

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
February 26, 2003

Present: Wilson Brett, Susan Clark, Martin Pincus, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch and Greg Whitchurch

1. Town Hall Clean-up

The first hour of the meeting was spent in cleaning the Town Hall in preparation for Town Meeting. Committee members were aided by a number of volunteers in this task.

2. Town Meeting Preparation

Susan reported the Middlesex Owners Manual will hopefully be ready on the Monday afternoon preceding Town Meeting. It may be possible to have it delivered to people's homes that day. Otherwise, they may be handed out at Town Meeting.

June Lakin has requested the committee's help with setting up for Town Meeting.

The committee is on the agenda to give a report at Town Meeting. Martin suggested a short recounting of what we did during the past year and what we still want to do. Wilson said we should point out that we are conducting research and collect information but that we don't actually make decisions. He also spoke about including any residents who are interested in the issues we are working on and that the committee could potentially branch out to include broader issues and help be a forum for residents to learn about issues. This led to a discussion about the scope of this committee - it could branch out to provide information and public forums on various issues or it could stick to the original mandate of addressing issues around participation at Town Meeting. Wilson noted that he believes there is some confusion among town residents as to what we do as a committee. Greg said he thinks we should work on helping people participate who can't get to Town Meeting, investigate the possibility of revisiting controversial issues that are voted on at Town Meeting and facilitating discussion of issues of local interest. Wilson mentioned his concern about issues happening with the Federal Government that could have major impacts on our democratic freedoms.

There was a discussion of offering transportation for those who might need it to Town Meeting. Susan mentioned that last year an offer for transportation was publicized in the Middlesex Monthly and there were no takers. This year we haven't advertised it but

would certainly be willing to offer it. There was a suggestion that next year the offer of transportation with a contact person could perhaps be put into the Town Report.

The topic of moving the location of Town Meeting to Rumney School was brought up as something that had been talked about previously. Wilson offered that he thinks holding Town Meeting at Rumney School could tend to alienate some people.

The next meeting will be held on March 26 at 7:00 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Reviewed by Susan Clark

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
June 24, 2003

Present: Kelly Ault, Wilson Brett, Susan Clark, Tim Murphy, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch and Greg Whitchurch

1. Middlesex Website

Committee members reported on the response of other town commissions, committees and boards to the concept of a Middlesex website. The following groups all expressed support: the Planning Commission, Rumney School Board, Conservation Commission, Rumney School and Historical Society. The Rumney School Board told Susan they already have a website where they post their meeting minutes. June Lakin told Susan Middlesex has a place on some state website. The site was apparently created some years ago by a Vermont Technical College student and just has some very basic information about Middlesex.

Peter Hood was also supportive of the website concept but was concerned about different town commissions and committees having access to the website for the purpose of updating it. He suggested it might be possible to have a town staff person be the web manager. Greg expressed concern with it costing the town money to keep the site updated. Kelly suggested that commissions could pay a fee for this service. Wilson said if there is enough interest in having the website it will probably be possible to find volunteers to maintain it. Tim said he would be willing to do the work involved with posting material to the site. Wilson said he contacted U-32 about their interest in possibly helping to set-up or maintain the site but since school is out for the summer this question would really have to wait until school is back in session. Tim said the work with upkeep of the site, once it is established, would probably be on the order of two to three hours a month.

2. Old Fashioned Fair Day

Susan said the Committee will likely have a stack of Operators Manuals available at this event at a table shared with the Historical Society. We will probably not actually staff the table as no one seems to be available.

3. Facilitating Discussions

Kelly brought up the idea of hosting discussions in a comfortable setting on topics of interest to Middlesex residents. The goals would be to foster a sense of community and get people used to meeting and discussing issues as a prelude to

Town Meeting. Wilson stated this is not a bad idea but that it might tend to draw the same people each time. Susan proposed that for each meeting we pick some people to call and specifically invite them to attend. There was agreement that the choice of topics would be important. Kelly indicated that the groups that would do the presentations would hopefully do a lot of the work and help with contacting people to attend.

Wilson expressed a concern with how to reach the less advantaged residents. He mentioned the idea of a community service award. Kelly supported this concept and suggested recognizing groups or individuals that have made a difference in town and trying to make them part of the audience for these meetings.

Some possible topics for a discussion series were proposed:

- a discussion of civility in Town Meeting discussions with some education on Robert's Rules of Order
- wildlife issues
- village planning and design
- recreational opportunities

Next meeting: July 24

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
July 24, 2003

Present: Susan Clark, Tim Murphy, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch and Greg Whitchurch

1. Middlesex Town Website

Tim reported on his progress thus far with setting up a town website. He has created the structure for the website and was able to display this on a computer for the rest of the committee to see. The website for Rumney School is hosted by U-32 and it is possible that they could host the town site as well. Susan said she happened to see David Lawrence and he might be able to host the town site. Tim is interested in working with Rumney School if students were involved as part of their curriculum.

Susan will request any corrections that people may have for the Middlesex Operators Manual in preparation for putting material from the manual on the website.

The town already has an account with Powershift so they could also potentially host the website. Being able to have a specific domain name would be one potential advantage to being hosted by an entity like Powershift rather than U-32.

Greg suggested putting a shell of the website on the internet so that some people can look at it on their computers and see how it looks.

2. Middlesex Discussion Series

Kelly will bring some ideas to the next meeting. John Puleio is interested in combining the "Listening Room" series with the discussion series.

Next meeting: August 21, 2003 at the town office.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
August 21, 2003

Present: Susan Clark, Tim Murphy, Martin Pincus,
John Puleio, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch and Greg Whitchurch

1. Discussion Series

Susan posed the question of whether the committee still wants to proceed with the discussion series given the likelihood that Kelly Ault will have limited time to spend on this. Dave will check with Bill Rossmassler about what kind of assistance might be needed for the village planning charrette. A possible topic for discussion that Bill suggested is Class 4 roads and legal trails. Susan would like to have a discussion, before next Town Meeting, on Robert's Rules of Order as it pertains to dialogue at Town Meeting. The committee expressed interest in proceeding with hosting some discussions and Susan said she will contact Kelly about how much of a role she will be able to play.

2. Town Website

The issue of identity theft was discussed as it might pertain to a town website. It was agreed that the committee should check with town officials and other people whose contact information is in the Middlesex Operators Manual about whether they mind having their information on a town website. Greg recommended not putting information on the website if there is any question about people's privacy. It was pointed out that we might not want to put some information on the web even if that information is legally public.

Tim has contacted the director of technology at U-32 and it is likely that they could host the website. The town could get it's own domain name and that would cost about \$25.00 per year. Tim and Susan will seek to get on the Select Board agenda to discuss some website issues including identity theft and how much information to publish about town officials. John mentioned there were some problems with the U-32 server last year in that it crashed several times. He did think it might at least be a good place to start.

Next meeting: September 25, 2003 at the town office

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
September 25, 2003

Present: Susan Clark, David Lawrence, Tim Murphy, Nancy Reilly, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch and Greg Whitchurch

1. Town Website

Tim has confirmed that U-32 will host the town website. There is a registered domain name - middlesex-vt.org. Susan and Tim met with the Select Board this week; the Board expressed support for the website. At present, about half of the Middlesex Operators Manual has been loaded onto the site.

Susan thinks it would be a good idea to visit other groups in town to show them the site and interest them in participating by posting meeting minutes etc... The main groups to visit would include: Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, Historical Society and Fire Department.

David Lawrence thought a bulletin board would be a good addition to the site. Greg suggested putting the website address into the Town Report. It will be necessary to check with businesses and individuals listed in the yellow pages section of the Middlesex Operators Manual about whether they want to appear on the town webpage. Susan will check with Kelly Ault about how to go about this.

2. Other Committee Priorities

Susan reviewed other topics committee members have been interested in working on:

a. Discussion Series

-The village design workshop is set for November 6 and this committee can assist if we are interested.

-Susan is interested in having a discussion on having civil debate at Town Meeting including some information on Roberts Rules of Order.

b. Issues Concerning Increasing Town Meeting Participation

-A big issue that remains to be tackled is allowing participation at Town Meeting for people who can't physically be present.

-Looking into means to allow voting on controversial issues that arise at Town Meeting at a later date by Australian ballot.

-Transportation to Town Meeting for those who might need it and childcare.

Regarding the village design workshop the committee was willing to assist with this if our help is needed but members felt if those planning the event have things well in hand, our committee doesn't have to be involved.

Nancy suggested holding neighborhood meetings prior to Town Meeting to discuss and become better educated about issues to be voted on at Town Meeting. Susan envisioned taking questions from voters via the town website and posting answers. The committee could develop a list of top issues to be voted on at town meeting with some facts about these issues that could be disseminated to people that would host neighborhood discussions.

Childcare could perhaps be provided by Girl Scouts. Another question is where there is a good space for childcare in close proximity to Town Hall. The fire station was mentioned as a possibility to look into further.

Regarding the transportation issue, it was agreed that it shouldn't be difficult to line up some drivers who would be willing to provide rides to Town Meeting if anyone needs one.

Other ideas for Town Meeting:

-provide cookies

-hold a photo contest with the winning photo on the cover of the Town Report if the Select Board was ok with the additional cost of a photo for the cover

On the issue of technology to allow participation in Town Meeting without being physically present, David Lawrence will try to set up a demonstration of what this might look like for the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 pm. The next meeting will be held on October 21 at the Town Hall at 7:00 pm.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
October 21, 2003

Present: Susan Clark, Tim Murphy, Nancy Reilly, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch and Greg Whitchurch

1. Approval of Minutes from September 25

The minutes from the meeting held on September 25 were approved.

2. Neighborhood Meetings

The committee talked about the idea of neighborhood meetings prior to Town Meeting where issues to be voted on could be discussed. A question to be answered is when the Town Meeting agenda is finalized so that issues that might be discussed at one of these meetings would be known. Ideas for getting the word out about these meetings included: the Middlesex Monthly, the Town website and putting up notices.

3. Childcare at Town Meeting

Susan has spoken to a Girl Scout leader who thinks they might be able to provide childcare. Currently the girls in the troop are not old enough but by Town Meeting there may be some older girls in the troop. The location where childcare would be provided still needs to be determined.

4. Town Website

Tim reported the homepage is up on the U-32 server and can now be linked to. Susan would like to demonstrate the website to other groups in town. One possibility is to show the website during the dinner hour of the upcoming village design workshop. Susan will check into whether this would be appropriate.

5. Photo Contest

The concept of having a photo contest with the winning photo going on the cover of the Town Report raises the issue that this would add cost to the printing of the Town Report. Another possibility would be to display them during Town Meeting and on the website. Greg posed the question of whether it might be preferable to do this as non-competitive.

6. Technology for Remote Participation in Town Meeting

There are two main questions that pertain to this issue: legality and technology. The committee doesn't believe it likely that a lot of people would use some technological means to attend Town Meeting because they can't be physically present. In addition, there are some questions about how well the technology might work in allowing participation from a remote location. Nonetheless, the committee feels it is important to offer something to address the issue of those who aren't able to physically attend Town Meeting but are interested and would like to vote. Tim said he could check with IBM about whether they would be interested in helping out with the technology for a demonstration project.

Susan noted that the Secretary of State's Office (SSO) is working on an initiative to revitalize Town Meeting including ways to promote local control.

Greg is interested in working out scenarios for remote participation in Town Meeting that could be presented to the SSO to get their feedback. Susan will contact the SSO to get their input on the remote participation idea and check if they might be interested in helping with this.

7. Revisiting Issues

Greg proposed that there might be a number of ways to revisit controversial issues. One possibility is to find a way to provide for an Australian ballot by an easier process than is currently available.

It seems likely that the ability to reconsider an issue from Town Meeting at a later date by Australian ballot would require either a change in current law or that Middlesex develop a Town Charter.

The committee could approach some knowledgeable individuals, such as Paul Gillies or experienced moderators, to get their opinions on the idea of reconsidering controversial issues by Australian ballot.

Next Meeting: November 19 at 7:00 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
November 19, 2003

Present: Susan Clark, Tim Murphy, Nancy Reilly, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch

1. Update

Susan will be meeting with the Secretary of State's Office in mid December to discuss legal issues around voting without being physically present at Town Meeting. Greg handed out a potential scenario he had worked up for how remote voting might work.

2. Website

The town website is on the U-32 server and can now be accessed but it can't be updated because Tim hasn't yet been provided with the password he needs to be able to access the site for this purpose. Greg will email all town officials to check if they have an objection to having their email address on the website.

The committee will need to check with those in the Middlesex Operator's Manual (MOM) yellow pages about whether they want to be listed on the website and to check if there are any changes to their listing in the MOM. Tim will send an email to those who provided an email address and he will send a postcard to those without an email address but with a postal address. Barb will call those who only provided a phone number.

The website was not shown to those attending the village design workshop as there wasn't an appropriate time to do so with everything else that was happening at this event.

Susan will write an article for the Middlesex Monthly informing readers that the town website is up and running. The Select Board can be contacted about providing agendas of Select Board meetings, minutes of those meetings and legal notices.

3. Childcare at Town Meeting

The fire station is a possibility for a location to provide childcare during Town Meeting according to Fire Chief Marty McMahon. Susan will visit the station to see if it looks like it could work. The Girl Scouts are still a possibility for providing the childcare.

4. Neighborhood Meetings Prior to Town Meeting

Ideas for neighborhood meetings were discussed. One idea mentioned was asking people who don't regularly attend Town Meeting why they don't. This might be especially pertinent for newer town residents. Another idea was to provide an overview of how Town Meeting works. It was also suggested

that it could be helpful for the moderator to give a review of the ground rules for Town Meeting as a preliminary to taking up the first item of business at Town Meeting.

Another idea was to create a Town Meeting primer that could be printed in the Middlesex Monthly for the issue that precedes Town Meeting. This document could also be available at Town Meeting.

If it would be helpful for the host of a neighborhood meeting, someone from this committee could attend the meeting. Committee members suggested possible hosts for these meetings. The idea is that the host would provide the place for the meeting and invite friends and neighbors to attend and this committee could provide a resource person and perhaps some materials.

Nancy suggested that she might host one at a Rumney playgroup in the school library.

Next meeting: December 17, 2003 at 7:00 at the Town Office.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard
