

**Brandon Select Board Hearing
January 29, 2024**

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

Board Members In Attendance: Tracy Wyman, Brian Coolidge, Heather Nelson, Tim Guiles, Cecil Reniche-Smith

Others In Attendance: Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, Jan Coolidge, Steven Jupiter, Carolyn VanVleck, Dorteia Langevin, Jack Schneider, Sue Gage, Neil Silins, Sandy Mayo, Karen Rhodes

Others in Attendance via Zoom: Annie Stratton, Natalie Steen, Vicki Disorda

1. Open Hearing

Tracy Wyman, Board Chair, opened the public hearing at 7:05PM.

Cecil Reniche-Smith advised the hearing is to obtain public comments for the draft town plan. The town plan was drafted after 16 months of work by the Planning Commission. The Commission provided opportunities for public input and also held a public hearing. The draft was discussed, comments were received and changes were made from the comments. The draft has been available for review at the town office and the library and at this time additional comments could be taken. The purpose of the hearing was not to debate issues but to take the comments and place them in the record. The Select Board will determine whether the plan needs to be amended based on the comments.

2. Public Comment

Jan Coolidge stated the section regarding the Brandon Fire District #1 and #2 that Fire District #2 no longer exists. Cecil Reniche-Smith reported until the legislature acts on this item, the Town still has two fire districts. Ms. Coolidge also noted on Page 14 regarding appropriations that the Town has no authority over appropriations except to accept them. Organizations have to apply to the Town to place them on the ballot. She also advised the Brandon Town Players have disbanded per Kathy Mathis and Dennis Marden and on Page 60, a correction to Forest Dale being two words.

Vicki Disorda advised she has several comments to make about the proposed plan. Her first concern is the data presented on Page 12; the general poverty rate is 9.9%. On the census quick facts, persons in poverty are more recently at 10.9% and noted this is an example of how misrepresentation of minority groups occurs and this would change the information from a single digit number to a double-digit number. Regarding minority groups represented she did not see anything mentioned about the disabled people in the community. According to the census 10.4% of people under age 65 have a disability in Vermont and the Vermont Department of Health indicates one in four have at least one disability. She believes it is worth noting so that when multi-million-dollar projects are done they take ADA compliance into account. At the bottom of Page 12, it mentions the increase in the medium housing sale prices but no mention in addressing the inflated rates that will impact the assessed values of the homes. She suggested grandfathering the assessed value in from 2019 to keep locals from being taxed out of their homes. She also did not see anything about a laundromat and this needs to be addressed in the Town Plan so that local people have their needs met. On Page 49, with regard to encouraging development that enhances the scenic quality of the Brandon landscape that does not have an adverse impact, Ms. Disorda noted all of Vermont is a scenic landscape and she is concerned with the development of solar panel fields. That is reason enough to disallow them as we need to preserve the natural beauty of our State. On Page 50, the Town is going to discourage light pollution, but Ms. Disorda noted it will allow solar. On Page 64, regarding the implementation of an in-town travel service, Ms. Disorda suggested it also be made handicap accessible.

Seth Hopkins reported that it was passed along to him that the WIC program now meets at the Brandon Congregational Church's Fellowship Hall, not at the Senior Center. Cecil Reniche-Smith advised the Plan notes the various services but is not a resource of where the services are available as the Plan is to cover an 8-year span and the specifics may change at any given time for the services.

Annie Stratton was concerned with the rapid climate change and unexpected weather events that there is not anything in the Town Plan to develop a plan for addressing various types of events. She is a professional hydrogeologist and has worked with watersheds providing technical assistance on water management problems. Unfortunately, most of the data for flood management was outdated 20 years ago. This is something to acknowledge and recognize and put into the section indicating newer data is needed to accurately evaluate where risks are. Ms. Stratton suggested adding a section calling for a citizen-based collaborative evaluation of flood risk and where it might be as this is needed and is important in going forward in the kind of environment the Town is dealing with right now and have experienced. It is not just tropical storms. The culvert is at capacity and should be included in the plan so that it remains part of the awareness to address it. Cecil Reniche-Smith confirmed the section Ms. Stratton was referring to was the flood management section.

Carol Rhodes expressed concern the Town wants to borrow a lot of money and get bonds and she would like to see saving money as she does not see a lot of savings discussed but sees a lot of proposed borrowing. She thinks borrowing and asking for money from different rebates looks good but will not benefit the Town in the long run.

Jan Coolidge stated in the section on buildings, in doing a new highway garage and salt/sand shed there are new rules the State issued and asked if the proposed plan will meet the standards and suggested the Town needs to look into the changes. Cecil Reniche-Smith advised the Town Plan includes potential action steps, but how the actions are achieved and the guidelines are outside the Plan.

Vicki Disorda reported in the resource section the Food Shelf, Bone Builders, the Friend Zone, and Sandy's Soup Bowl that is a free community meal are all located in the Methodist Church. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated the resources are identified in the Town Plan, but specifics for the resources are not noted.

3. Close Hearing

The hearing closed at 7:29PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary