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"A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." ~ Mark Twain

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Radio Referendum Results

Yes
644

No
727

Middlebury Radio referendum fails

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

It took Middlebury Police Chief Richard Guisti five years to get a new public safety communications system before voters Tuesday, but it took just 14 hours for voters to turn down funding for the new system in a 727 to 644 vote. The 83-vote loss (a win for those opposed to the system) highlights the importance of every single vote. After Tuesday's voting results were announced, Guisti said, "Obviously I'm disappointed, but town residents have cast their vote. I'm not going to give up. This is another bump on the road."

Guisti said five years was a long time to have been working on the project, but he was ready to go back to the drawing board. He said he would wait a couple of days and then call a meeting of the Police Commission's radio communications subcommittee and would also discuss the issue at next Monday night's Police Commission meeting. "I want to thank the town residents for coming out and giving their support," Guisti said. "We'll be back."

Earlier in the day, Eileen Clarke said she voted for the system. "I would really hate that if someone couldn't get help," she said, adding she was surprised to see on a map that 50 percent of the town doesn't have adequate public safety radio coverage. "If we can't at least give our service people the tools they need, we're going to be in horrible shape," she said.

The map Clarke saw shows radio coverage is lacking at three of the four public schools in town: Memorial Middle School, Middlebury Elementary School, and Mary I. Johnson School. Only Long Meadow Elementary School is

in the coverage area. Coverage also is lacking at the Woodside Heights senior residences and at the new Middlebury Edge office complex. The Middlebury Hamlet appears to be in the coverage area, but when the dispatcher attempted to contact Officer Demers while he was in this newspaper's office in the Hamlet, the message that came over his portable radio was so garbled he had to use a cell phone to contact the dispatcher and determine what had been said.

Communications Director Matt O'Connor of the CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, which represents Middlebury's police officers, said of the defeat, "I think we can lay a lot of the blame on Marcus and his smear campaign the last few days." O'Connor was referring to the flyer mailed to Middlebury residents and the telephone calls they received just days before the election, both urging them to vote "no" Tuesday. "The real losers tonight are the people of Middlebury, the people who want their officers to be there for them," O'Connor said.

Selectman Bob Desmarais, who was at Shepardson Tuesday night to hear the results of the vote suggested there might be another referendum on the issue. He said it would not be illegal to bring the issue before voters a second time.

Reached in his office at Town Hall Wednesday, First Selectman Tom Gormley said he was somewhat surprised the referendum lost. "I personally think it is very unfortunate for the town as a whole," he said. Gormley said town officials will regroup and decide how best to proceed. He said the next step likely will be that Guisti and the Police Commission will develop a plan of action to present to the Board of Selectmen.