

Town Meeting Working Group Summary Report

Mission: To identify and fully explore all the Town Meeting options for Middlebury. The group will return to the Selectboard by late Summer, with their recommended plan(s) of action for when events like our current pandemic, impact traditional Town Meeting.

Process:

The COVID-19 pandemic upended the patterns of our lives in countless ways. We were forced to stay home, maintain distance from others and learn new ways of communicating and working. Among the institutions affected was Town Meeting, the legislature understood that a traditional gathering of hundreds of unrelated voters in proximity would be unsafe. As a result, municipalities were presented with options for conducting business during a public health emergency. Middlebury chose to move all voting items to the Australian ballot, obviating the need for an assembled meeting.

As more people became vaccinated, life slowly returned closer to normal, and Town Meeting appears similarly on the road to recovery. This experience, however, raises the prospect of future dislocations of our Annual Meeting and, for that matter, Special Meetings that are called from time to time. Future emergencies may not relate to a health crisis; there are other scenarios in which a meeting may need to be conducted in other than our customary venue. It may be a decision that can be made well in advance, or it might be a last-minute requirement. In any event, Middlebury wants to be prepared.

The Selectboard asked a group of residents to consider how the Town might respond in such an eventuality and recommend alternative locations for Town Meeting, should that become necessary.

We researched how other VT towns handled their Town Meetings during the recent pandemic, as well as looked at the history of their emergency Town Meetings. The group established a traditional floor vote Town Meeting held at MUHS Auditorium (capacity of 390) as our baseline and identified all possible alternative options and locations.

We then shared this information with Town Manager, Kathleen Ramsay and included her feedback in our next steps. Then, we toured all the alternative locations and documented their pertinent information, regarding capacity, equipment, audio & visual, costs, and accessibility, etc. We chose not to rank the options or the alternative locations, but instead let the emergency or event the Town is facing, determine the value of each option.

Conclusion & Final Recommendation:

The Committee appreciates the willingness of many community organizations to stand ready to assist the Town, should the need for relocating Town Meeting arise. We are grateful to all who are prepared to accommodate it, in most cases at no cost and often on short notice. We understand that the likelihood of activating this contingency plan is remote, but we wouldn't have predicted the pandemic, so it's important to have back-up options in reserve.

It is the Working Group's recommendation to have the Town Manager, Town Clerk and Moderator meet while a Town Meeting warning is being drafted. These three people have extensive election, budget and statutory responsibilities connected to Town Meeting. They will be able to use this report to quickly review options and alternatives and weigh them against any life events, to make a thoughtful recommendation to the Selectboard.

We recommend that the specifics of this report be revisited periodically, as circumstances may change at these alternative sites. If the Town is to be truly prepared, the document must be kept current.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this exercise. We look forward to returning to our annual rite of democracy in the coming year.

Kurt Broderson, MCTV Executive Director

Gov Jim Douglas, ACSD Moderator & Previous Town Moderator

Susan Shashok, Town Moderator

Ann Webster, Town Clerk

October 20th, 2022

Town Meeting Options

- Traditional Town Meeting (TM): Floor vote held at MUHS Auditorium (room capacity 390) followed by Australian Ballot (AB) for some Articles on the following day.
- Informational meeting only (in person or hybrid) followed by all AB voting the next day.
- Delay to hold traditional TM.
- Select a different venue to hold traditional TM.
- Hybrid/Online voting of traditional TM.
 - Not allowed by state at this time but most likely will be in near future. This is a placeholder for future consideration.
- Brattleboro's Elected Representative Model. Would need a Charter change and working with legislature to complete this change.
 - Not recommended by the Working Group at this time. This is a placeholder for future consideration.

American Legion

49 Wilson Road, Middlebury

Contact & Permission:

Tom Scanlon, Commander TScanlon@aol.com (802) 989-0486

Laura Flynn, Commander (802) 363-7713

1. Space

- Capacity is 500 max with chairs.
- Availability: No Wednesday evenings because of Bingo. Legion has a meeting every 4th Monday of the month but are willing to reschedule if the Town needs the space.
- Fees: Waived for Town
- Accessibility is excellent for people and very good for parking.
- Stanchions, extra chairs and voting equipment can be stored ahead in the ante room next to the lobby. They have 200 chairs on site, lots of tables and a platform to raise the podium. Can use their multiple large screen TV's.

2. MCTV can plug into their comcast, wifi and/or microphone system to broadcast and record.

3. Staff time needed: to set up supplemental chairs & stanchions, then break them down.

4. Considerations

- The lobby & ante room is good for check-in, so the regular number of facilitators needed.
- Will need to bring stanchions.
- Kitchen available for fundraising food service.
- Middlebury College can loan extra folding chairs.

Dana Auditorium

Middlebury College Contact & Permission:

Susan Ritter, Special Assistant to the President (802) 443-3289
sritter@middlebury.edu

Jennifer Erwin, Director of Event Management (802) 443-5772
erwin@middlebury.edu

1. Space

- Capacity is 252 with 1 ADA seat at the ready. Eight more seats can be converted to ADA ready with sufficient notice.
- Availability: Has a nightly classes T, W & TH 7:30-10:30pm and the space is used frequently by the college. Site has a quick set up.
- Fees: Waived for Town
- Accessibility is excellent for people and the college has parking nearby (but not adjacent). College can provide a PDF parking map with enough notice.

2. Stanchions, low stage, tables, podium, large screen, and projector are all available onsite.

3. MCTV can plug into their systems to broadcast and record.

4. Considerations

- The lobby can be used to check in voters. There are several side entrances that will need to be monitored so that no one bypasses the check in.
- Will want to have MCTV talk with the College's Media Services ahead of time to have the college prepare for MCTV's needs.
- Town Manager and Moderator can prepare a "25 Live" plan with the College's Director of Event Management for the college to set up the room as needed.
- VT State Fire Safety Mandate: Any crowd of 50+ needs a "Crowd Manager", a crowd of 250+ requires 2 Managers. College can easily train any Town staff or officers to be Crowd Managers ahead of time.

Mary Hogan Gym

201 Mary Hogan Drive, Middlebury

Contact & Permission: Bruce MacIntire, ACSD Director of Facilities
(802) 382-1198 cell:(802) 349-9684 (also requires Principal's approval)

1. Space

- Capacity is 800-1000
- Availability: Can separate space in half.
- Fees: waived for Town, may need to reimburse for custodial time.
- Accessibility is excellent for people and very good for parking.
- Room to store voting equipment ahead of time. Can separate voters and non-voters with stanchions. Site has 200 chairs and enough tables plus a low platform and screen.

2. MCTV can broadcast, record, and use microphones. Can plug into on site access.

3. Additional staff time needed: time for staff to set up extra chairs, tables, and stanchions.

4. Considerations

- Will need to bring stanchions.
- Plan for one or two extra facilitators to direct crowds because of multiple entrances.
- Middlebury College can loan extra folding chairs.

Memorial Sports Center

296 Buttolph Dr, Middlebury

Contact & Permission: Rick Marshall, Facility Manager (needs approval from FOMH) manager@memorialsportscenter.org (802) 388-1238

1. Space

- Capacity is Approx 800-1,000 people in stands and on chairs in rink.
- Availability: Is in between already scheduled events. The ice goes in the last week of Sept. and is out usually by the first week of April. Can cover the ice with artificial turf but it's not been done yet and only in a pinch. Summertime is better.
- Fees: One day rental= \$200, but Town would need multiple days for set up and teardown. One week rental = \$745.
- Accessibility is very good for people and parking. Rick can set up extra handicapped parking & seating and to keep rink barriers up to separate voters & non-voters (who can go in the stands). In addition to MSC parking lot, we can use the Courthouse's lot and ACSD Director of Facilities gave permission to use Mary Hogan's parking lot.
- There is room to store voting equipment on site. Middlebury has a low stage available to raise the podium and screen (stored at WWTP).

2. MCTV can broadcast, record, and use their microphones. Can plug into MSC's internet feed. There are speakers in the new café seating area upstairs.

3. Considerations

- Additional staff time needed to set up chairs, platform, table and stanchions then break them down to a broom clean Plan for extra facilitators to check in, direct people and keep them from wandering.
- A non-profit could use the concessions area to raise \$ from food sales.
- Bruce MacIntire from ACSD said it was a possibility to cost share set up during the week of MUHS and MUMS graduations. Would not be ready for a Monday night meeting but could be set up in time for Tuesday night.
- Midd College will loan extra folding chairs.

Middlebury Airport

467 Airport Road, Middlebury

Contact & Permission: Trini Brassard, Assistant Director Policy, Planning & Intermodal Development

Trini.Brassard@Vermont.gov (802) 522-8112

1. Space

- Capacity in SRE is 2200 square ft that will also have tools and supplies pushed against the walls. Approx 150-225 people with bay doors open.
 - Availability: Needs enough notice to secure permission and coordinate equipment delivery & set up.
 - Fees: None
 - Accessibility requires a lot of effort to achieve the minimum. Fair weather parking is on grass outside of the fence line with a few handicapped spaces available to mark on a nearby paved surface. Winter snow and ice will complicate parking in these same areas.
 - Any items to be stored during rain/snow/sleet or overnight must be put in a back building when not in use. Middlebury has a platform available to raise the podium and screen (stored at WWTP).
5. MCTV can most likely broadcast, record, and use their microphones. Ideally this should be tested ahead of time to make sure no interference with aircraft radios or businesses with avionics. MCTV will need to check if they can live broadcast here.
6. Lots of additional staff time needed to set up chairs, platform, tables, screen, and stanchions then break them down.

7. Considerations

- Middlebury College can loan extra folding chairs.
- Will need extra staff to set up/breakdown and facilitators to direct the public to the building and back to their cars. No one is allowed to wander around. Can be as simple as a few cones and 1-2 people.
- Will need to bring in the Town's stanchions, tables, platform and screen.
- Airport will also consider a tent set up outside the fence line if it is not too high.

Middlebury Town Gym

154 Creek Road, Middlebury

Contact & Permission: Dustin Hunt, Superintendent

dhunt@townofmiddlebury.org

(802) 458-8014

1. Space

- Capacity is max 448-941 people depending on set up.
- Availability: Facility promises to make Town Meeting its priority, even in emergency situations with less than 1/2 hour notice.
- Fees: None
- Accessibility is excellent across the board for people and parking.
- The locker rooms are available to store voting equipment, chairs, and tables ahead of time. Some can use bleachers but most will need seats on the floor. Middlebury has a platform available to raise the podium and screen (stored at WWTP). Gym has stanchions, 14 tables and 120 chairs already on site. Can easily separate voters and non-voters.

2. MCTV can broadcast, record, and use their microphones. Gym has its own PA system but MCTV's equipment may be better.

3. Staff time needed to set up and breakdown. It requires the regular number of facilitators and set up of tables and stanchions.

4. Considerations

- Typically, the site is used as a polling place the following day. Can separate space in half.
- Middlebury College can loan extra folding chairs.

MUHS Gym

73 Charles Ave, Middlebury

Contact & Permission: Sean Farrell, Activities Director
sfarrell@acsdvt.org (802) 382-1500 (also requires Principal's approval)

1. Space

- Capacity is 1,000 including bleachers
- Availability: Can be very responsive to our needs even for a last minute move from the MUHS Auditorium (capacity 390) over to the Gym.
- Fees: waived for Town, may need to reimburse for MUHS custodial time.
- Accessibility is excellent across the board for people and parking.
- Room to store voting equipment & chairs ahead of time. Most people in bleachers with some more accessible chairs on floor. MUHS has a platform to raise the podium, some chairs and screen. Can easily separate voters and non-voters with stanchions.

8. MCTV can broadcast, record, and use microphones.

9. No additional staff time unless an excessive crowd that needs seating beyond the bleachers and accessible seating. Regular staff time to set up the tables and stanchions.

Considerations

- A good choice for last minute switch from the auditorium to keep in same location.
- Can separate space in half. Will need to bring stanchions.
- Bring stanchions, Middlebury College can loan extra folding chairs.

MUHS Football Field

73 Charles Ave, Middlebury

Contact & Permission: Sean Farrell, Activities Director
sfarrell@acsdvt.org (802) 382-1500 (also requires Principal's approval)

1. Space

- Capacity is 1,200 in stands
- Availability: Not during sports games, practices can most likely be moved.
- Fees: waived for Town, may need to reimburse for custodial time.
- Accessibility is good for people and parking.

2. No room to store voting equipment & chairs outside ahead of time. MUHS has a platform to raise the podium, some chairs. Most people to sit in bleachers with some more accessible chairs in front of bleachers.

3. MCTV can broadcast, record, and use their own microphones. Can tap into onsite PA system which has 1 wireless mic to use.

4. Considerations

- Shoveling snow and no heat in winter is a challenge. They can turn on outside lights.
- Will need lots of extra facilitators to help direct and contain people for voting.

MUMS Gym

48 Deerfield Lane, Middlebury

Contact & Permission: Bruce MacIntire, ACSD Director of Facilities
(802) 382-1198 cell:(802) 349-9684 (also requires Principal's approval)

1. Space

- Capacity is 800 including bleachers
- Availability: Can separate space in half.
- Fees: waived for Town, may need to reimburse for custodial time.
- Accessibility is excellent across the board for people and parking. Most people in bleachers with some more accessible chairs on floor.
- Room to store voting equipment ahead of time. MUHS can loan their platform to raise podium and their screen. Can separate voters and non-voters with stanchions. Site has 150 chairs and enough tables.

10. MCTV can broadcast, record, and use microphones. Can plug into on site access.

11. Considerations

- Can divide space in half.
- Need to bring stanchions.

Wilson Hall

Middlebury College Contact & Permission:

Susan Ritter, Special Assistant to the President (802) 443-3289
sritter@middlebury.edu

Jennifer Erwin, Director of Event Management (802) 443-5772
erwin@middlebury.edu

1. Space

- Capacity is 404 if space in front of the stage is utilized for extra seating and the podium and screen are on the stage. Only 356 if that space has the stage, screen & podium instead.
- Availability: Space is readily available and has a quick set up.
- Fees: Waived for Town
- Accessibility is excellent for people and the college has parking nearby (but not adjacent). College can provide a PDF parking map with enough notice.

2. Stanchions, low stage, tables, podium, large screen, and projector are all available onsite.

3. MCTV can plug into their systems to broadcast and record.

4. Considerations

- The lobby can be used to check in voters. There are several side entrances that will need to be monitored so that no one bypasses the check in.
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