

Minutes of Joint Meeting of Brandon Selectboard and Budget Advisory Committee
16 September 2024, Brandon Town Hall

Attendance
Selectboard present: Doug Bailey, Heather Nelson, Ralph Ethier, Brian Coolidge, Tim Guiles.
Budget committee present: Janet Coolidge, Gabe McGuigan, Karen Rhodes, Barry Varian, Tricia Welch. Public present: Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, David Kachajian, Jeff Cohen, Dorothea Langevin, Faith Daya, Steven Jupiter, Sue Gage, Neil Silins, Tom Kilpeck

Selectboard Chair Doug Bailey called the meeting to order at 7PM. Item 3 of the agenda was deleted at the request of management. On motion of Heather Nelson and second by Tim Guiles, the amended agenda was adopted by the selectboard 5-0.

Selectboard
Remarks
Doug Bailey offered remarks on the goal of initiating and completing a budget process everyone will feel is fair. Heather Nelson facilitated individual introductions of the selectboard, budget committee, and town management team.

Police Chief
Remarks
Doug Bailey introduced the FY26 conceptual discussion of the police department, which represents about one-third of all Town expenditures. David Kachajian, Chief of Police since January 2022, had been requested to provide a brief state of the department. He stated the department is at its full authorized staff of six officers plus the Chief and an administrative assistant, and is one of a very small number of departments in Vermont which are fully staffed. Since 1 July 2024, the department has been on a 24-hour on-duty schedule, with no on-call schedule. He cited success of the K9 program and reported over \$100,000 in drugs seized in the past quarter, as well as a 29% reduction in car crashes in Brandon year-over-year. Call numbers are increasing and he has a goal of officers becoming certified as trainers in various fields to provide in-house training.

Budget Committee and Selectboard members asked questions about stressors on the officers, the capital needs of the department, a drug recognition expert possibility, and use of drones.

Police:
Positives
Doug Bailey led a discussion on what the meeting perceived to be the positive aspects of the department. Meeting participants cited 24 hour on-duty coverage, a strong push to remove drugs from the community, education/prevention/protection over ticketing, and communications received from townspeople who have had interactions our the police department. David Kachajian highlighted several comparison statistics for various metrics across several years, all indicating greatly increased activity. He stated morale has been improved by the 24 hour on-duty schedule as it enhances the officers' quality of life (predictable scheduling, uninterrupted sleep, etc.).

Police:
Negatives
Doug Bailey then led a discussion on what the meeting perceived to be negative aspects of the department or areas where improvement is needed. Meeting participants noted a desire for a written capital plan and getting control of labor costs, particularly overtime. Selectman Tim Guiles offered consideration of the level of policing in our community as something the community can choose based on its own cost benefit assessment, similar to choosing among various levels of insurance and insurance premiums. He would like to see reducing the demand for drugs addressed as energetically as limiting the supply. David Kachajian agreed and relayed that all officers would like to see availability of more robust mental health services. He briefly shared the evolution of policing from simple law enforcement to a broader concept of public safety to

today's view of police acting as problem solvers. In response to Doug Bailey's question regarding any pitfalls of the 24 hour on-duty coverage schedule, he agreed that the overtime costs have been excessive and were not forecast to have been this high. Seth Hopkins advised that US Department of Labor regulations do require overtime at time-and-a-half be paid for all hours beyond forty in one seven-day workweek. We are not able to average the hours (48 hours in the first week and 36 hours in the second week of the pay period) for purposes of overtime calculation.

Police:
Two-tier
Funding
Proposal

Discussion turned to the possibility of a base level of funding for policing within the Town's general operating budget with a one-year, one-time article asking voters whether they supported 24-hour on-duty coverage at an additional stated cost, with such cost to become part of future budgets if the question is voted affirmatively (meaning, no plans for a yearly article which could result in highly unstable police funding). This would provide a very clear indication of the will of the voters on this topic, even more so than the advisory question posed in March 2024 and would likely be seen as their definitive view for a time.

Town
Clerk

At the conclusion of the discussion on police matters, Town Clerk Sue Gage recommended from her position as Town Treasurer that the Town consider not just a 5-year capital budget but forecasting a 5-year operating budget.

The town manager was directed to work with the chief on cruiser leases and capital plan for the October 7th meeting.

Meeting
Schedule

Future joint meetings of the Selectboard and Budget Advisory Committee will be held at the Brandon Town Hall from 7 - 9 PM on Mondays, September 30th, October 7th, and October 21st.

On motion of Brian Coolidge seconded by Heather Nelson and voted 5-0, the meeting adjourned at 8:56PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Seth M Hopkins, town manager