

Town of Middletown Springs
Town Meeting Informational Meeting
Held on Monday, March 4, 2024
Start time: 6:30pm | Approved Minutes

Moderator, Kimberly Bushnell called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. Kimberly welcomed everyone to Town Informational Meeting 2024. This is our first hybrid town meeting with folks joining on zoom as well as in the room. Kimberly thanked Kevin Eaton for volunteering to monitor zoom for us. Kimberly then went through instructions for speaking and asking questions during the meeting.

She outlined how articles 12 to 36, which are local organization appropriations, can be bundled as one item at the end of the session, questions on any of these articles will be entertained at that time.

Kimberly led the room in the Pledge of Allegiance.

She then introduced State Representative (and town Selectboard member) Robin Chesnut-Tangerman who came to review the news from Montpelier. Housing is the biggest issue facing Vermont today as a whole. This issue threads through all the other important issues Vermont is facing. Housing stock is low and expensive not only in our area but also across the state. The legislature is working on this issue and trying to find creative solutions to address the problems within the state's capacity to fund any projects. Robin wished he had a more cheerful report but this problem is serious. He then asked for questions from the floor.

Jon Mathewson asked about the neonicotinoids pesticide bill which would ban these pesticides that are harmful to pollinators.

Robin stated that the bill is currently in process, expects house to pass it, not sure about what will happen when it goes to the Senate.

No other questions.

Robin thanked everyone for attending and was encouraged to see such a good turnout.

Terry Redfield, on behalf of the Selectboard, thanked Robin for his service to the town as a selectboard member as well as the state representative.

Kimberly read the warning introduction as presented, then introduced Herb Childress, chair of the Selectboard to give a few opening remarks before we move on to the articles up for discussion.

Herb introduced the selectboard, Herb Childress, Patty Kenyon, Terry Redfield, Peter Stevensen and Robin Chesnut-Tangerman. Herb thanked both Peter and Robin for their service, acknowledging that they have chosen not to run this year.

Herb then reviewed the tasks of voting tomorrow, we will be voting town officers, town ballot items, school ballot items, and your choice of ballots for the Presidential Primary, so be sure to give yourself enough time to review the ballots and cast your votes.

Herb thanked the Town Clerk, Patty Kenyon, also a selectboard member, for organizing a very complex election ahead of us.

Kimberly then began to read the warning articles.

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

No questions.

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

Juanita Burch-Clay – Town Auditor thanked Sarah Grimm who has been an auditor for seven years for her past service. Sarah has been attending selectboard meetings and reviewing board orders regularly. Sarah has chosen not to run again this year. Nita encouraged folks to step up and fill the open auditor position. She reviewed the job of a town auditor to try to encourage and pointed to pages 12 and 13 of the town report to give folks a sense of the duties of an auditor. If you are interested in being a town auditor, please reach out to Nita directly.

Nita then reviewed the auditor's general observations on the financial health of the town. The auditors believe that the current town officers are doing a good job keeping the town's finances in good health. The town has made a lot of progress over the last ten years toward keeping a good financial house. One example is the successful completion of the new Town Office.

No questions posed to the auditors.

3. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs appropriate **\$419,495** for the **general operation** of the town, the sum of **\$339,995** to be raised by taxes on the 2024 Grand List of the Town of Middletown Springs for the fiscal year of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025?

Pat Hemenway commented that she thought that the proposed budget was really tight and well thought out. But she did not notice any money in the budget for maintenance of the new building.

Herb referred Pat to page 33 (the town budget) under the Town Office category there is \$12,500 for maintenance of the town office. This number includes maintenance and utilities to run the office.

No further questions.

4. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs appropriate **\$580,120** for the **care and maintenance of highways**, the sum of **\$424,620** to be raised by taxes on the 2024 Grand List of the Town of Middletown Springs for the fiscal year of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025?

No questions on the highway budget.

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?

Melissa Chesnut-Tangerman asked the Selectboard to explain this article.

Patty Kenyon reviewed the article's intended purpose which is to save money left at the end of one fiscal year to be used in another fiscal year when needed. Basically, a rainy day fund used to stabilize taxes when the town faces unexpected cost overruns at the end of a fiscal year. small amount of any surplus funds generated to be used in the future if we face a deficit.

No further questions.

6. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to fund the **Reserve Fund for Town Municipal Facilities** with up to \$50,000 of any non-allocated General Fund surplus from the current fiscal year, and further allocate any surplus still remaining to be used to reduce taxes?

Sally Achey asked the Selectboard to explain the purpose of this specific fund in relation to the fund that was set up to help fund the town office building.

Patty explained that initially the Municipal Facilities fund was established to be more generalized, because the town had many facilities needs and the Selectboard at that time wanted to make sure the money could be used for any municipal project. Later on when the Selectboard began to add general surpluses to the fund, the treasurer accounted for those surpluses separately from the money that was dedicated for the new town office. Continuing to fund this reserve gives the Selectboard some funds to work with in the early stages of a project.

Sally asked, if this article doesn't pass, what would happen with a surplus?

Patty responded that if this didn't pass, more than likely any surplus would be used to reduce taxes.

No further questions.

7. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to establish a **Reserve Fund for Memorial Day Commemoration**, to be funded with previously unused Parade funds plus any future voter allocations and external funds raised to support the annual parade and ceremony on the Green?

Patty Kenyon explained the intention of this reserve fund. Since the grange disbanded and town volunteers took over the organization and funding of the parade, they asked the town to hold and disburse their accumulated funds. This money has been kept in a pass through account. The proper way to deal with that money is to have a dedicated account for it, this article if passed will create that account. There is no taxpayer cost for this article.

No further questions.

8. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Select Board to establish a **Reserve Fund for Highway Expenditures**, to be funded with existing and future highway surplus funds?

Herb explained the intent to establish a reserve fund for highway expenditures. This fund provides a dedicated accounting container specific to surplus highway funds.

Sally Achey asked how does this fund differ from the current highway surplus fund?

Herb answered that this fund could be used for vehicles equipment or supplies.

Sarah Grimm asked does this surplus have a limit like the other reserve funds do?

Herb answered not currently. In the future the board might see a need to impose a limit.

Carl Haynes asked about the Highway Surplus fund listed which currently has \$99,000 in it and the fund that has \$124,000 in it.

Patty answered that currently the highway surplus fund is not a town highway reserve fund. General year end highway surpluses, as outlined by the state, have specific rules for spending those funds. In general, they can only be used for the budgetary purposes they were initially budgeted for. If we create this town reserve fund and stipulate that highway surpluses go into that fund at the end of the year, we can then use those fund for any highway expenditures we have instead of only the highway line items they were originally gleaned from.

No further questions.

9. *(An Advisory Vote)* Shall the Voters of the Town of Middletown Springs authorize the Selectboard to include existing allocations to non-profit agencies within the Town General Government Budget, with individual ballot items only for new or increased requests?

Herb explained that this is an advisory vote, we'd like to know the sense of the community. There is a cost to having all of these individual ballot items listed and voted on separately. So, this is asking, if something has been approved over and over should we just write it into the budget?

Jon Mathewson stated that he was under the impression that the reason we voted on these separately was by court order.

Patty answered that she learned that the state allows any town to build these items into the budget. In the early 2000's the town had an advisory vote to see if folks wanted to see all these items on the ballot. That vote was in the affirmative. After that time these items were added to the warning individually. The lawsuit came from a resident who didn't like the wording of the articles. The court then determined the proper wording for these articles should they appear on the ballot. That court order did not take away the Selectboard's ability to decide whether or not they should appear on the ballot.

To include these 20 odd items on the ballot each year costs \$40 per article just to program the tabulator. There is also the increased cost of paper both for ballots and the town report and time to put together such a big warning.

Tracy Weatherhogg asked would this change the process for organizations asking for money?

Patty answered that every organization would still need to request money each year, articles would only be voted on if a previously approved organization asked for more money or a new organization asked for money. Everything else would be the same.

Jim Graves asked what if the Selectboard decided to stop funding an organization?

Patty answered that in the spirit of the article wording the Selectboard wouldn't have the authority to make that decision.

No further questions.

10. 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?

No questions.

11. 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?

Juanita Burch-Clay stated that she believes that the cemetery association should use money set aside in the Copeland Cemetery Fund that they have not been using and not ask the taxpayers for funding. It is her understanding that the Copeland Cemetery Fund is intending to give money back to the town after years of not being used, asked John Weatherhogg, cemetery fund trustee, is that correct?

John Weatherhogg answered will the Pleasant View Cemetery Association receive money from the Trust? Yes, the request is in, but the money has not been sent. The fund money is specifically there to maintain the Copeland Family plot in the cemetery and anything left over after that maintenance can be used for general maintenance.

Jenny Talke Munyaiak stated that in theory there is money in the Copeland Cemetery fund to fund the Pleasant View Cemetery.

Additionally, she asked for clarification on the cemetery report, page 42, a payment of \$10,000 into the fund from the Middletown Springs First Response.

Terry Redfield answered that when the Middletown Springs First Response dissolved they disbursed their funds to the volunteer fire department and the Pleasant View Cemetery Association.

No further questions.

12. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **\$32,554** for the support of **Poultney Rescue Squad** determining that the program serves the residents of the town with emergency life support and transport services?

Jenny Talke Munyaiak stated that this request has gone up about \$21,000 over last year. Is anyone here from Poultney Rescue Squad? If not, can the selectboard speak to that?

No representative from Poultney Rescue.

Patty responded that as with any request, this comes into the board as a letter of request and reports for the town report. This year the letter asked for \$41 per person based on the 2020 census. There was no explanation and no visit from Poultney Rescue Squad. Beyond that the board has no other information.

No further questions.

At that time, Kimberly asked to bundle articles 13 through 36 are now on the floor for questions or discussion. Room agreed.

There were no questions on articles 13 through 36.

13. 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?
14. 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?
15. 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?

16. 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?
17. 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?
18. 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?
19. 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?
20. Shall the voters of the Town of Middletown Springs deem necessary and appropriate **\$400** 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?
21. 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?
22. 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?
23. 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?
24. 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?
25. 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?
26. 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?
27. 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 childcare and recreational services to residents with younger children?

28. 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?
29. 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?
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 **\$800** 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 **\$250** for the support of **Big Heavy World** determining that it provides support for Vermont's musicians and music education?
33. 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?
34. 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?
35. 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?
36. 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?
37. To transact any other business proper to be before said meeting.

George Gonda thanked everyone on the selectboard for what they do and then stated that he noticed in the town report the meeting calendar, that date is incorrect. Also, he would like people to know about a school survey that they are encouraging people to complete. Surveys will be on the information table in the polling place.

Steve Harrington asked if the Rescue Squad number had been verified?

Herb answered that we received the request at the last moment with no additional explanation, we believe the number is valid, but we haven't seen a representative from the rescue squad to confirm it is or isn't valid.

Nora Rubinstein remarked that this \$41 per person is similar to the direct mail request we get yearly. Could this mean that would go away?

Jack Clay asked what if we don't pass this? Will they still show up?

Patty answered that it's her understanding that each of us as individuals will get a subscription request. In terms of them responding or not, we are in their coverage area and that means they would be dispatched out to us from 911. I don't believe that they can refuse coverage in an area they serve. They have mutual aid backup from other agencies as well. We are served by many ambulance services in reality.

Carl Haynes stated that the request in Poultney was in excess of \$120,000 and he believes it's a spinoff of what's being charged in Fair Haven. Small services just can't last in this economy.

Carl then asked why there was no Sheriff's department article this year?

Patty answered that the Sheriff's line item was put into the general fund budget this year after a long history of passing.

Sarah Grimm thanked the selectboard for adding the memorials on pages 2 and 3. We lost some great townspeople this year and it's a nice way to remember them.

Michael Beattie stated that he is running as a write-in for the 3 year selectboard seat.

Herb stated that during the next year we will have a really important retirement happening within the town. Bill Reed, after more than 20 years of service, will be retiring. Next year this time Bill will be a civilian. Thank you Bill. The audience showed their appreciation with a lengthy round of applause.

Terry stated that we have to thank two other people tonight who are stepping down from their positions, Peter Stevenson as Selectboard member and Kimberly Bushnell for her service as moderator.

Peter remarked that he has enjoyed being a member of the selectboard over the past year. He thanked the rest of the board members for the honor of serving the town. He noted that not very many people come to the meetings and it's important to come to meetings and get information directly from the source.

Patty thanked Max Holmes and his dad Mark Holmes, who made it possible for us to successfully navigate a hybrid meeting. They put in a lot of time to source, set up, and monitor the equipment necessary to help us effectively communicate across the different platforms.

Kimberly recessed the meeting until Tuesday at 7am at the town office.

Respectfully submitted,

Patty Kenyon
Town Clerk and Selectboard Clerk

Approved by Town Moderator - Kimberly Bushnell – March 27, 2024

Approved by Selectboard – March 28, 2024

Attest: Patty Kenyon – Town Clerk – March 29, 2024

