

SELECTBOARD MINUTES  
MARCH 10, 2014

Meeting opened at 6:00pm

Present: Alan Vint, Chair; Howard Knickerbocker, Clerk; Mitch Feldmesser  
Duane Pease, Administrative Assistant (AA)

Warrants approved and signed: Expenses: \$17, 509.91 & \$12,322.21; Payroll: \$9,955.13

Minutes approved as amended on motion by Alan, Howard 2<sup>nd</sup>; vote 3-0.

Mail reviewed: Gateway Regional School District (GRSD) sent grading request on how the Board feels on administration, declined to respond as Board felt they did not have enough contact with school to complete.

Country Journal (CJ) to be informed that complete and accurate minutes of all public meetings are available on the Town web site. Brief discussion on writing letter to CJ and it was agreed to table for later discussion.

Alan authorized to sign release of electrical consumption information for HCOG on his motion, Howard's 2<sup>nd</sup>; vote 3-0.

Howard suggested Town change Board of Assessors from elected positions to appointed. Discussion followed and Mitch felt positions should be elected as assessors would then be accountable to the voters. Alan said the upside of appointing would be the appointees would have to have requirements and a professional capacity; however, they would have to be paid more than current level.

Sherri Venditti questioned if the State required that assessors be elected. That question was unanswered and further info will be needed.

Next item discussed was the possibility of obtaining a new law firm to represent the Town. One letter has been received from the firm of Doherty, Pillsbury, Wallace & Murphy. They are located in Springfield. Alan spoke with Jonathan Silverstein of Kopelman & Paige, Town's current firm, and they are willing to work out a retainer type billing on a monthly basis and if the Town does not exceed the retainer, any funds would be returned to the Town. If the Town exceeded the retainer, there would be no additional charges. This would not include any defense work done if a law suit were filed. There will be further discussion on this matter at a future Board meeting.

The Peru Wind Turbine Public Hearing was also on the agenda. The Board discussed sending a representative to the hearing as an observer or participant as the turbines will affect some residents of Town. Alan felt the Town Planning board felt strongly about this issue and as a result enacted a very strict by-law regulating large Wind applications. This by-law was passed by the Town with more than a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> vote. On a motion by Alan, Howard 2<sup>nd</sup>, vote 2-0 with Mitch abstaining, it was agreed to have the AA contact either current or former Planning Board members to see if they would attend and represent Middlefield's interests.

Highway Superintendent, Skip Savory, met with the Board and advised the new truck had suffered some minor damage as a result of striking the railroad arch. He has contacted the

insurance carrier and is waiting for an adjuster to contact him. The truck is still serviceable. Skip also had the Board sign for Chapter 90 reimbursement. Also, he requested the Board vote to approve an additional \$5,000 in overspending on the snow account. Alan motioned to approve, Howard 2<sup>nd</sup>; vote 3-0 to allow overspending. The snow account is the only account that can be overspent.

AA advised he had follow up calls in to the 2 companies that inspected the kitchen for an estimate on a stove hood and fire suppression system and neither had called back. He will follow again this week. The lack of a useable kitchen is hindering the Highland Agricultural Society in their fundraising attempts as many residents want to support the Fair but want the events held on neutral ground. Mitch advised he had spoke nwith Jackie Duda, Health Agent regarding using the kitchen in its current condition but she deferred back to the Board. There was much further discussion on the kitchen including the minimum standards acceptable. Mitch will follow with the Building Commissioner and Health Agent.

Eric Weiss forwarded the Request for Proposals (RFP) to the Board for the ceiling tile replacement and repair. Alan motioned to approve his signing, Howard 2<sup>nd</sup>; vote 3-0 and Alan signed. Approval was scanned and email back to Eric.

Police Chief, Tom Austin, spoke briefly on receivership and what the Town can do to abandoned and derelict properties. These properties would include those that are in disrepair, present a dangerous situation or safety concerns. The property adjacent to the Town Hall is an example and Tom has sent a letter to the Health Agent voicing his concerns. There are about 8 homes in Town that are not being lived in or in the process of foreclosure.

The remaining funds from the Green Grant were discussed and it was agreed by all that the best use would be to make improvements in the Senior Center. Items needed in the Center include a new furnace, ceiling insulations and a drop ceiling. All of these would conserve energy usage.

There was discussion about the increased cost of the charge to the Town for the 9-1-1 emergency dispatch and if it were possible for the Town to join Northampton Control as it is a free service. The heads of the fire Dept, Police Dept, Emergency Mgmt, EMT and Highway will meet with the Board at a later date to discuss.

The Selectboard stipend was next discussed. The AA had obtained figures on what similar towns pay and Middlefield paid the least of the Towns. Alan felt the S/B does a host of other things and although they are not doing it for the money, the stipend should be increased. Howard said there is a huge responsibility with the position, the Board approves all spending and runs the Town. He didn't take the position for the money but would support an increase. Mitch did not feel it was a good idea fiscally but would agree to \$2,250 or \$2,500 for the Chair and \$1,500 for the remaining members. There was additional discussion and eventually Alan motioned for an increase to \$2,500 for the Chair and \$2,000 for the other members. Howard 2<sup>nd</sup>; vote was 2-0 with Mitch abstaining. These figures will be put forth at the Annual Town Meeting.

In Open Forum, Tamarin Laurel-Paine requested copies of the costs incurred by DEP in cleaning up the brownfields at the former General Store. She was advised the Town did not have these figures and she was given the names of people at the DEP that may be able to provide them to her.

Wally Smith commented on the state of the kitchen and felt the repairs should be made before anyone is allowed to use it. He did not want the rules broken just so it could be used now.

Terry Crean, ZBA chair, addressed the Board regarding an ongoing hearing regarding property on River Road. He requested permission to speak with Town Counsel as the ZBA had questions regarding procedural issues. Alan motioned to approve, Howard 2<sup>nd</sup>; vote 3-0 to allow Terry to speak with Town Counsel. Also, applicants may be required to place funds into an escrow account to cover legal costs, mailings, etc. This will be checked out and Town Counsel can advise if escrow is possible under the by-laws.

Since this property is on the middle branch of the Westfield River the Wild and Scenic by-laws may also apply as Middlefield had agreed to the by-laws of the group. Alan also stated the assessor's records show a 5 bedroom home and the septic design is for a 4 bedroom home. He has concerns with the capacity as it is within 100' of the river and is also in a flood plain. Alan motioned to approve contact with the Building commissioner and Health Agent to discuss, Howard 2<sup>nd</sup>; vote 3-0.

Alan spoke with Aimee Burnham, Chair of the Huntington Board of Selectmen, and they have hired outside counsel to represent them in the Worthington attempt to withdraw from Gateway. This was necessary and Kopelman & Paige is Town Counsel to Worthington as well as other members of the GRSD. Huntington is looking for the other towns to contribute to this cost but no dollar amount has been determined.

Joe Kearns, Finance Chair, advised the State Board of Education Assistant Commissioner has agreed to come to the area to discuss the Worthington withdrawal with the remaining towns. If a meeting with the Commissioner is needed, it would have to be in Malden. The initial cost of Worthington's withdrawal would be approximately \$60,000 to Middlefield initially. There are also additional costs such as retirement and liabilities.

Alan motioned to adjourn, Howard 2<sup>nd</sup>; vote 3-0 and meeting adjourned at 8:30pm.

Minutes respectively submitted by:  
Duane Pease, Administrative Assistant  
Minutes accepted with/without changes:

Alan Vint, Chair

Howard Knickerbocker, Clerk

Mitch Feldmesser