

## Radio plan rejected again in Middlebury

\$700,000 proposal defeated for 2nd time

**BY MATTHEW O'ROURKE**

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

MIDDLEBURY — For a second time, residents rejected a \$700,000 proposal at a townwide referendum Tuesday to upgrade the town's radio communications system to hi-band.

The vote was 919-857 against the plan, with 35 percent of the town's registered voters participating, according to an unofficial tally. That was a boost in turnout after the previous referendum ended in 504-504 tie last month which led to Tuesday's re-vote, as required by state statutes.

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### **VOTE: Selectman cites 'propaganda'**

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"I thought the higher turnout would work in our favor," First Selectman Thomas P. Gormley said. "I'm not sure where we go now. We're going to have to regroup to figure out what's next."

The proposal presented Tuesday was a scaled-back version of the original \$2.4 million plan, to be installed by Motorola Communications, with officials using figures based on the state's bid.

That plan was rejected by voters at a townwide referendum in March.

The project was later divided into phases, which would require separate town meeting or referendum votes, but opponents of the plan argued the system would still cost the same price.

Another resident, Jerry Ranado, said he voted against the new proposal Tuesday because he felt it would raise taxes.

"Taxeshereareastronomical," Ranado said. "We need to bring these things back to reality."

Sindi Pietrorazio said she missed the last referendum in May, but voted in favor of the plan.

"I feel they need it," Pietrorazio said. "It must be frustrating when they're trying to get a hold of someone and their equipment doesn't work."

Town officials said part of the cost would have been offset by a \$215,000 federal grant, leaving the remaining \$485,000 to be covered by bonding. The proposal called for 90/80 coverage, meaning the system will cover 90 percent of the town, 80 percent of the time. The current low-band system works about half the time, covering half the town.

Police have complained for more than five years that parts are becoming harder to find for the radios and they are unable to hear each other because of "dead spots," areas of town where the low-band radios don't work.

Gormley went on to blame what he called a “misinformation campaign” by opponents of the radio proposal, citing an advertisement in the Middlebury Bee-Intelligencer paid for by Bruce Marcus, of Manchester- based Marcus Communications, urging residents to vote no Tuesday to save money.

“There was a lot of distorted information and propaganda out there,” he said.

Marcus was the lower of two bidders for the radio system, with a \$1.2 million proposal that was rejected by the Police Commission. The town’s consultant, Peter Oliver, of Oliver Associates, has said the plan did not meet the town’s specifications, but Marcus has argued the town did not give him a fair chance.

Officials launched their own “yes” vote effort, with Economic and Industrial Development Commission co-chairman John Cookson purchasing and placing signs around town asking residents to approve the upgrade.

Police Commission member Jordano Santos, who oversees the commission’s radio subcommittee, said the group will meet soon to determine next steps but said he was uncertain if that would include rebidding the system.



**JOSALEE THRIFT** REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

**Nancy Vaughan votes in Middlebury’s second round of voting on a \$700,000 proposal to upgrade the town’s radio communications system at Shepardson Community Center on Tuesday. Voters rejected the plan.**

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