

**Brandon Select Board Meeting  
April 25, 2022**

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

**Board Members In Attendance:** Seth Hopkins, Brian Coolidge, Tim Guiles, Michael Markowski, Tracy Wyman

**Others in Attendance:** Dave Atherton, Bill Moore, Bernie Carr, Jim Emerson, Jack Schneider, Neil Silins

**Other In Attendance Via Zoom:** Police Chief Kachajian, Jan Coolidge, Keith Whitcomb, Annie Stratton, Stephanie Jerome, Trisha Welch

**1. Call to order**

The meeting was called to order by Seth Hopkins, Chair 7:00PM.

*a) Agenda Adoption*

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Tracy Wyman to adopt the agenda as amended. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Add Police Cruiser Purchase

**2. Approval of Minutes**

*a) Select Board Minutes – April 11, 2022*

**Motion** by Mike Markowski/Brian Coolidge to approve the April 11, 2022, minutes as amended. **The motion passed with one abstention – Tracy Wyman.**

Change minutes to reflect that Jan Coolidge was on Zoom, not in person.

**3. Town Manager’s Report**

Dave Atherton provided the following report:

- . The Town received the Class 2 paving grant for the Arnold District Road. The amount has been increased from \$100,000 to \$200,000.
- . Mr. Atherton met with the landowner near the culvert that is to be replaced on Arnold District Road regarding a temporary easement. They are very supportive of the project and are excited to see it getting replaced.

Bill Moore, Acting Town Manager during Mr. Atherton's absence, provided the following report:

- . The Highway Department has been busy with spring clean-up.
- . Pickleball @ the Neshobe school will commence on Sunday, May 1<sup>st</sup> from 3PM to 5PM
- . May 7<sup>th</sup> is Green-up Day. Join Jim Leary, Green-up Day Coordinator, at Central Park to pick up bags and give instructions on where to bring them after being filled.
- . May 14<sup>th</sup> is the Neshobe Kindness and Safety Day. A multi-organizational collaboration to bring folks together at the Neshobe School from Noon to 4PM. Neshobe PTO, Brandon Fire, Rescue, Police, Brandon Area Toy Project, Brandon Area Bike Association, and the Rec will have many family-friendly displays along with food, music, fun, annual Omya Helmet Give-Away, Boyce Family-sponsored Bike Safety Course, and Brandon Area Bike Association bike tune-up.

#### **4. Public Comments and Participation**

Bill Moore reported there will be a revote of the OVUU school budget tomorrow and polls will be open in Brandon from 10AM to 7PM. The voting will take place at the Brandon American Legion.

#### **5. Announce Vacancies on Planning Commission**

Seth Hopkins reported there are two vacancies on the Planning Commission. Individuals interested in serving on the Committee were encouraged to contact the Town Manager.

#### **6. Appointment**

##### ***. Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) Representative for Remainder of Term Ending June 30, 2022***

Mr. Hopkins advised this appointment would take the Town Manager's place on the RRPC Board. Dave Atherton noted it is better for someone on the local Planning Commission to be the regional representative to the RRPC. Mr. Hopkins thanked Mr. Schneider for volunteering to serve as the Town's representative to the RRPC.

**Motion** by Tracy Wyman/Mike Markowski to approve the appointment of Jack Schneider as Brandon's representative to the RRPC for the remainder of the term ending June 30, 2022. **The motion passed unanimously.**

#### **7. Brandon Energy Committee**

##### ***. SolarFest Discussion***

Jim Emerson reported SolarFest will have an Open House on June 4<sup>th</sup> for their main supporters, volunteers, and key people, including several members of the community. The event will be to explain their game plan for the current and coming years. They have invited the Town Manager

to share a few words of welcome. Their annual event this year will be a one-day event on September 12<sup>th</sup> and they are currently formulating the plan for the festivities. Mr. Emerson advised that as a citizen of the Town, he is brainstorming ideas of what can be done in coordination with their fall event to involve local businesses. Jack Schneider advised their annual event is usually held in July but has been pushed back to September this year. Bill Moore acknowledged the hard work of the Brandon Energy Committee and Selectman Tim Guiles in welcoming SolarFest and serving as liaisons for the Town. Seth Hopkins noted something like this does not just happen but is a cultivation of relationships and background work that goes into attracting this type of group to the community and extended the Select Board's gratitude. Mr. Emerson advised SolarFest is also planning to have a year-round training program with in-class training and will be using the barn space for some of their hands-on programs. Dave Atherton suggested meeting with Bill Moore, the Chamber Director and him to discuss how to welcome SolarFest to town without causing financial burden to the businesses. Mr. Atherton reported he received a call from the State asking about the Davenport monument in Forestdale that the Town owns. He noted it needs a refurbishing and welcomed assistance from anyone who would like to volunteer for this project. Mr. Emerson will bring this request to the Energy Committee. He also noted the Energy Committee is hoping to do a video to announce the Davenport Fest that will include the monument. Stephanie Jerome reported the Thomas Davenport resolution was signed by the House of Representatives and will be presented at the EVFest this July. Ms. Jerome questioned if the SolarFest's training would result in certification and Mr. Emerson confirmed that it would. Ms. Jerome suggested advertising this with the local high school. Mr. Emerson reported SolarFest has been coordinating with Devon Karpak at Otter Valley regarding this program and have been discussing other areas where they can work together with the school. Mr. Hopkins requested the resolution be shared with the Select Board and suggested it be made more accessible. Ms. Jerome noted it was a good opportunity to educate the House regarding Thomas Davenport and is a good piece of PR for the State and Brandon. It was noted that Dr. Kevin Thornton had drafted the proclamation for the Town and Mr. Moore advised that Dr. Thornton has put a lot of time and effort to bring Mr. Davenport's fame to light. It was noted that SolarFest will be located north of Brandon on the land behind the Community Health Center with access from Route 73.

### **. *ARPA Community Solar***

Jim Emerson stated the Energy Committee suggests a community solar project as one of the uses for the ARAP funds with a proposed location of the old landfill on Corona Street. The suggested system would be for a 150kW solar project due to the single-phase power by GMP. The available land is close to an acre and if deemed to be less than an acre, the Energy Committee discussed with MHG the possibility of more efficient panels to use on less land. MHG recommended using stone cages as a more economical and environmentally friendly option to using concrete platforms for the panels. MHG provided a cost estimate of \$375,000 to \$525,000 due to current supply chain issues. Mr. Emerson stated it was calculated the Town uses about 415,000kW hours annually. From the Town's contract with Green Lantern of 320,000kW hours, there is still 95,000kW hours needed currently. Excess generation could be used by the Fire District at a discounted rate, with the estimated usage of that department at 200,000kW hours per year or it could also be used for community solar. This project would help the Town meet its goal towards the State's renewable goal. As the Town moves more towards use of EVs, the

current fleet is traveling around 55,000 to 60,000 miles per year which would need an estimated 20,000kW hours per year. Mr. Emerson advised in the event of an issue with a landfill solar project, there is potentially an alternative solution as SolarFest is planning to place a 500kW community solar project on their land. Mr. Emerson noted the 150kW project would generate 235,000kW hours, which would provide a net savings of \$40,000 per year that would benefit the taxpayers of the Town. The Energy Committee endorses setting aside \$500,000 of ARPA funds for a solar project until the exact cost could be determined. The \$40,000 savings could be used for bonds to fund the other projects on the ARPA fund list. Dave Atherton stated the landfill has a clay cover and a solar project would need to be flush mounted as the covering could not be penetrated. Tim Guiles noted Bristol had the same issue and their project was developed totally on the surface without penetrating the land. Mike Markowski noted \$500,000 would use 90% of what is left for ARPA funding with around \$125,000 used for the Fire District 1 and 2 project and \$360,000 for the Newton Road pump station project. Mr. Emerson stated in three to six months, a more accurate figure could be determined. Mr. Atherton would like to see the projects that are at a crucial need get done first and noted that bonding for sidewalks or roads is not a good idea as the Town would be paying past the longevity of what is being bonded. Mr. Atherton suggested discussion with another solar company, similar to the agreement the Town has with Green Lantern where the solar company builds the array and the Town receives cost savings and taxes on the project. Tim Guiles stated when reviewing Middlebury's project, they compared Green Lantern to ownership, and ownership created a much larger benefit. He thought Green Lantern is great for the Town, but ownership would be more beneficial. It was suggested to bond for the solar project and use the ARPA funds for the municipal projects. It was also suggested a solar array could potentially be placed on the Police Department roof to make the entire complex self-sufficient or at the future Town Garage. Mr. Atherton advised he had previously discussed the landfill location with Green Lantern and the concern was that the three-phase falls short so it is not as cost effective. Mr. Guiles stated Green Lantern could not make it possible, but with town-ownership it comes into a different class and he would like to see a bid process to determine the hard numbers. Jan Coolidge questioned who would be paying for the decommissioning costs as all costs need to be considered. Mr. Emerson advised the decommissioning costs would be fairly modest with the cages and the panels now recyclable. Mr. Atherton noted with the Green Lantern project, they own the panels and are responsible for decommissioning the project and the Town gets 15% of the energy and payment for leasing the land. Mr. Hopkins stated the Board will continue to look at all projects and the funding sources available and for community solar, there may be another option for the Town to consider in six months.

### ***. Electric Police Car Research***

Jack Schneider of the Energy Committee reported he had researched information about EV police cruisers and provided a summary to the Select Board. The Energy Committee is following the Towns' Green Fleet Policy to try to reduce gas house emissions. Mr. Schneider attended a demonstration by the Richmond Police Chief of their EV police cruiser that the department has had since October. The advantage of an EV is that they are fast, have very low fuel costs and virtually no maintenance. It was noted that Tesla has some cars that are going to be approaching one million miles. Richmond's Chief thinks their replacement cycle will be 6 years rather than 4 years. In general, there is a price premium for EVs but payback would be 18 months to 2 years.

Some of the perceived drawbacks is the range, however, Richmond is going over three hundred miles on a charge. In Brandon, the vehicles are driven 40 or 50 miles per day. In Brandon, the officers can drive their cars home and they could be plugged in there. In cold weather, the Tesla model is found to lose 20% of the charge. The NYC police department has put in ballistic glass and carry more equipment than this Town's department would need and the additional weight is not considered to be an issue for Richmond. The interior for both the Tesla and Ford Mach-E are too small for a cage. Richmond has put a cage in their truck for prisoner transport. Richmond's Chief also noted the EV performs well in snow but is more of an issue on muddy roads. Of the major car manufactures, Nissan and Toyota offer an EV that is used for administrative purposes, but not for patrol. Ford and Tesla are the major players for the police departments with Ford having two-thirds of the market. Dodge is a couple of years away from offering an EV for police use. In terms of environmental reasons and the cost of maintenance and fuel, an EV makes a lot of sense for the Town. There are supply chain delays. Ford completely outfits the Mach-E cruiser; however, a retrofitter would need to be found for the Tesla for the lights or other kinds of equipment. The Tesla fully loaded would cost between \$60,000 and \$62,000 and the Ford Mach-E's cost would be \$54,000 plus add-ons. Richmond paid \$58,000 fully loaded for their Tesla. There will be a delay with purchasing an EV, but if there is not an immediate need, it is recommended to postpone the purchase. Jim Emerson stated Tesla does require some retrofit, but there are companies in the region that do that. With the principle of reduce, recycle, and reuse, the Energy Committee is recommending the Town not buy a vehicle until it is really needed. He does not think there is a huge emergency to purchase one right now.

Dave Atherton reported the Town's fleet consists of an F150, two – Explorers, two – Taurus and two – Chargers of which one is out of service. The Town is looking at trading one of the Chargers and there is a need to replace the other one that is ten years old. There are currently six staff members that includes Chief Kachajian. Mr. Atherton advised that all officers take a car home and the Chief is conducting interviews for hiring another officer. There will be seven police officers and there will be a need to supply seven vehicles. Tim Guiles did not think there was the need for officers to take vehicles home. It was noted that this is a stipulation in the Union contract. Mr. Guiles stated there is information about per capita spending on police and the average in Vermont is \$62.91 and Brandon spends \$220 which is more than three times the average. He thinks it is reasonable to discuss how to bring the Town's police department towards the average. Mr. Atherton stated the officers are on call and this is one of the benefits of working for the Brandon Police Department. Over the last couple of years, the Department has been smaller that has required the officers to be on call. With regard to the cost, the townspeople wanted 24-hour coverage and there are some towns that have part-time coverage and do not have full-time certified officers. There are also towns that are covered by the State Police. Mr. Guiles questioned how often officers need to respond from home, rather than going to the office to get a car. Tracy Wyman stated the community had indicated they wanted 24-hour coverage and if a change were to be made, he thought the Select Board needs to put this out to the voters. Mr. Wyman cited an incident in Leicester where someone had to wait for two hours for the State Police to arrive on a scene. Mr. Wyman also noted the Union contract indicates the officers can take a car home and retention of good officers is important. Mr. Guiles stated it has not been proven successful in maintaining staff with allowing the police officers to take their cars home. Mike Markowski stated the number has been determined to be seven officers as Chief Brickell had indicated that would be required for 24-hour coverage. Trisha Welch suggested the Town

should be buying a new gas car as it can be purchased from G. Stones now and when the quirks are worked out, purchase an EV in the coming years. The police should be supported and Ms. Welch does not want to have to wait for an officer to go through a snowstorm to get a car before answering a call. Chief Kachajian advised with seven officers, the Department is able to do 20-hours with officers on call for 4 hours. He is actively trying to recruit officers and, in this day and age, Brandon needs to be competitive and needs to compete with other agencies. The Town will lose officers to other towns that can offer additional benefits and there is a need to invest in good employees. He does not want to see anything that can affect that and taking home cars is a benefit and will attract officers to come into the Department. There are other towns that will offer more to take officers away from towns. He noted that a take-home car is a major benefit and in inclement weather, it can make a difference between life and death. There are 20 hours when officers are on duty and 4 hours a day when officers are on call and he hopes to get the extra position to get to 24 hours. Mr. Atherton noted there is nothing on the agenda to talk about a change in the Police Department. Seth Hopkins stated the conversation provides information to the Select Board for their consideration of an EV or gas police car. Jim Emerson stated if it is deemed necessary to purchase now, an EV will last twice as long compared to the current fleet. There will be a savings of \$45,000 per year once one recovers the excess costs. He does not want to go back to gas and pollute. Bill Moore stated this is a phenomenal Police Department and one needs the history of the Town to understand how it decided this amount of coverage and the willingness to fund it. Tracy Wyman agreed the Town needs to go to EVs, but he does not think it is the right time to do that.

## **8. Police Car Purchase**

Seth Hopkins noted there has been a lot of information received which includes the prior EV research discussed.

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Tracy Wyman to move forward with the Police Chief's recommendation to purchase a Ford Explorer for an amount not to exceed \$45,242.

Tim Guiles stated investing in fossil fuel is the wrong thing to do and at the very least, the Town should not be replacing a car with an SUV that is a larger vehicle. The Energy Committee has produced valid information and talked to other police departments that shows an EV police car is viable. Brian Coolidge noted he trusts the police chief's recommendation and he does not think the EVs are ready for police use. Tracy Wyman noted the delivery time would also be longer. Police Chief Kachajian understood Mr. Schneider's presentation and recommendation but noted that his recommendation did not change. He agreed the next purchase of a police vehicle would be an EV as long as it is a viable option for the Department. He needs to do what is the best for this community and he does not feel that it is the appropriate choice at this time, but by the time another vehicle is purchased he intends to do so. He is trying to be fiscally responsible and is committed to going green and will commit to purchase an EV if it suits the Department's needs in the future. The Mach-E is not built for police departments and he does not feel comfortable with transporting a prisoner that is not separated by a cage. The safety of his officers is a major concern, but he is more than willing to look at an electric vehicle when the time comes in the future.

**The motion passed 3 to 2 – No votes by Seth Hopkins and Tim Guiles.**

## **9. ARPA Discussion**

Seth Hopkins noted there was previous discussion in the meeting and this agenda item is a placeholder for discussion.

## **10. Trustees of Public Funds Position on Mosquito Abatement Funding**

Seth Hopkins reported the Trustees of Public Funds have a change in the position of funding mosquito abatement. Minutes of their meeting were provided to the Board noting they have been advised by an attorney that the bequest is not designated for mosquito control. Mr. Hopkins noted the Town has relied on the funding to cover a portion of the assessment to the mosquito district. Mr. Hopkins stated it is the responsibility of the Town to meet the Otter Creek Watershed Insect Control District funding. Mr. Hopkins questioned the analysis of the bequest noting that in 1960 when the Shirley Farr's will was created, drainage of swamps and spraying of trees was the way insects were controlled and noted Ms. Farr served a long time on a committee to control and mitigate these ill effects. Mr. Hopkins requested the Town Manager have a conversation with the Trustees of Public Funds regarding this topic. Mr. Atherton suggested having a conversation with the Town's attorney first. Mr. Atherton stated the Trustees have funded a portion of the assessment for quite some time and did not have a problem with the language in Shirley Farr's will and it is not known why the interpretation changed. Bernie Carr stated perhaps the current board has taken a different view but noted for the general welfare of the community and quality of life, the funding has to come from somewhere. He is sure that every taxpayer feels strongly about the mosquitoes, as the quality of life was down to zero when the mosquitos were a major issue. This is money well spent for the Town of Brandon and it needs to be taken care of somehow. Mr. Carr stated there is a backlash to the mosquito district and this is dangerous as it is known what can happen. The Town cannot let the mosquito district be reduced as a thriving village could not be maintained. Mr. Hopkins agreed and noted there has been full support for the mosquito district. The Select Board is not wavering for the mosquito district, but the bequest needs to be honored. The Town Manager will talk to the Town's attorney and will have a conversation with the Trustees of Public Funds on this subject.

## **10. Fiscal**

### ***a) Warrant – April 25, 2022 - \$106,887.02***

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Tracy Wyman to approve the April 25, 2022, warrant in the amount of \$106,887.02. **The motion passed unanimously.**

The Board recessed at 8:38PM.

The Board reconvened at 8:46PM.

**Motion** by Seth Hopkins/Mike Markowski to enter into executive session at 8:46PM for the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee per 1 V.S.A. 313(3)(a)(3). **The motion passed unanimously.**

### **11. Executive Session**

**Motion** by Tracy Wyman/Mike Markowski to come out of executive session at 9:45PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

There were no actions required.

### **12. Adjournment**

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Tracy Wyman to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:46PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant  
Recording Secretary