

TOWN OF BRANDON
WARNING FOR EVENING MEETING
MARCH 2, 2015

Moderator Art Doty called the Annual Brandon Town School District meeting to order at 7:02 P.M. Attending the meeting were select board members Chairman David Atherton, Douglas Bailey, Devon Fuller, Seth Hopkins, and Ethan Swift, Clerk Sue Gage and 139 registered voters.

Cub Scout Keith Carrara of Pack 123, Brownies Aly LaRoche, Kylee Raymond, Clara Cifone, and Linnea Faulkner of Brownie Troop 300067, Brownie/Daisies Christina Carrara and Lucia Carrara of Troop 30033, and leaders Sarah-Lynne Carrara, Jeff Carrara, Tanya LaRouche and Liz Alvarado presented the colors and lead the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The following business was then transacted:

Moderator Doty introduced Select Board Chair David Atherton, who introduced the remaining Select Board as well as the Budget Committee members, Jan Coolidge, Seth Hopkins, Carol Bertrand, and Doug Sawyer. Chair Atherton also recognized select board members that resigned during the year, Maria Ammatuna and Blaine Cliver, and thanked them for their service.

1. Take appropriate action on the reports of officers as they appear in the Town Report.

Mr. Bailey noted a correction on page 41 of the Annual Report, in the Assessor's section of the budget report. The proposed FY 15/16 budget was incorrectly compared to the FY 13/14 rather than the FY 14/15 budget. The summary on page 37 is correct, but the detail is incorrect.

2. To hear a presentation by the Select Board of its recommended budget for fiscal year 2015-2016. This budget and appropriations will be voted by Australian Ballot on March 3, 2015 at the Neshobe School located at 17 Neshobe Circle.

Mr. Hopkins led a presentation on the budget proposal. The presentation included an overview of the budget, estimate of the tax bill, and answers to anticipated questions.

Following the presentation Moderator Doty invited the voters present to address the Select Board with any questions or concerns.

Deb Bratton addressed the comparison of the current budget to the prior year budget with the library and senior center removed from the current budget, but still in the prior year budget. She stated that the 2% increase is actually a 6% increase, and the comparison is confusing. Mr. Hopkins reiterated the estimated tax effect of all budgets and appropriations passing.

Jeremy MacLachlan expressed concern that the budget does not address capital improvements that are much needed in the town and that he sees an increased budget but not increased services. He asked when the board will address changes to reduce administrative expenses, he indicated that the budget is top heavy, specifically with the salary of administrators. Mr. Fuller stated that the town has a number of projects in various stages that need to be addressed and will be addressed with the hiring of a full-time public works director. Mr. Bailey also addressed the fact that the town requires a full-time public works director to complete the projects on its list.

Larry Rogers asked to address the union contract negotiations. He noticed pay raises in the budget and asked whether these raises were a result of the contract negotiations. He also wanted to know who is representing the town in the negotiations. Mr. Bailey stated that the union contract negotiations are not complete, but the budget responsibly reflects a likely increase in employee's wages. Mr. Fuller stated that negotiations are underway and the town is represented by select board members Devon Fuller, David Atherton, the town manager, Robin Bennett and an attorney. Mr. Rogers is concerned that the town manager is on this negotiation team, because she directly benefits from anything in the union contract.

The select board conducted a straw poll asking whether those present would support the board pursuing a Local Options Tax in Brandon. Mr. Fuller explained the 1% local options tax to the attendees, and explained that this would require changes to our town charter. Mr. Bailey explained that both Middlebury and Rutland have this tax in effect. He also explained that Middlebury used the funds provided from these taxes for infrastructure improvements. Mr. Bailey would like to see a Local Options Tax support infrastructure in Brandon. Jed Byrom asked whether the select board had any idea how much revenue could be generated with a local options tax. Mr. Bailey stated that we could see an additional \$80K in revenue, depending on how extensive the tax would be.

Cindy Bell asked what the time frame would be before we would receiving these funds. Mr. Bailey stated that it is difficult to tell, at least a year or more. Ms. Bell stated that it appears the town takes a long time to move forward on projects. Mr. Fuller clarified that this is a timely project, and that is exactly why the board wants to take a straw poll of the people present because the task will take a long time and they don't want to invest time in something that the populous doesn't support.

Ms. Bell has a larger concern about town management not seeming to get through projects in a timely manner. Mr. Fuller stated that the straw poll on local options tax was currently on the table and these larger concerns were not germane to the discussion on the table.

Judy Bunde spoke as an inn owner in support of a local options tax in Brandon. Rep. Steve Carr along with Rep. Butch Shaw have talked to folks in Montpelier. He stated that a change in the charter can take a few months through the legislature, but he is confident that if the town wants to go ahead and the local options tax is voted in next town meeting, it could happen during the next legislative session (Jan – May of 2016).

Stacey Doucette owns the Brandon Motor Lodge and agrees with Judy Bunde in support of the 1% local options tax. She also urged the select board to get information out to the voters. She also clarified that the local voters will really not be paying this tax, but tourists and travelers through town will be shouldering it.

Phyllis Reed clarified that Rutland Town has a 1% Local Option Tax, but Rutland City does not.

Moderator Doty conducted the straw poll on whether the select board should pursue a Local Options Tax in Brandon. The Ayes won.

Motion Bernie Carr and a second by Jan Coolidge to accept the reports as presented. Clarification that the reports were amended during the discussion.

Bernie Carr moved to accept the reports as amended, seconded by Charlie Jakiela. The motion passed

3. To see if the voters of the Town of Brandon will authorize the Select Board to spend unbudgeted, unanticipated income received by the Town so long as the expenditure of such funds will not create a deficit?

Motion to approve the question from Larry Rogers and a second from Dolores Furnari. The motion passed

4. To see if the voters of the Town of Brandon will vote to exempt the buildings and property belonging to the Brandon Senior Citizens Center, Inc located at 1591 Forest Dale Road (parcel ID 0083-1591) from **education property tax** for a period of five(5) years in accordance with the exemption clause for charitable and fraternal organizations as set forth in 32 V.S.A § 5404A?

Motion to approve the question from Bob Ripley and a second from Jan Coolidge. The motion passed

5. To see if the voters of the Town of Brandon will vote to exempt the buildings and property belonging to the Brandon Senior Citizens Center, Inc located at 1591 Forest Dale Road (parcel ID 0083-1591) from **municipal property tax** for a period of five(5) years in accordance with the exemption clause for charitable and fraternal organizations as set forth in 32 V.S.A § 3840?

Motion to approve the question from Bob Ripley and a second from Jan Coolidge. The motion passed

6. To transact any other business proper to be done when met.

Cindy Bell asked whether there will be any adjustments to the sewer bills for people who are running their water per the Fire District request. Mr. Atherton stated that there will be adjustments to everyone's bills.

Janet Mondlak requested support for the Brandon Free Public library. She also clarified the library funding needs, stating that the money from the town funds four positions at the library.

Rep. Steve Carr requested that we suspend the rules so that Rep. Butch Shaw of Pittsford can speak at the meeting. Bernie Carr moved and Charlie Jakiela seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Rep. Carr addressed the largest issue facing the legislature which is the budget deficit. He spoke about the proposed closure of the local dispatch centers and introduced Rep. Shaw who explained that there is a consolidated effort fighting these closures both in our area and in the Northeast Kingdom. Rep. Shaw stated that this is part of the budget process, and cuts are being examined across the board including closing the Veterans home in Bennington, closing the prison in Windsor, cutting state employee's wages 5%, and reducing the size of the legislature. Beyond the budget woes, the legislature is looking at incentives to keep graduating students in Vermont. Rep. Carr spoke of his shared concerns about rising property taxes, and recognizes that we need to make some changes to the education funding system in the state. Rep. Carr stated that there is a bill in the legislature currently which may address some of these issues through innovative funding of smaller schools. Both representatives encouraged individuals to examine the education bill introduced. Rep. Carr can be reached at scarr@leg.state.vt.us and Rep. Shaw can be reached at bshaw@leg.state.vt.us.

Moderator Doty read the remaining warning items that will be voted by Australian ballot tomorrow.

The meeting was recessed at 8:28 P.M.

POST RECESS - Judy Bunde asked that those present recognize Janet and Joel Mondlak as our Town Report dedicatees.

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur Doty
Moderator

Louis Faivre
BCA Chair

Susan Gage
Town Clerk