

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

Attendance Selectboard present: Doug Bailey, Heather Nelson, Ralph Ethier, Brian Coolidge. Budget committee present: Janet Coolidge (by Zoom), Gabe McGuigan, Karen Rhodes, Barry Varian, Tricia Welch. Public present: Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, Steven Jupiter, Jeremy Disorda, Chris Kent, Pat Wood, Todd Nielsen.

Selectboard Chair Doug Bailey called the meeting to order at 7PM. On motion of Heather Nelson and second by Ralph Ethier, the posted agenda was adopted by the selectboard 4-0.

Selectboard Remarks Doug Bailey indicated it may be prudent to return to a discussion of the police department during the conceptual phase of these meetings. Heather Nelson reiterated her suggestion of using a whiteboard or easel pad to note ideas offered by meeting participants. Doug Bailey distributed an FY24 “net” sugaring-off by the four large mission areas, a staff chart also using the four large mission areas, and a study based on the VLCT 2023 Compensation Report comparing Brandon’s administrative costs to other Vermont towns of like size.

Highway Division Chief Remarks Doug Bailey introduced the FY26 conceptual discussion of the highway and buildings & grounds departments. Highway Chief Jeremy Disorda reported that the reduction of one full-time staff member during last year’s budget revotes has not been detrimental. The department is focused on maintenance work such as ditching, culverts, Municipal Roads General Permit compliance efforts, grading, and mowing. Guardrails were installed in several locations this spring, and sidewalk work got underway last week. He identified his department priorities as including a replacement highway barn / shop building / garage; replacement of the single-axle truck which required \$10,000 in work to get ready for last year’s winter operations [ballpark quote is \$300,000], and a different roadside mower. A replacement zero-turn mower is also on the horizon. Paving he has identified for FY26 includes Wheeler Road from the bridges at Marble Street up to at least Lover’s Lane if not to end of pavement at Richmond Road; and McConnell Road south from Wood Lane to Route 7.

Committee Questions & HWY Discussion Selectboard and budget advisory committee members inquired as to the status of leases and buildings & grounds revenue sources. A committee member asked whether the Town crew could take over watering the flowerpots and gardens in the downtown, which up to this point have been the responsibility of the business owners nearby (pots) per a longstanding agreement between them and the Downtown Brandon Alliance, and of a dedicated group of volunteers (gardens). A suggestion was made that due to conditions at the highway barn and any potential replacement facility being in the middle distance, a job trailer might be procured for the use of the department staff. A ballpark figure of \$500/month plus utilities was noted. Upon question about the next round of sidewalk work, the rest of Carver Street (but in conjunction with the larger work required for utilities and roadbed rebuilding there), Champlain Street, and more distance up West Seminary Street. Possible methods for funding a capital replacement program were discussed. Doug Bailey noted that for paving, there are basically three ways of providing local funding (separate from any state grants available): the operating budget, a voted appropriation article, and the 1% local option tax fund. Differing opinions regarding the best methods were discussed by the group. Impacts of the attempt to fund paving with a large line item in the

original FY25 budget proposal were reviewed. More than one member commented on the need to restore trust and a desire to not put the operating budget at risk.

Admin &
Finance

Seth Hopkins then led an overview of the Administration & Finance mission, which is fundamentally a stable mission area of several one-person departments, with the welcome doubling of available hours for our code enforcement officer / health officer / rental housing officer / zoning administrator Larry Stevens. There is a big push to increase the supply of available housing, and there are significant projects underway in Brandon, including two at existing buildings in Park Village and various independent property owner projects throughout town. It is expected that GovPilot will assist in generating some rental housing permit revenue which has long fallen short of its potential. A few questions regarding the town management team approach and work schedule were addressed. The main concern is the seeming impossibility of reining in health insurance costs. Several creative options have been explored, none feasible so far.

Community
Development

Bill Moore led a discussion of Recreation and Economic Development which together constitute the Community Development mission. Taking on year-round programming of the Town Hall when the Friends of the Town Hall disband at year's end is an exciting new focus. This is yet another instance of the Town's Rec Department taking on work that was formerly done by non-Town parties (similarly to youth sports no longer offered at the elementary school, and to picking up a Chamber event such as harvest people). A key focus is multi-generational opportunities for people of all abilities. There followed discussions about facilities, collaborations with other groups, scholarships for those who may have challenges accessing programs, a capital plan, grant matches, and approaching nearby towns for support as is done by the Library.

Revisiting
Police

Doug Bailey initiated a follow-up discussion regarding the police department budget, addressing past spending and the current overtime dynamics with the 24-hour on-duty schedule. It was noted that the overage in the police spending in FY24 was almost but not quite made up by the other departments coming in under budget for FY24. Bailey noted that the police chief is on vacation this week and will be meeting with the town manager when he returns.

FY26
Draft

It was requested that the town manager provide a rough draft of the proposed FY26 operating budget at the October 7th meeting. The town manager will comply and restated that he is not available to attend the October 21st meeting. [It is my recommendation to reschedule that meeting.]

On motion of Brian Coolidge seconded by Heather Nelson and voted 4-0, the meeting adjourned at 9:25PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Seth M Hopkins, town manager