

MINUTES
BRANDON TOWN MEETING
MONDAY MARCH 2, 7 PM
BRANDON TOWN HALL, 1 CONANT SQ, BRANDON, VT 05733

Moderator Bill Moore called the Annual Town Meeting to order at 7:00 pm. Attending the meeting were Select Board Members, Seth Hopkins, Douglas Bailey, Brian Coolidge, Tracy Wyman and Timothy Guiles, Town Manager, David Atherton, Clerk, Sue Gage and 105 registered voters. Cub Scout Troops 2019 and 110 and Cub Scout Pack 110 including members and leaders Klara, Agatha, Christina, Lucia, Sarah-Lynne, Michelle, Alisha, Jon Jeremy, Jacob, Keith and Nicholas led the flag ceremony.

Moderator Bill Moore addressed the dedication of the annual report to Dolores Furnari. The dedication was received with a standing ovation. Moderator Bill Moore thanked all for coming and provided an overview of the proceedings. Bill Moore introduced Wayne Kingsley, Brandon's Tree Warden to read the report from the Tree Warden that was erroneously omitted from the town report. Mr. Kingsley reported the following:

2019 Tree Warden Report

The Select Board appoints the Tree Warden annually in accordance with 24 VSA § 67. All shade and ornamental trees within Town rights-of-way are under control of the tree warden. I have served as Brandon's Tree Warden for the past four year and have worked closely with the Director of Public Works. During that time, I have approved the removal of approximately 18 unhealthy and hazard trees. In addition, approximately 9 public trees were removed during the upgrade of the Fire District's main water lines.

Segment 6, Route 7 required removal of many public shade trees. There were 244 trees within the public right-of-way. 126 of these trees were removed, leaving 118, the largest being 45-inch silver maple on Conant Square. Segment 6 requires the contractor to plant 196 new trees consisting of 14 different species. This results in a net gain of 70 additional public trees. The contractor is responsible for the survival of these trees for one year after planting. The Town will be responsible for watering and pruning for the next 4 years.

I have seen many places in Town where residents have applied mulch around public trees. This is a good practice to prevent damage to the tree trunk, providing it is done properly. Mulch should only be applied to a maximum depth of 4 inches around the tree and should not be piled up around the trunk (Volcano mulching), as this may result in trunk decay.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Respectfully, Wayne Kingsley, Town Tree Warden

Moderator Bill Moore introduced the first article.

- 1) To hear a presentation by the Select Board of its recommended budget for fiscal year 2020-2021. This budget and appropriations will be voted by Australian Ballot on March 3, 2020 at the Brandon Town Hall, Basement Meeting Room, 1 Conant Square, Brandon, VT.

Motion to open the Article by Bernie Carr, second from Devon Fuller. Moderator Bill Moore introduced the Select Board to present their budget proposal. Seth Hopkins thanked the Budget Committee members Jan Coolidge, Cindy Bell, Anthony Peduto and Barry Varian for their time, and welcomed the public to participate in future budget meetings.

Tim Guiles led the presentation of the budget proposal and explained how the school, fire district, town and voted appropriations affect one's property tax bill. Mr. Guiles also addressed the town department breakdowns and how each department affects property tax bills. Doug Bailey provided further information on the breakdown of the property tax bills. Mr. Bailey also spoke about the paving appropriation request, and explained that the paving expenses change year to year based on the availability of state grants. Mr. Bailey also indicated the roads that have been paved and the roads to be paved in the next 12 – 18 months.

Seth Hopkins addressed the delinquent taxes and sewer over time, and indicated that these have been cleaned up substantially over the last three years, effectively reducing the large balances by 75%. Mr. Hopkins spoke about the reappraisal that has been ongoing for the last two years, and will conclude this spring. New assessed values will be assigned to everyone's property which should better reflect the property's market value. Mr. Hopkins stated that the Board approved a new personnel policy last year, updating a policy from 1988. He also indicated that switching healthcare from Blue Cross Blue Shield to MVP has saved the town money, and increasing employee shares of the cost to 10%, 12% and 15% for 2019, 2020, and 2021 respectively, has served to balance the health insurance increases. Mr. Hopkins applauded the staff and employees of the town and stated that investing in and retaining good employees is a priority. Police and Highway departments in particular have suffered employee losses due to other towns or organizations luring them away with better wages and benefits. Brandon needs to stay competitive to keep good employees.

Mr. Hopkins summarized a report from VT Digger comparing towns in the State using ratio analysis. Brandon fared well in this report. One area of improvement is in our Unrestricted Fund Balance. The Select Board drafted a Fund Balance policy in 2017 which specifies keeping 15%-30% of the annual general fund budget in unrestricted funds. The balance is currently on the lower end of this spectrum. This ready cash allows for funding emergencies like the flooding of Newton Road a couple of years ago, and provides better fiscal responsibility. Mr. Hopkins also spoke about the Local Options Tax fund and explained what the funds can be used for. Mr. Hopkins stated that we have tapped into these funds for the first time this fall to fund our matching dollars for Segment 6 construction. Mr. Hopkins finished up with a summary of the remaining activity left in the Segment 6 project.

Moderator Bill Moore then asked whether the voters attending the meeting had any questions for the Select Board regarding the budget presentation.

Linda Stewart is happy that the delinquencies have been reduced but wondered if more can be done with the people who appear on the list year to year. Town Manager Dave Atherton stated that a number of those folks are on monthly payment plans and have been paying regularly. Ms. Stewart also wanted to know how many employees there are compared to last year. Dave Atherton stated that we have 24 employees which is probably down 3 employees from prior years.

Nancy Leary asked whether the 1% local option tax would sunset after the projects were completed. She would like us to consider the effect of this tax on local business and economic development. Mr.

Hopkins stated that the local options tax was not set up as a sunset tax, but rather a permanent source of local income. It can however be repealed by the voters.

Keith Arlund asked who the full-time buildings and grounds employee was. Mr. Atherton indicated that Josh Preseau is the buildings and grounds employee. Mr. Arlund questioned whether Mr. Preseau is still on the Highway. Mr. Atherton stated that we will be hiring a new highway person and that Mr. Preseau is paid out of buildings and grounds but supervised by the highway foreman.

Devon Fuller asked whether there was additional maintenance money budgeted for the completion of Segment 6. Seth Hopkins stated that employing a full time Buildings and Grounds person was the beginning of addressing this. The bulk of the budget items for maintenance run through Highway and Buildings & Grounds. Devon wondered if there was anything specifically for materials and lightbulbs. Mr. Atherton explained that the Contractor is still responsible for all maintenance until the project is officially closed. Wayne Kingsley added that the town will be responsible for watering the new trees and plantings for four years and that we should employ a certified arborist for pruning.

Marge Munger asked how the condition of the new sidewalks would be addressed, stating that they are pitted already after one winter. Seth Hopkins stated that Segment 6 is still an open contract, and there will be a walkthrough of the project and any issues will be identified and addressed. Mr. Atherton stated that the sidewalk pitting is due to a moisture content issue and that they are already addressing approaches to fix this. There is not a definite solution yet.

Sam Glaser was concerned about older trees on Park Street that perhaps should be removed by the town. Wayne Kingsley responded that he had two large trees removed for this very reason, and the trees that Mr. Glaser is referring to are likely on private property, rather than in the Town right-of-way and will need to be removed by homeowners.

Ellen Walter added that the abandoned house next to her has a dangerous tree. Dave Atherton stated that he has called the bank who owns the property but they have not received a response. If the tree is not in the town right of way, there is not much recourse.

George Reilly asked how much repairs to the new sidewalk would cost and who would pay for them. Dave Atherton responded that the town will not be paying for these repairs.

Pam Douglass was concerned that the crosswalks installed through town need better lighting as they are very dark and pedestrians are difficult to see. Dave Atherton has asked VTRANS to review this situation. He also stated that there was additional work to do around the crosswalks.

Neil Silins stated that much of the road paint has disappeared and wondered if this will be addressed with the contractor. Mr. Atherton stated that the lines are all being repainted this spring.

Keith Arlund asked why the Segment 6 Public Information Officer was not in the salary listings, and who employee Trevor Patterson is. Mr. Atherton stated that Mr. Patterson was on the Highway crew but left for a position in the Town of Killington. Mr. Atherton also explained that the Public Information Officer was not funded through the general fund but through the Segment 6 funding pool, and that the position was subcontracted, not an employee. Mr. Arlund asked how much that was, and Bernie Carr stated that he made \$30 per hour.

- 2) Shall the voters of the Town of Brandon exempt the buildings and property belonging to the Brandon Senior Center located at 1591 Forest Dale Road (parcel ID 0083-1591) from municipal property tax and 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 VSA 3840?

Motion to approve from Richard Baker, seconded by Bob Ripley. The article passed.

- 3) To transact any other business proper to be done when met.

Pam Douglass made a motion to open the article, Emily Nelson seconded the motion.

Representative Stephanie Jerome introduced fellow legislators Representative Butch Shaw and Senator Cheryl Hooker. Stephen Douglass moved to allow non-voters to address the town meeting, seconded by Liz Gregorek. Representatives Stephanie Jerome and Butch Shaw and Senator Cheryl Hooker spoke about their work in the legislature and issues to be aware of in the coming legislative session.

Robert Black addressed the fact that Brandon has a designated downtown, which is serviced by the Downtown Business Alliance or DBA. He wanted to invite anyone interested to join in some interesting projects around town including the Brandon Greenways, which is working on extending trails and sidewalks through and around town.

Barbara Ebling introduced herself as an Otter Valley Unified Union School District (OVUUSD) Board member representing OVUUSD at tonight's meeting. She encourages folks to participate on the OVUUD boards. Ms. Ebling also provided an overview of the OVUUSD budget indicating that it is a moderate increase from the prior year. Ms. Ebling also noted that there are four open seats on the Board of Directors if anyone is interested in serving.

Kelly McCullough asked that the Board give some thought to a full-time animal control officer. Ms. McCullough stated that the recent raid in town indicates that we have a need for someone to spend more time on these issues.

Kevin Thornton stated that Brandon is the birthplace of the electric motor, invented by Thomas Davenport in Forest Dale. Mr. Thornton stated that we will be having some events around Thomas Davenport and the electric motor, and we should think about honoring him with a statue.

Bill Moore thanked everyone for participating, and thanked the Friends of the Town Hall for the restoration of the Town Hall, noting that we now offer activities throughout the year in the Brandon Town Hall. The new stage has been dedicated to Dennis Marden and memorialized with a plaque.

Motion to adjourn the Annual Town Meeting from Dolores Furnari, with a second from Deborah Jennings. Motion passed.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:34 pm

Bill Moore, Moderator

Susan Gage, Clerk