

MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 22, 2025

SELECTBOARD

Selectboard Members Present: Doug Bailey, Cecil Reniche-Smith (by Zoom), Ralph Ethier, Brian Coolidge, Jeff Haylon

Others Present: Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, Brent Buehler, Gerad Lowell, Steven Jupiter, Ray Marcoux, Barry Varian, Vicki Disorda, Billy Bullock, Todd Nielsen. By Zoom: Bruce Jenson, Cecil Reniche-Smith (noted above), Zoe Armao.

- 1 Chair Doug Bailey called the meeting to order at 7PM. All selectboard members present, one by Zoom. Motion by Ethier/Haylon to adopt the posted agenda. Posted agenda voted 5-0.
- 2 Selectboard Members' Remarks: Bailey called attention to the passing of former town manager David Atherton and highlighted some of his achievements while he led Brandon. He called for a moment of silent respect to be observed. Following that, Reniche-Smith offered her remembrance of Dave as someone who really, really cared about Brandon and who inspired others, herself included, to public service.
- 3 Recurring Matters: The following were moved by Haylon/Coolidge as a consent agenda. Voted 5-0.
 - a Minutes of September 8, 2025 (regular meeting)
 - b Minutes of September 15, 2025 (budget workshop)
 - c FY26 Check Warrant / Orders on the Treasurer
 - d Approve special event liquor permit issued by Town Clerk
 - i #65035 – Fairly Buzzed LLC, Estabrook Field, 760 Grove St
Brandon Harvest Fest, 10/5/2025, 12pm – 6pm
- 4 Reports and updates to the selectboard from the town management team (town manager Seth Hopkins and deputy town manager and community development director Bill Moore) were accepted. Barry Varian appreciated the upcoming service to the traffic signals and encouraged in-house personnel be trained/certified to make adjustments. Cecil Reniche-Smith confirmed with Bill Moore that there are early plans to bring the 2026 whoopie pie festival to Brandon. Brent Buehler thanked Bill Moore for following up regarding the collateral for the revolving fund loan to Ripton Mountain Distillery (collateral was removed by the business, not by the Town).
- 5 Bailey led a report of the first FY27 budget workshop and invited the public to participate in this series, which is informal and collaborative. The next workshop is October 6th from 7 - 9 PM. The draft capital program and plan offered by the town manager was discussed. In conjunction with that, Hopkins presented a received-today excerpt from a Vermont Bond Bank report into which he had inserted Brandon data points which tend to demonstrate the Town is in a very good position relative to long-term debt in comparison to the Bond Bank's reported median of our Vermont peer communities. The prospect of bonding for the replacement highway barn if determined to be in the best interest of the Town should fit well within the Town's debt capacity.
- 6 The matter of reporting \$148,000 of Town Farm Rd paving in the highway department operating budget when it in fact was paid by the 1% Fund was discussed. The Town Treasurer's input was considered and accepted. Motion by Haylon/Coolidge that non-operating budget expenditures are to be reported directly from the fund from which they are expended and not reported in the general fund operating budget. Appropriate notes to appear in the Town Report. This is in support of transparency about funding sources and in support of demonstrating respect for the voter-approved operating budget limits. Voted 5-0.
- 7 In the town manager's updates (below), information provided by the Rutland Herald and Addison Independent was tabulated for the board's information. Motion by Ethier/Haylon to designate the Addison Independent as the Town's newspaper of record with the Rutland Herald as the alternate newspaper of record. Voted 5-0.
- 8 Hopkins reported big-picture results of the comprehensive system-wide wastewater capacity study researched and completed by Elaine Smith at the town office. The individual capacity number for each connected property is defensible and documented. Essentially, the system is designed for a maximum daily treatment volume of 750,000 gallons per day; we have allocated 500,000 maximum gallons per day to existing connections; and the "average day" actual amount processed is in the 250,000 gallons range. This establishes the Town's available capacity for future development and also to give the selectboard a way to consider the most equitable methods

available for fairly apportioning the cost of the operation and investment in the wastewater collection and treatment system.

The selectboard appreciated the work done by Elaine and accepted the preliminary report for discussion at a later date, to include impacts of different billing structures on various anonymous example properties.

9 Public comment: Vicki Disorda asked several questions regarding matters minuted from the September 8th selectboard meeting and September 15th budget workshop. These were answered. She also expressed concern, in the context of the announcement that the Town would be moving to a local government web platform that the town manager is going to be controlling the narrative.

Reniche-Smith clarified the meaning of “newspaper of record” and what it does not mean.
Brent Buehler encouraged greater use of the News & Notices section of the Town website.

9 Motion by Coolidge/Haylon to adjourn. Not debatable. Voted 5-0.

8:13PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Seth M. Hopkins

MONDAY UPDATES

PUBLIC WORKS MISSION

- Lafaso Electric expects to be in Brandon this week to inspect the current traffic signals with an objective of improving traffic flow on US7, particularly during the morning and afternoon “rush hours”. Increasing Carver and Union Street wait times, and prioritizing the green arrow onto Park Street are the current strategies under consideration. They will also troubleshoot why we so often have outages in the circuits that power the ornamental lampposts. Four replacement lampposts were received today, some to be installed where errant motorists have broken existing posts, and some to be held in stock as the lead time on these is lengthy.
- The Town has reached out to our local clockkeeper again regarding revisiting repair to the clockworks now that the town clock faces have been repainted and the steeplejacks have left.

PUBLIC SAFETY MISSION

- No updates since report.

ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE MISSION

	Rutland Herald	Addison Independent
Publishes	Tue, Wed, Thur, Fri, Sat (Sat = “weekender”)	Thur
Circulation	4,000 (daily) + 4,500 (weekender) = 20,500 (total per week)	5,568 (total per week)
Delivery	Home Delivery; USMail; Newsstands	USMail & Newsstands
In Brandon	600	387
Digital Users	7,385 (daily) + 7,065 (weekender) = 36,605 (total per week)	12,000 - 15,000 (total per week) + 3,700 opt-in subscribers to e- newsletters (3x per week)
Legal Ad Rate	\$21.50 / column inch Tue-Fri; \$22.50 / col. inch weekender (includes print and online)	\$9 / column inch (includes print and online)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MISSION

- I am applying to the Trustees of Public Funds for support for the historic preservation commission's rewrite of the Brandon Workbook. The commission has applied to the South Lake Champlain Fund of the Vermont Community Foundation and to the Walter Cerf Fund for grants, but these have not been successful.

FOLLOW-UP

- No petition for a townwide vote disapproving the selectboard's July 14 vote to repeal with pool hall ordinance was received by the deadline of August 28, so the repeal became effective September 15.

Seth M. Hopkins

The nature of discussion at this meeting is provided below as captured and digested by artificial intelligence. If further detail is required, the Zoom recording of the meeting is posted on the Town website. Notes on Combined Board (Selectboard and [as needed] Liquor Control, Cannabis Control, Sewer Commission, and Board of Health) Meetings

Notes on Selectboard Meeting

Created on September 22, 2025 at 7:00 PM by Minutes AI

— All votes were unanimous. —

Agenda Adoption

- Motion to adopt the agenda was made and seconded.
- No changes were proposed.
- The agenda was adopted.

Select Board Remarks - David Atherton

- David Atherton, former town manager of Brandon for over eight years, passed away.
- Noted for guiding the town through segment six and his work with Hurricane Irene recovery and FEMA projects.
- Cecil: "I just would like to remember Dave as someone who really, really cared about the town of Brandon."
 - Cecil mentioned that Dave encouraged her to run for select board.

Consent Agenda

- Items 3A, B, C, and D (minutes of September 8, minutes of September 15 budget workshop, the warrant, and a special liquor permit) were moved to a consent agenda.
- Mr. Bailey had questions regarding page five of the warrant, specifically payments to the bond bank.
 - The general fund takes the whole payment, and then positive and negative entries are made to the liability for the individual bond and the asset where the accumulated debt is tracked.
 - The warrant displays it this way for the convenience of the town staff.
- The only general fund payments are for Route 7, the police department bond, and segment six.
- Items A, B, C, and D were approved.

Select Board Reports - Town Manager

- The town manager submitted a report in advance.
- Lafaso Electric will inspect traffic signals to improve traffic flow on US 7.
 - Considering increasing wait times on Carver and Union streets and prioritizing the green arrow onto Park Street.
 - They will also troubleshoot outages in the circuits powering the ornamental lamp posts around the park.
- Four replacement lamp posts were received.
- The four faces of the town clock have been repainted, and new numbers and hands have been installed.
- Public safety is waiting for replacement firearms.
- Applying to the Trustees of Public Funds for support for the Historic Preservation Commission's rewrite of the Brandon workbook.
- No petition was received to disapprove the Select Board's July 14 vote to repeal the pool hall ordinance.
 - The repeal became effective on September 15th.

- Lamppost cost and insurance:
 - When lampposts have been hit, the driver has been identified.
 - In most cases, the driver was insured, and the insurance company covered the property damage.

Globe Lamp Post Costs

- Single globe lamp post: \$3,600.
- Triple globes (on Center Street and at the beginning/end): \$6,000 range.
- Manufactured with breakaway bases to minimize motorist injury upon impact.

Traffic Signal Solutions

- Barry asks about the traffic signal and whether the outside contractor/technicians will provide alternative solutions or enact changes the town wants to make.
- The town manager is open to both, having communicated the problem and potential solutions based on local observation.
- The town needs a certified traffic control person or firm to program the lights.
- Barry suggests training someone locally to make changes, but the town manager is unsure about the training's complexity and availability.
- The traffic signal company is local, based in Rutland.

Historical Request & Aikido

- Brent Buehler asks about the request to the trustees of public funds for historical purposes.
- The figure is in the \$12,000 range.
- Aikido starts on October 4th.

Neshobe Pie Gobbler Fun Run

- November 23rd.
- Registration is open.
- URL is listed on the report.
- Approximately 3 miles at the Neshobe golf course.
- Every 10th finisher receives a pie.

Other Rec Department Events

- Brandon Pittsford Rec departments are happy to see the Boston Celtics play the Denver Nuggets on January 7th.
- Forest Dale Path Scoping Study committee public meeting on October 22nd.
- Dennis Marden will be hosting Brandon's Got Talent auditions on October 4th and 5th.
- Colleen Wright Events is facilitating the harvest fest on October 5th at Estabrook Park.

Whoopie Pie Festival

- There is a rumor that the Whoopie Pie Festival is coming to Brandon in 2026.
- The Chamber of Economic Development of the Rutland region approached Brandon about hosting in 2026.
- Talks are in progress, and a committee would need to be formed.
- The event could bring thousands of people into town.

Ripton Distillery Collateral

- Brent Buehler thanks Bill for clarifying that the collateral for the Ripton Distillery was removed by the owners, not the Town.

Budget Workshop Recap

- The budget workshop was held on September 15th.
- It was poorly attended but informative.
- Information was provided in person by department heads: Chief Kachajian for Police, Chief Disorda for Highway, Director Moore for Community Development, Town Manager Hopkins for Administration & Finance.

Budget Workshop Discussion

- The budget workshop involved each department giving a three-minute presentation on the past year, the current year, and their needs for the upcoming year (FY25, FY26, FY27).
- Mr. Hopkins introduced a multi-page capital investment plan that will be a continual moving target.
- The capital plan will address how different capital projects will be funded through the budget, the 1% money, and other sources.
- The next budget workshop is scheduled for October 6th at 7 p.m. and will end by 9 p.m. The public is invited. Workshops are informal and collaborative.

Capital Investment and Debt

- The Vermont Bond Bank sent a report titled "Bond Bank Medians" with data on towns in Vermont with populations between 2,000 and 6,000 people.
- Brandon's debt metrics were compared to the median values for towns in that population range.
 - Brandon has more unassigned general fund balance and cash on hand than the median town.
 - Brandon has less bonded debt, and lower debt service as a percentage.
 - Brandon's long-term debt divided by the full value of the grand list is slightly higher than the median, but this is due to the state certifying that we are undervaluing the grand list by about 30%.
- Brandon has \$257 of debt per person, while the median town has \$643 and larger towns have \$995.
- The town is considering a replacement highway garage, similar to what Cornwall is facing.
 - The current garage is in poor condition, and modern trucks with plows don't fit.
 - The bond for segment six will be paid off, so a highway garage bond would still result in overall savings.

State Non-Operational Project Costs

- The town has spent 26.6% of its budgeted expenditures, slightly ahead of pace.
- The resurfacing of Town Farm Road is booked as a highway department operating budget expense, even though it is being paid for by the 1% fund.
- It was suggested to stop stating these non-operating budget expenses in the operating budget revenue for the departments and start reporting them out of the fund they were expended from.
 - This could be communicated through a footnote in the budget or a note in the town report.
 - The speaker (town manager) feels that it is important to demonstrate respect of the voters' intent with the operating budget limits.

Highway Budget Discussion

- The voters approved a highway budget of \$881,000, but expenses may exceed \$1 million due to the way the Town Farm Road paving is reported.
- Concern that overspending the highway budget will appear as disrespecting voter instructions.
- Suggestion to keep local option tax (LOT) expenses out of the operating budget and treat it as only operating expenses.
- Motion to designate local option tax paid projects to be accounted for directly out of the local option tax rather than in the operating budget.

Clarification of Motion

- Non-operating budget expenses should be recorded in the fund from which they were expended, not in the operating budget report.
- Reserve fund money is part of the general fund (fund 10) and would be included in the operating budget.

Reporting and Transparency

- Reporting should clearly show the activity for each fund, including the starting balance, additions, and subtractions.
- A past issue was that a truck purchase paid for with 1% LOT money still showed up as a highway expense.
- Motion passed to account for non-operating budget paid projects directly out of the local option tax or other fund they are expended from, rather than appearing in the operating budget.

Selection of Replacement Newspaper of Record

- A well-attended meeting was held to discuss the community newspaper, The Reporter, and its current status.
- Contact was made with other newspapers to potentially fill the role of newspaper of record for the town.
- The Herald publishes Tuesday through Saturday, with Saturday being a larger "Weekender" edition.
- The Addison Independent publishes once a week on Thursday.
- The Herald has a circulation of 4,000 per day (20,500 per week), while the Addison Independent has 5,568 per week.
- The Herald estimates 600 subscriptions/newsstand copies in Brandon, while the Addison Independent estimates 387.
- The Herald reports 36,605 digital users per week, while the Addison Independent reports 12,000 to 15,000 per week, plus 3,700 e-newsletter subscribers.
- The legal ad rate for The Herald is \$21.50 per column inch Tuesday through Friday, or \$22.50 on the weekend, while the Addison Independent's rate is \$9 per column inch.
- Both newspapers include an online version of the ad with the print ad.
- The Reporter's publication is scheduled to end on October 1st.
- The select board will not meet until October 13th, but the budget committee will meet on October 6th.

Legal Ads and Newspaper Costs

- Legal ads are placed for various reasons, including DRB hearings, ordinance repeals, and bond votes. Some ads need to be published multiple times.
- The cost difference between the Rutland Herald (\$21.50) and the Addison Independent (\$9) is significant.
- The board needs to decide on a paper for legal publications.
- The newsstand cost of the Reporter is \$1, and the Addison Independent is \$2 per week.

Newspaper Selection

- A DRB notice in the Reporter (two columns by three inches) costs \$39, while the same ad in the Herald would cost \$129.
- The Addison Independent's cost would be about half of the Herald's (\$54).
- Either the Addison Independent or the Rutland Herald would have a comparable circulation to the Reporter in Brandon.
- Motion to go with the Addison Independent as the primary paper and the Rutland Herald as the secondary paper, which was seconded and passed.

Wastewater Capacity Study

- Elaine at the town office has been working on a system-wide wastewater capacity study.
- She had to calculate wastewater design flows based on state of Vermont tables, considering factors like bedrooms and restaurant seats.
- The system's rated capacity is 750,000 gallons a day.
- Existing buildings in Brandon require 500,000 gallons a day of capacity.
- Normal flow is around 250,000 gallons a day.
- The system is engineered to treat 750,000 gallons a day.
- Existing connections to the system require two thirds of what it's designed to treat.
- Most days the system treats one third of what it's designed to treat.
- There are 12 crossings in the rivers.
- Sanitary sewers go through swamps.
- The select board should consider different models of billing.

Billing Fairness and Capacity

- The current billing system is based on units in buildings with a small component for consumption.
 - There was a shift away from consumption-based billing due to fluctuating numbers.
 - The Enterprise Fund primarily covers fixed costs like bond payments.
- A hybrid system was implemented to encourage conservation while addressing infrastructure costs.
 - A portion of the bill is based on consumption at a lower rate.
 - The overall dollar input into the wastewater system remains relatively flat.

Revenue and Infrastructure

- Revenue has increased to support the wastewater system compared to the old billing style.
 - The current billing method raises more money to cover borrowing and infrastructure.
 - Borrowing is required for upgrades and expansions, leading to increased expenses.
- The community needs to decide on the most equitable way to apportion the burden of the wastewater system.

Capacity and Growth

- The goal is to achieve an equitable apportionment of the system's operating burden.
- Ensuring sufficient capacity for current needs and projected growth is a priority.
 - The state favors development in areas with existing public water and sewer systems.

Capacity-Based Billing

- Billing based on capacity could result in different costs for smaller households compared to larger ones if they occupy a home with the same rated maximum capacity requirement.
 - Currently, unit fees make up the bulk of the bill, with a smaller portion based on metered water usage.
 - Capacity is similar to property taxes, based on the highest and best use of the property.
- Excess capacity could potentially be sold back to the town for a billing credit.
 - Capacity would need to be repurchased if the property's usage changes.

Study Completion and Future Steps

- The completed study indicates that current treatment system capacity meets or exceeds needs.
 - The recent upgrade focused on meeting standards for chlorination and dechlorination without increasing capacity.

- The last capacity increase occurred in 1973.
- Sample scenarios will be provided to illustrate potential billing impacts on different types of properties.
- Elaine is credited for her thoroughness and attention to detail in ensuring the accuracy of the capacity numbers.
- The select board is accepting the report for review and discussion at a later date.

Fourth Cruiser Purchase

- Vicki Disorda stated at a budget meeting, the town manager asked the board to waive its purchasing policy to purchase a fourth cruiser, but it wasn't on the agenda for tonight's meeting.
- The town manager stated he did not ask them to waive it, he asked whether they would consider waiting it at their next meeting. His published report recommended dropping the idea of waiving the purchasing policy and initiating standard procedures to solicit bids for both internal combustion and electric models.
- A grant for \$7,500 was available if a purchase was made before next week, but there's limited car availability.
- There are no current plans to purchase a cruiser.

Police Budget

- The police budget was fully expended last year by buying a replacement cruiser.
- The police department is currently (FY26) under budget by \$40,000 due to unfilled positions.
- There are currently three active applicants for police officer positions.
- When officers leave, they are paid out for accrued paid time, which impacted the FY25 budget.
- Overtime expenses in the early part of FY25 also contributed to budget expenditures.

Technology and Transparency

- The manager mentioned the need to improve the town's technology to reduce reliance on a community newspaper.
- Designating a newspaper of record, such as the Addison Independent, may not provide the same level of coverage as the current Reporter.
- The Town is considering a government platform for a website that proactively sends out agendas and minutes, which will be funded as a subscription service under the administration department's budget.
- The goal is to maintain transparency and provide citizens with information on a weekly or bi-monthly basis.
- Seth sends a synopsis of each select board meeting to staff, which could be published.
- The "paper of record" designation is purely for legal requirements of posting legal notices.

Paper of Record

- The speaker (Doug Bailey) says that the paper of record isn't necessarily the paper that they would choose or prefer in terms of reporting about what actually happens in town at select board meetings.
- The speaker says that The Reporter would come to every meeting and report on every meeting because it was so very local.
- The speaker says that the Addison Independent or the Rutland Herald cover a much wider geographic area and might not think that what was discussed at the select board meeting was as important.
- The speaker says that they were thinking about some more different kind of electronic communication that would keep people informed.

Concerns (Vicki Disorda)

- Concerned that the same person that has been appointed the liaison for ethics complaints, who stood up at the trustees meeting and said that all applications should come through him, is now going to be controlling the narrative of what occurs at select board meetings. This reference was to Seth Hopkins, town manager.

Independent Local Newspaper (Cecil Reniche-Smith & Doug Bailey)

- The speaker says, "I think it would be almost everyone's preference to have an independent local newspaper."
- The speaker says that the paper of record is just a paper that they will be printing their legal notices.
- The speaker says, "We certainly appreciate what Keith does do and that he is often on zoom like he is tonight, and he writes an article and puts it in the paper the same as Steven has done. And we hope to get more, but we cannot. We cannot require that the paper of record do that, you know, so it's just where we place our legal ads is what it amounts to."

News and Notices Section

- Brent Buehler says that the news and notices section on the town website is very underutilized.
- Brent Buehler says that he never sees legal notices.
- Brent Buehler says, "If we're doing notices in newspaper, we could at least put them in our news and notices website. I would like to see that utilized."

Motion to Adjourn