signs. His concerns were compounded by the fact that the comments were made by a town representative. Scott invited Neil to consider the impact of the messaging, he also expressed that for the average person traveling through town the messaging is not one of welcome or inclusivity. For a person of color the message could be hurtful. Scott talked about raising a black son and the impact of the message for him is disappointing and deeply concerning in that context. To some people the impact of that message is that of hatred or not being wanted, of not being seen or recognized, being dismissed, marginalized, pushed to the side. He requested that Neil reconsider the messaging that he wants to communicate to people as a member of the town and as a public official.

Neil responded that he didn't feel a board meeting was the place to air this issue, and that he is also a private citizen and able to put forth his private view as a private citizen. He has nothing against anybody. He's a genuine person who welcomes anyone. But he disagrees with the premise of basing access to vaccines on skin color. He is happy to have a private discussion about the issues at any time with anyone.

Michael Beattie, Terry Redfield, and Herb Childress weighed in on the science and data behind the decisions made by the state regarding vaccine priority. In short, it's their understanding that the state of Vermont has decided to vaccinate the people who are most vulnerable and work their way down the list. The policy is not a statement of favor, it's a public health decision which puts the most vulnerable and most likely to impact a large number of people in queue first as a way to protect the greater whole.

Neil shared statistics that informed his perspective that people of color, of all age groups regardless of health status, were put in front of older white people and that he still felt that wasn't fair. Because our population is 94% white, it follows that more white people are going to die. And he still believes that the decision was purely based on skin color and that the government was choosing who lives and dies purely based on skin color.

Mary Hissong, stated that she joined the meeting tonight to express how much Neil's sign disturbed her and she felt that not speaking out against what she felt was a blatantly racist message, made her complicit in the racism.

Heather stated that she felt that the Selectboard was not the proper forum for this discussion. She feels that this is an issue that should be approached person to person. It's Neil's right to convey his opinion on his own property and what a person does on their own property, even if they are a Selectboard member, is their right and should not be the subject of a town board meeting.

There was further discussion including Leslie, Melissa, Heather, Neil, Mary and Terry, on the appropriateness of a board meeting as the place to air this type of grievance, about the inferred additional responsibility a town official carries with them, about the many ways that people can feel like an "other" (someone who doesn't fit in) and how many of us feel "othered" in differing ways.

Jaya Holliman asked to speak as a matter of public record. She expressed that if a Selectboard member is willing to make a public statement, then said member absolutely opens themselves up to a board meeting being the forum that people are going to turn to.

If there is a sign in the community with racist language on it, we have a responsibility and a right to say, hey, this is not okay in our town. Jaya asked Neil to reflect on why the public policy that inspired the sign bothers him so much. She stated that the sign, whether you intend it to or not, feels horrible to her family and is hurtful. She thanked the board for the opportunity for public comment in this forum and appreciates the people who are willing to have further conversations.

Deb House felt that it was unfair to bring this to a public meeting. Terry re-iterated that part of our job is to listen.

Meredith Morgan asked to have her written statement added into the public record - that statement is attached as an addendum. Beyond the many points made tonight Meredith asked the board to look into the legality of the signs in the highway right of way, there are links in her statement that go to Vermont law regarding signage on highways.

Robin reported that in an attempt to get some objective information he reached out to VLCT and asked if there were state laws that apply to situations like this. Their Initial advice was that state law regulates commercial signs and does not regulate citizens expressing their opinion on their own property. Robin stated that he felt the messaging on the signs was harmful to the community.

## **TOWN OFFICERS:**

**Town Office Reorganization - spring cleaning** - Third week of working with volunteers to go through the office, rearrange things and get rid of duplicate information. We've made good progress. We have made space in the two vaults for the most used land record books. We still don't have enough room, but it feels like we are using the space more effectively.

## **Town Clerk / Treasurer / Auditors / Listers -**

Deb, as the delinquent tax collector reported on her recent activity - new policy and sent letters to delinquents. In the last month she's brought in almost \$14K and has agreements with five people who will be making a payment each month over the next two years to clean up the delinquencies She is moving forward on tax sales on a couple of properties because there is no way for them to clean up their taxes in a two-year period. Delinquent taxes are a priority and she is hoping that we can get our liability under control as we go forward.

## **TOWN HIGHWAY:**

### **Road Commissioner Report –**

- Sarah had a question regarding Brown's slate invoice and contract hauling - Bill is happy to go over it with Sarah in depth. He allocated as he felt was correct for each piece of the invoice.
- Mud Season wasn't as kind to us as we had originally hoped.
- Grading is starting on roads that are ready.

- We will need to replace some culverts that were damaged by the frost heaves.
- Working through the roads as best they can, it's really dry so there are dust issues as well right now.
- They have been busy trying to get us back together for the summer.
- Next week we will be cooler and hopefully some rain in the future.
- We have the bulk fluid account approval so that will save us some \$.
- Tires for the grader - there are some in stock. Would like to get 6 tires to be picked up in the new budget year. He will see if he can order them and have them put on in late June or early July.

By unanimous consent, the board authorizes Bill to try to reserve 6 grader tires to be purchased in the next fiscal year's budget.

**Other Town Highway** - Bill talked about washing equipment at the West Street property. He would like to see if he could set up a wash station for the summer. The board is not opposed to Bill exploring that possibility.

**TOWN LANDS** - Design Development package - decision and review discussion - Geoff has sent the drawings are off to the estimator. Once we have the estimate, we can move to the next step.

**SOLID WASTE:** Big Dump Day preliminary planning (May 8, 2021) - Terry reported that we are anticipating a large turnout, so do others feel we should get another container - bump it up to 6? All agreed to get an additional container. Terry will confirm with Hubbard's to set everything up and make sure we have what we need when we need it. Bill has some suggestions for how to approach things to keep the flow going.

**CORRESPONDENCE:**

- Post Card announcing grants from VT Rural Fire Protection
- Thank you ARC
- Note from Jenny RE: Memorial Day Parade Deposit

**BOARD ORDERS:**

Terry moved to approve board orders as presented, Patty 2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor, motion carried. (Electronic approval per COVID 19 protocols since there were only two members at the office.) Board members will stop in and sign if they have a minute.

**LEGAL:** None.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** WRASC Class IV permission (North Road)

Terry shared the annual permission form for VASA/West Rutland ATV Sportsmans Club for class IV roads.

Robin moved to approve permission to the West Rutland ATV Sportsman Club to travel on the Class IV portion of North Road in MTS May 1 to September 30, 2021, Heather

2<sup>nd</sup>. All in favor, motion carried.

Other ATV issues or concerns - continuing on the ATV discussion - Terry asked board members how they felt about exploring an ATV ordinance for the town again? There was discussion about the last go-round on ATV's as well as possible changes we could make in the future to educate the public on the reasons an ordinance can be a good tool for exerting some control over riders. The board was open to having further discussions when time permits.

**Upcoming Meeting Schedule:**

Next Regular Meeting - Thursday, April 22, 2021 at 7pm.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION: (if necessary) - none**

**ADJOURN:** Patty moved to adjourn at 9:57pm, Neil 2<sup>nd</sup>. Meeting adjourned at 9:57pm.

Respectfully Submitted  
Patty Kenyon, Clerk

Full statement from Meredith Morgan on next page.

Statement concerning offensive/racist signage

I want the members of the board to hear that I am offended by the racist statements on the plywood boards signs on route 140 west bound on the north side of the street. I am particularly concerned that these signs are illegal based on Vermont state law, as well as being offensive to not only me but other members of our community as well as people who drive through. The owner of these signs apparently does not understand the intent of the vaccine plan designed by the state of Vermont. Nor do they realize how offensive these statements are.

As an elected Wells Springs School District Board member I am deeply disappointed seeing these types of very destructive and confusing sentiments. At a time when education is key to eliminating racial bias, I hope that the history of these signs will serve as a lesson in better understanding of everyone.

I would like the town to look into the removal of the signs based upon the legality of them on the town road route 140.

I would like the select board to consider:

10 V.S.A 495 Conservation and Development Chapter 021 Other regulations applying to permitted signs.

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/10/021/00495>

10 V.S.A. 493 Title 10: Conservation and Development Chapter 021 Tourist Information Services On-premises signs

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/10/021/00493>

10 V.S.A. 481 Title 10: Conservation and Development Chapter 21: Tourist Information Services 481 Definitions

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/fullchapter/10/021>

Thank you in advance for you time.

Meredith Morgan