

Town of Middlebury
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
Middlebury Union High School Auditorium
Monday, March 6, 2023

Town Meeting Minutes

Citing the warning to the legal voters of Middlebury, Moderator Susan Shashok called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Susan explained the basic meeting rules, and introduced the Selectboard: Chair, Brian Carpenter, Vice-Chair Lindsey Fuentes-George, Heather Seeley, Andy Hooper, Dan Brown, Farhad Khan and Isabelle Gogarty.

The Moderator introduced Town Manager Kathleen Ramsay and requested permission for the following non-resident members of the Town Administration to speak as needed throughout the meeting: Town Manager Ramsay, Library Director Dana Hart, Director of Public Works Planning Emmalee Cherington and Fire Chief David Shaw. There were no objections.

ARTICLE 1: To act upon the reports of the Town Officers.

Chair Brian Carpenter gave a brief review of 2022.

- New vitality downtown following the Covid shutdown and social distancing allowing people to once again enjoy the many events held downtown.
- The new Amtrak's Ethan Allen Express Train from Vermont to New York City from the new rail platform on Middle Seymour Street.
- The Zoning Bylaws were updated to permit greater residential housing densities and expanded mixed use areas, and our recent approval by the State as a Neighborhood Development Area Designation that provides incentives for development of workforce housing.
- New water lines were installed on Washington Street.
- Colonial Drive was reconstructed with new water, wastewater and stormwater utilities.
- Cady Road was repaved following the replacement of two large culverts.
- Participation in the Middlebury Airport Master Planning process.
- Updating the Noise Ordinance.

Looking ahead to 2023, Carpenter highlighted the following:

- South Street Project – water, sanitary sewer and stormwater improvements.
- Halladay Road Pump Station upgrade.
- Develop plans and budget for Ilsley Library expansion and renovations.
- Wastewater Treatment Facility improvements.
- Police Department storage facility upgrades.
- Continued work with non-profits on an increase in housing and childcare services.

Carpenter said after careful deliberation the Selectboard adopted an FY2024 budget that reflects inflationary pressures and the Town's commitment to a robust Capital Improvement Plan, and an efficient vehicle maintenance and replacement plan while preserving the current level of Town services. He said with the approval of the use of the Cross Street Bridge Funds in Article III, the estimated FY24 Town General Tax Rate would be \$.8475, or \$.0450 increase from FY23, or a 5.6% increase. He thanked his fellow Board members for their hard work throughout the year and their commitment to the community.

Selectboard member Farhad Khan read the dedication of the 2022 Town Report to retiring Director of Public Works Planning Dan Werner, and Isabel Gogarty read the recognitions to former Selectboard member Esther Charlestin, and retiring Town employees Bill Malloy, Jackie Sullivan and Chris English. Gogarty also presented the Annual Robert E. Collins Award to Kerri Sinks for her extraordinary commitment and dedication to the Parks and Recreation Department.

Heather Seeley moved to adopt Article 1; Farhad Khan seconded.
Motion Passed by unanimous voice vote: Article 1 Adopted

ARTICLE 2: Shall the voters of the Town of Middlebury vote to adopt the proposed budget for the Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024) in the amount of \$12,921,448 with a portion thereof in the amount of \$8,553,380 to be raised by taxes and \$809,308 to be allocated from annual local option tax receipts in excess of debt and maintenance requirements of the Cross Street Bridge to offset spending for Capital Improvements?

Jeremy Rathbun moved to adopt Article II, and Nick Artim seconded.

Ramsay said the FY24 budget presented for voter consideration incorporates input the Selectboard has received over the years to draw on reserves to minimize increases in the tax rate and to use Local Option Tax revenue in excess of what is needed for the Cross Street Bridge debt to fund infrastructure improvement projects, reduce amounts borrowed and for leveraging grant and other funding.

Ramsay said the major drivers in this year's budget were wages (\$326,500), employee benefits (\$179,100), equipment maintenance (\$49,000) and equipment purchases (\$21,400), equipment fuel (\$23,000), Police Department adaptive reuse bond (\$124,4160) and Capital Improvements (\$92,870). She said the items that offset these increases are administrative charges in the Water Fund (\$26,400) and Wastewater Fund (\$17,600), General Fund interest (\$115,000) and Cross Street Bridge Fund interest (\$75,000).

Ramsay went over the breakdown of funding and the operational expenses and capital expenses by department and the Capital Budget, and an overview of the Local Option Tax receipts for the last 5 years, the Cross Street Bridge Fund debt, and the Local Option Tax funds available and proposed for Capital Improvement projects. She said the Selectboard has presented a budget requiring only a modest increase in the property tax rate this year, and asked residents to keep in mind that increases in wages, benefits, replacement of vehicles and equipment and unfunded mandates, as well as the uncertainty of inflation and the economy, and the future of state and federal funding and dwindling reserves, will put significant pressure on budgets in FY25 and beyond.

Discussion

James Malcolm asked about the Cross Street Bridge Funds timeline and Ramsay said they were bonded in 2010 for a 30-year term.

David Silberman asked about the roughly \$200,000 this year for the Police Department Reuse Plan, when he thought we approved funds for this project a few years ago. Ramsay said in 2020 voters approved a bond for the Police Department Reuse Plan which was secured through the Municipal Bond Bank for a 7-year term. The proposed use of Cross Street Bridge Funds will pay the current debt service on that bond.

Diane Lawson asked about the \$30,000 in the budget for Town Archives. Ramsay said when the Town Offices moved into the new offices in 2016, there was an extensive collection of old records that have been stored in various location around town, and this is a proposal to digitize these records.

Victoria DeWind asked if there would be a roundabout at the Court Street/Charles Avenue/Monroe Street intersection. Ramsay said we have hired VHB engineering to do a preliminary study and the results said the best option was to do an alignment with a 4-way intersection. She said they did analyze a roundabout, but it ranked lower than the 4-way intersection. Director of Public Works Planning Emmalee Cherington said one problem with a roundabout in that location was safety concerns given the number of bike and pedestrians that would be using the roundabout.

Meg Baker asked about sidewalks and traffic calming measures considering the high number of students that walk in that area. Ramsay said there are many years left in planning this and there will be lots of opportunities for public input before this is constructed.

Robin Barovick asked what the Police Chief's salary is. Ramsay responded it is one of our most underpaid civil servants for the amount of responsibility he has, and she thinks it's just over \$100,000.

Laura Asermily questioned the \$160,000 in the budget for salt, and asked if a more modest use of salt would be better. Director of Public Works Operations Bill Kernan said the increase in the line item for salt does not reflect an increase in use, just an increase in cost. Asermily said she would like to see a reduction in the use of it.

Lindsey Hescoock asked how many school resource officers do we have, since the amount budgeted is \$93,400. Ramsay said we have one officer, and that amount includes all the benefits as well as wages.

The Moderator called the question.

Motion Passed by unanimous voice vote: Article 2 adopted.

ARTICLE 3: Shall the voters of the Town of Middlebury vote, pursuant to 24 VSA § 2408(a), to authorize the Selectboard to apply up to \$228,496 from the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Fund to offset increased capital improvement expenses of \$92,860 and PD Adaptive Reuse Building debt service expense of \$135,636?

Heather Seeley moved to adopt Article 3, and Farhad Khan seconded the motion.

Fuentes-George said in order to offset the FY24 budget increase and reduce the impact on the tax rate, the Selectboard propose applying \$228,496 of the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Funds to cover the debt service as proposed to voters when the bond was approved in 2020 and to cover the increase in capital improvements in FY24. She said the debt service on the PD Adaptive Reuse Project of \$135,636 was planned when the Town bonded for the project for seven years rather than twenty years, allowing the Town to save an estimated \$179,000 in interest expenses vs. a twenty-year bond. She said this transfer will also offset an increased capital improvement spending of \$92,860 for time sensitive items one-time expenses including schematic design costs and fund-raising consultant fees for the Ilsley Library expansion project. She said if approved,

the transfer will shave \$.023 cents off the tax rate estimated for FY2024.

Discussion

Jeremy Rathbun asked if the fee for the schematic design included a contingency fund for things that might come up. Ramsay said the total budget amount for the schematic design and fund raising for the library is \$163,000 and this amount is simply the increase in the Capital Budget this year.

Ross Conrad asked what the other projects were being covered by these funds. Ramsay said in addition to the library, there are the usual projects including sidewalk upgrades, paving and road maintenance.

Max Kraus asked for a reminder of what the Adaptive Reuse Project was. Fuentes-George said it was to reuse the former wastewater plant for storage and vehicles for the Middlebury Police Department.

The Moderator called the question.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote: Article 3 adopted.

Article 4: Shall the voters of the Town of Middlebury vote, pursuant to 24 VSA § 2408(a), to authorize the Selectboard to apply up to \$295,000 from the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Fund for the purchase of the former Maverick Gas Station at 82 Court Street for the purpose of reconfiguring the intersection of Court Street, Monroe Street and Charles Avenue?

James Malcolm moved to adopt Article 4. Gary Baker seconded the motion.

Brian Carpenter said we've all experienced a traffic jam on Court Street, and the traffic planners and engineers have all indicated that the main issue to be addressed first is the congestion at that very awkward intersection coming out of the high school at Charles Avenue by the Maverick Gas Station. He said as the first step in realigning this intersection, the Selectboard secured a purchase and sale agreement with the Maverick Gas Station. He said the Board proposes the use of \$295,000 from the Cross Street Bridge Reserve funds to purchase that property that is needed for the realignment of this intersection to create a single, 4-way intersection to replace the current staggered configuration.

He said with the help of the Addison County Regional Planning Commission, the Town is applying for funding from the State's brownfields clean-up fund. He said using Cross Street Bridge Funds to purchase the property avoids the cost of issuing a bond and interest expense while the plan is finalized and funding for the realignment is secured. He said if the Town purchases the property, there are Capital Improvement funds set aside to maintain the property and make minor cosmetic improvements to improve the appearance of this property sitting at this major intersection. He said they would appreciate the support for this opportunity to address a critical infrastructure improvement to correct the traffic flow on Court Street.

Discussion

James Malcolm said in the late 1990's when major improvements were made at the high school, the Town wanted to align this intersection then and told the high school they needed to do it as part of their improvements. He said the high school could not do that since the owner of the gas station at the time didn't want to sell. He suggests we approve this to get this alignment done, since it's been 70 years since the high school was built and the development of the Buttolph Acres area and the traffic is significantly different.

Ellen Cronin asked if the sales price would be adjusted based on the findings of the environmental review. Carpenter said there is an agreed price in the purchase contract, but if there is something found we don't know about we may have to back out of it, however we know it's a brownfield, the tanks are already out of the ground, so while he can't promise nothing will be found, they have anticipated for this and is why the purchase prices is the assessed value. He said they've looked to purchase this property before, but prior inquiries to the company had strings attached to the purchase, but now they feel they have a fair contract and we are not assuming all the risk on this.

David Silberman said he thought this was a great project, and asked how "far down the road" is this project. Carpenter said if this is approved, we'll be working on the plans but between planning, permitting and funding he feels 5-years would be an aggressive plan. Silberman asked if we had any idea of what our maximum liability exposure would be for anything over the brownfield insurance protection. Ramsay said as she understands it so far, the polluting parties are the ones responsible forever and we would be applying to the program as an innocent purchaser to minimize any liability. Carpenter said they tried to assign the risk to the Town, but we were not willing to accept it.

Dawn Saunders asked what the plans were to improve the appearance of the property during the planning stages, such as leveling it. Ramsay said her original plan had been to demolish the building, but then remembered we have all the old town records traveling around town in storage and decided that would be a good location for them.

Tyler Ayers asked what studies and assessments had already been done and is there any sense of what the overall cost might be to do this alignment. Ramsay said when VHB did the conceptual look at this intersection it was 2015 and the estimate was \$1.5 million, and we all know what's happened with prices since then.

Emmalee Cherington said since the initial study and the purchase of the gas station, the Vermont Agency of Transportation has now expressed interest in the project and they may help offset some of the costs.

Jeremy Rathbun confirmed that this vote is approving the purchase of the Maverick Gas Station after an environmental assessment is complete so we know what we're getting into, and Carpenter said that is correct.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote: Article 4 adopted.

Brian Carpenter said James Malcolm asked about the Local Option Tax and it was pointed out that in 2010 we bonded for 30-years, which would take us to 2040. He said this has been talked about before, and the reality is that the Local Option Tax is here to stay. He said it has allowed us to do things and projects that have lagged for far too long and allows the greater community

to share the cost, and if you look throughout the State there are more towns that are beginning to utilize it as a way to fund infrastructure rather than just by property taxes. He said it's safe to assume that as we do our budgeting, while we want to be sure there are enough funds to take care of the needs of the Cross Street Bridge, beyond that we will utilize those funds for things that are critical to the town.

Article 5: Shall the voters of the Town of Middlebury vote, pursuant to 24 VSA § 2408(a), to authorize the Selectboard to apply up to One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000) from the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Fund for the purpose of constructing of a water tank for its public drinking water system?

Alan Shashok moved to adopt Article 5. Gary Baker seconded the motion.

Selectboard member and Chair of the Infrastructure Committee Heather Seeley said that in 2017 the Town received the results of a hydraulic study of the Town's water system that identified and prioritized needed repairs and improvements. She said in 2022 we completed the first item on the priority list, the completion of the Court St/Washington Street waterline replacement, and the second priority on the list was the need for a 1.5 million gallon concrete tank on Chipman Hill.

She said Article 5 is asking voter approval to use \$1 million in Cross Street Bridge Reserve Funds to offset the proposed \$3.5 million cost of this project and is the same process used to help fund the Court Street/Water Street waterline project costing \$3 million. Seeley said, however, through the hard work and initiative of Town staff, the Town of Middlebury was fortunate to receive \$1.36 million in loan forgiveness (we don't need to pay it back) and \$975,000 in no-interest finance with a 2% administration fee from the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund (DWSRF) and \$600,000 funding from the Northern Regional Commission Grant Program. As a result, we did not need to tap into the Cross Street Bridge Funds approved by voters in 2020 for this project, so she'd like to recognize the hard work of Town staff in this huge accomplishment (applause). She said we are using a similar financing strategy for this water tank project and are hoping for a similar outcome. She said the benefit to using the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Funds is to help offset the cost of bonding for this project, and it also broadens the payer base for funding infrastructure needed for residents, businesses, public services, schools, the hospital and firefighting and everyone benefits from this project, not just the water users, and it also reduces interest expense from borrowing.

Discussion

Charles Mraz asked what the need for this water tank is. Seeley said prior to the 2017 hydraulic study, the State Permit for our water system identified deficiencies in our fire flows and demand at peak times for water, and the 2017 study reiterated this problem. She said the system is required to permit a certain level of fire flows and at certain times there is a problem with the current water supply to meet the fire flows and the water demand. Mraz asked if the water source off RT 116 had adequate water supply and why couldn't we just increase the amount pumped to the reservoir. Emmalee Cherington said the Palmer Springs pump already pumps 20 hours per day to the reservoir, so it would be hard to increase the pumping from Palmer Springs, which is the main source.

Ross Conrad asked if this was a tank or tower. Seeley said it was an above ground, concrete storage tank. Conrad asked what it was lined with, since concrete has been known to have cracks. Seeley didn't believe the current tank is lined, and we'll know more when we get into the

construction. Conrad said concrete is porous and water is such a valuable resource, so we need to respect this.

Jeremy Rathbun, an engineer, said that the State requirement for storage is independent from supply, and requires several hours of fire flow that he believes it's 3,500 gallons per minute, so while we have a huge source, the State requires that much storage.

Amy Sheldon asked about the footprint of the tank on Chipman Hill and also the balance in the Cross Street Bridge Funds for bridge maintenance. Ramsay said after all these proposed Articles, there will be \$1.5 million remaining in the Fund for bridge maintenance and that is more than enough for any maintenance coming up in the foreseeable future, and we have a 20-year maintenance plan. Seeley said there is a site plan of the Chipman Hill site on the handout prepared for the tank project, and the proposed tank will fit within the Town's existing property boundary. Emmalee Cherington said it is a prefab concrete tank that will be constructed on the location of the old reservoir on the western side of the property and will be 80' in diameter and 60' in elevation and won't be seen from the roadway.

Tyler Ayers asked about the two separate Articles for this project and was this \$1 million added to the amount in Article 8, and what happens if one Article is approved, but one isn't. Ramsay responded that we need to bond for the entire cost of the project. Seeley said if Article 5 is approved, then the amount of the bond in Article 8 will be reduced by that amount. Seeley said if voters didn't approve the \$1 million from the Cross Street Bridge Funds, but they approved Article 8, then we would bond for the entire amount of the project. If Article 5 is approved, but Article 8 isn't, then we wouldn't be able to do the project and we wouldn't draw funds from the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Funds.

Dawn Saunders said this is being done for the purpose of the "public drinking water" and she assumes that means the Middlebury's water system, and she's always wondered about the connection between the Middlebury and East Middlebury water systems. She said both water systems need adequate water for fires, but she wonders how the financing works and are there similar motions and funding mechanisms for when the East Middlebury Fire District water system needs help. Seeley said there are two separate systems, and the users of the East Middlebury Fire District #1 users pay for that system with their user rates, similar to the Middlebury Water System and these funds are separate from the general budget funds.

Joe McVeigh asked for a reminder on what Seeley had said earlier in the discussion of Article 5 that was important, and Seeley said she had called attention to the success the Town staff has had in acquiring funds for water system improvements that did not come from rate users or the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Funds. She said they are hoping to have the same success with this project so we won't have to use the money from the Cross Street Bridge Reserves.

Charles Mraz said he lives on Springside Road on the way to the Chipman Hill reservoir, and that road is already in rough shape, and he's concerned about all the heavy trucks that will be on that road for this project. Seeley said she agrees that we're a little behind in keeping the roads in good condition and we've been prioritizing road projects over the last few years. Springside Road is on the list for 2025, following completion of the water tank project.

The Moderator called the question.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote: Article 5 is adopted.

Article 6: Shall the voters of the Town of Middlebury vote to collect taxes on real property for fiscal year 2023/2024 in TWO equal installments due in the Treasurer's Office on the 15th day of November 2023 and the 15th day of March 2024?

Nick Artim moved to adopt Article 6. Laura Asermily seconded the motion.

Selectboard member Andy Hooper said the local municipal tax and the State education tax are both issued in one tax bill at the local level. He said the State education tax is income sensitive and the calculation of the State tax relies on the database provided by the State and is updated throughout the year until early October. He said with Middlebury's first tax installment due on August 15th, we had to have the bills in the mail by July 15th, before all the information to calculate the State education tax had been received from the State, so bills were calculated using incomplete or outdated information that resulted in errors on the tax bills that causes stress for taxpayers and additional work for the Town's staff. He said pushing the first payment for property taxes until November 15th, allows us to receive all the calculations and updates from the State prior to calculating and mailing tax bills in mid-October allowing for accurate tax bills, so this year the Selectboard is proposing property taxes be paid in two installments; November 15th and March 15th. Hooper said for those wishing to pay in three installments, early, partial payment options are available by calling the finance office.

Victoria DeWind said the wording of the Article implied this was for one year only and wasn't on-going. Ramsay replied that voters are required to vote on this every year.

Diane Lawson asked if March 15th is the latest tax bills could be paid in the fiscal year. Hooper said the Finance Office had indicated the payments could be spread from November 15th, March 15th and May 15th. Lawson asked if they wanted to go with two payments, why not go with November 15th and May 15th. Ramsay said having the last payment on March 15th was considered the optimal time to be able to follow up with delinquent payments and get most of them cleaned up before the end of the fiscal year.

Robin Stattle said in 2020 tax payments went from 3 to 2 and wondered if that caused any adverse impacts. Ramsay said it hadn't, but we had been unable to articulate the reason for going from 3 to 2.

Tyler Ayers spoke in favor of the 3 payments saying it just made it easier to break the payments up, and the delinquent taxes are only about 2% of the income from taxes.

Dayton Wakefield said he was 100% behind this Article, because his tax bill last year had been totally messed up with both the Town and State and he didn't want to go through it again.

The Moderator called the question.

The motion was passed by voice vote: Article 6 is adopted.

Article 7: To transact other business proper to be done.

(For voting by Australian Ballot on Tuesday, March 7, 2023, polls open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 P.M.)

Article 8: Shall general obligation bonds or notes of the Town of Middlebury in an amount not to exceed Three Million Five Hundred Dollars (\$3,500,000) subject to reduction from available alternate sources of funding, be issued for the purpose of financing the construction of a water tank for its public drinking water system, the estimated cost of such improvements being Three Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$3,500,000).

Heather Seeley said the Selectboard is asking for your approval to bond for construction of a 1.5-million-gallon concrete storage tank on Chipman Hill adjacent to our current storage tank. She said the construction proposal includes tree planting to provide bank stabilization, screening and to provide natural habitats. She said our current tank is undersized and does not provide sufficient storage volumes for average daily demands and fire flows, and the additional tank will provide sufficient peak hourly demand, 3,500 gallons per minutes fire flow demand, stabilize water pressure and allow the Town to provide water service during repairs. She said the Town staff is working to identify grant funding and low-interest rate financing and/or loan forgiveness options that would eliminate the need to bond for the estimated \$3.5 million cost of the project, and to qualify for these funding sources the Town must show proof of community support for the project and a successful bond vote confirms voter and community support.

Seeley said the engineering costs of \$62,000 is funded through the Water Capital Improvement Fund. She said the funding options include the Capital Improvement Fund, a water rate increase (bond vote), Cross Street Bridge Fund Reserve approved in Article 5, and the State Revolving Fund Loan/Grant that requires a bond vote. She said a successful bond vote would help leverage State and federal funds and the goal is to reduce the costs to our residents.

Discussion

Alice Eckles asked if this additional storage is needed as a requirement for the State permit, and what happens if it isn't approved. Emmalee Cherington said the State could revoke our permit and the Town would not be able to distribute water.

Bruce Meacham asked if this proposed tank would replace the existing tank. Seeley said this would be an additional storage tank on Chipman Hill. Meacham asked how large the existing tank is and how much water does the town use in a day. Cherington said the existing tank is 1.50 million gallons and the average daily water use is 1.2 million gallons.

James Hand asked if Middlebury College was on the Town water system and if they were, what would their share be. Seeley said if the Town is able to secure funding to cover this then the water rates would not increase, but if we need to pay the Bond, then the water rates would be increased to pay for the Bond and all water users would share the cost. Hand asked about the money from the Cross Street Bridge Reserves, and Seeley said that money comes from the 1% Local Option Taxes that everyone contributes to through sales tax and rooms and meals tax.

Article 9: Shall the Town vote to adopt the following amendments to the Charter of the Town of Middlebury? Language to be added is underlined, and deleted language has a strikethrough:

***Section 302, Elective officers, revise (a) by deleting “(7) Town Treasurer” from the list of officers elected by the Town at its annual Town Meeting. ~~(7) Town Treasurer~~**

***Section 305, Treasurer, revise (a) as follows: (a) The Treasurer shall be appointed by the Selectboard. Elected annually at the annual meeting and shall serve for a three year term;**

***Section 306, Appointed Officers, revise (d), by adding “(7) a Town Treasurer” to the list of officers the appointed by the Selectboard:**

Selectboard member Dan Brown said we’ve been fortunate that we’ve had very competent and honest individuals who have been elected as Town Treasurer, and the last one was Jackie Sullivan who has retired and currently by Beth Dow, who has stepped up to fill the position. He said we are proposing a change to the Town Charter to allow for this position to be an appointed position rather than an elected position. He said the Selectboard feels a fiduciary responsibility to ask voters for this change for the appointment of this position and feel it’s essential for our financial operations and good governance. Brown said if this proposed change to our Town Charter is approved by the voters, then it needs to go for approval from the State Legislature.

Ellen Cronin asked what the job entailed, and Brown said the Treasurer’s job is actually about 5 hours per week and as it’s set up now the Treasurer is elected by the voters, but this proposed change would allow the position to be appointed and allow an opportunity for applicants to be interviewed and do background checks to determine we get the proper person.

Dave Silberman asked what the Town Treasurer does. Brown said they keep track of the checking account, and they sign checks and balance the checkbooks.

Dawn Saunders asked if Jackie Sullivan had been an employee as well as Town Treasurer. Brown said since there is only about 5 hours a week of work for the Treasurer, we’ve found it to be more efficient to combine those duties to an existing staff position in the Finance Office. Saunders is concerned that this infers an elected position isn’t as trustworthy, and Brown said not necessarily, but the Selectboard doesn’t have the option of who is elected.

George Klohck asked if Middlebury has researched how other Vermont towns handle this, and Brown said according to Vermont Digger there are 20 other towns in Vermont that are changing elected positions to appointed positions, and there were 20 last year as well.

Gary Baker said it’s his understanding you cannot do a background check on an elected official, and we all know of other communities that have had hundreds of thousands of dollars stolen by financial officials. Brown said the Board feels this is the responsible thing to do for good governance.

Article 10: To elect officers as required by the Town Charter.

The Moderator said this was an opportunity for town residents running for office to introduce themselves and speak, as well as out-of-town residents who are running for the Addison Central School District (ACSD) Board.

The following candidates asked voters for their support:

Isabelle Gogarty – Middlebury Selectboard
Dan Brown – Middlebury Selectboard
Brain Carpenter – Middlebury Selectboard
Laura Harthan– ACSD School Board (Middlebury)
Ellen Whelan-Wuest – ACSD School Board (Cornwall)
Chris Kramer – ACSD School Board (Cornwall)

Steve Orzech, who is a current ACSD Board member and is not running for re-election, spoke about the challenge the Save Our Schools (SOS) organization is posing to the ACSD Board by having members elected to the Board and they are not being transparent about who these members are.

Ann Webster said she is running for re-election as Middlebury Town Clerk, but she is trying to retire and has an agreement with the Selectboard to continue on through this fiscal year, so encouraged anyone interested in being Town Clerk to please step forward so she can work with them in the time remaining to allow for a smooth transition.

Laura Asermily spoke on the Annual Town Meeting Poll and the items included on the poll, including an item on a public rest room facility.

Joe McVeigh, President of the Ilsley Library Board of Trustees and member of the Ilsley 100 Project Team, gave a presentation on the work done to-date by the Ilsley 100 Project Team on the much needed expansion and renovation of the existing library building. He described the comprehensive process that went into exploring options over the last year, before choosing an option that was endorsed by the Selectboard. He said the Team is now in the process of reviewing qualifications of design firms that have shown interest in the project, and in April they hope to choose 3 or 4 to submit schematic designs in a design competition before choosing the final firm that will involve a public process and community engagement. He said the current estimation of cost for this project is \$14.8 million, and they are currently working on ways to fund this, including grants, fundraising, federal and state appropriations, and municipal financing in the form of a bond.

Ross Conrad, the Middlebury delegate on the Maple Broadband Board said this is a 20-member board made up of representative from Addison County towns to form one of ten tax exempt communications union districts in Vermont. He said their focus is high-speed fiber broadband service for everyone in the county and everyone in our town in areas who aren't served or are underserved. He spoke on their funding that comes from grants that come with limitations, and some funds are coming from ARPA funds from member towns. He said the Vermont Community Broadband Board has recently pledged to match any funds that Town's contribute, and they calculate they need another \$15 million to have the entire Addison County covered with fiber broadband. He said they've built about 25-miles so far and have been able to do a small corner of Middlebury by Blake Roy Road, and they hope to do more of Middlebury in Phase 2, and the remainder of the town in Phase 3. He said they appreciate the Middlebury Selectboard and their consideration of contributing a small portion of Middlebury's ARPA funds.

Addison County Senator Ruth Hardy gave a quick presentation and update on the bills being worked on by the Health and Welfare Committee and the Government Operations Committee that she serves on.

Margaret Klohck moved to adjourn and Isabelle Gogarty seconded the motion.

Motion to adjourn passed by unanimous voice vote.

The 2023 Annual Town Meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Minutes submitted by,
Beth Dow



Moderator, Susan Shashok



Town Clerk, Ann Webster