

**SPECIAL EDITION**  
**Selectboard Meeting Highlights**  
**March 24, 2020**

Meeting with the Middlebury Selectboard on Tuesday, March 24th, via teleconference, during its regular meeting, Addison County's legislators – Senators Chris Bray and Ruth Hardy, and Representatives Robin Scheu and Amy Sheldon – provided an overview of committee discussions and legislative actions taken in recent days in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Vermont.

What follows are brief highlights from that discussion. For more detailed information, you can view the full conversation on Middlebury Community Television's (MCTV) YouTube Channel: [MCTV Vermont](#). Highlights from the rest of the Selectboard's March 24th meeting will be published by the end of the week.

**Senator Chris Bray:** All Senate committees remain fully focused on assessing, and taking necessary actions to ameliorate, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Natural Resources Committee**

- Drinking water and wastewater systems: Current systems are already designed to deal with viruses of all sorts. There are no unique exposures related to COVID-19.
- Solid waste systems: Current systems are already designed to deal with medical waste. No changes are anticipated to how solid waste is handled.
- Wild animals and livestock: No animal-to-human transmission of COVID-19 has been identified.

**Energy Committee**

An order has been issued to public utilities (electric, natural gas and telecommunications) that there will be no customer disconnects while the state of emergency remains in effect. Utilities have been proactive in announcing that they will not make any disconnections through the end of April.

**Government Operations Committee**

New emergency legislation (temporary for the rest of 2020) was passed on March 24th designed to protect the fundamentals of democracy while addressing the realities of the pandemic:

- Candidates for office will not be required to collect voter signatures in order to be placed on a ballot, including for local elections.
- The Secretary of State has been authorized to implement new election procedures, including: requiring ballots to be mailed to all registered voters; creating early or mail ballot collection stations and allowing the drive-up collection of ballots; permitting town clerks to begin counting ballots within a 30-day window prior to the election; extending the time for processing and counting ballots; and extending voting hours on election day.
- Municipalities and school districts are now authorized to shift all voted items to Australian ballot.

- Open Meeting Law – warned public meetings may be conducted electronically, with members of the public invited to participate by teleconference or video teleconference. The need to identify a physical location for the meeting is suspended for now. Selectboard and school board meetings should be recorded to ensure that an accurate record is created.
- Municipalities may extend deadlines applicable to licenses, permits, programs or plans for up to 90 days after the state of emergency is lifted.
- Municipalities may not order disconnections from public drinking water and wastewater systems.

Here is the [full text of the emergency legislation](#).

**Senator Ruth Hardy:** The Senate working on its version of a House bill passed on March 13th. Proposed healthcare provisions in the bill would provide financial, regulatory and operational flexibility for hospitals, including:

- Licensing flexibility to allow retired medical professionals in other states to provide services in VT.
- Flexibility to provide, and be reimbursed for, telemedicine (this provision would sunset in 2026)
- Proposed government operations provisions in the bill include:
  - Expanding access to unemployment insurance (UI) for employees, while not negatively impacting to an employer's UI rating. The State's UI fund is in good shape, so capacity exists to expand coverage. The online process for filing a first-time unemployment claim is available at: <https://labor.vermont.gov/unemployment-insurance/ui-claimants>
  - The state is looking to the federal government for action on unemployment benefits for self-employed workers and contractors. These categories of workers don't pay into the Vermont UI trust and, therefore, are not eligible for state aid.
  - A new provision allowing for the remote witnessing of wills.

The state is not in a position to make other financial commitments – beyond UI benefits – at this time, until the budget revenue picture for the remainder of FY20 becomes clearer. The extension of the tax filing deadline July 15th further complicates this picture.

The Senate's sole focus is on "must-pass bills" that are required to sustain state government operations and COVID-19 legislation to deal with current crisis. Most other legislative initiatives that were underway before the crisis began probably will not make it through the session.

Individuals wishing to sign up for Senator Hardy's constituent newsletter, which contains updates on the legislative response to the COVID-19 crisis may do so at her website: <https://ruthforvermont.com/> or by emailing her at: [rhardy@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:rhardy@leg.state.vt.us)

**Representative Robin Scheu:** The House Ways and Means Committee is working to develop a complete picture of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the state budget. The revenue forecast for the remainder of FY20 (ending June 30, 2020) and FY21 is “pretty grim.”

As of the March 24th report, the forecast for the remainder of FY20 shows:

- Reductions in state General Fund revenue of \$200- to \$230-million (a 39-45% reduction vs. budget).
- Revenue reductions in the state Transportation Fund of \$30- to \$40-million.
- Revenue reductions in the non-property-tax portion of the state Education Fund (which represents about 1/3 of the budget) of \$35- to \$45M million. The shortfall could be significantly higher in FY21.

The House Appropriations Committee is dealing with a great deal of uncertainty as it works on building the FY21 budget. Among other things, it will need to assess potential impacts created by the extension of deadlines for tax filing and Homestead Declarations to July 15th, and the deferral of sales & use tax and rooms & meals tax deadlines to May 15th, as well as the effect of the stimulus package recently passed in congress.

**Representative Amy Sheldon:** In light of the foregoing discussion, Rep. Sheldon asked Selectboard members for any additional questions.

**Question:** Given the impact of the pandemic on hospital facilities, is planning in place for the creation of emergency medical units, particularly in Middlebury?

**Answer:** Yes, Governor Scott has been working with the Vermont National Guard to set up three Medical Surge facilities – in Burlington, St. Albans and Barre. As previously reported, Middlebury College has taken ice off Kenyon Arena to prepare it as potential medical facility, should the need arise.

**Question:** Has a system been set up to provide childcare for healthcare workers?

**Answer:** In response to the pandemic, the state has ordered school districts to provide childcare for “essential workers” (the list of essential worker categories, as of March 18th, subject to further revision, can be found on the [Vermont Emergency Management](#) website). The Addison County School District (ACSD), like other districts, is struggling to meet the need for childcare. While work continues to get a system in place, priority will be given to frontline healthcare workers and first responders.