SELECTBOARD

MINUTES OF OCTOBER 20, 2025

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

Others Present: Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, Jan Coolidge, Brent Buehler, Barry Varian, June Kelly, Chris Powers, Ray Marcoux. By Zoom: No one.

1 Chair Doug Bailey called the meeting to order at 7PM. All selectboard members were seated. Motion by Haylon/Reniche-Smith to adopt the posted agenda. Posted agenda voted 5-0.

2 Selectboard Members' Remarks: Bailey highlighted that budget workshops are intended to be informal and collaborative and invited active public participation by those present.

3 After information and discussion, motion by Coolidge/Ethier to approve letter of attestation for renewal of Downtown Vibrancy Fund Grant. Voted 5-0.

4 After information and discussion, motion by Reniche-Smith/Haylon to acknowledge the increase in sludge disposal cost from 12¢ to 14¢ a gallon will result in an overage of $9,600 on purchase order #12446 from the wastewater enterprise fund which had been authorized by the board in June of 2025. Voted 5-0.

5 The board, town manager, and the public present engaged in further consideration of the FY27 budget proposal as revised by the October 6 budget workshop. The following were key discussions and decisions:

a After information and discussion, motion by Reniche-Smith/Coolidge to bill Brandon Fire District No. 1 for a contribution to the Town budget in the same amount as has been paid by the wastewater enterprise fund for several years for billing and accounting ($30,000). Voted 5-0. [Fire District next meets Thursday 13 November.]

b Topics in which the public and board engaged in discussion
Prudence of using unspent funds in an operating department only after closing of the fiscal year
Clarification of ballots for elections (general mailed by State; primary not; Town not mailing)
Desire for % column and footnotes in town report
Possibly limiting word count of appropriation agencies rather than publishing whole report/request
Suggestions to ask trustees of public funds for money for mosquito control and sludge processing
Discussion of local option tax uses over time

c By 8PM, began to make further changes:
increase penalty & interest revenue from $45,000 to $60,000 based on recent actuals
moving new highway barn bond and perhaps paving to budget in FY28 when Seg6 debt is retired
progress on Union Street sidewalk reconstruction
discussion of increasing employee contribution to health insurance from 15% to 20%
discussion of events we're hosting at Town Hall; Rec dept staffing; a flyer for people to pick up
consensus was not to ask for a voted article this year as capital is reasonably well funded with existing sources, and the operating budget is the main concern
a cost of living adjustment of 3.3% to meet FY25 actual BLS calculated inflation was agreed
changes made tonight appear to bring the amount to be raised by taxes into the 2½ % range

6 As the entire meeting was a cooperative effort among the board and the public, no additional public comment was offered other than appreciation for the openness of the process.

NEXT FY27 BUDGET WORKSHOP: Monday, November 17, at 7PM at the Town Hall.

7 Motion by Coolidge/Haylon to adjourn. Not debatable. Voted 5-0. 8:59PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Seth M. Hopkins

Note: The recording is online at the Town's YouTube channel for those who require detail at the level of every word spoken. Below are notes taken by the Minutes AI app.

Notes on Budget Workshop #3
Created on October 20, 2025 at 7:00 PM by Minutes AI

Budget Meeting Opening
- Meeting called to order at 7 p.m.
- Agenda adopted.
- Meeting to adjourn at 9 p.m.

Downtown Grant Approval
- State provides $25,000 in funding through the Downtown Vibrancy Fund.
- Brandon Area Chamber of Commerce is the downtown organization.
- Motion to approve the grant attestation passed.

Sludge Disposal Increase
- The city of Rutland is increasing sludge disposal costs by 2 cents a gallon.
- At the time of authorizing the original purchase order in June, it was noted in writing that Bob, the Commissioner of Public Works did indicate over the course of next year they may raise prices due to rising costs on their end.
- The increase will exceed the purchase order by $10,000.
- The board acknowledged the rising cost of sludge removal.

Budget Adjustments
- At the previous workshop, reductions made in legal services, guardrails, culverts, road salt, police professional development, and police vehicle maintenance.
- Health insurance forecast decreased by $18,000.
- Bug district assessment increased by $5,000.
- The amount to be raised by taxes is up 3.44% compared to the current year's budget.

Fire District Billing Discussion
- Discussion about billing the fire district for services the town provides.
- The town has been doing billing and collecting for 300 water-only accounts for the fire district since 2020.
- The fire district used to have someone do the work, and they cut their budget by bouncing this over to the town.
- Suggestion to bill the water district for doing all their work.
- The 2022 actual for the fire district collector salary was $16,414 54.

Collaborative Relationship
- The fire district and the town have had a great collaborative relationship for many decades.
- The current structure has every property tax bill payer in Brandon essentially funding the water bill.
- The only real alternative would be to have someone employed by the wastewater department or the fire district to do the billing.

Billing
- It makes the most sense to have the administrative staff in the town office handle bills.
- A long-standing employee has done a lot of work to ensure the bills are correct based on capacity.
- It would take an action by the board to charge the fire district for billing services.

Concerns
- There is concern that if the fire department gets a $30,000 bill, it will raise water bills.
- There doesn't appear to be an internal policy for wastewater contributing to the general fund for billing, and there doesn’t appear to be a memorandum of understanding between the town and the fire district for billing.

Fire District
- The fire district is realizing savings by not doing the billing on their own.
- The fire district's next Prudential board meeting is November 13th.
- The town of Brandon has a reserve fund of $700,000, while the fire district has over $800,000 in reserve.

Motion and Discussion
- A motion was made to ask/demand that the fire district contribute the same amount to the town budget as the sewer department ($30,000) for billing processing.
- The board would go to the Prudential Committee meeting to inform them of the decision.
- If the fire district says no, the town would have to find other budget cuts and potentially consider discontinuing providing this service to the fire district.

$30,000 Figure
- The board discussed whether the $30,000 figure is disproportionate to the real cost.
- There is concern about having two different rates for sewer and water.
- If the fire district refused to pay, they would have to handle all delinquents and collections themselves.

Memorandum of Understanding
- The ideal situation would be for the town and the fire district to develop a memorandum of understanding for all services provided.
- The town does some things as a courtesy for the fire district in terms of human resources.
- It's hard to quantify how much time is used for specific tasks.

Vote and Budget Impact
- The motion to tell the fire district that the number the town feels is appropriate for them to pay is $30,000 starting next year was approved.
- A $30,000 revenue increase would reduce the amount to be raised by taxes from $2,009,756.41 to $2,009,456.41, and the tax increase would be 2.4% instead of 3.44%.

Budget and Health Insurance
- The town doesn't need to finalize the budget until January.
- There are still big decisions to make about health insurance.
- The board is cutting the health insurance down to exact numbers, relying on the assumption that the two candidates for the police department will work out.

Police Budget
- The police budget is currently $126,000 under budget for the year.
- These savings don't get reflected in next year's budget but go to the fund balance.
- The fund balance could be used for tax relief or projects like road paving.
- Using the fund balance to decrease taxes on a one-off basis can make the sticker shock worse the following year.

Capital Investment & Fund Balance
- Capital investment from fund balance is typically looked on as sound.
- A paving project on Wheeler Road is being considered, estimated to cost around $230,000. Funding options include the 1% fund, a $50,000 capital article approved by voters last year, or the general fund balance.
- The minimum fund balance policy is $500,000, and the maximum is $1 million. The current balance is $729,000.
- Savings realized from the understaffed police department in FY26 could be used in FY27, with the select board determining the best use of the fund balance.

Fund Balance Policy & Potential Needs
- The fund balance target is between 15% and 30% of the budget, roughly $500,495 to $990,000.
- There's a potential need for a new heating system at the town office, which could be funded by the fund balance.
- Complaints about speeding have led to discussions about hiring sheriffs for radar patrol, using funds from the police department budget.

Capital Investments & Operating Budget
- Voters tend to support capital investments, while the operating budget faces more scrutiny.
- The 1% fund is restricted to capital funds, and voters have supported capital articles.
- The general fund is for things like employees' wages, health insurance, and road salt, and the fund balance should not be used to supplement ongoing operating expenses.

Police Department Staffing & Budget
- It's likely that all police department slots will be filled by the time of the town meeting in March.
- Extra funds from the previous year due to understaffing were used to replace a police cruiser.
- In one year, $100,000 was returned from reserve, but at the same time $300,000 was added to the budget for paving, causing a "budget revolt."

Town Report & Election Budget
- The town report can include the percent change and footnotes for clarity.
- The town is considering reducing the number of pages in the town report by excluding funding requests from service agencies.
- The $5,500 election budget covers the general election, with the state mailing ballots for the general election but not for the primary. No ballots are mailed by the Town except by individual voter request.

Town Hall Revenue & Expenses
- The town hall costs about $24,000 a year but generates only about $12,000 in revenue.
- There are plans to send out a mailer to raise funds for a paint job at the town hall.

Local Option Tax Revenue
- The annual local option tax revenue has been close to $300,000 per year.
- The initial projection was $100,000, and it has outperformed itself every year since inception.
- The revenue was initially used to finish Segment 6 without asking voters for more money.

Penalty & Interest Revenue
- The penalty and interest revenue is budgeted at $45,000 each year.
- It has come in over budget in the last couple of years by between 18,000 and 30,000.
- The penalties and interest are actually received, not penalties and interest billed.

- Fiscal year 25 is over by 34,000.
- The 23 one was affected a little bit on the downside because back during COVID they agreed they weren't assessing and waived penalties.
- Revenue adjustment to 60,000 seems safe with the amount of delinquency.

Segment Six Bond
- This year the segment six bond will be and this budget will be done in December of 26.
- There is room in the budget for a potential highway barn bond payment because it would be half the size of what that bond payment is.
- Paving: "I think if we're ever going to move paving into the budget in some number, you know, 100,000, that's the time to do that too."
- They are working on getting the location for the highway garage. Mr. Moore is working with the state to see if they will allow another building where they are because that's wetlands.

Union Street
- Initial estimate of what they had to match for Union Street was high, and now it looks like the match will be lower than what they thought.
- Initially they had thought they were going to have to match $350,000, but now it looks like it'll be closer to $200,000.

Budget Numbers
- Boosting interest and penalty revenue by 15,000.
- If the fire district says no, they're not going to pay any money and we're still at 30, that would be 2.92% on the amount to be raised by taxes.
- Current rate of inflation is about 2.9.

New Town Truck
- The payment for the new town truck that they're talking about getting next year is coming out of 1%.
- The down payment would be 1% like they did this year.
- The Mac truck is at a point where it's starting to take more repair especially to the emissions system and that's repairs that they can't do and that he would like to replace it while it still has value.

Health Insurance
- This currently does not change current employment or employee contributions to health insurance.
- They did tighten it just in case terms of being more specific about the police insurance costs.
- The police contract expires in 2027.
- The board stated several years ago the desire to get to 80% Town contribution and 20% employee contribution but it was never like a motion and this is what we're going to do.

Dental and Vision Insurance
- The town pays 85% of the health insurance.
- The dental is paid 100% by the town.
- The vision is paid 100% by the employee.

Health Insurance Discussion
- A large health insurance increase of $78,000, which is 2.5% of the budget, is being discussed.
- The health insurance market is considered "broken" and is expected to become more expensive.
- There was an effort last year to explore alternatives to offering health insurance, but it was not feasible.

- There is a suggestion to increase the town's contribution to employee health insurance to reach an 80/20 split, but some are against increasing employee contributions in the current budget due to concerns about retaining employees.

Employee Retention
- Concerns about retaining employees are raised, especially after the police situation and poaching attempts on other employees.
- It's acknowledged that town employees could potentially earn more in the private sector but stay due to liking the town and the benefits.
- There's a sewer treatment plan job advertised for six weeks with no applications received, highlighting the current job market challenges.

Taxpayer Money
- One board member is considering the health insurance contribution as a matter of principle, not to save taxpayer money.
- Another board member argues that there are other ways to save taxpayer money, such as reconsidering a $50,000 additional tax burden for capital funding.
- A board member wants to treat town employees like every voter in Brandon, questioning why town employees are getting better insurance benefits than the average voter.

Town Hall Events and Rec Department Assistant Position
- The Rec Department is actively trying to host events at the Town Hall weekly, including partnerships with organizations like Camp Thorpe and Friends of the Town Hall.
- The goal is to have something happening at the Town Hall at least once a week on weekends.
- Colleen Wright Events has taken over some bus trips and other rec activities.
- The Rec Department is producing more events than other area departments of similar size, even after Colleen Wright left.
- A board member questions the need for the Rec Department assistant position, suggesting the community may need to step up to support youth sports.
- It's argued that the assistant position is necessary for running youth sports programs and managing the Town Hall.
- The former assistant rec director took the special events she created with her when she left.

Brandon Activities and Events
- The speaker believes that the excess of 1% money the town has been getting is attributable to the amount of stuff going on in Brandon.
- Suggestion: Produce a flyer or program of events for the year for people who don’t use the internet or social media.
- The town is planning to release a community calendar on the brandon.org website that will include events from the town, Chamber, DBA, and school.

Budget Discussion
- The board is considering whether or not to have an article for $50,000 for capital or paving.
  - One board member suggests letting the $50,000 capital fund grow instead of spending it right away.
  - A member of the public suggests that the $300,000 of 1% money should be sufficient to manage capital needs.
- The board discusses the cost of living adjustment (COLA).
  - The town is using 3.3%, which is the Bureau of Labor Statistics New England 12-month inflation rate.
  - The cumulative cost of living increase over the past four years has been 15.5%, and the town's actual increase was also 15.5%.

Connector Project
- There will be a local concerns meeting on Wednesday night to discuss the possible connector between downtown Brandon and Forestdale.
- The project manager and engineer will present alternatives and routes.
- This was a grant-funded scoping study to determine if there was going to be a path, where would it be.
  - It is not a commitment to fund or do the project.
  - It's just taking something that was discussed for decades here in this town and being scoped or dreamed about by an engineering firm at an 80% discount because there was a grant available to make it happen.
- No money has been budgeted for this project in the current budget, and no budget money will be required.

Upcoming Meetings
- The next budget meeting is scheduled for November 17th at 7 p.m (skip the November 3rd meeting).