

**Brandon Select Board Meeting
March 10, 2025**

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

Board Members In Attendance: Doug Bailey, Brian Coolidge, Ralph Ethier, Cecil Reniche-Smith, Jeff Haylon

Others In Attendance: Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, Sue Gage, Joe Bertrand, Barry Varian, Vicki Disorda, Helyn Anderson, Joe Bertrand, Jack Schneider, John Peterson, Patrick Snow

Others by Zoom: Keith Whitcomb, Neil Silins, Barbara White, Thomas Kilpeck, Elana Sadlon, Adam Murach

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order by Doug Bailey at 7:00PM.

a) Agenda Adoption – Motion by Brian Coolidge/Jeff Haylon to adopt the agenda, as amended. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Add Ethics Complaint following Item 8 - Road Postings.

2. Election of Select Board Officers

a) Election of Chair

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith to appoint Doug Bailey as the Chairperson of the Brandon Select Board. **The motion passed unanimously.**

b) Election of Vice-Chair

Motion by Jeff Haylon to appoint Cecil Reniche-Smith as the Vice-Chair of the Brandon Select Board. **The motion passed unanimously.**

c) Election of Clerk

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith to appoint Jeff Haylon as the Clerk of the Brandon Select Board. **The motion passed unanimously.**

3. Select Board Members' Remarks

Doug Bailey asked all to be nice. Mr. Bailey also wanted to take a moment to thank all of the citizens for participating in the town meeting and the elections. The citizens have given the funding asked for and it is up to the Management Team and Select Board to do the work to earn their trust for next year. He stated the #1 task is to rectify the Town's situation with public safety to get properly staffed. Towns and the State Police are looking to hire staff. The Select Board does realize the situation and is working diligently. The Board cannot discuss personnel matters and union matters in open session. Mr. Bailey asked the citizens to trust the Select Board to try to satisfy the public in this matter. He also wanted to plant the seed of thought regarding long-term planning for a new town highway garage as the larger equipment cannot fit into the current garage that is deteriorating. There will be a planning stage format of 18 to 24 months in looking at options and funding to get bays that the current large equipment can fit in.

Cecil Reniche-Smith encouraged people who wish to speak to come to the podium so that all on Zoom can hear as well.

4. 2025 Select Board Reorganization Resolution

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Brian Coolidge to approve the 2025 Select Board reorganization resolution as a consent agenda. **The motion passed unanimously.**

1) Designation of Select Board as Other Statutory Bodies

- a) *Board of Liquor Control (Title 7 VSA Section 166)*
- b) *Board of Health, (Title 18 VSA Section 604)*
- c) *Board of Sewage System Commissioners (Title 24 VSA 3602)*
- d) *Housing Board of Review (Title 24 VSA Section 166)*
- e) *Local Cannabis Control Commission (Title 8 VSA 166)*

2) Establish Regular Meeting Schedule, Time, and Location per 1 VSA 312(c)(1)

- 1) *Second and Fourth Mondays*
- 2) *7:00PM*
- 3) *Brandon Town Hall, 1 Conant Square or Zoom meeting ID #253 279 4161*

3) Adopt Meeting Rules and Procedures

- a) *Rules of Procedure for Select Board of the Town of Brandon, Vermont*
- b) *Reports of Appointed Boards, Commissions and Officials to the Select Board*

4) Designate Official and Alternate Newspaper(s) of Record per 1 VSA 174

- a) *Official – The Reporter*
- b) *Alternate – Rutland Herald*

5) Designate Physical Location for Posting Meeting Notices per 1 VSA 312(c)(2)

- a) *Bulletin Board outside Town Office, 49 Center Street*
- b) *Bulletin Board in Box Lobby at US Post Office, 32 Conant Square*
- c) *Bulletin Board at Junction Store, 2265 Forest Dale Road*

6) Appointments of Officials (Terms ending at first Select Board meeting after the 2026 Town Meeting)

- a) *Tree Warden per 24 VSA 871(b) – Neil Silins*
- b) *Fence Viewers per 24 VSA 871(b)(1) – Bob Kilpeck, Jon Wyman, & Tracy Wyman*
- c) *Inspector of Lumber, Shingles, and Wood per VSA 871(b)(3) – Bob Kilpeck*
- d) *Weigher of Coal per 24 VSA 871(b)(4) – Olya Hopkins*
- e) *Green-up Day Coordinator – James Leary*
- f) *Otter Creek Watershed Insect Control District*
 - i. *(2 representatives)- Wayne Rausenberger, Kerry White*
 - ii *(1 alternate) – Olya Hopkins*
- g) *Rutland County Solid Waste District*
 - i. *Representative – Gabe McGuigan*
 - ii. *Alternate - Tracy Wyman*

5. Recurring Matters

a) Select Board Minutes – February 24, 2025

Motion by Brian Coolidge/Ralph Ethier to approve the minutes of February 24, 2025. **The motion passed unanimously.**

b) Warrant – March 10, 2025 - \$80,783.93

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Jeff Haylon to approve the warrant in the amount of \$80,783.93. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Doug Bailey stated there is a warrant for salt and noted that the Town is having trouble obtaining more. Seth Hopkins reported there is a shortage of salt and several agencies are coming up short on request for deliveries. The Town had ordered and received 952 tons of salt and it was estimated the usage would be 1000 tons. The Town and the State are out of salt. The

Town has ordered another 100 tons of salt, but it is not readily available. With another storm, the Town will be plowing and sanding.

c) Updated Employee Blanket Payroll Authorization

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Jeff Haylon to approve the updated employee blanket payroll authorization. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Doug Bailey stated the Select Board could change this system where one or two Board members could be assigned to handle this authorization and approve the payroll every other week. Mr. Bailey thought it would be a good idea and noted that the decision did not have to be made at this meeting. Cecil Reniche-Smith would default to what is easiest for the Town Manager. Mr. Hopkins stated it would be the preference of the Select Board. When the payroll gets processed it is according to the personnel policy in accordance with 24 V.S.A. 1623. The time sheets are processed every other Monday and the payroll officer would need the Board members to see them on Tuesday or Wednesday. Mr. Hopkins noted the Board is seeing the flat hourly rate and if the Board members were assigned to do the two-week approval, it would be what is on the time sheets. Mr. Bailey noted the Board can discuss this at a subsequent meeting as it was not on this agenda.

6. 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.

Seth Hopkins thanked all who voted on Tuesday and noted the operating budget and funding is in good condition. Congratulations to Ralph Ethier, Cecil Reniche-Smith, and Jeff Haylon on their election. Mr. Haylon has resigned from the Energy Committee following his election to the Select Board. Anyone wishing to be considered for an appointment to the Energy Committee should submit the appointment cover sheet and a letter of interest to the Town Manager.

Mr. Hopkins reported he had further discussion with the Police Union representative and will discuss modifying the collective bargaining with the Select Board in executive session. The Board Chair and he also spoke with the Vermont Police Academy on recruitment.

Mr. Hopkins advised a 2018 Ford Interceptor SUV was placed on Municibid that is open through March 18th. If any Brandon residents would like assistance with bidding, people can come to the town office and Mr. Moore or Mr. Hopkins can help with placing the bid.

The Select Board members were provided a copy of the Selectboard Handbook, which is a best practice recommended by VLCT.

Mr. Hopkins thanked the Select Board for the opportunity to serve Brandon as the appointed town manager and renewed his commitment to deliver efficient government service and foster building of community among all the people of Brandon.

Mr. Hopkins reported that two of the three clarifiers at the wastewater treatment plant have significant damage. They were all outfitted with a new type of material for the curtain during the upgrade. Two of them have had damage from ice and are not functional – the north and center ones. The south clarifier is functional and operational. The chief wastewater attendant and the contractors are working to come up with a solution. There is a question about the durability of the new material. Jeff Haylon asked how long the prior ones made of aluminum lasted and Mr. Hopkins noted it was about 20 years. Cecil Reniche-Smith asked why the change in material and Mr. Hopkins stated it was more cost-effective and was recommended to have flexible attributes, but it has less tensile strength. Mr. Hopkins advised one looks bad but may just need a panel, but both are currently not being used. Mr. Hopkins stated this was part of the overall upgrade and he hopes this will be warranty work. Doug Bailey asked if there is a reserve fund. Mr. Hopkins advised there is a capital fund. Sue Gage asked if other towns are using this material and Mr. Hopkins stated the different towns sent out RFPs and there are about 6 engineering firms that do wastewater.

Barry Varian stated with respect to the police department, he understands conversations need to be privileged, but asked if an outcome results in a direction being considered whether the Board would share that with the public. Mr. Hopkins stated one

strategy is increasing the compensation package. Another strategy is to attempt to staff with currently certified Level 2 officers. If the Town goes the normal route, it will mean recruiting and sending them to the Police Academy, which is a 14-to-18-month timeframe. Someone less than a Level 3 could be recruited and not have to go through that stage and would provide more expedient restaffing. Mr. Bailey stated there is the feasibility of offering a sign-on bonus for a certified officer as the Town pays \$15,000 to \$19,000 to get an officer through the Academy and the next class does not start until September. Mr. Bailey noted the sign-on bonus could be provided over time to maintain retention.

Jeff Haylon suggested once there is a resolution to the wastewater issue that the information be sent to other towns.

7. Community Development Report

Bill Moore provided the following Community Development Report:

The Town Hall will be busy. Friday will be the 3rd Brandon Idol concert with songs from “The Year You Were Born”. There are 13 performers who will be singing for the opportunity to go on to the May final. March 21st the Worm Dogs will be performing from 7PM to 10PM. March 22nd will be Kennedy Park. March 29th the Electric Bears will be performing a free concert.

Baseball registration will begin March 27th with a clean-up day scheduled for April 5th.

The closing to acquire the property for the dog park is happening soon. A spring project at Estabrook will be a redo of the tennis court by the company that did the sidewalks from funds that the Select Board allocated.

On Newton Road, Carl Fjeld’s building is now an empty lot. The Town is waiting to hear from a couple more buyouts.

Robin Douglas has been hired to replace Colleen Wright and will be working 20 hours per week, Tuesday through Thursday. She will be attending the next meeting to meet the Select Board.

Vicki Disorda asked where the funding came from for the purchase of the dog park property. Bill Moore advised there is a \$12,500 grant from the State and the Select Board approved \$12,500 appropriated from the Town Farm Fund. This was not funds from the Trustees of Public Funds. Joe Bertrand questioned the reason for the Town purchasing property for a dog park. Mr. Moore stated this is property that was thought to be public property, but when the Brandon High School was sold to a private owner, the area belongs to that owner who has allowed the Town to use the property. Helyn Anderson asked about the updating of the old high school as it has been deteriorating. Bill Moore stated aside from the negotiations; the owner has not shared what they are going to do with the building. They have gone before the DRB; however, Mr. Moore is not sure what their plan is. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated there is a group that is organized to work on a plan for the property and they have been meeting and working on it. They have also made some small repairs to help avoid additional deterioration due to the weather. Doug Bailey stated the Town cannot have a stake in that as it is privately owned and would follow the zoning regulations. Mr. Bailey stated the Town had assumed it owned the property where the dog park is and tax dollars were not used to create the park. Mr. Moore stated the initial idea was to do something at Estabrook for a dog park that is a fenced in area, however, the cost was going to be \$20,000. Mr. Bertrand thought it a lot of money to walk your dog. It was noted there are people that live in apartments and this is a convenience for those people. The Town worked with the landowner of the Seminary Hill Park and the cost to refurbish the fence was \$5,000 that came from donated funds.

8. Ratify Seasonal Road Posting

Motion by Jeff Haylon/Brian Coolidge to ratify the seasonal road posting as presented. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Doug Bailey reported the roads will be posted before Friday.

9. Ethics Complaint

Cecil Reniche-Smith reported there is a new procedure for municipal ethics code violations from the State. The Board has received a complaint about elected officials of the Town. In open session, the Board has noted that it has received a complaint and appears to allege a violation. The Board will take it into executive session to discuss, investigate and then either in the session determine a code violation has occurred, or recess for further investigation. On the face, it does allege a violation. A clarification of the process was requested as it was thought that the violation could be announced in public. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated when a complaint is made: the receipt of the complaint is announced by the Select Board and it is reviewed in executive session and if determined it is not a violation, the details are not divulged. If it is determined a complaint, it is divulged. Seth Hopkins suggested divulging the item that is alleged. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated conflict of interest and misuse of position are the two allegations. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated it would be okay to say something in open session, but divulging the complaint would divulge the parties. It is not a complaint about this Board. Doug Bailey stated if there was something about a board member, that person would have to recuse themselves. It was noted when someone wants to make a complaint, one choice is to send it directly to the State Ethics Commission but this is not what this person chose to do.

10. Public Comment and Participation

Sue Gage reported there will be a rabies clinic at the Leicester Town Office tomorrow from 5PM to 7PM and the cost is \$20.00 cash or check.

Vicki Disorda stated the \$28 million school budget passed by one vote and it qualifies for a recount if there is one letter submitted to each of the district's town clerks. There is also an option for a revote if there is a petition signed by 365 individuals. There is a petition going around with one at the post office, the liquor store, and the Junction Store in Forest Dale.

Barbara White asked if it costs the towns if there is a revote on the school budget. Sue Gage reported it does cost all towns, with Brandon's cost about \$1200.00 to \$1500.00 with a total cost of around \$4,000.00 that would come out of the school budget. It would be a revote of the same budget and if it failed, there would have to be a second vote with the same costs.

Neil Silins stated that salary has a lot to do with police officers staying, but suggested improved treatment of the officers would also go a long way with retaining staff, noting concern with assigning them to overtime and on-call duty. Mr. Silins also noted there have been Select Board members who marginally work within the Select Board's authority in speaking to the Police Department as a representative of the Board, and who also has done a number of things that were demeaning to other Select Board members and Town staff. The Select Board should develop a system where Board members are held in check about doing things to other Select Board members and Town employees.

The Board recessed at 7:53PM.

The Board reconvened at 8:04PM.

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Brian Coolidge to find that premature general public knowledge of the pending contract negotiation with New England Police Benevolent Association Local 422 will clearly place the Town of Brandon at a substantial disadvantage by disclosing its negotiation strategy. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Brian Coolidge to enter into executive session at 8:04PM to discuss the Town's pending labor relation agreement with New England Police Benevolent Association Local 422, per 1VSA 313(a)(1)(b) for labor relations agreements with employees, to include the Town Management Team. **The motion passed unanimously.**

11. Executive Session

The Board came out of executive session at 9:13PM.

It was announced that Brian Coolidge, Ralph Ethier, and Cecil Reniche-Smith will be the Negotiating Committee for collective bargaining with the New England Police Benevolent Association.

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Brian Coolidge to enter into executive session at 9:14PM regarding the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A.(313)(3)(a)(3) to include the Town Management Team. **The motion passed unanimously.**

12. Executive Session

The Board came out of executive session at 9:33PM.

There were no actions required.

13. Adjournment

Motion by Brian Coolidge/Jeff Haylon to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:34PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary