

Town of Middletown Springs
Town Meeting Informational Meeting
Held Virtually on Monday, March 6, 2023
Start time: 6:30pm | Approved Minutes

Moderator, Kimberly Bushnell called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. Kimberly welcomed everyone to our third virtual Town Informational Meeting. She made some housekeeping announcements, the online pledge will play, Representative Robin Chesnut-Tangerman will speak with an update from the state legislature once he arrives. Kimberly then went through instructions for speaking and asking questions during meeting.

Kimberly played the pledge to officially start the meeting.

Kimberly thanked Haley Kenyon for doing the behind the scenes tech. Housekeeping included instructions for asking questions and protocols for speaking so everyone knows who is talking each time. Articles 12 to 37, which are local organization appropriations, will be bundled as one item at the end of the session, though questions on any of these articles will be entertained at that time.

Kimberly read the warning as presented.

1. To elect Town Officers as provided by Vermont Law.
2. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs accept the report prepared by the Town Auditors?

No auditors at the meeting or willing to speak at this time.
3. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs appropriate **\$363,775** for the **general operation** of the town, the sum of **\$286,275** to be raised by taxes on the 2023 Grand List of the Town of Middletown Springs for the fiscal year of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024?

Kimberly Bushnell read this article and then realized she was going to give Terry the floor to say a few things.

Terry Redfield reported that the selectboard unexpectedly received the resignation of Heather Grier as a member of the board last week. Terry thanked her for her service over the past three years and encouraged others to do as well if they see her around town. Terry also thanked the road crew for their work especially during last weekend's storm which dumped a foot of snow on us. Special thanks to Bill Reed, Joe Castle, Richie Miller, they do a fantastic job.

Terry Redfield also gave a short recap about the building in progress on the corner. We are looking forward to being in the new town office building sometime this year.

Representative Robin Chesnut-Tangerman came in at this point and gave an update from the statehouse. He reported that overall, across the state, the major concerns are housing, childcare and climate. There are a lot of things happening in the statehouse. He's vice chair of housing committee this year.

A couple new issues that have come up this year and have become a focus of this district are school choice and the Vermont State University Library closings announcement.

In housing the state still has an unprecedented amount of federal money available. The goal is to use this for one time projects and not new ongoing programs. There is also a bill that will change some zoning statewide to help to address housing density issues in order to establish more housing stock across the state.

The senate is working on childcare legislation including expanding access and improving compensation for childcare workers.

The affordable heat standard is another hot topic, the senate is working on a bill, once it's passed the senate, it will go to the house for approval, then be sent to the Agency of Natural Resources to design the program which is to implement cleaner, cheaper renewable heating fuels. The goal is a more stable, more predictable heating fuel prices.

Regarding independent schools and tuition question the two bills are not going anywhere. The legislature is not interested in the approach to eliminate all funding to independent schools. They are interested in making sure that tuition monies only go to schools comply with anti-discrimination regulations and provides appropriate special education services and that is accredited by national accreditation companies. Independent schools serve an important role in public education. Rutland Bennington District serves 12 towns and there is no public high school in this district, so this discussion is very critical to folks in this district.

Last issue to mention is the Vermont State University Consolidation – new president announced the libraries would be switching over to fully digital and getting rid of all books. Legislature's role is still unclear other than supporting the faculty and students who are challenging this decision.

Kimberly Bushnell call for questions or comments for Robin:

Michael Beattie suggested that the legislatures' role could be to call for the resignation for the new chancellor.

Hearing no other questions or comments for our state representative, Kimberly Bushnell brought us back to

Article 3: Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs appropriate **\$363,775** for the **general operation** of the town, the sum of **\$286,275** to be raised by taxes on the 2023 Grand List of the Town of Middletown Springs for the fiscal year of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024?

Patty Kenyon explained that this number reflects our general budget, so if folks have question on the general operations of the town. We tried really hard to keeping the budget as slim as possible.

Neil Russell chimed in that the amount is just \$4,375 above last year or about 1.5% increase.

4. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs appropriate **\$499,525** for the **care and maintenance of highways**, the sum of **\$394,525** to be raised by taxes on the 2023 Grand List of the Town of Middletown Springs for the fiscal year of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024?

Kimberly Bushnell asked for questions – none posed.

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 \$5,000** from the current fiscal year General Fund budget, to be used to reduce unanticipated tax increases due to general fund cost overruns?

Kimberly Bushnell asked for questions – none posed.

Patty Kenyon chimed in with a short explanation of the intent of this article. This is our attempt to put extra money at the end of the year away for time down the road when we may need a bit to balance our budget.

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

Kimberly Bushnell asked for questions – none posed.

Patty Kenyon chimed in on the intent of this article to address facilities needs in the future. So far this has been working well for the town.

7. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to allocate **\$20,000** to the **Reserve Fund for Town Library Facilities** to be raised by taxes on the 2023 Grand List of the Town of Middletown Springs for the fiscal year of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

Kimberly Bushnell asked for questions – none posed.

8. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to expend **\$26,125** to contract with the **Rutland County Sheriff's Department**, to provide law enforcement coverage for the Town?

Kimberly Bushnell asked for questions –

Nora Rubinstein – asked for clarification on how the sheriff expects to deploy these resources. Does the board have a sense of the priorities for this year's contract.

Terry Redfield responded that the contract is for a total of 10 hours per week on average. It's not literal, this is an average and each town in the four town compact gets approximately 10 hours a week of coverage. One of our primary goals was to police the 4-way intersection, some speed control, and a general patrol of town, driving the back roads, having a presence.

Nora Rubinstein expressed her concern is that we are an aging community. Looking for emergency support for folks in town – especially in a medical emergency.

Neil Russell explained the basic sheriff contract and how things works.

Nora Rubinstein – wondering if we need to have a conversation about coverage. Should our priorities change, do we need more emergency services for heart attacks, strokes, etc.

Neil Russell – well a medical emergency is not going to be covered by the sheriff anyway.

Patty Kenyon – Practicality of this is that we are hiring a sheriff for additional, more specialized coverage. Why do we need a sheriff, because we don't have adequate state police coverage in our rural town. By having a sheriff we are giving the state police another option when someone calls 911 and the dispatcher has to decide what and who gets the priority.

Melissa Chesnut-Tangerman – asked about what we take in for traffic fines from the sheriff's department.

Patty Kenyon – explained that fine income trickles down from the court system and is not a way to alleviate the cost of the sheriff.

Melissa Chesnut-Tangerman – is there a way to measure the infraction rate and efficacy of service.

Patty Kenyon – ticketing is not the way to answer the efficacy. Sarah Grimm did a study on this as an auditor a few years back. There is a way to find the tickets issued in our town but it's not something I have the specific answer to right now.

Neil Russell – added that as a board we decided the priorities and how we wanted the sheriff to perform. We did not want to turn this town into a speed trap. There is a value in just having a presence, ticketing is not a good metric.

David Wright - what was spent on the sheriff last year and what is being asked for this year? Th

Neil Russell – This year is \$26,125 last year they asked for \$25,600. An increase of \$525 over last year.

David Wright – thinks this is a lot of money for the return and wondered if we had considered putting up some flashing radar speed signs at certain places around town?

Neil Russell - The board looked into these type of signs last summer. Cost is \$5000 and up for solar signs, for those that are plugged in the cost is a bit less.

Patty Kenyon – couple of points of clarification, 1. we are billed for the time the sheriff is here, that's one explanation for the actual spending vs budgeted spending. 2. This is one of those discretionary pieces of spending that folks have a lot of differing opinions on, is it worth it or not to contract with the sheriff, and this is why we put it in front of the voters each year to make the decisions instead of folding it directly into our general budget. It's up to all of you to decide the efficacy and worthiness of this expenditure in the voting booth.

John Weatherhogg – his recollection is that one of the reasons for bringing the sheriff to town was a general feeling of safety. Regarding the sheriff they are pretty much the only game in town. The state police realistically are not coming out to Middletown Springs, unless there a domestic situation or a body.

Terry Redfield – brought us back to the crux of the initial question was around emergency medical incidents and responders. As most folks know there is a nationwide shortage of emergency responders. The board will go with the decision of the voters.

Steve Harrington – As a resident of South Street, he finds the deputy very ineffectual. He's seen no impact from his presence on South Street. He's much more in favor of illuminated warning signs at specific locations getting people's attention and slowing them down that way.

9. Shall the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **\$81,885** for the **Middletown Springs Volunteer Fire Department** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with fire protection and emergency response services?

Kimberly asked for questions – none posed.

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?

Kimberly Bushnell asked for questions –

Jenny Talke Munyak – just wanted to follow up on the conversation from last year for this article, whereas the Pleasant View Cemetery Association could avail themselves of money from the Copeland Memorial Cemetery Fund. Wondering if John Weatherhogg can speak to that as a Trustee of the fund.

John Weatherhogg – happy to speak to that. The Trustees have met and have decided to give out some money to both the Pleasant View Cemetery and the Old Town Cemetery for maintenance and upkeep. This money will be distributed in the coming year. The amount to be distributed to each entity is \$500.

11. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **\$7,940** for the support of **Poultney Rescue Squad** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with emergency life support and transport services?

Kimberly Bushnell asked for questions –

Patty Kenyon – wanted to inform the voters that the amount stated in the article is incorrect. The number should have been \$11,116 as requested from the Poultney Rescue Squad. The selectboard wants everyone to know that if this article passes, the board will vote to appropriate the amount requested of \$11,116.

Melissa Chesnut-Tangerman – asked where this additional money will come from?

Patty Kenyon – it will be taken from the General Fund budget, and we will do our best not to have it cause a shortfall by trying to save money in other places.

Chat question – can you discuss why the request increased by \$3,000.

Patty Kenyon – my guess is that they are just trying to cover their costs, this year they are operating with deficits at this point in time.

Mary Lou Willits – Do we know how often the Poultney Rescue Squad has been called to Middletown this past year.

Terry Redfield – 35 according to their report.

Mary Lou Willits – she was unable to get Poultney, or Fair Haven, there was an hour passed and they ended up driving in on their own. Wondering if others have had similar circumstances.

Terry Redfield – this all harkens back to EMS services nationwide, it's a huge problem. There is a significant shortage of staff and volunteers. There's no good answer at this moment in time.

Melissa Chesnut-Tangerman – spoke to the local Fire Department and their services provided in town and for mutual aid for surrounding towns. Hope folks will support the local Fire Department article.

At this time – we'll bundle Articles 12 through 37 and open the floor for any questions regarding those articles.

Nora Russell - It would be terrific if we could get the local organizations to send a representative to our town meetings to speak to their services.

Terry Redfield - in person town meeting folks would send a representative ready to speak. Since we've been meeting virtually, it's been a little more cumbersome. The board could put that request out there to organizations for next year assuming we'll be meeting in person again.

Hilary Solomon – speaking for the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District, she appreciates the past support and works to spend at least the amount of the ask in town on water quality measures. Also would like to note that for organizations it is hard to get to all the meetings around the county to speak to items, for instance she serves 17 towns with a staff of just a few people.

Virginia Parker – asked why we aren't giving more to organizations who might deserve more, Rutland County Humane Society and BROCC, these organizations do a lot for local citizens.

Patty Kenyon – we get the request directly from the organization. The board does not decide the amounts we simply ask for the amount requested.

Jenny Talke Munyak – Would also like to explain to new voters. Articles 7 through 37 are all additional to the town budgets requested, these are additional expenditures which you will be taxed on.

John Weatherhogg – reported the incorrect amount earlier when speaking about the Pleasant View Cemetery Article. The trustees voted to give \$5000 to each entity instead of the \$500 he stated earlier. Misspoke regarding the number. Apologies for that incorrect information.

Aileen Stevenson – Has a question about Poultney Rescue squad – how is membership different than town membership? If the town votes down Poultney Rescue Squad, would individuals still be allowed to be members?

Patty Kenyon – I don't know for sure, but I would think individual membership would be different than a town allotment. Don't know that one would impact the other, but it would be a great question to ask if we had a representative from the rescue squad here to talk to us.

Karen Castle – We have several ambulance corps that come to town and those folks are not directly paid by the town but they are emergency responders and so they are obligated to serve in their regions.

Neil Russell – thinks they are two independent things. Membership gives the individual a break in the billing. While town allotment is a form of regional coverage support.

Tracy Weatherhogg – commenting as an Auditor and for the Auditors as she missed the chance earlier in the meeting. The full Auditors report is included in the town report, it includes the items they've worked on this year. Including recommendations from the independent audit. Grateful for Jenny for the work that she does and that the selectboard does to keep finances in good condition here in town.

Melissa Chesnut-Tangerman – would like to commend everybody who is in public service. She spent a short time as an auditor and the work they do is remarkable. You could drown in the details of town government, the fact that these folks are stepping up mostly volunteer is amazing. Would like to applaud them.

Kimberly Bushnell thanked everyone for showing up and then recessed the meeting at approximately 8:05pm until tomorrow at 7am when polls will open.

Thanks everyone.

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?
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?
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 Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region 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?

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 family housing?
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?
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.

Respectfully submitted,

Patty Kenyon
Town Clerk and Selectboard Clerk

Approved by Town Moderator - Kimberly Bushnell - 4/10/2023

Approved by Selectboard – 3/23/2023

Attest: Patty Kenyon – Town Clerk – 4/12/2023