

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 22, 2005

Present: Kelly Ault, Susan Clark, Nancy Reilly, Dave Shepard,
Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch

1. Town Meeting Review

Approximately 140 people attended the 2005 Town Meeting.

In consideration of the discussion on health care that followed the close of the official Town Meeting Kelly questioned how there might be provision for more discussion of topics that aren't to be voted upon. One suggestion was to designate certain tables at the church supper where discussion of specified topics could take place. Another suggestion was a discussion session before the official beginning of Town Meeting.

Susan reported on the comments received about Town Meeting. One comment related to not being able to discuss the town budget. There was discussion of making it known to voters how much tax it would add for a hypothetical \$100,000 house for every \$1000 of spending that is approved. This had been suggested to do for the 2005 Town Meeting but it didn't happen. Possibilities would be for the Select Board to do this and put the information in the Town Report or perhaps the Town Meeting Solutions Committee (TMSC) could figure out the number and have the Select Board approve it. Some sentiment was again expressed for moving Town Meeting to Rumney School. Concern was expressed for a need to improve the sound at Town Hall.

Child care during Town Meeting was successful but there was some confusion over money matters this year. In the future, we will need to determine how to pay for this. Susan suggested meeting with Community Connections, Rumney School and the Select Board. Kelly suggested it might be possible to get a day care facility to help sponsor the childcare and to provide staff. Dave suggested approaching the Select Board about the town providing some financial support. Susan said she will meet with the Select Board to discuss feedback about Town Meeting and will bring this issue up.

2. New Middlesex Voter Letter

Among this year's recipients of the welcome letter for newly registered Middlesex voters were Patrick and Marcelle Leahy, who previously had been registered to vote in Burlington. Susan shared a nice thank-you letter she received from the Leahy's in reference to the new voter letter.

3. Middlesex Web Page

As the new webmaster, Greg asked for some guidance and suggestions on the town webpage. Greg received some information from June on town officers and contacts. In some instances, this

information was not completely up to date. Where TMSC members are aware of changes to the contact list they'll let Greg know and he will make the updates and corrections. Greg said he is fine with receiving material to go on the web on paper as well as electronically.

The calendar page was discussed at some length. Greg said he would archive past events. Kelly thought it would be helpful to figure out a way to include both general monthly events (from the Middlesex Operator's Manual) as well as specific events for the current month.

Greg asked about the possibility of posting community news items such as deaths, fires and situations where people may need assistance from community members. It was agreed that this topic would be discussed in more detail at a future meeting.

Susan suggested there might be town forms that could be available on the website in order to reduce the workload for the town clerk and assistant town clerk in having to mail these out to residents. Susan will contact June to see if this would be useful.

The possibility was raised of having an opinion page where residents could express their views on topics of interest to the town. Kelly suggested if this were to be done that it would be best to accept submittals on a given topic for a specified period of time and then that specific topic would come off the page rather than having an endless back and forth. She also thought it might be helpful to solicit opening comments from opposing sides on a given issue. Concerns were expressed over the possibility of an ongoing debate where there might be large gaps in time and potentially no response representing an opposing view. Overall, given the pros and cons there was not a lot of support for this idea.

Greg also requested a person or two that he could bounce webpage ideas and questions off. Susan and Dave agreed to fill this role.

4. Next Meeting

The date for the next meeting was set for April 19th at 7:00 pm at the Town Hall.

This meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 19, 2005

Present: Susan Clark, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch

1. Meeting Minutes on the Town Webpage

Jim Colby has pointed out to Greg that some Planning Commission meeting minutes appear to be missing from the Town webpage. Greg will check through information he received from Tim Murphy and see if the minutes are there.

2. Town Budget

Ideas of how it might be possible to make the town budget more intelligible to the average voter were discussed. The Town Meeting Solutions Committee (TMSC) has learned that there are some complications to trying to state the cost of a given item on the current year's Town Meeting warning in terms of an amount per \$100,000 of assessed value due to some costs being spread out over a number of years. Greg suggested a different method that might put monetary items on the warning into perspective would be to compare an expenditure to what it would have meant in terms of an amount per \$100,000 of assessed value for the two previous years where the necessary data would be more available.

Susan suggested holding a brown bag type gathering to provide a training session on how a town budget works. We would need to find someone who understands budgets well to lead such a discussion. Susan will discuss the concept with the Select Board. The target date to hold such an event would be late January.

3. Public Meetings vs. Hearings

A Middlesex resident has suggested that it might be helpful to have an informational session on public meetings and hearings and how they differ. This would likely best be accomplished by getting an outside speaker who is knowledgeable about this topic. It was noted that September would be a good time to hold such an event as there will likely be a public meeting on the zoning regulations coming up later in the fall.

Greg thought it might be helpful to provide a "suggestion box" posted at the town office where residents could write out a question or a suggestion for any of the town boards or commissions. The intent would be for the various town boards and commissions to take up any pertinent questions or suggestions during their meetings. The TMSC would need to contact the boards and commissions and check with them about this possibility.

4. Minutes from March 22, 2005 Meeting

The minutes from the March 22, 2005, meeting were approved with the understanding that the list of comments received from the Town Meeting questionnaire will be appended to the minutes.

5. Middlesex Website

Greg reported that the website has been down recently. New school board members Don Hirsch and Aaron Weed and new Planning Commission member Steve Martin need to be contacted about adding their contact information to the website.

With regard to the Fire Department, there was a long list of all the officers of the department on the listing of town officials June Lakin provided to Greg. The TMSC thought it would be a good to list all of the members of the Fire Department but to only include the Fire Chief on the contacts page of the website. We will check with the Fire Chief about the contact information and inquire about listing all department members names on the webpage.

The contacts page previously mainly provided phone numbers and sometimes email addresses. Greg now does have quite a few mailing addresses as well and asked if they should be included on the webpage contacts page. The TMSC agreed that mailing addresses would best be left off the webpage except for the institutional buildings such as the Town Office, Rumney School and U32.

Greg brought up the idea of a community bulletin board as a place to post a notice of a community member in need. He will check with June Lakin about letting him know if there is an appropriate listing.

Next Meeting: May 24, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Office.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 24, 2005

Present: Kelly Ault, Susan Clark, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch

1. Minutes of April 19, 2004 Meeting

Minutes from the Town Meeting Solutions Committee (TMSC) meeting of April 19, 2005 were approved.

2. Meeting with the Select Board

Susan reported on her meeting with the Select Board about the 2005 Town Meeting.

Childcare: Regarding the childcare provided during Town Meeting, the total amount paid to caregivers was \$245, reduced by \$80 in donations received for a total cost of \$165 that came out of the Community Connections budget. The Select Board expressed support for providing childcare and, if necessary, offered to pay for the childcare next year. They were also willing to reimburse Community Connections the money for this year.

Taxation Explanation: The concept of explaining budget items in terms of an amount per \$100,000 of appraised value was supported by the board. Bill Callnan agreed to help work on this using the previous years budget to create the comparison. Greg expressed interest in this and it was noted that John Riley may also be interested.

New Voter Letter: The Select Board was agreeable to sending a letter to new voters each year informing them about Town Meeting and related matters in Middlesex.

Suggestion Box: The Select Board supported the concept of a suggestion box at Town Hall where questions for town boards or commissions could be left off for those boards or commissions to take up at their meetings. They agreed to take up any questions that might be directed to them.

Town Meeting Survey: The Select Board noted the comments pertaining to space issues. Peter Hood stated he thought there should be cordless microphones. Susan has concerns about the potential for microphones to decrease the number of people who will be willing to speak up. Greg suggested if the moderator is careful to repeat every question it may be sufficient. There should be microphones for the moderator and the Select Board table. All present at the meeting were in agreement with this approach. The Select Board also commented that more people seem to be attending Town Meeting.

Susan also brought up with the Select Board the idea of informational sessions on the differences between a public meeting and a hearing and on how to understand a town budget. Susan will follow up on the informational session on public meeting vs. hearing. Greg suggested involving members of town boards/commissions in determining who might conduct the informational session.

3. Summer Schedule for TMSC

The summer meeting schedule and any events that TMSC might want a presence at were discussed. The Rumney School Fair is coming up on June 4th and TMSC could have a table there with our poster and some Middlesex Operator's Manuals. It was decided to meet in June but not in July or August.

4. Town Website

Greg noted that the group seeking to build a town bandstand has posted information on the website. Susan reported that a Woodbury College student has picked Middlesex for a project partly based on a favorable impression from the website.

Next meeting: June 28, 2005 at 7:00 at the Town Hall.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
June 29, 2005

Present: Susan Clark, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch

1. Minutes of May 24, 2005 Meeting

Minutes from the Town Meeting Solutions Committee (TMSC) meeting of May 24, 2005 were approved.

2. Rumney School Fair

This year the TMSC did not have a presence at the fair due to logistical complications with getting materials to the fair.

3. Town Budget

Greg agreed to get contact information for John Riley to Susan so she can coordinate with John and Bill Callnan to set up a meeting to discuss developing an explanation of the town budget and how it relates to the an individual land owners property tax. Susan will also check on the interest in having a workshop on how to understand a town budget.

4. Middlesex Historical Society Book

The history of Middlesex manuscript that was recently completed by the Middlesex Historical Society was a topic of discussion. Susan suggested a celebration of the completion of this book as a prelude to the 2006 Town Meeting, perhaps running from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

5. Communication from Planning Commission

The TMSC has received a request from the Planning Commission for any assistance TMSC might be able to offer with soliciting public input on proposed revisions to the zoning regulations. The TMSC discussed various possible methods to encourage more public involvement in this process. Greg and Barb suggested providing example comparisons of the current and proposed zoning to be published in the Middlesex Monthly. Susan mentioned some form of public presentation where this type of information could be provided. Susan will compile the various suggestions and send to the TMSC for review and then provide then to the Planning Commission.

6. Next Meeting

It was agreed to take some time off over the summer with the next meeting scheduled for September 6, 2005 at the Town Office at 7:00 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

**Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
September 6, 2005**

Present: Susan Clark, Ron Krauth, John Riley, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch

1. Minutes of June 29, 2005 Meeting

Minutes from the Town Meeting Solutions Committee (TMSC) meeting of June 29, 2005 were not available for approval at this meeting.

2. Town Budget

John Riley attended this meeting to present to the TMSC information he has compiled about the town budget toward the end of making the budget more understandable to the voters. He had prepared tables and graphs of town income and expenditures. He sought to answer the question of how much money in total does the town spend for the town budget, Rumney School and U32. He has found that this is not an easy question to answer.

With regard to the presentation of budget items in the Town Report, he recommends having more detail about what some of the columns in the tables mean. For instance it would be helpful to know what date the amount expended in the current budget year is based on.

It will be necessary for John and others who are interested to meet with Bill Callnan to work on how to present town budget items in terms of what each item means in to the taxes paid by a Middlesex resident. Information that is developed, once approved by the Select Board, can be posted on the town website.

3. Email from Jim Colby

Susan received an email from Jim Colby concerning some of the Planning Commission meeting minutes. As it seemed that perhaps Mr. Colby had confused a meeting agenda for meeting minutes on the town website, Greg asked TMSC members to take a look at how meeting agendas and minutes are presented on the website and let him know if the way they're currently presented seems unclear. He would welcome any suggestions for ways to improve the clarity.

4. Planning Commission Request for Assistance

The TMSC discussed the request from the Middlesex Planning Commission (MPC) for help with public outreach about the revisions to the town zoning regulations. Susan shared the letter she sent to the MPC on behalf of the TMSC with various the ideas for the outreach effort that were discussed at the last TMSC meeting. Susan said that Kelly Ault has volunteered to help with articles pertaining to zoning for the Middlesex Monthly. She was also interested in the proposal for some form of discussion (perhaps neighborhood meetings) of all of the zoning options. This idea was discussed further and an idea emerged of hosting a meeting at the Town Hall where for part of the meeting those attending would break into small "neighborhood" type groups, with a facilitator, to

discuss specifics of zoning for Middlesex and where questions could be raised. Later all of the smaller groups would reconvene to share what had come up in the small groups. A major intent of this event would be to allow all sides on the zoning issue to express their opinion.

5. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the TMSC was tentatively set for October 12 at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Office.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
October 17, 2005

Present: Kelly Ault, Susan Clark, Ron Krauth, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch

1. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

Minutes from the June 29, 2005, and September 6, 2005, Town Meeting Solutions Committee (TMSC) meetings were approved.

2. Town Budget Presentation for Town Meeting

Susan met with John Riley and Bill Callnan about how to do a presentation on the town budget for Town Meeting. This year the Town Report will include a pie chart showing where the money in the town budget goes. They discussed developing a figure for what each \$1000 on the town budget would result in for taxes on a property value for the average Middlesex home. TMSC members expressed a preference for developing examples for a couple of property values including one, such as \$100,000, that is easy to scale up for greater property values.

Bill agreed that a presentation/report by the Select Board on the budget would be a good idea and expressed support for this being done.

3. Zoning

TMSC discussed an effort to present information about proposed new zoning regulations through a series of articles in the Middlesex Monthly. Both Kelly and Barb are willing to write articles. Susan has also contacted Kim Hagen who is willing to help with this.

Potential article topics were considered with the following ideas emerging:

- What is zoning and why is it needed or not needed?
- What has been Middlesex's process for planning and zoning?
- How does Middlesex's zoning compare to similar towns?
- What would the proposed regulations mean for individual property owners?
- How can one get more information?
- Fact sheet with question/answer format

It is important that TMSC's neutrality be maintained throughout this process. TMSC's role is to help Middlesex voters be better informed.

3. Letter to Non-Profits Seeking Funding at Town Meeting

Susan has drafted a letter, approved by June Lakin, to send to all non-profit organizations seeking funding from Middlesex at Town Meeting.

4. Child Care for Town Meeting

Susan has contacted both Elaine Laine, the Rumney School principal and Ann Gilbert of Community Connections about child care for Town Meeting. She will be setting up a meeting with both Elaine and Ann.

5. Rumney Art Project

There is a possibility of working with Rumney on some sort of student art project related to Town Meeting.

6. Articles for Middlesex Monthly Related to Town Meeting

The following are possible articles for the Middlesex Monthly related to Town Meeting:

- Roberts Rules summary
- How and why to read your town report

7. New Voter Letter

Essentially the same letter for new voters will go out this year as last year. It appears there will be less new voters this year.

8. Town Contacts Sheet

There was discussion of updating the list of town contacts as an insert for the Middlesex Operator's Manual including the best time to do this. While it would be desirable to have them available at Town Meeting, there is logic to waiting until after Town Meeting as some of those contacts will likely change on Town Meeting day. The question was posed whether it could be included with the tax bills that are mailed out in July. Dave volunteered to check with June Lakin to see if this could be done.

Meeting adjourned 8:38.

Next meeting: November 14, 2005 at the Middlesex Town Office

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

**Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
November 14, 2005**

Present: Kelly Ault, Susan Clark, Ron Krauth, Dave Shepard

1. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes for the October 17 meeting were not available for approval.

2. Letter to Non-Profit Organizations

Nancy Reilly and Susan Clark sent out 16 letters to the non-profit organizations that asked for or received money at Town Meeting in 2005.

3. Town Budget Information for Town Meeting

John Riley, Susan and Bill Callnan met to discuss presenting more information about the town budget for Town Meeting. A pie chart will be prepared showing school appropriations and the town operating budget. A second pie chart will present a breakdown of just the town portion of the budget that is voted by voice vote at Town Meeting.

As a visual aid, there will be a chart at Town Meeting that will show the amount of tax increase for each \$1000 of spending referenced to a hypothetical \$100,000 home.

4. Zoning

An informational article has been prepared for the Middlesex Monthly on the interim zoning vote. Greg has been putting a lot of zoning related information on the website. Susan asked if there were any suggestions on how to best organize the zoning material on the website.

Susan has met with the writers for the series of articles for the Middlesex Monthly on the town-wide zoning regulations.

5. Childcare for Town Meeting

Susan and Kelly will meet to discuss childcare for the 2006 Town Meeting. Susan has some ideas for non-Middlesex residents who might be able to help with childcare.

6. Involvement with Rumney School Regarding Town Meeting

Susan has made some contacts and has an idea of working with the art teacher and social studies teacher on a project.

7. Potential Legislation Relating to Town Meeting

Susan reported that there may be a proposal in the legislature for Town Meeting to be considered much like jury duty where employees must be allowed time from work to attend.

Adjourned at 7:43 pm.

The next TMSM meeting will be on December 12, 2005.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard

Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee
Meeting Minutes
December 12, 2005

Present: Kelly Ault, Susan Clark, Dave Shepard, Barb Whitchurch, Greg Whitchurch

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Minutes from Town Meeting Solution's Committee (TMSC) meetings of October 17th and November 14th were reviewed. Greg made a motion to approve the minutes with a second by Barb. Minutes were approved.

2. Town Budget Information for Town Meeting

Susan reported that two pie charts illustrating the town budget will be prepared for Town Meeting. One will show the entire budget, including the school budgets, while the other will provide more details about just the town budget without the school budgets. The Select Board is supportive of including both in the Town Report. Blown-up versions of the charts could be prepared to post on the walls at Town Meeting. There could also be a spreadsheet that will show how much each budget item will cost in taxes if one owned property of a certain value. Figures would be provided for several examples (e.g. \$100,000 property, \$200,000 property).

The Select Board is also willing to do a short introduction of the budget before the discussion and vote on the budget. This is complicated by the fact that not all budget items are known by Town Meeting.

3. Middlesex History Book

The history of Middlesex prepared by the Middlesex Historical Society will be available for sale at Town Meeting. Susan suggested a slide show of images from the book that could show either a short time before the actual start of Town Meeting or all during the day when people stop in to vote the Australian ballot portion of the voting.

4. Zoning Articles

For the December issue of the Middlesex Monthly there will be an article by Kimberly Hagen on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of zoning regulations. There will also be an article on the history of land use regulation and planning in Middlesex.

5. Town Website

Greg will be working on a webpage for the Conservation Commission. It was mentioned that the zoning proposal that was defeated by the voters in November, 2004 should be removed from the website to avoid confusion. It was also suggested that it would be useful to post a copy of the current zoning regulations on the website if an electronic copy can be located.

6. Childcare for Town Meeting

There will be a meeting in January with Rumney School principal, Elaine Laine, to discuss providing childcare at Rumney School during Town Meeting. Susan is interested

in the potential for a childcare exchange with a neighboring town that may have Town Meeting at a different time from Middlesex so that caregivers wouldn't have to miss Town Meeting.

7. Updated Town Contacts Sheet

Dave reported that he has checked with June and it isn't possible to send out the updated town contacts sheet with the property tax bills. Susan will check with the Select Board about their willingness to pay for distributing the contact sheet. If they are interested, possibilities include mailing them or including as an insert in the Middlesex Monthly.

8. Town Meeting Invocation

Some towns have some sort of an invocation to start off Town Meeting and Susan proposed that Middlesex might do this. She suggested someone in town who would be voting for the first time might deliver it. The town of Danville has an invocation that Middlesex could use.

The next TMSC meeting will be January 9, 2006 at the Town Office and 7:00 pm.

Minutes recorded by Dave Shepard
