

**Town of Middlebury
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

**Middlebury Union High School
Monday, March 4, 2024
Meeting Minutes**

Citing the warning to the legal voters of Middlebury, Moderator Susan Shashok called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Moderator Susan Shashok introduced the members of the Selectboard present and town officials. Vice Chair Andy Hooper, Heather Seeley, Lindsey Fuentes-George, Farhad Khan, Dan Brown, Isabel Gogarty, Town Manager Kathleen Ramsay, Town Clerk Karin Mott, and minute taker Monica Sanchez Webb. Not present: Selectboard Chair Brian Carpenter.

Madame Moderator requested admittance to the meeting for the following non-resident members of the Town administration: Town Manager Kathleen Ramsay, Director of Public Works Planning Emmalee Cherington, Library Director Dana Hart, and Fire Chief David Shaw. With no objection they were allowed.

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

Farhad Khan moved for the adoption of Article 1; Heather Seeley seconded.

Selectboard Vice Chair Andy Hooper delivered opening remarks after thanking all the Town employees for making the selectboard's job easier. Andy continued by mentioning a few highlights from 2023:

- South Street reconstruction on Phase 4 and prepping for Phase 5
- Road improvements for Leno Lane, Kings Row, Lower Foote Street and Brookside Drive.
- Wastewater pump station improvements.
- Carbon Reduction measures with input from the Energy committee.
 - Municipal vehicle replacement with 2 hybrid vehicles
 - Designing and installing future charging stations, including a rapid charger.
 - Signing of memorandum of understanding to investigate the use of the falls for power, without damaging the attraction of the falls.
- The Ilsley 100 project - that has had community support from the beginning.
- The challenge of our humane treatment of the unhoused population.
- The epic flooding of the summer of 2023, damaging roads, and waterways for 2024.
 - More stormwater upgrades and added capacity to our water supply with a new reservoir on Chipman Hill.
 - Bakery Lane project that is currently up for Bond vote.
 - The continued work on South Street Phase 4 and start of Phase 5, which is also currently up for Bond vote.
 - The renovation of the Ilsley Library Bond will be voted on May 7, 2024.
 - Recognizing the state of inflation and the increasing cost of everything, the Town has presented a budget with only a 3.5% increase.

Selectboard Member Dan Brown spoke on the dedication of the Town report to Ann Webster who served as Town Clerk for 21 years. One of her biggest accomplishments was digitizing all the land records, this proved to be invaluable during COVID.

Selectboard Member Isabel Gogarty acknowledged and thanked Lindsey Fuentes-George for the six years she served on the Selectboard and especially for her commitment to diversity and accessibility to our community.

Gogarty then acknowledged that Alicia and Dean Butler have been chosen as the recipients of The Robert E. Collins award for their extraordinary commitment and dedication to the Parks and Recreation Department and the community at large. A full write up is in the Spring Park and Rec pamphlet.

Selectboard member Farhad Khan on behalf of the Selectboard wants to recognize and thank the following people:

- Tom Hanley, former Chief of Police for his 32 years devoted to the Town of Middlebury and as the Emergency Management Chair.
- Dustin Hunt, for 14 years, served the Town in several roles in the Parks and Recreation department, most recently as Recreation Superintendent.

Khan also wanted to congratulate:

- Wastewater Supervisor Bob Wells, who was awarded the 2023 Regional Wastewater Treatment plant operator of the year. Wells was nominated by the VT Department of Environment Conservation.
- The Town of Middlebury and Kori Crane for being awarded the Roadside Flower award from the Middlebury Garden Club for the downtown flowers and landscaping at the roundabout in 2023.

In Memoriam:

- Jeff Warden, Highway Department 12 years.
- Victor Nuovo, former Selectboard member from March 2006 to January 2014 and again March 2016 to November 2020. Special recognition to his wife Betty Nuovo who also served this community as a Selectboard member and State Representative.

MOTION PASSED BY UNANIMOUS VOICE VOTE
Reports of the Town Officers ACCEPTED

ARTICLE 2: Shall the voters of the Town of Middlebury vote to adopt the proposed budget for the Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025) in the amount of \$13,609,827 with a portion thereof in the amount of \$8,753,310 to be raised by taxes and \$1,040,700 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?

Andy Hooper moved for the adoption of Article 2; Isabel Gogarty seconded.

Kathleen Ramsay then went on to explain that after careful and thorough deliberation, the Selectboard adopted an FY25 (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025) budget requiring an increase in the estimated tax rate from \$.08648 to \$0.8947, an increase of \$.0299 or 3.5%, if Article 3 is approved.

The proposed budget reflects both inflationary pressures and the Town's continued commitment to a robust capital improvement plan and an efficient vehicle and equipment maintenance and replacement plan, while preserving the current level of Town services. The proposed FY25 budget and other articles presented for voter consideration at this year's Town Meeting incorporate the input the Board has received over the years.

- Draw on reserves to minimize increases in the tax rate.
- Use Local Option Tax revenue in excess of what is needed for Cross Street Bridge Fund debt to fund infrastructure improvement projects.
- Use the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Fund to:
 - Fund capital improvements.
 - Reduce amounts borrowed and or interest/expense and
 - Leverage grant and other funding.

The FY25 capital budget includes funding road, sidewalk, stormwater, parks and recreation infrastructure and public works, police, fire, recreation, library and Town office buildings, equipment, and technology, with over 70% of funding allocated for public works projects:

The Major Budget Drivers are:

• Capital Improvement	\$257,066 Increase
• Employee Wages & Benefits	\$191,161 Increase
• Highway Gravel Road Improvements	\$70,000 Increase
• Equipment Maintenance and Purchases	\$34,016 Increase*
• Middlebury Regional EMS	\$34,016 Increase
• Property & Casualty Insurance	\$21,750 Increase

**Editor's Note: there was a typo on the slide for this item: the increase in Equipment Maintenance and Purchases is \$83,305 for FY25.*

Major Budget Offsets

• General Fund Interest Increase/(decrease)	\$150,000
• Local Option Tax Revenue Increase/(decrease)	\$200,00
• Transfers from Water & Wastewater Fund Increase/(decrease)	\$54,239
• Addition of Police Dispatch Contract with Addison County Sheriff's Dept	\$24,000 Increase(decrease)

And tax rate offset Article 3:

Cross street bridge Fund Reserve for PD adaptive Reuse Debt \$133,450

Ramsay went on to explain that the Selectboard reviews several agencies every year. This year they met with The Charter House Coalition and Tri-Valley Transit:

The Charter House Coalition.

The Charter House Mission is to provide shelter for the homeless, nutritious meals for the hungry, and the social service support that people need to progress toward better health and stable housing. They are open all day every day and they work in close partnership with other agencies, including housing managers, The Middlebury Police Department, the Turning Point Center and the Counseling Service of Addison County as well as the Ilsley Library and Tri - Valley Transit. Charter House's request for funding for FY25 is \$6,500, the same as the last three years.

Tri Valley Transit:

Tri-Valley Transit connects the people and places of Addison, Orange, and Northern Windsor Counties of Vermont with a network of community transportation alternatives. They provided 180,794 rides in Fiscal Year 2023 and of those 62,851 originated in Middlebury. 80% of their funding is from federal grants requiring a 20% local match, less than 5% of their funding comes from municipal appropriations. Tri- Valley Transits FY25 request of \$30,178 and increase of \$4,080 over FY24 funding of \$26,098 and is the first increase requested in the last nine years.

Ramsey noted while looking ahead the Selectboard has presented a budget requiring a modest increase in the property tax rate this year, keeping in mind the increases in the following expenses:

- Employee wages and benefits
- Infrastructure improvement projects
- Replacement of Vehicles and Equipment
- Unfunded mandates

And continued uncertainty about inflation and the economy and the future of state and federal funding as well as dwindling reserves/Fund balance will put significant upward pressure on the budgets in FY25 and beyond.

Madame Moderator opened the floor for questions on Article 2.

Department Heads are available to answer any questions voters may have:

General Government & Revenues: Kathleen Ramsay

Libraries: Library Director Dana Hart

Public Safety: Police Chief Jason Covey and Fire Chief David Shaw

Parks & Recreation: Park and Recreation Superintendent Scott Bourne

Capital Improvements: Director of Public Works and Planning Emmalee Cherington

- David Clark asked for clarification on the Middlebury Regional Ambulance request for this year and if it is the same for next year. Ramsay answered that this was a one-year request and MREMS implied there may be more requests in the future.
- Mia Zimmerman questioned the College's commitment to the Cross Street Bridge. Ramsay answered that the College pays \$600,000 yearly until 2040 on the 30-year bond.
- Dick Terk asked about other College payments, whether they are committed or estimated. Ramsay answered that the Town has a 20-year agreement, and they pay toward the bond for the municipal and recreation buildings. He also asked about the budgeted amount for water lines. Ramsay responded that the Selectboard will be looking at that this spring.

- Laura Asermily commented on how grateful she was for the set-up and slides and all the work done in preparation for the Town Meeting. Asermily also asked for clarification on where the water pipe repairs are reflected. Ramsay responded that they are not in the General Fund under Public Works. The Selectboard is the Town's water commissioners so they will be taking this up this spring and decided at the Selectboard level. Asermily also wanted to know where the MREMS line item was. It was moved to Public Safety vs an Organization - Line item 485.
- Victoria Dewind asked about the paving of gravel roads being postponed until next year. Director of Public Works and Planning Emmalee Cherington answered that there is no plan to pave gravel roads this year and it is up to discussion when in the future. Dewind also had been wondering if the pickle ball courts will be paved this year. Parks and Recreation Superintendent Scott Bourne was not available to answer.

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 \$133,450 from the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Fund to offset PD Adaptive Reuse Building debt service expense?

Nick Artim moved for the adoption of Article 3; Farhard Khan seconded.

Selectboard Member Lindsey Fuentes-George and Kathleen Ramsay spoke on Article 3.

- As planned when the Town bonded for the project for seven years rather than 20 years, the shorter seven-year term for the bond will save the Town an estimated \$179,000 in interest expense vs. a twenty-year bond.
- If approved, the transfer from the Cross Street Bridge Reserve Fund to offset debt service on the Police Department Adaptive Reuse Project will shave \$.0135 off the tax rate estimated for FY25.

Questions on Article 3:

- Ira Schiffer asked what the Cross Street Reserve fund is, and how is the limit determined. Ramsay answered that the Cross Street Bridge Fund was started when the Local Option Tax was adopted to cover the Town's share of the Bond and maintenance for the future. The current balance is projected to be \$2 million in funds and the estimated cost for maintenance in 2030 is approx. \$900,000.
- Ted Scheu asked what the PD Adaptive Reuse Project is. Ramsay answered that in 2020 a Bond was voted and approved to rehab the former wastewater plant that was near the police department into storage and a fitness center for the police department.

MOTION PASSED BY UNANIMOUS VOICE VOTE
ARTICLE 3 ADOPTED

Heather Seeley moved for the adoption of Article 4; Farhard Khan seconded.

Article 4: Shall the voters of the Town of Middlebury vote to collect taxes on real property for fiscal year 2024/2025 in TWO equal installments due in the Treasurer's Office on the 15th day of November 2024 and the 14th day of March 2025

Vice Chair Selectboard Member Andy Hooper and Kathleen Ramsay responded to questions.

- Chris Diel asked if tax payments can be shifted to three payments. Hooper and Ramsay answered that the Town went to two payments since the Town did not have up to date Homestead payment info to be able to send the tax bills in time for the August payment, and the Town was having to send out corrected tax bills. There are about 12 residents that pay on a payment plan or monthly. Ramsay responded that anyone who wants to send in money more often may send it in and it will be credited to their account.

MOTION PASSED BY UNANIMOUS VOICE VOTE
ARTICLE 4 ADOPTED

Article 5: To transact other business proper to be done.

[For voting by Australian Ballot on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, polls open from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M.]

Selectboard Member Heather Seeley spoke on Articles 6 and 7 on the bonds that would be voted by an Australian ballot on Tuesday.

Seeley talked about the Project Description and Goals being the following:

- Wastewater, Stormwater and Traffic Calming Improvements,
- Limiting wastewater rate increases.
- Anticipated construction cost \$1,500,000

Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) and ARPA CSO Funding:

- The Town has secured \$1,162,200 in funding for the project.
 - \$664,000 as a grant from the ARPA CSO fund
 - \$498,200 as a 2% low interest 20-year loan through SRF
 - Repayment approximately \$51,000 annually.
- The SRF program requires a Bond vote to show public support.
- Seeley stated that just because the community Bond asks for the full balance, that does not mean the community will be responsible for the full balance. If the Town does not receive the anticipated additional funding the project may not go forward. For example, the Town has yet to receive the additional funding for the Chipman Hill reservoir project, thus that project is on hold until then. Seeley also stated that state and federal funded grant and loan forgiveness programs require community support for eligibility, which is demonstrated by a bond vote. The Selectboard takes great care to reduce the cost to our residents.

- Vivian Valtri Burgess asked about what traffic calming measures are. Seeley answered that Bump outs and narrowing roads at crosswalks are examples of these.
- Dave Silberman stated that he was surprised this work would not be started until 2025 since the road is currently “a mess”. Seeley responded that Phase 4 was not completed in 2023 because of several factors (not specified) and the continuation of Phase four will start in May 2024 and then a rest to give the residents a break, before Phase 5 in 2025. Public Works Director of Planning, Emmalee Cherington confirmed that they did not want to release both projects at the same time, with the possibility of different contractors working each Phase, however the curbing and sidewalk work is in the Phase 4 plan.
- Linda Schiffer Asked for clarification on what parts of South Street this work will be affecting. Seeley answered using a map showing that from Main Street to Chipman Park is where most of the work will be done.
- Laura Asermily stated that Public Health and Safety, Middlebury Safe Routes and The Bike Council all approve of traffic calming measures, and especially designs that do not inhibit the bicyclists.
- Ellen Cronin asked for clarification that Phase 4 is incomplete to date. Seeley confirmed that Phase 4 is in process and Phase 5 is scheduled for 2025. Cronin also asked if the areas that are already worked on will be worked on again before Phase 5 in 2025. Emmalee responded to Cronin’s question that areas were temporarily stabilized for the winter and will be permanently stabilized in 2024.
- Ann Christie from East Middlebury asked what traffic calming measures are planned for South Street. Emmalee responded that South Street is about 75% design completed - bump outs and lane narrowing are some of the possible measures. Because of funding sources, and because it is the main route to the hospital, with parking on one side of the road, this is very complicated. Seeley reminded Christie that Rte. 125 is a State Highway and not a Town road.
- Jamie Hand asked how much of the rest of Town has the same storm water/sewer issues. Emmalee responded that South Street is not a true combined system but more of an infiltration system problem. Gorham Lane possibly has this issue and Seminary Street Ext where the new development is proposed. Thus, the Town is requiring the sewer line to be lined for this development.
- Debbie Ramsdale asked for clarification on who was giving all the answers, Seeley reintroduced Public Works Director of Planning, Emmalee Cherington.

Seeley talked about the Project Description and Goals being the following:

- Wastewater, Stormwater and Traffic Calming Improvements,

- Limiting wastewater rate increases.
- Anticipated construction cost \$1,200,000

Funding:

- \$944,871 through Clean Water State Revolving Fund (requires bond vote)
- \$355,129 (remaining balance) Water/Wastewater/Highway Capital Funds.

Work Involved in Efforts:

- Wastewater Pump Station Upgrade
- Waterline Replacement
- Sewer line Replacement
- Stormwater Improvements
- Paving Improvements

Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF):

- The SRF program requires a Bond Vote to show public support.
- Town has secured \$944,871 in funding for the project.
- 2% low-interest 20-year loan
- Repayment approximately \$80,000 per year
- Lower interest than a bond note.

Conclusion:

- State and federally funded grant and loan forgiveness programs require community support for eligibility,
- Community Support is demonstrated through a bond vote.
- Positive bond vote will leverage State and Federal funds.
- The goal is to reduce the cost to our residents.

Seeley then asked if any questions:

- Ann Christie asked how these improvements consider potential flooding from the river. Public Works Director of Planning Emmalee Cherington answered that they don't. The work that is proposed is all under the roadbed.
- William Biederman was questioning if the staging area would change for South Street. Seeley responded that the same staging area would be anticipated for the additional South Street work but not for Bakery Lane.
- Jamie Hand was asking how this project rated compared to other areas in Town. Emmalee stated that this is more an infrastructure improvement project mostly since the pump station that is served in this area is served by several restaurants and South Street. When the road is paved - which is a bonus - reverse crowning will be done to direct stormwater away from the riverside buildings.

- Christy Lynn's question was how this changes pedestrian accessibility to the parking lot. Emmalee and Jennifer Murray referred to the Downtown Master plan of 2020 and they looked at Green Alleys, however with all the deliveries at different times and the private tenant parking, striping the road may be the best that can be done.
- Alan Shashok asked if the Bakery Lane project takes into consideration the possible rebirth of the EDI project discussed several years ago. Emmalee responded that this was not planned at this time.
- Nick Artim asked if this project would be scalable for the EDI project area. Emmalee responded that she didn't know off the top of her head.
- Fred Dunnington mentioned there was another slide that showed another map of the project.
- Claire Tebbs asked Emmalee to describe the stormwater techniques. Emmalee answered that there may be more funding opportunities from the state if Bioretention is installed at the bottom of the hill.
- Chris Field was wondering if there was any consideration for the businesses that will be affected. Seeley responded yes that the Town and businesses have been in conversation and will continue to do so.
- John Cook wondered if pedestrian and bike traffic was thought about and talked about for this project during construction and after. Seeley responded that yes, it is important, however the limits of space and parking limit what can be done. The Town is trying to accommodate all users in a tight small space. Emmalee commented that more conversations need to be had with the businesses, but if they were to shut down the road, the project would take about 4 weeks vs. 3 months.

Seeley gave a big thank you to Emmalee for coming forward to help answer all the questions, and a reminder to vote tomorrow.

Madame Moderator also gave a big thank you to Dave Silberman and Fred Dunnington for running microphones to the speakers on the floor. She also thanked the Justice of Peace and volunteers, Dorothy Mammen, Jeff Byers, Pam Spatafora, Hudson Tilford, Diane Mott, Carolyn Kuebler, and Brian Bauer. Abigail Martin and Juliet Vayer provided ASL translation.

Article 8 To elect officers as required by the Middlebury Town Charter.

Moderator Susan Shashok offered any candidates for elected offices to come forward and introduce themselves. The following came forward: Fred Dunnington - Selectboard, Farhad Khan - Selectboard, Meg Baker - Library

Library Director Dana Hart and Joe McVeigh, Library Trustee and Chair of the Ilsey 100 Project Team, presented a short presentation regarding the library renovation and information meeting and voting date of May 7, 2024, at the town offices 7am - 7pm.

Laura Asermily mentioned that the Town has a new website and is a resource connector and is full of all kinds of information. The Town also has a listserv for email and text options. Laura also mentioned there is no Town poll this year.

Farhard Khan moved to adjourn; Peggy Rush seconded.

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY BY VOICE VOTE

The meeting adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Monica Sanchez Webb, Board Clerk

Susan E Shashok
Moderator Susan Shashok

Karin S. Mott
Town Clerk Karin Mott