



# Town of Middlefield

## Communications Committee

### FY 2016 Annual Report

The Communications Committee is pleased to report further progress in expanding, upgrading and maintaining the Town's communications infrastructure during FY 2016.

#### The Town Website

The Town website at [www.middlefieldma.net](http://www.middlefieldma.net), which employs the popular and powerful WordPress content management system (CMS), continues to run without a hitch. Various boards and committees continue to post their meetings and upload their minutes, and community events are regularly submitted for posting.

In the face of a potential five-fold increase in fees, we migrated the town's website from GoDaddy to InMotion Hosting, which provides more powerful tools at a much lower cost.

The comprehensive security system with firewall protection and daily scans continues to do its job, including the interception of frequent hacking attacks.

#### Connecting to MassBroadband 123

The Town Hall continues to be served by Crocker Communications over the MassBroadband 123 middle mile network.

#### Town Hall Data Security

The Backblaze cloud backup & recovery service provides continuous real-time backup for on all critical computers – the Selectboard, Accountant, Assessors, Treasurer, Tax Collector, Building Commissioner, and the library.

#### The Town Hall Network

The Town Hall network continues run smoothly. The dual system provides an open, public network for library and general use, and a separate, secure network for official town business. There is public, wireless access in the Town Hall for meetings, auditorium presentations, and many other uses. We installed free 24/7 WiFi on the outside of the building.

A Comprehensive Gateway Security system protects the entire network.

#### The Middlefield GIS

Our powerful, customized geographic information system (GIS), which can be accessed via the town website, has been upgraded to HTML5/JavaScript with enhanced features.

#### Public computers

Public computers are available in the Town Hall auditorium for classroom training and free use.

### **CodeRED Emergency Notification**

Following an extensive review of various “reverse 911” options employed by various towns, we installed the CodeRED system from the Emergency Communication Network, to be maintained and used by the town’s emergency responders.

### **Emergency Communications**

The Middlefield Selectboard asked the Communications Committee to investigate shortcomings in our Emergency Communications network as a result of a drowning on River Road where Chief Tom Austin was unable to communicate for help. We recommended a single town-wide repeater with all agencies sharing the system, since Middlefield has only a few hours a month of radio use, and departmental coordination (interoperability) would be guaranteed and simplified. The repeater could be installed on the transfer station monopole proposed for the town’s last mile broadband network. Separate in-vehicle repeaters would be installed in primary emergency vehicles, allowing walkie-talkies within range to access the town-wide system.

We also recommended that the town switch from Berkshire County to Hampshire County for dispatch services. This would potentially save the town over \$8K per year, and consolidate 911 calls on a single service, since Hampshire already handles cellular calls.

### **Last Mile Broadband**

Our greatest efforts were expended in researching and planning how to bring, at long last, affordable last mile broadband to Middlefield residents. We held meetings with two vendors proposing all-fiber solutions, Axia Networks and Crocker Communications. Both would have entailed the million-dollar bonding turned down at the 2015 Annual Town Meeting. Calgary-based Axia had promised investment on their part, but they went through a reorganization and dropped out of contention.

We have been working with several other towns to share experiences and coordinate plans, including Leverett, Warwick, Royalston, Hawley, Worthington, Montgomery, and Peru.

We applied for and received a planning grant from the MBI to hire an engineering company (Interisle Consulting) to design an affordable last mile broadband network. Deliverables were received and presented to the Selectboard, including the engineer’s budgetary design & cost estimate and a detailed spreadsheet of capital & operating costs for a wireless network. These documents were presented and then posted on the town website.

The engineer was subsequently engaged by the Selectboard to provide a comparative technical and budgetary analysis of hybrid options, concluding that stretches of fiber could be added on an as-needed basis following completion of the wireless network.

We held a joint meeting with the Selectboard, the project engineer, and the MBI tech team. We assured the tech team that we would provide 100% coverage for the town, satisfying a major MBI wireless concern. In an effort to get around the current “funding pause” we agreed to break out the initial pilot costs for immediate partial funding.

We also proposed to access to the Chester fire tower, as it would enable the Middlefield wireless network to deliver greater connectivity at a lower cost.

Respectfully submitted,

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