

**Brandon Select Board Meeting  
February 27, 2023**

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

**Board Members In Attendance:** Seth Hopkins, Brian Coolidge, Tracy Wyman, Ralph Ethier, Tim Guiles

**Others in Attendance:** Bill Moore, Doug Bailey, Maria Ammatuna, Neil Silins, Karen Rhodes, Carol Fjeld, Bernie Carr, Cecil Reniche-Smith, Brent Buehler, Marielle Blais, David Kachajian, Steven Jupiter, Jack Schneider, Mike Markowski, Wyatt Waterman, Sue Gage, Tom Kilpeck, Erin Kilpeck

**Others In Attendance Via Zoom:** Bruce Jenson, George Wetmore, Trisha Welch

**1. Call to order**

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

***a) Agenda Adoption***

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

Add Item 9a – Consider Appointment of a Representative and/or Alternate to the Rutland Regional Transportation Council

**2. Approval of Minutes**

***a) Select Board Meeting Minutes – February 13, 2023***

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Tracy Wyman to approve the February 13, 2023 Select Board minutes. **The motion passed unanimously.**

**3. Interim Town Manager Report**

Bill Moore attended the monthly construction update meeting for the wastewater upgrade. Everything is progressing as expected; warm weather has/had made for good progress. Scheduled summer shutdown targeted for end of April. Mr. Moore would propose holding a special meeting of the Select Board at the site sometime in early April and again at the end of the project.

Closing date has been set for the 337 Newton Road buyout.

The highway crew was not fooled by the spring-like weather and kept the plows on the trucks which allowed them to once again keep the roads safe during the complex weather at the end of last week.

Appointments will need to be made at the annual reorganizational meeting for the Select Board. That listing in full will be part of the Select Board packet. Elaine Smith is dutifully checking with incumbents to determine their willingness to continue in their positions.

**Recreation Department News:**

Spring Baseball/Softball registration has opened for Pre-K – 6<sup>th</sup> grades. Register by March 24<sup>th</sup> to avoid late fees.

Brandon Idol's 50's/60's concert is to be held on March 11<sup>th</sup> at the Brandon Town Hall. \$5 per person, doors open at 6:30PM.

Colleen Wright has developed a partnership with My Healthy Vermont to offer a Type-2 diabetes awareness prevention class at the Brandon Museum.

Mr. Moore reported this will be the last meeting of the Select Board in this room. The next meeting will be held in the foyer of the Town Hall. Mr. Hopkins asked if there is concern about the size of the space. Mr. Moore suggested to give it a try and if it is not a good fit, the meeting can be moved to the upstairs of the Town Hall.

Mr. Hopkins stated Doug Bailey and he had a tour of the wastewater treatment plant in the past and agreed that it would be a good idea for the Select Board to visit the plant after the reorganization of the new Board. It is good to see the complexities of the operation.

Brent Buehler stated the crosswalk light is out on Park Street from the Library across Route 7. Mr. Moore will advise the vendor of this issue.

Bernie Carr stated the town meetings used to be held in Sue Gage's office area and thinks the foyer will work.

#### **4. Public Comment and Participation**

Seth Hopkins hoped that all have received their Town Report and wished to thank Sue Gage, her team and Tim Guiles for all their work in developing the report. He noted it is very informative and useful.

Carol Fjeld, representing the Brandon Library, thanked the Select Board for their offer to use the Town Hall space during the library renovations. She noted they have been gifted new bins from New England Woodcraft for the Children's section. Mr. Hopkins wished the Library good luck with their move.

Sue Gage reminded all that a week from tonight is the town meeting at the Town Hall and a week from tomorrow will be the voting at the Brandon Legion from 10AM to 7PM.

#### **5. Consider School Resource Officer (SRO) Position**

Seth Hopkins advised Police Chief Kachajian had provided background information on a proposed SRO for the school district. Chief Kachajian noted it is a project that they have been working on with the school for a while. He is a proponent of the position and he has noticed that not having an SRO at the high school has been detrimental. Chief Kachajian met with the Superintendent of the school district and was advised the School Board would like to proceed and has agreed to fund the entire program. The supervisory union will fund the program for the entire year that would allow the SRO to work in the schools' summer programs and assist with juvenile issues during the summer. They are asking for a district-wide position with the officer predominately at the high school. Other schools would be on an as-needed basis. Chief Kachajian is in support of this program and noted the swatching incident that happened in Vermont is happening in other areas of the country as well. There was also the tragic incident in Alburgh. He has had experience with the SRO program and has seen the importance of the program. He noted that in his past position, the SRO assisted with many social interactions with students and was able to help a lot of children's lives. He thinks it would be a worthwhile investment for the community.

Seth Hopkins noted the information was publicized in the board's packet of what would be the officer's duties. Mr. Hopkins asked if the MOA was approved when a candidate might be placed. Chief Kachajian advised he has a job description, has done research on a cruiser, and has reached out to some people who might be interested. He has done a thorough research of what needs to be done and is ready to place an ad tomorrow if approved this evening.

Tim Guiles appreciated the information and did some research about police officers in schools. He has been troubled by the increase of police in schools and thinks discipline should be something that happens inside the school. There is a report from the NEA that indicates police officers in schools do not make schools safer but discipline harsher. Mr. Guiles stated school shootings is an important issue and noted that 5 of the 6 schools that had shootings had SROs. He is not convinced it is safer to have a police officer in the school and suggested we should be putting the money into counselors to meet the mental health needs that will support the students and possibly prevent a school shooting. He was surprised that the American Federation of Teachers opposed having police in schools as they are the second largest teacher's union

for schools. Mr. Guiles asked if the teachers want to have an SRO in the school. He is not opposed to police and policing is important medicine, but questioned what is the right amount. Chief Kachajian agreed with some points as he does not want someone there arresting students. He noted that in the 30 years of doing the job, he has never had as many criminal charges in schools as he has since he has been in Brandon. His intent is to not have a militaristic police presence, but an officer can also act as a deterrent being in the schools. As far as school safety, an officer cannot predict a school shooting, but an officer could reduce the number of people affected if an officer was in the building. He thinks as a detrimental factor alone, an SRO is good to be at school and if there is someone that is in school and is there to hurt people, he would rather have someone already in the school rather than having to call someone. Chief Kachajian has heard that many teachers are in favor of an SRO and he has made it clear to the Superintendent, the job is law enforcement and keeping students safe, but the SRO would not be there to discipline students. It is necessary to build bonds with the students so that they trust the police. He has seen the good work done over the years and agreed the job of the SRO is not to discipline the students, but for safety and law enforcement. With regard to the teachers' unions, they have their reasons and he has seen both sides of the coin, but in speaking with the teachers here, they are very much in support of the program. From what he is hearing from the people in the community and even from some students, they would like to have an SRO at the high school. If they do want that, he wants to be responsive to the community and wants to keep the students safe. He does not want to see any children hurt and if we can get someone in the schools to prevent that, he will do what he can to keep the students and teachers safe.

Brian Coolidge strongly supported the Police Chief moving forward with this program and is a win-win for Brandon to have this officer. Tracy Wyman also supported the program and noted it is fantastic the school district will fund it. His children went through OV with an SRO present and they had no issues with the program and the officer helped keep some students out of trouble. Chief Kachajian noted one of his friends is an SRO and talks about safety issues with him and he has seen the good that he does for the students in his community. Mr. Wyman stated one of the SROs at OV became the lacrosse coach and helped many students. Chief Kachajian has also seen this program help teachers as well and it is not just law enforcement, but a lot is social work and getting people the resources they do not have access to. He stated it takes a special person to be an SRO and it is a hard job, but with the right person a lot of good things will come out of the program. Ralph Ethier asked if any other local high schools have an SRO. Chief Kachajian advised Castleton, Middlebury, Fair Haven, Rutland, and in Chittenden County almost every school district has an SRO.

Maria Ammatuna stated she was on the OV School Board and they at times would have to hold judicial-like hearings due to incidents like a student having guns in a truck or a student setting someone's hair on fire. She noted when serving on the Board, there were a lot of students that were neglected at home and students who had issues. At that time, there was a lot of back and forth between the Town and school regarding the SRO program with regard to funding. Ms. Ammatuna stated in reviewing the MOA, having restorative justice is a positive going forward. Another situation the school had dealt with was drugs in cars, as far as whether the Administration could search and she noted it would be good to have that outlined in the MOA. Another issue was that parents did not like the fact the school could request a police officer search for drugs and she noticed that one now needs supervision from a parent. The school has funded a lot of money around bullying, and partnering with an SRO would help close that gap. There have been many critical times when an SRO was needed.

Marielle Blais stated she worked at OV and understands some students would not want an SRO. In terms of counselors, there were three school counselors and the high school counselors were working with students preparing for college, and their caseloads are very high. As a teacher, she was not worried about a school shooting, but her greatest fear was a fight that could break out on lunch duty when there was only one person supervising. The two SROs at OV, David Butterfield, and Anne Bandy had really good rapport with students. Ms. Blais noted she was aware of students that only Anne Bandy could handle when a crisis arose. Ms. Blais felt more secure with having an SRO in the school, and she has seen them in action and is in favor of it. Chief Kachajian stated it would be his intent for the SRO to not dress in the usual uniform of an officer.

Carol Fjeld asked if an SRO has specific training. Chief Kachajian advised all SROs have to go through a special training that is a 40-hour basic training, and there is also a 40-hour enhanced SRO training. There are other classes that can be taken and would be part of the requirement of the officer to keep up on the training as juvenile law is very confusing and under federal constraint. It is a special skillset and he would mandate the officer would need to keep up with the training, which is outlined in the job description. Doug Bailey asked if the officer would always be at the high school or could they go into the other schools. Chief Kachajian stated all officers have state-wide jurisdiction and being a regional position,

they could go to Pittsford, Leicester, Whiting and Neshobe but the majority of the job would be at the high school. Right now, it is a one-year contract and it is hoped to expand that to possibly a 3-year MOA with the district. In the event of an incident, additional officers could be called in if needed and would not be the responsibility of just the SRO. Cecil Reniche-Smith asked if the willingness of the supervisory union would be to continue to fund this position. Chief Kachajian stated in speaking with the Superintendent, it appears it would be a long-term investment. He was told they have the money for this and had budgeted a certain amount of money to fund this program and for some physical security. A safety audit was done and the addition of an SRO was a recommendation. Brent Buehler stated they have redone the entrance to the high school and asked if safety features were added. Chief Kachajian stated people have to either be buzzed in, or key cards are required. The former SRO's office was also in the front of the building.

**Motion** by Tracy Wyman/Ralph Ethier to approve the MOA for a School Resource Officer. **The motion passed with one no vote – Tim Guiles.**

Tim Guiles wished them the best with the program, but he continues to believe that police officers do not belong in schools.

## **6. Consider One-Item Revision to Zoning Fee Schedule**

Seth Hopkins stated the Zoning Fee schedule was approved in 2021 and out of a training he attended, there was a suggestion of a \$235 fee for DRB hearings. A clarification was recommended that one property would be liable for only one fee, regardless of how many hearings it takes. That way the Town can assist with making affordable housing easier and the DRB will perform all of the hearings for one property with one fee.

Mr. Hopkins recommended striking the word "hearing" and replace with the word "action" (per property, not per hearing).

Bill Moore thought this a good idea. In speaking with Jackie Savela, Mr. Moore noted there is a situation where the fee would not cover all of the actions, but that is very rare and the fees tend to cover the cost of the recorder and the advertisements in the papers.

**Motion** by Seth Hopkins/Tim Guiles to approve the revision to the Zoning Fee Schedule as recommended by Mr. Hopkins. **The motion passed unanimously.**

## **7. Consider Grand List Certificate – No Appeal or Suit Pending**

Seth Hopkins advised this item had been provided by the assessor.

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Tracy Wyman to approve the Assessors Grand List Certification. **The motion passed unanimously.**

## **8. Consider Appointment of Moderator to Run Evening Town Meeting on March 6, 2023**

Seth Hopkins advised when Bill Moore was appointed as Interim Town Manager, he had to resign the Moderator position. A notice was placed on FPF and announced at the Select Board meetings. Karen Rhodes has expressed interest in the Moderator position.

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Tracy Wyman to appoint Karen Rhodes as Moderator to run the evening Town Meeting on March 6, 2023. **The motion passed unanimously.**

## **9. Consider Appointment of Alternative Authorized Representative to the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund & Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund**

Seth Hopkins stated the appointment form has been submitted with Bill Moore as the Alternative Authorized Representative to replace Dave Atherton in his capacity as Town Manager.

**Motion** by Tracy Wyman/Brian Coolidge to appoint Bill Moore as the Alternative Authorized Representative to the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund & Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund. **The motion passed unanimously.**

***a. Rutland Regional Transportation Council Representatives***

Mr. Hopkins advised Dave Atherton had previously been the Town’s representative to Rutland Regional TAC.

**Motion** by Seth Hopkins/Tim Guiles to appoint Tracy Wyman as Brandon’s Representative and Bill Moore as the Alternate to the Rutland Regional Transportation Council through June 2023. **The motion passed unanimously.**

**10. VTrans Structures Grant Application**

Bill Moore read the following statement:

*“Highway Foreman Shawn Erickson has identified a deficient twin-culvert on McConnell Road that is in need of replacement, based upon a hydraulic study completed by VTrans in 2020. East Engineering has submitted a proposal for design engineering that would need to be approved by the Select Board. Funding for the \$10,000 in engineering costs could be funded using Local Option Tax funds; this type of expenditure fits within the policy set by the Select Board to support infrastructure. Signing this will also allow us to apply for a 2024 VTrans Municipal Highway Structures grant to fund the construction.”*

Seth Hopkins clarified this will be to use \$10,000 of Local Options Tax money with \$10,000 still remaining in the proposed budget for repairs and replacement of small culverts. It was noted the grant would be for \$220,000.

**Motion** by Tim Guiles/Tracy Wyman to use \$10,000 of the Local Option Tax money for engineering costs associated with the McConnell Road culvert project. **The motion passed unanimously.**

**11. Consider Adoption of Policies**

Sue Gage provided the Select Board with three updated policies for consideration. Ms. Gage stated there are some very outdated policies and she has been working on them since July. They are mostly from the VLCT, with some changes that pertain to the Town. They are overarching policies that are important. The Accounting, Auditing and Financial Reporting policy will indicate the Town is in accordance with GAP and is a good guide in general. The Cash Receipts, Petty Cash and Returned Check policy is for safeguarding of funds, noting whenever cash is received, a receipt is always provided. The Investment policy is a guide, but not all pertains to the Town. She stated this policy indicates the Town Treasurer will meet with the bank annually, which will give her an opportunity to review what the bank is doing. The Trustees of Public Funds also just did a review of their policies. Ms. Gage is also working on an Internal Controls document that involves a lot more procedures and is using the Town of St. Johnsbury’s document as a template as they just recently developed this document. Seth Hopkins thanked Ms. Gage for the work that she is doing.

- a. Account, Auditing and Financial Reporting Policy***
- b. Cash Receipts, Petty Cash, and Returned Check Policy***
- c. Investment Policy***

**Motion** by Tracy Wyman/Brian Coolidge to approve the Account, Auditing and Financial Reporting Policy, Cash Receipts, Petty Cash, and Returned Check Policy, and Investment Policy as presented. **The motion passed unanimously.**

**12. Fiscal**

***a) Warrant – February 13, 2023 - \$1,292,193.43***

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Ralph Ethier to approve the warrant in the amount of \$1,292,193.43. **The motion passed unanimously.**

It was noted the majority is the warrant was for the school district.

### **13. Adjournment**

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Tracy Wyman to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 8:15PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant  
Recording Secretary