

1 TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY
2 Infrastructure Committee
3 Town Offices Large Conference Room
4 Thursday, December 12, 2019
5 Meeting Minutes
6

7 Committee Members Present: Lindsey Fuentes-George, Chris Robbins, Candy McLaughlin, Luther Tenny,
8 Gary Baker and Judy Wiger-Grohs. Heather Seeley was absent.
9

10 Town Staff: Town Manager Kathleen Ramsay, Director of Public Works Planning Dan Werner, Director of
11 Accounting Services Manager Jackie Sullivan, and Director of Public Work Operations Bill Kernan.
12

13 Also Present: Irene Barna
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15 The meeting was called to order by Fuentes-George at 8:16 a.m.
16

17 Approval of Agenda
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19 Baker moved, and Tenny seconded, to approve the agenda. The agenda was approved as presented
20 with 6 in favor, 1 absent.
21

22 Approval of Minutes
23

24 McLaughlin moved, and Baker seconded, to approve the minutes of November 12, 2019. The minutes
25 were approved with one amendment, with 5 in favor, 1 abstention (Fuentes-George), 1 absent.

26 Add: Line 229 – “Robbins also said a lot of erosion happened at the site.”
27

28 Project Updates
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30 Werner reported that the VTrans Class I paving project is expected to begin in the spring of 2021.
31

32 Werner said he and Kernan met with Judy Harris of Harris & Harris Consulting to talk about the Public
33 Works building and site project and will be looking at properties around town that have access to water
34 and sewer.
35

36 Werner said they met with the three property owners along the Maple/Willard Street storm sewer
37 project that will run along the western side of their properties. He said they walked the project and
38 they’re all in agreement and they understand the need and that they’ll benefit it as well, so easements
39 will be drafted up for them to sign.
40

41 Werner also said there was an e-mail response from Elizabeth Peebles, a Historic Resources Specialist
42 with the State Division of Historic Preservation on the warning devices at the Pulp Mill Bridge that was
43 included for their information.

44

45 Citizen Comments

46

47 Irene Barna said she was here because she had further thoughts on the Pulp Mill Bridge during the
48 downtown shutdown next summer. She wants to be sure everyone understands how the covered
49 bridge works, and that it is not a static structure, it's flexible. She said these bridges move, and she's
50 concerned that with the amount of traffic that bridge will have during the downtown construction,
51 there's going to be too many vehicles on the bridge at the same time and that will be very bad for the
52 bridge. She said there used to be a sign that said "One vehicle per lane", but those signs are gone. She
53 said she just wanted to bring attention the fact that the bridge is a vulnerable structure, and suggested
54 Ramsay contact Alpine Construction who reconstructed the bridge the last time, about the potential
55 overload. She said the damage may not show up right away.

56

57 Werner said it was VTrans that recommended limiting vehicles to one-vehicle per lane prior to the
58 repairs some years ago, but once the repairs were done the sign came down. He said he was told that
59 the way the bridge was constructed the weight of the floor far exceeded the weight of the bridge if it
60 was fully loaded with vehicles, so the last time it was reconstructed the floor was redone so the bridge
61 has far less load now than it did before.

62

63 Water System Upgrades

64

65 Werner went over the Court Street Water Main project, which he'd broken down into 3 contracts. He
66 said the Committee had been thinking about programming additional funding each year towards these
67 water projects, so he programmed that amount (\$109,000) each year towards these contracts, and also
68 showed the additional funds needed beyond the Water Capital Improvement funds. Ramsay said for the
69 additional funds needed, which is just under \$1 million, the Committee had discussed two possible
70 options; a bond vote or using Cross Street Bridge Funds. She said Werner has cautioned against bonding
71 because of how it ties our hands for future projects if committed to a bond payment for 20 years.

72 Robbins said she's in favor of using the Cross Street Bridge Funds. Baker asked how much was available,
73 and Ramsay said there was around \$2.5 million.

74

75 Tenny said when you look holistically at all the highway and water deficiencies; he doesn't know how at
76 some point we will avoid bonding. He said there is too much deferred maintenance and he doesn't
77 think we can raise our user rates and tax rates that aggressively to keep up with this without incurring
78 some debt. He said he agrees it's not the greatest thing to do, but there has to be a plan to bridge that.

79

80 Fuentes-George said she was thinking we'd need both, but we needed to work on the timing so we
81 aren't under a burden that ties our hands for future needs. She thinks if the Bridge Funds are sitting
82 there, and we have all these needs, then we should be utilizing it for the benefit of everyone.

83
84 McLaughlin said if there is a big backlog of work that needs to be done, we'll never get out of it. She
85 said if we borrow we can pay it back over the life of the project. She doesn't think you can always do
86 pay-as-you-go with huge projects like this. Robbins said she thought people might be more willing to
87 use the Bridge Funds for water projects. Tenny said part of the problem with bonding is it takes the
88 money to pay the bond so you don't have the funds for real-time fixes, and you're paying a large
89 amount of interest. McLaughlin asked what the bond rate was, and Ramsay said it was 3.5%. Tenny
90 asked what the annual surplus of the Cross Street Bridge Funds was, and Ramsay said it was around
91 \$500,000, but those are committed already to the Capital Improvements budget. Tenny said after this
92 Court Street/Water Street water project, there is the Exchange Street water project that got leapfrogged
93 due to the paving project and then the water storage tank. Werner said there is also the South Street
94 line that has to be done before they can replace the sanitary sewer, so that's also waiting in the wings.

95
96 The Committee continued to discuss the escalating costs of construction and how there was no
97 replacement plan for these water lines when they were installed 80 years ago. Robbins said studies
98 show that as residences begin to sprawl out along a street, they don't cover the cost of the
99 infrastructure in the street, so there should be more housing infill to help with costs and a limit to
100 extending infrastructure to rural areas.

101
102 Ramsay said this wasn't going to be solved at this meeting, so she and Werner would put together a 10-
103 year plan on the three large water projects that are priorities and see what it looks like for funding. She
104 said Werner's projections today for the Court Street project was under the assumption there would be
105 \$109,000/year increase to the Water Capital Improvement Funds, but suggested maybe lowering that
106 amount somewhat and extending the time from 5-years to 7 to 10-years. Tenny said when doing the
107 plan, don't look at individual projects, but how much do we need on an annual basis, and that's what we
108 need to be pursuing and work towards that model. He said we know we need it and while this project is
109 important due to the need to do it prior to the paving project, that's how a lot of projects are sometimes
110 driven and that gets us outside of the model, so we need something to keep us in check. Fuentes-
111 George said we should also be looking at this as how much debt can the Town carry, so maybe we set a
112 certain debt load to help guide us as to how things are paid for.

113
114 Tenny asked if there was a decision needed from the Committee now from a schedule standpoint.
115 Ramsay said if we're thinking of a bond vote at Town Meeting, then we need to know by the end of
116 January, but there's a lot of work to do. Werner said the State has funds available for replacing water
117 lines with lead joints, which the South Street line has, but one of the requirements for the State funds is
118 the project has to have a bond, so he said that needs to be considered when deciding which project to
119 bond for.

120

121 Wiger-Grohs said water is an absolutely necessary resource and we've taken it for granted, so she's in
122 favor of an even higher user rate to fund these projects. Tenny said he worries about businesses and
123 industries shying away from locating here due to high water and sewer rates, or the low-income and
124 fixed-income residents that need to be considered.

125

126 Highway Capital Projects

127

128 Werner went over the highway projects for the next several years and said the funding projection for
129 these projects and the grants received and funds available. He said a few months ago it was discussed
130 about increasing the Highway Capital Funds with the Selectboard, and they talked about doing some of
131 these projects that are in close proximity and not spread them out geographically. He went over the
132 clustering of projects he's proposing over the next several years.

133

134 Tenny said he understood economies of scale and the public-opinion piece of this too. He said when
135 you're putting all your improvements in one area, unless people drive to these areas, people have the
136 perception nothing is being done, so doing things in multiple areas sometimes has a positive impact. He
137 said it's the same thing with the water projects too. Tenny feels we just need to overlay some roads and
138 leave the water and storm drains for another day, instead of waiting until we can afford to do a total
139 reconstruction. Robbins said a lot of these roads aren't travelled on by people other than the people
140 who live on them, so if you pave roads that are more heavily traveled, people think things are
141 happening.

142

143 Tenny suggested bundling smaller sections of streets and do the road, curbs and sidewalk, and this
144 might actually invite more contractors to bid. Werner said after July 1 there will be around \$210,000
145 available for paving, so he'll estimate the cost of doing Monroe Street and one other smaller road in the
146 area. Werner said if a road is showing extensive cracking there is no sense in doing only an overlay that
147 only lasts 15 years, because that only drives up the cost the next time.

148

149 Wiger-Grohs asked about the "bikeability" and the law about "complete streets" that meets the needs
150 of not only drivers and walkers, but bikers needs as well. She said wonders where that fits in to these
151 plans. Tenny said he tried to work with the State on Rt. 125 when they were going to do their repaving,
152 and when asked about abiding by their own rules they said they didn't have the funding for that. He
153 said we don't have the funds either, so if they can't abide by their own standards how can towns do it
154 where the cost is higher due to curbs and sidewalks. Wiger-Grohs said she wondered how other places
155 did it, and Fuentes-George said she felt it was because they were higher density areas. Tenny said if you
156 need to widen the roads to accommodate for a bike lane, many times you have to deal with wetlands
157 and agriculture restrictions that make it impossible.

158

159 Sidewalks

160

161 Irene Barna said Valley View needs a sidewalk, because there is none there now and it has heavy foot
162 traffic.

163
164 Werner reviewed the list of suggested sidewalk areas to be replaced, including Monroe Street,
165 Weybridge Street, Court Street and Seminary Street. He said the Court Street sidewalk would be an
166 attempt to elevate the sidewalk in the area of the Foshay property to try and alleviate some of the
167 water that drains into his basement. Robbins said there is also mud that gets on the sidewalk in that
168 area that washes into the creek.

169
170 Equipment

171
172 Kernan went over his 20-year schedule and said they're now reviewing what equipment is holding up
173 and what isn't. He said they've made some adjustments based on the condition of the equipment now.
174 He said the loader and mower moved up on the schedule because the current equipment won't last that
175 long. He said the manufacturer of the existing mower is no longer in business, and the loader was
176 modified to fit this mower so others might not fit. He said they'd like to change to a tractor type
177 machine with a mower that will save money and costs down the road. He said they also want to
178 replace one of their International trucks that they've had continued problems and is getting very
179 expensive to maintain. He said he'd like to swap it for the Mack they wanted to trade next year and to
180 purchase a slightly smaller truck as well. Kernan said they want to trade the Trackless sidewalk plow and
181 go for another Bobcat Toolcat machine. He said overall the changes save over \$1 million over a 20-year
182 period.

183
184 Tenny said when going from a loader to a tractor you are limiting what you can do with it, and also the
185 smaller trucks you tend to overload them and they get beat-up a lot faster.

186
187 Fuentes-George asked if the budget would cover moving the loader up to this year's budget. Ramsay
188 said that is quite a bump and while we know we have to get to \$400,000 for the Equipment
189 Replacement Fund, there is also a question of how fast we can get there. She said these will also be on
190 the Warning at Town Meeting, so they will need to be approved in January.

191
192 Robbins reminded Kernan to ask the dealers about energy efficiency.

193
194 Ramsay said there had some grant money a couple of years ago for sweepers, but there was a problem
195 with the "buy in America" clause for sweepers. Kernan said the sweeper got moved up a year because
196 the old one is in bad shape.

197
198 Pool Information

199
200 Tenny said he appreciated the update on what had been done so far and what more needed to be done.
201 He said the thing he was having trouble with is the future "splash pad" and what are the drivers of that
202 and is that investment going to bring in additional revenue, or is it just because other places have them.
203 Kernan said the kiddy pool takes a lot of maintenance and it's also on its separate circulating system that
204 isn't what it should be. He said it isn't used much either, so the splash pad hopefully will attract more

205 people to the pool. He said this would be in 5-6 years. Tenny said when we get ready to do this, some
206 type of community outreach would be needed so we feel good and confident about that investment.

207
208 Kernan said a few years ago Harris and Harris did an evaluation of all Town facilities, and at that time it
209 was recommended about \$170,000 in structural repairs were needed at the pool, and most of those
210 have been done with around \$64,700 remaining. Ramsay said that one of our long-range business plans
211 was to look at that structure and know what investment was going to be needed in a number of years.
212 Fuentes-George asked about pool revenues, and Kernan said pool passes were up 61% over the last 3
213 years.

214
215 Committee Concerns

216
217 McLaughlin said a lot of times when discussing something the comment is made that about the need for
218 public outreach and she wonders if there is a way of doing this routinely. Ramsay said recently she had
219 attended a conference with Assistant Town Manager Chris English, and from the information the
220 gathered there they are both interested in doing podcasts as a way of informing the public.

221
222 Baker said bikers are very demanding and while hunters and drivers purchase licenses and registrations,
223 bikers don't contribute anything for revenue, so he'd like to see them required to have a license or pay
224 and excise tax as a way to generate some revenue towards these improvements to accommodate them.

225
226 Tenny said as far as public outreach, we have consistent e-mails that go out, and the College is looking at
227 better ways to get the word out, because e-mails are quickly deleted, so he thought the idea of podcasts
228 was a good one.

229
230 McLaughlin asked if there was a Public Works Day, like there was a Wastewater Day, where there are
231 tours for the public, and Werner said there wasn't.

232
233 Robbins said the photo she'd shared with the Committee was taken on St. Paul Street in Burlington
234 where they have incorporated rain gardens all along the area that was reconstructed. She said during
235 the Planapalooza the consultants had a stormwater team that designed several rain gardens in the
236 downtown, so when something else is happening it would be good to incorporate one into it, such as
237 the work on Maple Street.

238
239 The meeting adjourned at 9:38 a.m. upon motion by Wlger-Grohs, seconded by Baker.

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241 The next meeting of the Infrastructure Committee will be January 9, 2020 at 8:15 a.m. in the Town
242 Offices at 77 Main Street.

243
244 Respectfully submitted,
245 Beth Dow