

**Brandon Select Board Meeting  
May 26, 2025**

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

**Board Members In Attendance:** Doug Bailey, Brian Coolidge, Ralph Ethier, Cecil Reniche-Smith, Jeff Haylon

**Others In Attendance:** Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, Jack Schneider, Barry Varian, Brent Buehler, Steven Jupiter, Gerard Lowell, David Martin, Jim Leary, Serge Cotnoir, Vicki Disorda, Karen Rhodes, Lisa Wolcott, Michael Wolcott, Joyous Emerson

**Others by Zoom:** Bruce Jenson, Jan Coolidge, Jessica Doos, Neil Silins, Nita Hanson, Patricia Welch

**1. Call to order**

The meeting was called to order by Doug Bailey at 7:06PM.

**a) Agenda Adoption – Motion** by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Ralph Ethier to adopt the agenda. **The motion passed unanimously.**

**2. Select Board Members' Remarks**

Doug Bailey reiterated that attendees be nice and treat everyone with respect.

**3. Recurring Matters**

**a) Select Board Minutes – May 12, 2025**

**Motion** by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Jeff Haylon to approve the meeting minutes of May 12, 2025, as amended. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Correction Beate Jensen's name on page 4.

Correction of Claire Astone's comment on page 3 that she did not want to reinvent the wheel.

**b) Warrant – May 26, 2025 - \$1,590,770.24**

**Motion** by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Jeff Haylon to approve the warrant in the amount of \$1,590,770.24. **The motion passed unanimously.**

It was noted this warrant includes payments for the appropriations and the school tax.

**4. 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. Mr. Hopkins provided the following highlights from his report:

There are two vacancies for the Trustees of Public Funds that the Select Board was advertising for letters of interest through June 5<sup>th</sup>. There are now three vacancies and Mr. Hopkins questioned if the Board wished to change the window for inquiries. It was decided to maintain the current window for the letters of interest.

Mr. Hopkins met with the Police Chief, Police Officer, and a risk assessor from the insurance company to discuss options for the Sanderson bridge.

The Town had collected delinquent taxes totaling \$181,961 and since the letter from the attorney \$51,676 has been collected.

Chief Kachajian will be making a conditional offer of employment to a Level 2 officer for one of the open positions on Tuesday. The Highway Chief also has a verbal commitment from a qualified individual for the Highway Department.

Brian Kilpeck and Jeremy Disorda completed the first Goshen roadwork and the next work to be done will be roadside mowing after July 1<sup>st</sup>.

The uninspectable police cruise sold for \$1,400.

The health insurance rates have been announced with Blue Cross Blue Shield having a 13.7% increase and MVP a \$7.5% increase. Currently the Town staff is on MVP, except for the police department that has Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Cecil Reniche-Smith asked if trucks come from both directions on the Sanderson Bridge. Seth Hopkins advised they do come from both sides but most come from the west. Ms. Reniche-Smith asked if there are the same warning signs on both sides and it was confirmed there are. Mr. Hopkins noted the risk assessment person who met with them at the bridge was surprised with the number of issues with the number of signs at the bridge. There is discussion of widening the turnaround on the Town side of the bridge and installing on both sides a telephone pole with a swinging bar that would strike the truck first. The insurance company may have some funds available for these changes. Doug Bailey stated from the Town Manager's report; it was noted that the State's Ethics Committee has said they do not have the manpower to enact the law that has been instituted.

## **5. Community Development Report**

Bill Moore provided the following Community Development Report:

*"On May 14th, the Town closed on the purchase of the .74 acres that will complete the Seminary Hill Park. This has been in the making since the SB had approved a match in December. Excited about the park being the Town's.*

*On May 16th, we received the official grant award for the purchase of a van that will serve as a rec vehicle and eventually a public transit connector. The Town will purchase a white VW ID buzz from Lundgren in Rutland.*

*Big thank you to Otter Valley advisories (Mr. Rose, Mr. Perta, & Ms. St. Raymond) for their work on May 16th. They stained the Thomas Overlook deck, spread wood chips at seminary, and stained 10 of the 15 downtown park benches. This is a school-wide volunteer day.*

*On June 7th, the former FOTH sponsored Silent Movie will be showing Saturday, June 7, 2025, 7p.m.: "Underworld" (1927) starring George Bancroft, Evelyn Brent, Clive Brook. This is Director Josef von Sternberg's groundbreaking tale of big city mobsters, widely considered the father of all gangster pictures. Free Will Offering - Proceeds will support the 2026 future silent movie series.*

*Lego Robotics Camp is back. August 4th - 8th at the Brandon Town Hall. Registration for all programs can be found at [brandonrec.com](http://brandonrec.com).*

*The Upstairs of the town hall will be unavailable for use due to the Great Brandon Auction prep and sale through July 13<sup>th</sup> starting June 16<sup>th</sup>.*

There was a successful Memorial Day parade that was put on by the American Legion and is the 123<sup>rd</sup> year for the Flower Girls to place flowers around the monument.

Jan Coolidge asked if the purchase of the land for the park came in under budget. Bill Moore reported that the total was \$25,097 and the Town Farm Fund money will pay for the rest of the attorney's fees.

## **6. Request for Tier 1B Designation for Brandon (Act 181/Act250)**

Seth Hopkins advised he attended a meeting of the Brandon Planning Commission regarding a presentation by Logan Solomon of the RRPC concerning the details of Act 181 that is a relaxation of Act 250 requirements in certain areas. This

will help to facilitate the growth in streamlining the application. The areas affected would include the designed downtown, village center, planned growth area and the village. Those 4 areas would receive relaxed permitting and would not require Act 250. The Town has water and wastewater and would be in-fill where there is density. There are areas where Act 250 status quo will remain the same and some areas that are rural conservation and forestry. Those would have heightened Act 250 requirements. The Town's option is to be considered for Tier 1B designation or leave it status quo.

Jack Schneider stated every town has to do a town plan and the next step is a future land use map. The Planning Commission sees no downside to this designation. The Town has very strong land use ordinances in place and this primarily effects 10 acres or under in not having to go through the Act 250 expense. The Brandon Planning Commission recommends submitting a request for the Tier 1B designation.

**Motion** by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Jeff Haylon to request to be considered for Tier 1B designation as described in the Board packet. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Seth Hopkins stated the Town went from 1 acre to 10 acres for when Act 250 would be triggered and Act 181 has additional requirements. The Town is not eligible for Tier 1A designation but is eligible for Tier 1B due to having wastewater and water.

Vicki Disorda stated this would be a significant change without discussion from the general public and expressed concern with the limited number of parking spaces in Brandon, as it would make life much more uncomfortable for people.

Jack Schneider advised the BLUO follows state mandates of 5 dwellings per acre and 50 units on 10 acres would likely be multi-story but it is something that is mandated. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated this is in keeping with what the state law requires and a lot of this information was provided by the Brandon Planning Commission and the RRPC has also addressed this. Mr. Schneider stated the RRPC has had meetings around the county and the public meeting in Brandon was held on the 13<sup>th</sup>. There will be continued RRPC meetings when they get to the next phase.

Jan Coolidge asked if there is a limit on the lot size for multiple houses. Unless building up, it makes a difference as to how much the structure would take for a footprint. Mr. Hopkins stated this will not change the BLUO and that is where that would get addressed. This action is for retaining or eliminating Act 250 requirements. Doug Bailey stated the additional use of sewer would reduce the cost for the individual users.

Jan Coolidge asked what Act 250 does with 10 acres outside of those areas with water. Mr. Hopkins stated that it would be subject to Act 250 as it is outside the four areas noted and there is no public infrastructure.

Vicki Disorda asked if there is a limit to how high a structure can be and Mr. Schneider advised the building height can be 30 feet.

Jeff Haylon asked the timeline for the designation process. Mr. Hopkins advised it has to be provided to the State by July 1<sup>st</sup> and his understanding is that the Town will be advised in a matter of months, likely in time for the next building season.

## **7. Town Report Appropriation Request Info**

Ralph Ethier stated this topic comes from the last Trustee of Public Funds meeting where a woman stated there should be a financial statement provided when submitting for an appropriation and she thought that it should be made public. Mr. Ethier thought this was a good idea. Doug Bailey asked if there is a record for anyone who wants to see this information. Seth Hopkins advised this is public information that is available but is not placed in the Town Report. This information is provided to the Town Clerk and Ms. Gage has only been asked a couple of times for this type of information. Cecil Reniche-Smith asked if they are single page financials. Mr. Hopkins noted the financials are not provided in the same format from everyone and are usually 4 to 7 pages, and there are around 15 that are usually submitted. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated that there would be an additional 60 pages and this would be completely the Town's cost. This would be doubling the size of the Town Report and Ms. Reniche-Smith asked if it was possible to make it better known. Mr. Hopkins stated a notice could be on the Town's budget page for the appropriations. Doug Bailey stated a bold statement in the Town Report could be added advising people where they could find the details. Mr. Ethier agreed it would be good information to provide. Mr. Hopkins suggested since the Fire Department and School District are now separate reports, it could be good to determine what the Select Board

wants to accomplish with the Town Report. He stated it would be a good chance to take a fresh look at what the voters would like to see. Jan Coolidge did not think it is wise to print all of the financials but agreed that a statement about the availability of the information should be sufficient for people and if one does not have a computer, they could go into the Town Office to see the information.

## **8. Purchase of New Cruiser Following Sealed Bid Process**

Seth Hopkins provided information on the 11 different bids for the new police cruiser and noted it was a good open bid process. The Brandon Energy Committee (BEC) solicited bids from the Green Fleet policy and also provided information regarding electric police cruisers. The Green Fleet policy does require consideration and the police staff believes that one of the two electric vehicles would be too small. The main concern that they have is with all the equipment they wear in needing more space than provided in the Blazer. Cecil Reniche-Smith asked with regard to the cost if the gas cruisers include the equipment and Mr. Hopkins advised that only the electric cruisers are offered without the police equipment and the gas cars are a police package. There was also a hybrid option and Ms. Reniche-Smith asked if that is something they would like. Mr. Hopkins advised the police staff thought the maintenance cost would be higher risk. Jeff Haylon asked if it is possible for the officers to test drive the vehicles. Mr. Hopkins advised the two Electric vehicles are at Vermont dealers but the others are from another state. Brandon has had Dodge Chargers and Ford Explorers and they know how they drive. Doug Bailey complimented the BEC on the electric cruiser packet. He stated we have heard a great deal of negative comments about how they would not work in Vermont and noted the information provided shows that they can work in Vermont. He would like to have the police chief go to Windham County to see the cars in another police force. Mr. Bailey noted he is not ready to have the public concerned about an electric car but appreciated all the work the BEC did on this. Jeff Haylon agreed with Mr. Bailey and thought the police know best what they need and want to use in the field. Mr. Bailey asked if the Charger was the model that gave the Town problems. Gerard Lowell stated there were suspension parts but there are also now new generations of the motor. Mr. Lowell questioned if they were all-wheel drive with extended warranties. Mr. Hopkins advised they are all-wheel drive with 3-year warranties. Mr. Lowell noted the Town had purchased extended warranties in the past and with more electrical items in the cars, the extended warranty is huge and suggested looking into the extended warranties. It was noted that the all-wheel drive Charger is what the police department prefers.

Brian Coolidge asked where the money is in the police budget. He likes Option G but noted the budget is currently 1.5% over budget. Seth Hopkins stated in the officers salary line, as of tonight there is \$287,000 and that is where the \$60,000 would come from. Mr. Coolidge stated the budget should be 87.5% for the year and the police budget is 89%. Mr. Hopkins stated the officers' salary line has room and the bottom-line figure is not going to exceed the budget for the department. Mr. Hopkins noted the vehicle would be deliverable shortly after the first of the fiscal year.

Joyous Emerson asked why the Town is in need of a new cruiser after losing a number of police officers. Seth Hopkins stated the cruisers are aging and the Town needs to build a fleet. There are two good vehicles and a new cruiser would replace one of the oldest cruisers to keep the fleet refreshed. Mr. Hopkins noted the Police budget has the capacity to make this payment for this fiscal year. Mr. Emerson asked if the idea is to hire a new officer. Mr. Hopkins advised an offer will be extended tomorrow for an additional officer.

Karen Rhodes thanked Jeff Haylon for his comment of letting the people that do the work pick the appropriate vehicles for the work that they do. It may be nice to have an electric vehicle, but if the Town does not listen to the people that do the work, it is selling them short. She asked the Select Board to listen to the police staff and not go with something that seemed vogue.

David Martin agreed with Mr. Haylon's statement and suggested the specifications matter as having a top line number is not enough for the decision. The operating costs that the BEC provided are what the mpg is and what the costs for operating them are. Hearing from a mechanic is helpful and he thought more investigation is warranted. Mr. Hopkins stated the Green Fleet policy is legitimate and sets the parameters the Select Board to consider alternative vehicles. He stated the primary consideration is when there is an officer safety standard that needs thought. He stated Chief Kachajian is concerned with all of the equipment they need and wants the latitude to fully operate the vehicle safely and the Charger that is the second lowest bid appears to be their preference. He is not discounting looking at the electric vehicles, and perhaps a service vehicle would work with a Tesla, but there is not a non-pursuit vehicle being considered at this point. Mr. Martin stated the Blazer is different from a standard model and he wants to be sure that the Chief was looking at the Ev-blazer and not the standard one.

Cecil Reniche-Smith stated it is a question of the environment we are in right now and the status of our police department. Given that the two officers have expressed a preference, she wants them to know that the Select Board respects their ideas and concerns, and that we acknowledge that they are in the best position to know what they need right now. She would personally go with what the police staff are most comfortable with and feel most safe in. It does not mean that down the line, she would not encourage looking at a hybrid or electric vehicle.

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Ralph Ethier to approve the purchase of the Dodge Charger all-wheel drive, Option G with an extended warranty. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Doug Bailey suggested the Police Chief visit one of the Vermont towns and test drive an electric vehicle. He appreciated all the information from the BEC.

## **9. Select Board Statement Regarding Ethics Report**

Doug Bailey stated the Select Board always welcomes community involvement except on this agenda topic. Over the last 8 weeks, all has been said and the Board knows the comments from the public.

**Motion** by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Jeff Haylon for the Board to adopt the following statement:

*“At the May 12, 2025, meeting of the Brandon Select Board, the Board approved and adopted the Report on the Investigation of Ethics Complaints against two members of the Trustees of Public Funds regarding a pledge for \$20,000 by the TPF to the Otter Valley Athletics Association. After the report was distributed, the original complainant contacted the authors of the Report and demanded the report be withdrawn and changed. The complainant was upset that the Report addressed the issue of potential financial conflicts of interests on the part of the Trustees, even though the complaints themselves did not expressly allege the existence of a financial conflict of interest.*

*The complainant is correct that his complaints did not expressly state that either Tanner Romano or Laura Miner had an undisclosed financial interest in the outcome of their decision to pledge \$20,000 to the OVM.*

*However, both complaints did allege that the OVAA was simply acting as a "pass-through" for another entity, the VCC, and alleged that Trustee Romano was a "member, and probable director" of the VCC. A reasonable reader could understand the complaint to be concerned not only with any personal interest the Trustees had in the OVAA, but also with the possibility that, as a "probable director" of the VCC, Mr. Romano may have had financial interest in the funds request. Moreover, once the complaints were accepted by the Board for investigation, the Board had an independent responsibility to analyze the allegations in light of Brandon's policy on conflicts of interest in light of information gathered during the investigation. Finally, appropriate analysis of the issue required examining all the forms which a conflict of interest could manifest, and address whether any of those forms were implicated. That is what the Report did.*

*The Report is available for review on the town's website. Citizens are advised to read the Report for themselves, rather than rely on media interpretations or word of mouth. The Board understands that many readers of the Report have been dissatisfied with its contents. That is to be expected in these situations. The Board stands behind its investigation and its Report. The Board considers this case to be closed.”*

**The motion passed unanimously.**

Doug Bailey advised this statement will be posted on the web page with the original complaint. Mr. Bailey reiterated the Select Board does not oversee the Trustees of Public Funds as they are an elected body. The Select Board has one task in two weeks to name new members to that board from the applications received. This is something the Select Board does for any committee and by law, it is something they have to do. The appointments will only be until March voting and those appointed will have to reapply to run for those positions. Mr. Hopkins advised in March there will be a one-year term of a three-year term, a two-year term of a three-year term and a three-year term on the ballot. Mr. Bailey noted going forward aside from appointing the trustees, the Select Board will not be discussing the Trustees of Public Funds at the Board meetings. Mr. Bailey noted the Select Board learned a lot about ethic complaints and will be making some changes to the policy.

## **10. Summer 2025 Road Paving Plan and Funding**

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Seth Hopkins provided information on Wheeler Road and Town Farm Road as the Class 3 roads that need attention and noted the Select Board had indicated \$100,000 could be available for paving. The Town has been advised the match will be \$200,000 for Union Street rather than \$350,000 and the Town Treasurer has advised the 1% option tax fund is \$487,000. There is a new lease payment for the highway truck. The roof on the town hall will use all the ARPA funds including the amount from the solar proposal, the insurance payment from the chimney failure, plus \$30,000 more. Mr. Hopkins noted currently there is about \$200,000 remaining in the option tax fund. Doug Bailey stated Town Farm Road would cost around \$160,000. Mr. Hopkins advised this is only repaving the currently paved sections. Cecil Reniche-Smith suggested doing Town Farm Road as it is the least expensive project.

**Motion** by Cecil Reniche-Smith/Brian Coolidge to go out to bid on the Town Farm Road paving with use of the local option tax fund. **The motion passed unanimously.**

## **11. Public Comment and Participation**

Brent Buehler stated as the complainant regarding the ethics complaint, he wanted for the record to indicate he did not elude or allege impropriety of either Tanner Romano or Laura Miner.

## **12. Adjournment**

**Motion** by Brian Coolidge/Cecil Reniche-Smith to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 8:18PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant  
Recording Secretary