

TOWN OF BRANDON
MINUTES OF EVENING MEETING
MARCH 5, 2018

Moderator Bill Moore called the Annual Town Meeting to order at 7:00 pm. Attending the meeting were Select Board Members Chair Seth Hopkins, Douglas Bailey, Devon Fuller, Tracy Wyman and Brian Coolidge; Town Manager David Atherton; Clerk Sue Gage; and 104 registered voters. Color guard members Aaron Tucker and Burt Reynolds from American Legion Post 55 and Girl Scouts Christina and Lucia Carrara of Troop 300067 led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Moderator Moore welcomed all attendees and laid out ground rules for a productive exchange. He also thanked Friends of The Town Hall (FOTH) for all the wonderful work and new stage, and thanked Arlen Bloodworth for providing sound equipment and filming the proceedings.

Chair Seth Hopkins recognized our Town Report dedicatees, Deborah and Dick Kirby, who were met with a standing ovation.

Moderator Moore read the Town Meeting Warning, noting an error under item number 2. Voting by Australian Ballot will be on March 6, 2018, rather than 2017, as is written in the warning.

The following business was transacted:

1. To take appropriate action on the reports of officers as they appear in the Town Report. Bernie Carr moved to accept the reports as they appear in the Town Report. The motion received a second from Mona Rogers.

Mr. Hopkins made a further motion to amend the Town Report by replacing page 40 with the revised page handed out at the start of the meeting. This motion received a second from Devon Fuller. Mr. Hopkins addressed the changes on page 40. The motion to amend the Town Report by replacing page 40 was voted and passed.

Brent Buehler stated that prior to last year, there was further breakdown in the budget and increases were indicated with percentages. He asked if there was a reason the budget format was changed. He further asked if we can produce the budget reports as they were once produced. Chair Hopkins stated that the budget committee met in the fall and notes were created, but the notes did not make it into the printed copy in the Town Report. Doug Bailey stated that the percentages were removed on purpose because the board and budget committee felt they took away from the clarity of the report. He indicated that people look at the % and not the meat of the report. It's more important that people look at the budget in its entirety. Mr. Buehler said the breakdown is not clear anymore and he would like to see a breakdown of wages and benefits per employee. He would like to know what people make in the town office and would like to see the Town Report include employment package information.

Bernie Carr raised a Point of Order. Mr. Carr noted that we are discussing item 1, which is merely the reports of officers, not the budget, nor is it the structure of the Town Report. Moderator Moore agreed, and asked Mr. Buehler to table his concerns until we began discussion of the budget later.

The Motion to accept the reports as they appear in the Town Report was approved.

2. To hear a presentation by the Select Board of its recommended budget for fiscal year 2018-2019. This budget and appropriations will be voted by Australian Ballot on March 6, 2018, at the Brandon Town Hall, Basement Meeting Room, 1 Conant Square, Brandon, VT (Note that the warning originally read March 6, 2017; this error was acknowledged when the warning was read). Lisa Kenyon made a motion to open the article, seconded by Shirley Markland.

Seth Hopkins led a presentation of the proposed budget. Mr. Hopkins first thanked budget committee members Jan Coolidge, Anthony Peduto, Carol Bertrand, and Doug Sawyer. Mr. Hopkins also noted that the town-wide reappraisal will begin this summer and will take three years. Mr. Hopkins explained the increases in the budget and noted that 2/3 of the increase is due to health insurance. The Select Board is pursuing a new labor contract and is hopeful that changes in the contract will help mitigate increasing health care costs. Mr. Hopkins also spoke of the local option tax revenue which was \$173,000 for the first year. These funds are being held at this point and may be used for matching fund needs of Route 7, Segment 6. Doug Bailey spoke about infrastructure and increases in the public works department to meet the maintenance needs of the town. The gravel roads need repair, which the budget increase addresses. Mr. Bailey also indicated that the recreation department has exceeded expectations, as program revenue is exceeding program costs. Mr. Bailey noted that the Select Board has reduced the zoning and code enforcement position to part-time in the upcoming budget year. The public works director, Daryl Burlett, will be functioning as

the project manager for the Route 7, Segment 6 project, which brings revenue to the town. These funds will be held in reserve in the infrastructure fund, further adding to our matching funds for the project.

Larry Rogers asked what Govt & WC expenditures were as indicated in the budget. Mr. Hopkins responded that these were workman's compensation insurance expenses and Rutland County assessments. The line also includes general liability insurance. Sam Glaser asked about health insurance and whether non-union employees are subject to a co-pay of premiums. He also asked how our benefits compare to other towns. Mr. Hopkins replied the town currently pays 90% of the platinum plan per the union contract and this applies to all employees, including non-union. This is competitive with other communities.

Brent Buehler would like to see a full breakdown of employee wages with benefits. He asked that the town report also provide a copy of the insurance policy. Mr. Hopkins answered that the board will take that under consideration. Mr. Buehler then followed up asking if the town report could show each employee and their complete compensation package including insurance and benefits. Mr. Hopkins stated that there may be sensitive information that is not public, but the Select Board will investigate this possibility.

Bill Claessens thanked the board for the budget information and asked whether 2018 was on target. Mr. Hopkins replied that there are some overages in the public works department due to winter weather. Mr. Bailey also noted that when budgeting we are looking a year and a half ahead, which makes it difficult to nail down. Mr. Hopkins explained the budgeting process.

Robert Black indicated that the public works budget appeared to have risen, but the revenues also rose. Mr. Hopkins explained that we budget for known revenues, so that we are budgeting conservatively, and occasionally we will get more revenue than expected, such as grants, to offset additional expenditures. Mr. Hopkins further explained that the Select Board passed a policy to maintain 15% of the current year expenditures in the unrestricted fund balance, in case of unknown events. He also explained that the ceiling is 30%, and anything above 30% would be returned to reduce taxes.

Priscilla McKeighan asked what the Rutland Economic Development Council (REDC) did for the Town of Brandon. Devon Fuller answered that they work closely with us to attract businesses to the area. Moderator Bill Moore asked Bernie Carr to act as moderator so that he could answer the question as the Economic Development Director. Mr. Moore stated the town has found a great partner with REDC, and this partnership was instrumental in attracting Olivia's Croutons to Brandon. They share business leads with the town.

Jan Coolidge, a member of the budget committee, thanked the town supervisors for providing all the information for the budget committee. She also noted that the budget committee meetings are public, and that the public is welcome to attend.

Larry Rogers noted that the actuals compared to budget are about 10% off. Seth Hopkins explained that we get opportunities to bring in additional revenue and expend more than originally budgeted on something necessary. Mr. Hopkins added that this information can be expressed differently if that would be helpful.

Brent Buehler stated that the budget format from two years ago was much better, and it illustrated changes and had notes for reference. He would like to see us use the old format again. Seth Hopkins stated that the missing notes were a mistake, not intentional. Mr. Buehler added that the notes were not in the prior year report either.

Bill Claessens appreciates the fund balance policy and understands its importance. He would like to see a report on the fund balance in the Town Report that summarizes the beginning balance and ending balances. Mr. Claessens also asked for an explanation of the extraordinary expenditures on the amended page 40 of the town report. Treasurer Susan Gage explained the expenditures and noted that these are as of June 30, 2017, and some of matching funds expended will be coming back into the general fund, because the projects came in under budget.

3. To hear a presentation by the Select Board regarding the issuance of general obligation bonds for financing the cost of making infrastructure improvements within approximately 1,300 feet of Park Street extending westerly from its intersection with Marble Street, namely, water and sewer line replacement, storm water collection and treatment upgrades, and highway modifications, the aggregate estimated cost of all such improvements being One Million Four Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,400,000), subject to reduction from the receipt of available state and federal grants-in-aid. Meeting was separately warned per VSA 24 §1756. These general obligation bonds will be voted by Australian ballot on March 6, 2018 at the Brandon Town Hall, Basement Meeting Room, 1 Conant Square, Brandon, VT.

Motion to open the article was made by Pam Douglas and seconded by Jean Lamarre. Devon Fuller made a motion to allow Jason Booth, who is not a Brandon resident, to speak about the project on Park Street. The motion was seconded by Richard Baker, and was approved.

Devon Fuller explained that a positive bond vote indicates that the town supports the project, which allows the town to seek other funding that will partially offset borrowing to complete the project. The project would replace all water and sewer infrastructure, and those improvements will be paid by the water district and sewer department. We would rebuild the road and pave with 2 coats of asphalt with the remaining coat paved by the State in 2020 included in their paving of Route 73. He also stated that the upgraded stormwater runoff system would contribute to the cleanup of Lake Champlain, something the town should be proud of. The project would also include new curbs on both sides of the road as well as crosswalks.

Myles Krans asked about the timeline for the project. Devon Fuller stated that it would go to bid in 2019, with an April 2019 start and final construction when the state paves in 2020.

Robert Black asked whether the engineers have been sensitive to the historical nature of Park Street and whether they will try to keep the historical detail. He wondered if there was coordination with the Route 7, Segment 6 project. He also made the point that we can use this as a marketing tool, and perhaps set up a webcam. Jason Booth stated that they went through more detail at the January meeting, but they understand the historical significance and will try to incorporate that in the final plans. They have been coordinating with the Route 7 project and integrating the two projects.

Pam Douglas asked what type of funding was being sought for this project. Dave Atherton stated that we have already received a \$310,000 storm water study grant, which will be used for this project. He also reiterated that the Brandon fire district will be paying for its share of the infrastructure

Bill Claessens asked if the bond vote was an authorization only with no taxes levied. He also asked when the tax assessment on the borrowed amounts would take effect. Devon Fuller stated that any tax ramifications would be in the 2020 budget. Dave Atherton also noted that the water district and sewer department would have a greater effect than the town taxes. Jason Booth chimed in to state that the State Revolving Loan Funds have a 2% interest rate and generally over 20 or 30 years. Drinking water funding has an interest rate of -3% to 4% over 30 years. Mr. Booth clarified that the negative interest rate was needed to treat loan funds as grant funds. Mr. Fuller then clarified that increases in water and sewer would be an additional \$42 per year. Doug Bailey noted the public angst about bonding but said the Champlain Street Pump Station project was a good example of turning a positive bond vote into an opportunity to obtain further funding.

Carol Fjeld commented that this is an awesome project and long needed. She had a question about parking and how the swales will affect it. Jason Booth answered that the bioswales will take up some area and eliminate some parking spaces on Park Street, but they will create some designated parking. Ms. Fjeld followed up asking if the swales can be relocated, as she is concerned about parking for the library. Mr. Booth stated that the plans are a preliminary layout, and that final plans will set the swales in optimal collection areas to catch the storm water. He said they are also looking at the symmetry and transitions from the Segment 6 project.

Judi Bunde asked that the swales be addressed by Mr. Booth. It was her understanding that they are mandated by the state. Mr. Booth clarified that although they are not mandated they are highly recommended by the state. Brandon's storm water runoff minimization is one of the higher ranked projects. The goal of the state is to reduce runoff that ultimately ends up in Lake Champlain. The EPA has mandated cleanup of Lake Champlain and storm water runoff is one area the state is addressing. Devon Fuller added that the storm water runoff study has given us the funding to move forward with Park Street project and addressing storm water will give the town more funding for the project. Mr. Fuller also noted that minimizing phosphorous in Lake Champlain is the right thing to do. Mr. Booth added that VTrans funding would pay for the bioswales.

Faith Claessens stated that she drives Park Street several times a day. She asked what is going to be done between now and the project completion and whether there would be any patching done. Dave Atherton stated that they are discussing this now.

Kathy Clark asked if there will be room for bicycles on Park Street. Mr. Booth answered that there will be bike lanes.

Cliff Audet asked for an explanation of a bioswale and what one looks like, and whether it has a life expectancy. Jason Booth showed pictures of a bioswale and explained that they are a plant-based filtering system that filters out phosphorus from storm runoff.

Mary Lou Webster asked if they would be recycling the old marble curbing. Jason Booth answered that it may not be possible to keep the marble curbing, as much of it is damaged now. They may recommend granite curbing which would tie in with Segment 6. Ms. Webster also voiced concerns about library parking needs. Mr. Booth stated that this project will not affect the library, as the library is part of the Segment 6 project.

Carrie Mol asked whether the bioswales required regular maintenance. Mr. Booth answered that maintenance is necessary. Mr. Fuller stated that any infrastructure requires maintenance.

Robert Black asked about public safety regarding the bioswales. How much water is collected in them, and how deep is the collected water. Could it be a danger to children? Mr. Booth answered that water can get up to 6 inches deep, and the swales are designed to retain the water for up to 12 hours to allow for proper filtration.

Carol Fjeld followed up stating that the Segment 6 project gives the library limited parking. She would like to see the swales move further down the street so as not to impede library parking. Mr. Booth answered that it may be possible to move the swales a bit further down the road. Mr. Fuller added that the parking will be better with the completion of this project regardless of the location of the swales.

Pricilla McKeighan moved to adjourn the meeting. No second.

4. To see if the voters of the Town of Brandon will vote to exempt the buildings and property belonging to the Stephen A Douglas Birthplace Community Center, Inc located at 4 Grove Street (parcel ID 0079-0004) 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 § 3840? Richard Baker made a motion, seconded by Larry Rogers. The article passed.

5. To see if the voters of the Town of Brandon will vote to exempt the buildings and property belonging to the Stephen A Douglas Birthplace Community Center, Inc located at 4 Grove Street (parcel ID 0079-0004) 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? Bernie Carr made a motion, seconded by Lisa Kenyon. Patricia Welch asked if this request was the same we have done in the past. Moderator Bill Moore confirmed that this is what is done every five years. The article passed.

6. 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? Steve Carr made a motion, seconded by Deb Jennings. The article passed.

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

Judi Pulsifer, citizen and principal of Neshobe School thanked the community for past support of Neshobe School and made a motion to allow Superintendent Jean Collins, who is not a Brandon resident, to speak to the attendees. Carrie Mol seconded the motion, the motion passed. Ms. Collins thanked the community for its continued support and recapped the Otter Valley Unified Union School District budget. Carrie Mol also asked the voters to please support the education budget.

8. Adjourn. Lou Faivre made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Priscilla McKeighan. The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 pm.

Susan Gage, Town Clerk

Seth Hopkins, BCA Vice-Chair

Bill Moore, Moderator