

**Brandon Select Board Meeting  
August 26, 2024**

**NOTE: These are unapproved minutes, subject to amendment and/or approval at the subsequent board meeting.**

**Board Members in Attendance:** Doug Bailey, Heather Nelson, Brian Coolidge, Ralph Ethier, Tim Guiles

**Others In Attendance:** Seth Hopkins, Dorthea Langevin, Neil Silins, Jeff Cohen, Jan Coolidge, Karen Rhodes, Peter Werner, Sandy Mayo, Vicki Disorda, Gabe McGuigan, Barry Varian, Tricia Welch, Bill Moore, Steven Jupiter, Barbara Scribner, Scott Scribner, Barbara White, Todd Nielsen, Billy Bullock, Linda Gebhard, Karen Farwell, Stephanie Jerome, Ray Marcoux, Chris Conlin

**Others by Zoom:** Keith Whitcomb, Kate Schirmer-Smith, Jessica Doos, Jay Merluzzi, Bruce Jenson, Carrie Lewis, Sue Gage, Nancy Leary, Kelly Coolidge

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00PM by Doug Bailey – Board Chair.

***a. Agenda Adoption***

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Heather Nelson to approve the agenda. **The motion passed unanimously.**

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Brian Coolidge to enter into executive session at 6:01PM regarding the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee per 1 V.S.A.313(3)(a)(3) to include Budget Committee applicants. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Jeff Cohen joined the Executive Session at 6:07PM and left the executive session at 6:12PM.

Jan Coolidge joined the Executive Session at 6:12PM and left the executive session at 6:18PM.

Vicki Disorda joined the Executive Session at 6:18PM and left the executive session at 6:22PM.

Sandy Mayo joined the Executive Session at 6:22PM and left the executive session at 6:27PM.

Gabe McGuigan joined the Executive Session at 6:27PM and left the executive session at 6:33PM.

Karen Rhodes joined the Executive Session at 6:33PM and left the executive session at 6:39PM.

Neil Silins joined the Executive Session at 6:39PM and left the executive session at 6:47PM.

Barry Varian joined the Executive Session at 6:47PM and left the executive session at 6:54PM.

Tricia Welch joined the Executive Session at 6:54PM and left the executive session at 6:59PM.

Peter Werner joined the Executive Session at 6:59PM and left the executive session at 7:05PM.

**2. Executive Session**

The Board came out of executive session at 7:34PM.

Doug Bailey stated we are a group of citizens that care about Brandon and the meetings will work better when all in attendance get along. There will be a change in the order of the agenda to provide the results of the interviews for the Budget Committee.

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Brian Coolidge to appoint the following members to the Budget Committee: Jan Coolidge, Barry Varian, Gabe McGuigan, Karen Rhodes, and Tricia Welch.

Tim Guiles thanked all who applied for the committee and noted that everyone is welcome to attend the meetings to offer suggestions and share their points of view. Mr. Bailey encouraged all candidates to stay involved and noted that he appreciated the efforts of the Board for their deliberation. It was in the best interest to mix some new people with experienced people and it is hoped there will be a positive budget process. Heather Nelson agreed and encouraged anyone who has input to attend the meetings or email any board or committee member. Mr. Bailey stated budget input is important and is appreciated during the process and before the budget has been published.

**The motion passed unanimously.**

Mr. Bailey reported the first conceptual budget meeting will be held on September 16<sup>th</sup> at 7PM in the town hall. The duration of the meetings will be two hours and the follow-on meetings will be scheduled at the first meeting. Seth Hopkins stated the town office staff has asked for clarification on terms of the appointments.

**Motion** by Heather Nelson/Ralph Ethier to set the term for the Budget Committee appointments to end at the voter approval of the FY26 budget. **The motion passed unanimously.**

### **3. Recurring Matters**

#### ***a. Approval of Select Board Meeting Accessibility Modification Hearing Minutes – August 12, 2024***

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Ralph Ethier to approve the Select Board Accessibility Modification Hearing minutes of August 12, 2024. **The motion passed with one abstention – Heather Nelson.**

#### ***a. Approval of Select Board Meeting Minutes – August 12, 2024***

**Motion** by Heather Nelson/Brian Coolidge to approve the Select Board minutes of August 12, 2024. **The motion passed unanimously.**

#### ***c. Warrant – August 26, 2024 - \$69,906.05***

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Heather Nelson to approve the warrant of August 26, 2024, in the amount of \$69,906.05. **The motion passed unanimously.**

### **4. Town Manager's Report**

A Town Manager's report was provided by Seth Hopkins and is available for viewing in the Board packet on the Town's website.

Mr. Hopkins provided some highlights from the report. He prepared and submitted two Vermont Emergency Management grants, one for a buyout on Newton Road and one for a flood plain restoration in the area of Union Street and Pearl Street adjacent to Otter Creek. A third grant application, Mr. Hopkins is working with the RRPC for a grant to delineate a Neighborhood Development Area. He has also been working with the Town's Finance staff regarding the 23% increase in premiums for the health insurance plan. The Town is not eligible for Cigna, with the only options being BlueCross and MVP. This will be a stressor of \$80,000 on the FY26 budget. Mr. Hopkins reached out to the RRPC to ask they consider using a multi-town service agreement with the RRPC becoming a clearing house for towns who want to participate in a larger group, rather than the small group rate, to allow towns to qualify for Cigna. The RRPC is happy to explore this option and it is

within their statutory authority. Mr. Hopkins advised The Bus is seeking a representative from Brandon and anyone interested in this position can obtain background material on the following website: <https://thebus.com/meeting-material/>.

Mr. Hopkins provided additional updates to the Board that included a financial update, noting the FY25 operating expenses are at 16.7%. The unrestricted fund balance has not changed. The local option tax fund has grown through the Board's vote of needing \$35,000 rather than \$100,000 for paving that increased the fund to \$326,173. Delinquent property taxes remain unchanged and delinquent sewer taxes have increased.

Congratulations to Brandon's Barn Opera for hosting our community's iteration of the "Play Every Town." This was a free concert project by UVM Music professor and pianist, David Feurzeig. Josh Collier and Eve Beglarian were featured artists and Brandon's concert was #64 in the series.

On Sunday, Mr. Hopkins attended the Brandon Rec Department and Brandon Museum's hosting of an examination of eugenics in Vermont and the story of Ivor Devino as this is an important story about human rights in the community.

Mr. Hopkins had a conversation with Jeremy Disorda concerning the winning bidder for the sidewalks. It was suggested the best use of the funds would be for West Seminary to reconstruct the sidewalk from the Neshobe House to the center of Town. There are a number of people at that facility that use wheelchairs and the sidewalk is not suitable. Heather Nelson agreed with the recommendation. Mr. Disorda also noted there could possibly be some additional work done with the funds.

Doug Bailey requested an update of the local option fund commitments. Seth Hopkins advised there will be a Union Street update provided at a subsequent meeting and noted there is money being reserved for the Union Street project. The Wastewater Treatment plant is complete. They have taken some recommendations and have cleaned out the 2-bay garage and that will remain a heated storage location and will continue to not heat the 4-bay garage. They have cleaned out material that will be brought to scrap vendors. Ralph Ethier asked if the sewer upgrade will be on budget and Mr. Hopkins reported it will not be over the amount the voters fully authorized but will be over what had been expected. It is at \$5.8 million, with it expected to be \$5.3 million, and the Town had anticipated \$6 million.

## **5. Rec Director's Report**

Bill Moore reported he was out of the office last week. Mr. Moore stated all fall registration is on the website. There are going to be some interesting things planned for October including a movie showing on one of the weekends. Mr. Moore stated at the last meeting Mr. Coolidge asked about the additional costs for the water fountains at the dog park and the Seminary Hill Park. Due to more donations to the Dog Park Fund, the cost to the Town will be less than \$400. There is also a fundraiser planned for October and more people have expressed interest in donating money. Doug Bailey advised that he plans to be in attendance at the Beer Garden event to accept donations for all the parks for improvements and to answer any questions and discuss how he would see the park improvements. Mr. Bailey noted the Seminary Hill Park is a good setup for children, and he saw many parents and grandparents present with their children. Brian Coolidge asked if the other landowner had insurance as he is concerned with liability. Bill Moore stated the liability insurance is on the Town. He does not have a COI from the landowner and noted that most litigation is people going for the party with the largest pockets, which is the Town.

## **6. Appointments to Budget Committee for Term Ending with Voter Approval of FY26 Budget**

Doug Bailey stated a date has been set for the first budget meeting so the people on the Committee can be prepared. There will be a generic discussion of the Highway Department and Town management with a conceptual discussion about where we are, what we like and what might be added or reduced, after which dollars and cents will be assigned. Tricia Welch asked if the Committee members could have a copy of the budget. Mr. Bailey stated the first two meetings will be conceptual conversations, with the first meeting with Public Service and Management, and the second meeting with the Police Department and Rec Department. After those conversations, the Town Manager and the Departments will develop the first pass of the spreadsheet that will be provided to the Committee in advance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. It is Mr. Bailey's vision to look at where the Town is before assigning numbers, and then look at numbers to see if the numbers are realistic.

## 7. Public Comment and Participation

Chris Conlin asked what the process will be when there is a wish list for the budget, but not the funds. Doug Bailey stated the wish list will help to generate the list of capital expense. There will be a discussion about the highway garage as something that needs to be done, and a discussion of the roads and what funds are available. Mr. Bailey suggested people stay involved and come to the meetings. There is a need to look at what is affordable and what can be achieved, and there will be a separation of needs from wants. Heather Nelson suggested people be involved from the beginning for the Board to take things into consideration. This will provide a structure point and a better look at where we are right now. Neil Silins asked if it was possible to have the documents available to everyone. Seth Hopkins advised all meeting materials will be on the Town website in advance of the meetings.

Stephanie Jermone advised that she is still working on constituent outreach. She is currently working on a project regarding cell towers, noting there was a concern brought to her attention at the polls regarding a dark spot in Forest Dale. She is meeting the new educators and talking about the issues of hiring. She will be working to ease up on some of the regulations to make it easier for professionals to apply for jobs in the State. Representative Jerome noted she is still working for the people and she will be scheduling her next constituent coffee hour. If anyone has concerns in the meantime they can call or email her.

Dorthea Langevin noted that she loves Brandon and due to her green card status, she is not allowed to vote or hold office but has been participating in most of the Select Board meetings. She wished to give kudos to all who come to the meetings and who do the work. Ms. Langevin noted she comes from a democracy that offers some freedoms more than other countries and stated people have a birthright to speak and be heard, and she thanked all for participating.

Wendy Fjeld thanked the Board for the work that they do and apologized that she does not say thank you enough. She noted when she reaches out to Mr. Moore or Mr. Hopkins, they are easy to work with and she appreciates all that they do. She has lived in Town for 40 years and taught school here for 40 years and noted the Town is getting better and better, and there are many things that people can take advantage of.

Vicki Disorda stated she is glad there are fountains in the park, but noted there was discussion of the Town purchasing the dog park and possibly turning it into parking. Bill Moore stated the Town has not moved forward with the discussion of purchasing the land. There was an offer made for the Town to purchase the park, but nothing has been done at this point. The Select Board would need to approve it and a plan developed. He stated that there was no plan to demolish the park and in talking about parking, the current owner had asked about parallel parking on the side of the hill. People park along West Seminar as there is no parking on the east side and there was talk about parking along the road. He stated the thought would be a dog park and green space, and parking along the park. Tim Guiles stated there will be an executive session this evening to discuss this item.

The Select Board recessed at 8:14PM.

The Select Board reconvened at 8:17PM.

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Heather Nelson to enter into executive session at 8:24PM per 1 V.S.A.313(a)(2) regarding negotiating or securing real estate purchase or lease option. **The motion passed unanimously.**

## 8. Executive Session

The Board came out of executive session at 8:41PM. There was no action required.

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Tim Guiles to approve the submission of an application for a \$12,500 matching grant from the Building Community Grants to purchase land at the Seminary Hill Park. **The motion passed unanimously.**

## 9. Adjournment

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Tim Guiles to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 8:42PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant  
Recording Secretary