

**Brandon Select Board Meeting
January 8, 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, Bernie Carr, Ray Marcoux, Steve Bissette, Tom White, Jan Coolidge, Doug Bailey, Ralph Ethier, Vicki Disorda, Jacqueline Carrigan, Ken Manning, Chris Conlin, Sharon Stearns, Steven Jupiter, Jackie Savela, Tom Kilpeck

Others in Attendance via Zoom: Bruce Jenson, Susan Benedict, Tricia Welch, Aidan Alnwick, Marielle Blais, Annie Stratton, Jack Schneider

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01PM by Tracy Wyman – Board Chair.

a. Agenda Adoption

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Brian Coolidge to approve the agenda as posted. **The motion passed unanimously.**

2. Approval of Minutes

a) Select Board Meeting Minutes – December 11, 2023

b) Select Board Budget Workshop Minutes – December 18, 2023

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Heather Nelson to approve the Select Board minutes noted above. **The motion passed with one abstention – Tim Guiles.**

3. Town Manager's Report

A Town Manager's report was provided by Seth Hopkins and is available for viewing in the Board packet on the Town's website.

Seth Hopkins reported the Town received a call from the Army Corps of Engineers for a study in light of the summer events and is interested in moving forward. The Town was summoned to court on a landlord/tenant issue and Mr. Hopkins accompanied the Health Officer/Rental Housing Inspector who did a good job representing the Town.

Cecil Reniche-Smith asked about the gap-funding grant for the town hall roof and Mr. Hopkins advised there was only a form received back that did not have specifics from the Town's submission.

4. Rec Director's Report

Bill Moore submitted a Recreation Report to the Board and is available for viewing in the Board packet on the Town's website.

Mr. Moore provided a review of the report:

The ice rink is up and nearly ready for skating. The 30' x 50' rink is located next to the performance pavilion behind the Brandon Inn. The decision to test run a walkable to downtown location was in response to some community members suggesting a change in venue. It is fortunate our ice tender, Wendy Fjeld, lives very close to this new spot. Thanks to Brian

Kilpeck and Nate McKeighan for their work to construct at the perfect time. Shout out to Brandon Fire District #1 for their support (water).

Brandon Idol audition spots are filling fast for the January 26th concert. We will cap the number at 20, so register your singer today! Mr. Moore asked Select Wyman to consider participating, as it would be good to have him in the program.

The Brandon Town Hall indoor schedule has been impacted by the floor work, but when we get back upstairs it will be very, very busy with Town events being planned for nearly every weekend through the end of April and dovetailing into the FOTH 2024 season. Check out brandonrec.com for more information.

Heather Nelson thanked Mr. Moore for obtaining the Rescue Squad building for today's aikido class. Brian Coolidge asked about the Commissioner for the Rec Department. Bill Moore reported he has no one that he is paying and he is working with someone to do administrative work, but there is no pay being given to perform the work.

Chris Conlin asked if the Town had fixed the town hall roof before putting the floor down. Bill Moore reported the roof was fixed so that it is not leaking, but it is not a total repair.

5. Public Comment and Participation

Neil Silins stated as a member of the Budget Advisory Committee for 4 years he was disappointed with the last advisory committee meeting. There were 3 cooperative meetings to discuss the wishes of townspeople and they came up with a reasonable perspective on a budget. In the 4th meeting it was like the Select Board ignored all of the comments in cutting the police dog, reducing the police budget, and adding \$300,000 of paving that increased the budget to 13%. He was very disappointed and did not think it was cooperative.

Mr. Manning stated at the last meeting there was a discussion of EVs for the police department and noted EVs are meant to be moved and not sit idle. Also, there is no recycling of the lithium batteries that have a replacement cost of \$20,000. If the Town is trying to go green, this is not the way as it would be creating a cesspool of batteries. Tracy Wyman advised the solar array will be something the general public will vote on in March. Mr. Manning also questioned about the charging stations with the police officers taking the vehicles home. Tim Guiles stated the EVs would go multiple shifts between charges and advised they can stay idle as they have plenty of charge. He stated the question is if it is responsible to not go electric as they are less expensive to run. Vicki Disorda has read EVs catch on fire and when trying to put out fires the water becomes toxic and emergency personnel need to be trained in saving people from EVs. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated EVs catch on fire less than gas engines and this would not be a good reason to not get an EV. She also disagreed with them not working in subzero temperatures as Norway has a very good program with them and she knows many people that have EVs. The Town is making a choice with the two cars on their way out to replace them with EVs to get the benefits from the government. Mr. Guiles stated EVs have instant power and will always beat a gas-powered engine. Ms. Disorda also noted some insurance companies are not covering EVs and chargers at home. Mr. Guiles stated that is not true as there is not an insurance issue with putting a charger at a home. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated her understanding was using regular plugs to charge cars instead of installing a charging plug could be the issue. Mr. Guiles has never had a problem with overheating issues with his EV and he has driven over many miles and it is a very dependable car. The charger is a very small cost if one installs it and GMP has incentives and they install for about \$500. The average EV can be purchased for less than a gas car. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated specific to the police cars, there was a price comparison and with the tax incentives it would be comparable. Heather Nelson requested clarification on the municipal car lease concept. Seth Hopkins stated it is less of a lease and more of a pay overtime as the Town would own the car at the end and it is spreading the cost over 3 years. Jackie Savela stated it is either paid annually or bi-annual. Brian Coolidge advised one of the two cars that were not usable has been repaired and is back on the road and the other will be on the road shortly. He is not in favor of EVs as someone will pay to put in charge stations and there are insurance companies that do not cover EVs. Mr. Guiles stated other departments are finding it costs less to maintain the EVs. Heather Nelson suggested with a lease, most repairs would be under warranty for the first three years. Mr. Hopkins noted he has had an EV that has 80,000 miles and has never had to repair it and stated he would not be signing off on a budget with putting in a number that was unrealistic as he would come into a deficit. He is tight with the dollar and will guarantee from personal experience that the maintenance costs will be much lower. Tracy Wyman agreed with Mr. Coolidge and thinks that at the budget meetings, the police budget was misrepresented. Currently the police department has 6 cars on

the road and one that will be. Mr. Wyman is not against EVs, but not at this time and suggested the cars should be used until they run out. Ms. Reniche-Smith asked if the Board wanted to revisit the police budget at this point and Mr. Wyman stated the budget was set but he wanted to provide his comments. Sharon Stearns noted she sent a letter to the Select Board. She heard about the proposal and stated EVs are relatively new and people are buying them individually due to tax credits. The Select Board manages public money and perhaps it is a good idea for some municipal staff but this is about public safety and needing to assure that our officers are safe with their cars and assurance they will run. There are many fires that are happening in EVs and Ms. Stearns suggested the Board consult with the water department when making a decision on what to buy. They are not in agreement with this purchase as the EVs are highly flammable and take 3 times as much water to put out a fire. With a police vehicle, there would be the addition of lights and running laptops and she does not want the police department to be gutted and not be able to do their job. She noted this is another way to hurt our public safety and insurance companies are starting to not insure homes where they are being charged and do not want to replace those that burn. Ms. Stearns also questioned if the department will then need to have double the cars and if there will also need to be a full generator system installed. Ms. Stearns suggested there may be a usage fee coming for using the roads with the reduction in the gas tax fund. She asked the Board to not test with the public money and public safety, and requested any board member who has invested interests in any electric company to recuse from a vote. Ms. Stearns stated we are talking about dangerous lithium batteries and we don't want the Select Board to use public funds for these items.

Doug Bailey stated he has been working on the Town's budget for a number of years and personally as a taxpayer he finds it very scary about passing a budget with a 13% increase. It seemed adding \$300,00 at the last meeting was done quickly and suggested changing the amount to \$200,00 that would reduce the budget by 3% and would allow paving two of the three streets requested by Public Works. He sees a 13% budget, plus the school budget falling.

Jan Coolidge advised everyone she has talked to indicates they are going to vote down the budget. Now is not the time to add \$300,000 for paving and she would like to it reduced to \$200,000 in the budget and use \$100,000 from the 1% local options tax fund. Cecil Reniche Smith asked if the community has indicated specifics or departments that are an issue for voting the budget down.

Vicki Disorda had comments on the 77-page Town Plan and Ms. Reniche-Smith advised that the Plan was developed by the Planning Commission and is on the agenda for the purpose of the Select Board scheduling a public hearing for comments.

Sharon Stearns noted concern with the large budget increase as it is too high.

6. Announce Planning Commission Vacancy

Seth Hopkins stated there is a Planning Commission vacancy that will end June 30, 2024. Mr. Hopkins encouraged interested parties in the position to submit a letter of interest and the form that is on the Town's website to the Town Manager.

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Heather Nelson to fill the voting member vacancy in appointing Neil Silins who is the current alternate and announce a vacancy for an alternate member.

Cecil Reniche-Smith advised she is stepping down from the Planning Commission as of next week. Tim Guiles noted Mr. Silins could continue as an alternate and determine if there is anyone interested in being on the Planning Commission. Ms. Reniche-Smith advised as an alternate, Mr. Silins only has a vote if there is not a quorum and this appointment would recognize his service so far. Mr. Guiles stated the current process is to announce the opening and after two meetings, the Board considers the interested parties and makes an appointment. The Commission has Mr. Silins as the alternate and he can still act in that role but keep the process intact. Ms. Nelson agreed that it would make sense to go by the book.

The motion passed with one no vote – Tim Guiles and 1 abstention - Heather Nelson.

7. Citizen Stormwater Mitigation Concern

Susan Benedict requested the Select Board and Town to consider forming a Water Mitigation Committee that would be under the authority of the Select Board. After the flooding she was surprised that she received 3 visits from FEMA. She had put in a

French drain and will be putting in another which is her investment for mitigation. There are people above her with water issues and there are springs coming up. The highway department dug a ditch to route the water away from the houses, but it did not work. As more water comes up through the ledge it needs to be addressed as there is a lot of water in Brandon. Anne Stratton stated she is having increased water problems in her basement due to other people having changed their drainage. She has been advised there is nothing the Town can do and she agrees that there should be a commission to look at the drainage in the Town. Impacts on neighbors should be taken into consideration with changes, but that has not been historically done. It is time for some concerted attention to this issue.

Tim Guiles understood and appreciated the concerns but there needs to be consideration between public and private. He is not comfortable with the municipality overseeing this and suggested the development of a group of concern citizens to discuss this as until there is something that is in the town's right of way or jurisdiction, he does not see that this is an issue for the Town. Ms. Benedict stated she pays for roads that she does not use, but gladly supports them and she is not asking the Town to pay for the mitigation, but to gather information together and address it with FEMA. Ms. Benedict stated FEMA has visited her due to the water coming down East Prospect Street. Ms. Stratton stated the water problem is also coming down Carver Street for which no drainage has been provided and enters into people's driveways. The water comes onto her property from the street, and there are also neighbors who have changed their driveways with modifications that were against the town ordinance in changing the drainage pattern. Ms. Stratton noted the Town does have a role in both of these areas and the Town can't claim it is a private matter when it is a failure of the town drainage. Mr. Guiles asked if there is a process for appealing to the highway foreman and Mr. Hopkins advised there is not an appeal process. Mr. Hopkins thought citizen involvement is a good idea but does not think a group of lay people would strike a promising solution. He spoke with the Army Corps of Engineers and there are resources available to communities as it is difficult to navigate these types of resources. He would welcome citizen participation and stated it would behoove the group to become connected with the Army Corps of Engineers and the State's Agency of Natural Resources as vehicles to express the conditions, but not attempt to suggest solutions outside what those agencies would advise as solutions. Ms. Benedict agreed there are foundations and nonprofits that do work and have the science, but she thinks it takes the citizens to motivate the Select Board and she hoped they would create a committee and talk about it and not pretend it is just water coming down the street. Sharon Stearns stated there are people with issues in Town with the amount of water that has received. It is part of property ownership, and she has a lot of water that costs her a lot of money. If one property owner gets assistance, the Select Board will be in a tough spot as there will be many who will line up to be next. Neil Silins thought it would be a good idea for all affected citizens to get together to present to the Army Corp of Engineers. Ms. Stratton stated when she moved into the house, she did not have this problem but when the Town put in sidewalks was when the water started coming in. The road has been paved and is now above the level, the water is getting worse and the Town needs to look at the drainage issues. There are preexisting conditions with the increased intensity of water and the Select Board needs to look at the options for mitigating it. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated if there are specific issues with public property that are creating water issues, which is something the highway department could look at, but to the extent that water is coming from private property to other private property the Town cannot do anything about it. To the extent there is anything the roads are contributing to might be worth looking into. Mr. Silins suggested the affected citizens should get together and map out the areas of concern to present to the Army Corps of Engineers. He noted every major municipality is dealing with run off from roads and roofs and the easiest solution is to use permeable asphalt.

8. Consider Request to Close Park Street on April 7, 2024 from 1:00PM to 2:30PM

Seth Hopkins advised there is a request from the Brandon Chamber to close Park Street as part of a weekend celebration for the solar eclipse. Bernie Carr stated this is to get the participants from the top of Park Street to the area in front of the Brandon Inn and will likely be much less than an hour. Neil Silins asked if there are provisions to protect vision. Mr. Carr advised there will be glasses available. Cecil Reniche-Smith advised one can also obtain glasses from Astronomers without Borders and the film they use is good for years. Mr. Silins' concern was with blindness as it is not immediately apparent and does not show up for years. Bill Moore stated the Rec Department also requested glasses for the events that will happen. The eclipse in this area will be 99.8% and glasses can be shared. The Rec Department will advertise about safety and there could be a potential for many people visiting the area for the total eclipse.

Motion by Heather Nelson/Cecil Reniche-Smith to approve the request to close Park Street on April 7, 2024 from 1:00PM to 2:30PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

9. Approve Annual Certification of Highway Mileage

Seth Hopkins reported there were no changes to the Certificate this year.

Motion by Brian Coolidge/Tim Guiles to approve the annual Certification of Highway Mileage. **The motion passed unanimously.**

10. Approve Draft Town Plan for Purposes of Scheduling Public Hearing

Cecil Reniche-Smith stated the Planning Commission has been working on updating the Town Plan since October 2022 and has to be updated every 8 years. The Town Plan has to be in place in order to obtain state and federally funded grants. This is an aspirational document and from it the Town develops policies and decisions. Over the course of many meetings and community forums, the new plan was drafted. The Planning Commission had a public hearing and people were invited to make comments or send their comments via email. The Town Plan and Enhanced Energy Plan were amended based on the comments and approved by the Planning Commission to send to the Select Board. The Select Board now has the draft plan and needs to approve the plan for the purposes of scheduling a public hearing. There is a tight timeframe prior to adoption and the Select Board can choose to approve the plan for moving to a public hearing or hold off to make its own amendments but will need to approve a hearing by January 17th that must be held by February 7th.

Motion by Heather Nelson/Brian Coolidge to approve the draft plan for the purposes of scheduling a public hearing.

Cecil Reniche-Smith advised the last Town Plan was adopted in February 2016 and state law requires it be adopted every 8 years. When she came on the Planning Commission in 2022, it was realized that the Plan was due in 2024. It had been thought the Plan was not due until 2027 because there had been an amendment to it, but that was not the case. The Committee has been trying to get the Plan through in a compressed schedule. Jan Coolidge asked whether the Select Board can make edits once the public meeting is held. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated the Select Board can make edits and approve it. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted through the Planning Commission's process there have been public meetings and the Select Board now needs to review it and approve a final plan. Vicki Disorda stated if this is only done every 8 years why there has to be a Planning Commission. Ms. Reniche-Smith advised the Planning Commission is also in charge of the land use ordinance (BLUO) and in most towns they do the capital planning. The Town Plan and BLUO fell all due at once, but land use is an ongoing thing. As soon as this Town Plan is adopted, approved, and enacted, there is always something for the Planning Commission to do.

The motion passed unanimously.

A date for the Select Board hearing for the Town Plan was set for Monday, January 29th at 7PM.

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Heather Nelson to set the Select Board's hearing date for the Town Plan for Monday, January 29th at 7:00PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

11. Editing and Submitting Select Board Contribution to Town Report

Cecil Reniche-Smith provided the Board with a draft Select Board report for the Town Report, noting there are blanks for the outcome of the budget discussion this evening. She requested the Board review and let her know if there are any changes to make to the report. Heather Nelson suggested adding a sentence noting some of the changes that are being included in the budget, like the paving or other substantial differences. Tim Guiles noted this is the first chance to communicate with the taxpayers of what is needed and is not just made of numbers and is the Select Board's chance to defend the number. He stated during the presentation at the town meeting, the Select Board chair presents the budget in a process to put our best foot forward in providing examples and promoting the budget. This is a micro-version for those who do not get to town meeting. Ms. Reniche-Smith will revise the document for the Board's review. Mr. Hopkins advised the layout person for the report will attend the next Select Board meeting and will plan to make any changes for submission to the printer.

Seth Hopkins asked about the dedication for the town report. Mr. Hopkins provided the Board with names to consider.

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Heather Nelson to approve the dedication of the town report to Dennis Marden. **The motion passed unanimously.**

12. Chimney Repair and Boiler Replacement for Town Hall

Seth Hopkins advised there is a recommendation for the repair of the town hall chimney and a replacement of the boiler. It was noted Mr. Marden provided help with the cleanup and the Town has the settlement in hand. There have been efforts to replace the chimney and a lining would cost almost \$9,000. Mr. Hopkins' recommendation was to abandon the use of the chimney and use the insurance settlement to replace the oil boiler with a propane boiler to be vented without the chimney.

Motion by Tim Guiles/Cecil Reniche-Smith to approve Mr. Hopkins plan except for replacing the propane boiler with a heat pump boiler.

Mr. Guiles stated there may be a MERC grant and suggested postponing a decision to determine whether the grant is received and allow the Town Manager to look into the pros and cons of fuel switching. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated it would be helpful to have those numbers. Seth Hopkins stated it is his judgement that the boiler is giving signs that it is tired and this year they have had to repair it three or four times at a cost. Heather Nelson stated previously during a cold period the heat pumps had an issue and she would like to have two heat sources and felt comfortable with Mr. Hopkins original plan. Mr. Guiles noted typically when buying a new appliance is the time to switch and with having the insurance money is an opportunity to switch fuels. Mr. Hopkins noted the plan would be a fuel switch from oil to propane that is less carbon. Neil Silins suggested the discussion was premature without knowing the cost of a heat pump boiler. Mr. Hopkins suggested it would not be prudent to unduly prolong the repair as getting quotes for a propane boiler had been time consuming and he is not convinced a heat pump appliance that is drawing from air in this building is prudent. Tracy Wyman asked when the propane installation could take place and Mr. Hopkins advised Ploof had indicated they could do it in the next couple of months. Bill Moore stated the Town applied for the energy grant program and the town hall was identified as one area for the grant. He agreed with Mr. Hopkins' assessment to get it done as quickly as possible and perhaps the MERC grant could be considered. Jan Coolidge asked if a generator would be needed if the town hall was all electric when it is to be used as an emergency shelter. Mr. Hopkins advised the town hall would not be used as a shelter and that either the Brandon Legion or the Neshobe School would be used. Mr. Guiles suggested a friendly amendment to the motion to go with electric hot water rather than a heat pump that would change out the fossil fuels.

Motion by Tim Guiles to amend the original motion to an electric boiler rather than heat pump boiler. **The motion failed with no second.**

The original motion failed 3 no votes to 2 yes votes – Cecil Reniche-Smith and Tim Guiles.

Motion by Tracy Wyman/Brian Coolidge to accept Mr. Hopkins recommendations **The motion passed 3 yes votes to 2 no votes – Cecil Reniche-Smith and Tim Guiles.**

13. Allocation of ARPA Funds for Town Hall Roof

Cecil Reniche-Smith stated at previous meetings that there was discussion to replace the town hall roof. Bids have been received and at the time there was discussion of dedicating the remainder of the ARPA funds for the town hall roof.

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Tim Guiles to allocate the remaining ARPA funds for the replacement of the town hall roof with understanding that the grant application being considered by Historic Preservation could pay for a significant amount and the allocated money could be spent for something else.

Tracy Wyman stated the lowest bid was \$269,000 and if there is to be redecking it would be another \$30,000 to \$40,000. Mr. Wyman did not have a problem spending money on the roof and suggested with the solar project going out for a bond vote, the \$60,000 could be added back to the ARPA funds to cover the complete cost of the town hall roof.

Seth Hopkins recommended the Board wait until the Town hears back regarding the grant from Historic Preservation. There would need to be work done with the bond bank to recalibrate what the solar project would be if the \$60,000 was not included. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated we have almost enough left in ARPA funds to do the roof and the grant would fill in the holes. Hopefully, the grant will come through and if not, other sources could be reconsidered. Neil Silins stated there was discussion that the government could ask for the ARPA money back and rather than committing it to the roof, suggested placing it into a fund. Ms. Reniche-Smith advised there could not be a request for the funds if they are allocated and there is a stipulation that the remaining funds could be placed in an existing fund, but a new fund could not be created for the purpose of securing the ARPA funds. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated the largest amount the grant would provide is \$100,000.

The motion passed 3-yes votes to 2-no votes – Tracy Wyman/Brian Coolidge.

14. Adoption of Workshop-drafted FY25 Town Operating Budget Proposal

Cecil Reniche-Smith stated it would be helpful for the Board to know the reasons for people voting no on the budget as in terms of reducing it will be helpful if people have specific line items or issues. Sharon Stearns stated it is too large and is due to the content in the budget. She understands there is someone on the Board who would want to change everything to electric and she will vote no and will do everything she can to encourage people to vote no if EVs are added to the police department. The 13% increase is too much and \$300,000 for paving is too much. The Select Board is to be good fiduciary representatives for the Town and it is not a responsible spending plan given what the people are feeling. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted the paving is 9% of the increase in number and in the past the paving was done as a separate appropriation. Tracy Wyman stated for the past several years it was put into appropriations and is a smoke and mirror tactic. This would reduce the budget by 4% and then go into an appropriation which would appear the Select Board reduced the budget, but with approval of the appropriation the increase would still be the burden of the taxpayers. Anything less than the \$300,000 for paving in the budget, he will vote no as there is not enough 1% local options tax funding. Heather Nelson was initially reluctant to add the paving due to the large increase however, she now understands that the government does not provide yearly funding and having a consistent number in the budget would be good. It is known that roads and municipal vehicles need to be replaced. Tom Kilpeck stated there should be a plan to replace the police vehicles. Mr. Guiles stated the Board has been responsive to the road foreman and this is not spending money haphazardly and perhaps there will be a time when the department does not need that much for paving. He suggested respecting the road foreman and noted the Board has done its best to smooth out taxes, but what was done is correct. Ms. Reniche-Smith understood from Mr. Wyman's discussion that the road foreman had indicated there is at least \$300,000 needed per year and the Board chose to add it to the budget rather than making it an appropriation. Mr. Guiles stated the Board has done what it could to keep taxes down and in looking at the last five years, the Board has been very frugal and this year is a fair ask. Brian Coolidge stated he will vote no on the budget because a 13.4% increase does not have the taxpayers in mind and it is not a responsible budget. Ms. Stearns noted that Mr. Coolidge will have a lot of support. Mr. Manning stated between the state, town, and school it is a very large tax increase. Doug Bailey stated last year the decision was made to bring down the budget by \$100,000 with the reserve fund. Secondly, in the past an appropriation has been made for paving and he agreed with the Board to add it to the budget. There are two different ways to tell the taxpayers what is being done, and with an appropriation it gives people the opportunity to see it, but it should be in the budget. Every other year the Town gets funding from the government for Class 2 roads, which is why the ask for paving fluctuates. The 1% local options tax fund was designed to assist with Segment 6 and then for the future it was hoped to use a lot of it for roads. Last year due to circumstances, the Select Board correctly purchased a truck but at budget time the truck was not included and was \$260,000 that was committed to spending without funds set aside so this depleted the 1% local tax funds. This has left the Town short for planning with the 1% funds going for the roads currently. There will be a bond paid off next year and it will look much better next year. Mr. Bailey noted there is a need to educate and sell the budget to the population as it is clearly not bad spending or bad decisions by the Select Board. Mr. Bailey stated his previous request for bringing the funding down to \$200,000 would be to do 2 roads rather than 3. Mr. Guiles stated it is important to note that if the state, education, and town taxes go up 13%, the taxes would go up an average of 13%.

Motion by Tim Guiles/Tracy Wyman to approve a budget in the amount of \$3,796,180 with \$3,271,510 to be raised by taxes that equates to a 13.4% increase in the amount to be spent and a 9.7% increase to be raised by taxes.

Tom Kilpeck stated a lot of effort was put into establishing a canine unit that is effective and questioned why it is being eliminated. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated when discussing the police department, the canine unit came up and the Board had agreed on a flat number for the police department budget of \$900,000. She thought that with a flat allotment the Police Chief would determine how to spend the funds and potentially keep the canine unit, however, there was a motion to eliminate the program. Mr. Kilpeck works closely with the police department and noted it is a very good department. They are very helpful and the Select Board needs to give them the tools to do their job. They have equipment that is run down and past due for replacement, and he feels they should be taken care of. Tracy Wyman stated he made the motion to remove the dog, as it was a donation and was added without Board approval. The cost is now \$26,000 to have the program that was initially in the budget for \$3,000. He thinks the department has been misleading and noted that during the budget meeting it had been indicated two cars were ready to be junked, however, one of the cars has now been inspected and the other will also be ready to go back on the road. The mechanic has indicated the cars are acceptable. Mr. Wyman stated the police chief should have provided the information on the dog and he also blames himself for not doing research on the canine unit. Mr. Kilpeck stated it comes down to a department head being given a budget to manage the department and perform their duties. Mr. Wyman noted he voted to eliminate the dog but does agree there is a need to update the cars, but this is not the year to do it. Heather Nelson stated she was not on the Board when the dog was obtained, but the Town now has it and the police chief sent detailed information about the dog. Now that the Town has the dog and an experienced officer that comes with the dog, it cannot be taken lightly and she has serious concerns about the morale of the department that should not be taken for granted as it is important. In the spirit of compromise, with what has to be done with the feeding and care of the dog, the officer has agreed to do that at a lesser rate and Ms. Nelson thought that speaks highly of the officer and department and suggested reconsideration of the canine unit. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated the ½ hour per day would be a reduction of just under \$5500.00. Officer Alnwick agreed to forego this in lieu of taking the ½ hour shift to feed and maintain the canine unit so that the budgetary concern has gone away. The other thing the police chief indicated was that when a police dog is eliminated, the dog and the handler are a team and she is concerned about losing an officer. When discussing the police budget, Ms. Reniche-Smith thought when agreeing on a flat \$900,000 for the police department it that would allow the police chief to decide whether to keep the dog or not. Sharon Stearns felt strongly about having a police dog as it is a good opportunity for the Town and is another officer as that is what they are trained for. The Town has an officer willing to dedicate himself to training another officer and this officer has put everything into it. She felt that the Town would lose this officer if the canine unit were removed. This unit does an incredible service as they can defuse things, help children, and save other officers' lives. There is much to training the dog and if you put that officer in a place where he has to make compromises, he will be gone and the Town will lose one of its best officers. Ms. Stearns did not want this to happen as the Town needs a solid police department and the canine unit is part of it. Vicki Disorda stated the police force now, compared to the former one is much improved and the Town has a police force that it can count on. Ms. Nelson agreed with Mr. Kilpeck and Ms. Stearns that the canine unit is valuable and is thankful for the police chief being respectful in providing more information. She felt that a commitment was made as a Town and thought it would be a disservice to eliminate the canine unit. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated she had a misunderstanding of what had been spent, but in light of the feedback she has been getting about the canine unit and in light of the police chief's letter, it is something the Board could reconsider as it would not change the bottom line of the budget.

The motion passed with one no vote – Brian Coolidge.

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Heather Nelson to allow the Chief of Police to continue with the canine unit with the understanding it does not change the amount that has been awarded to the police department budget.

Tim Guiles stated every time the canine officer goes out of state for the training, it is time out of the schedule that someone else has to cover. It does create a burden on the force and Mr. Guiles does not think Brandon is a community large enough to support this feature and the police department is not large enough to support a canine program.

Neil Silins stated from his understanding at the budget meeting, the police dog has been involved in 18 apprehensions and suggested that warrants the police dog. All the time the human officer is spending with the dog, he is also serving his normal schedule and is not taking money out of the budget. Mr. Silins stated the police chief needs to manage his own department and it would be micro-managing to removing the dog and lastly, the Town needs a more active police presence because he is concerned that crime will move in if there is not a visible and active police department. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated another concern is if the Town loses the canine handler because they go together, that creates a hole that others are going to have to

cover. Rather than having to find a new less experienced officer, keeping a senior officer that lives and wants to stay in the community is important. Jan Coolidge stated the Town also has a lot of time invested in the officer, and the police force was willing to give up part of their day to have the unit trained. Sharon Stearns expressed that she was offended by Mr. Guiles comments about it being a waste of time and when working with people, we spend time with our coworkers. There is no health insurance, retirement, and many things that one would pay for a human officer. She is embarrassed and appalled at the comments and stated the Town will likely lose the officer because of this discussion if this is not fixed. If you did not do your research, you are saying to the officer that you do not care about him. Ms. Stearns noted the Town previously had a drug problem and those dogs are unbelievable in those situations and whenever there is a human officer, they take family leave and many hours off duty. She stated the Town should let the officer know that this unit is supported. Ms. Disorda stated there needs to be a sense of loyalty, including the dog that lays their lives on the line and there needs to be support for the morale of our officers.

The motion failed 2-yes votes to 3-no votes - Brian Coolidge, Tracy Wyman, Tim Guiles.

15. Fiscal

a) Warrant – January 8, 2024 - \$500,826.88

Motion by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Tim Guiles to approve the warrant of January 8, 2024, in the amount of \$500,826.88. **The motion passed unanimously.**

16. Adjournment

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

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary