

**MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 17, 2025**

**SELECTBOARD**

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. By Zoom: No one.

- 1 Chair Doug Bailey called the meeting to order at 7PM. All selectboard members were seated. Motion by Haylon/Coolidge 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 an open communication experience; he invited active public participation by those present.
- 3 The board, town manager, and the public present engaged in further consideration of the FY27 budget proposal as revised by the October 20 budget workshop. The following were key discussions and decisions:
  - a As warned on the agenda, a discussion about capital funding for a replacement highway truck was held. Without committing to awarding any bid or making any purchase, upon motion of Reniche-Smith/Haylon, the board directed the town manager to solicit bids for a tandem truck for the consideration of the board, and to attempt to obtain trade-in value that would be offered for the 2017 Mack tandem that was recently repaired and returned to service. Voted 5-0.
  - b As warned on the agenda, the cost of employee health insurance was discussed. Now that the 2026 plan selection forms are being returned by current staff, it is clearer that we have a greater liability for health insurance than forecast at earlier workshops. Plan selection changes may mean a figure on the order of another 2% on the overall budget.
  - c General discussion of FY27 budget topics (no votes; see discussion notes below from Minutes AI)
- 4 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: TUESDAY, December 9, at 7PM at the Town Hall.

5 Motion by Coolidge/Reniche-Smith to adjourn. Not debatable. Voted 5-0. 7:57PM.

Respectfully submitted,



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 Created on November 17, 2025 at 6:59 PM by Minutes AI

**Budget Workshop**

- The first order of business is to adopt the agenda.

**3a Capital Funding for Highway Truck**

- Discussion about capital funding for a highway truck.
- The truck plows the west side of town, roads west of Route 7.
- The truck was in the shop for seven weeks, and the repair bill was \$13,309.
- The original purchase order was for \$12,500.
- The truck is a tandem dump truck used for moving gravel and ditching.

**Truck Information**

- A smaller truck was purchased last year for \$173,924.
- \$73,924 was from the 1% money, and \$100,000 was financed over five years.
- The current tandem truck is a 2017 model.
- A new tandem truck is expected to cost around \$300,000.

#### Funding Sources

- Potential funding sources include the 1% fund and the capital fund, which has \$70,000.
- The board can also elect to put the payment into the operating budget in the highway department.
- The funding source may depend on the bids and the value of the current truck.

#### Next Steps

- Solicit bids, including trade-in value, and bring it back for further discussion.
- Get an idea of the current tandem's trade-in value.
- Shop for lease or interest rates.

#### Concerns

- One board member (Ethier) thinks it might be a year early to trade the truck, especially after \$13,000 into repairs.
- The truck has 90,000 miles on it and might rust out before wearing out.
- Another board member would like to see the bids but suggests limping through the winter and reassessing.
- Macks are "a good hardy truck;" the speaker (Coolidge) is not in favor of doing anything with it this budget cycle.
- The most recent maintenance was always the emissions system and the exhaust.
- The speaker says, "Even the newer ones that work, they haven't improved on this. It's a finicky system. It doesn't really amount to anything."
- Motion to obtain some numbers to get a ballpark figure passes.

#### 3b Staff Health Insurance Costs for Calendar Year 26

- Open enrollment period for staff to make changes to their health insurance plans is November and December.
- Paperwork coming back in is looking more costly than what was expected during the budget workshop.
- Plan selections are driving further pressure up on the amount needed for health insurance as a group.
- The out-of-pocket costs for employees have also gone up.

#### MVP Health Insurance Plan

- The town is staying with MVP due to the cost and instability of Blue Cross.
- Comparing a plan from last year to the same plan for next year:
- \$400 on a family plan, \$400 in the plan deductible for a year, \$400 in the out of pocket max for the year, \$100 increase in the prescription out of pocket max maximum, and a monthly premium increase of \$60.81. So an annual increase of \$729.72.
- At least one employee is going from being covered by their parents' plan to needing to buy their own insurance.

#### Budget Discussion

- The number from the previous meeting is not solid because plan selections are meaningful in the amount of money being discussed.
- The next budget meeting should be scheduled once the health insurance plans are all in to have solid numbers.
- The town had planned on \$78,000 of up in the health insurance premium, but it is expected to be closer to \$134,000.

#### 3 General FY27 budget workshop topics

- There is a plan to budget \$30,000 income from the fire district for billing and collecting the water accounts.
- The fire district prudential committee meeting is this Thursday (was postponed from last Thursday).

#### Budgeting and Potential Deficit/Surplus (Reniche-Smith)

- Budgeting for payment for doing water billing for the Fire District and the potential outcomes:
  - Budgeting for it, not getting paid leads to a deficit.
  - Not budgeting for it, getting paid leads to a surplus.
- The health insurance number should be available by Thursday night.

#### Collection of Numbers

- The board discussed the possibility of budgeting for the work, informing the other party of the cost, and ceasing work if payment is not received.
- Even if they decline to provide the number, it is public record.
  - They can make life difficult by delaying their own collections or delaying providing numbers.
- A public records request could be filed to require meter readings.
- A board member expressed hope for a decent working relationship and not demanding money.
- It's a prudential board decision for them.
- It makes sense for them to collect it now.

### Sewer Department Comparison (Bailey)

- If the Prudential Board refuses to pay, the town shouldn't charge the sewer department.
- If one doesn't pay, neither should the other, or they should both pay the same amount.
- The town does things to help them, and they do things to help the town.
- When they have a water pipe break, the town's backhoe and guys go down there and dig it for them and they don't charge them for that.
- The Prudential Board should have been paying all along.

### Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)

- Comment that the board never officially decided on the COLA number, but the budget includes 3.3%.
- Last year, there was discussion of putting the money in a merit pool, but it wasn't done.
- Hopkins related that a select board member suggested that a merit pool should be separate from a cost of living adjustment.
- (Reniche-Smith): The point of COLA is to keep pace with the rising cost of living.
- The town has been using the Bureau of Labor Statistics calculated consumer price index for New England.
- Over the past four years, the town's number and the index number balanced out to 15.5%, despite some year-to-year variations.
- The board could switch to using the Social Security COLA (suggested by member of the public [Jan Coolidge]).
- (Reniche-Smith): The Social Security COLA factors in the cost of living nationwide and tends to be lower.
- It is often under inflation right now.
- (Hopkins) A cost of living adjustment of 3.3% to meet the FY25 actual BLS calculated inflation was agreed upon and minuted in the October 20th workshop.
- Before discussions, the roll up for a percent increase was at 1.88%, including the \$30,000 from the fire district.
- Health insurance pressure could add another 2%, potentially bringing the increase to around 3.8%.

### Budget Concerns (Bailey)

- There is a concern about a potential 4% budget increase and whether to try to reduce it.
- The goal was to stay below 3%.
- At 1.8%, they "were doing dances and feeling that we were pretty damn special."
- At 4%, "we're not so special."
- There may not be much wiggle room in the budget.

### Potential Savings

- Consider making the administrative person for hours at the police station a 20-hour position to save on salary and benefits.
- If the town is under salary this year, the unused funds go into the unrestricted reserve (fund balance).
- The current fund balance is at \$729,000, with a target of \$750,000 (floor at \$500,000, ceiling at \$1 million).
- Using funds above \$750,000 could offset the 4% challenge, but it's a one-time fix.

### Delinquent Property Taxes

- (Hopkins responding to question from member of the public Brent Buehler): The town clerk stated that it's not uncommon for taxpayers to be late in the first few quarters, but satisfy the payment by the fourth due date.
- Historically, about 3% of the town's tax revenue becomes delinquent at the end of the year.
- (Bailey) Delinquent taxes generate interest and penalties, creating a revenue source.

### Budget Reduction Strategies

- Consider removing a one-off expense from the budget and using the unrestricted reserve to cover it.
- Example: Boiler repair at the town office.
- Paying off a loan could also free up funds in the budget.
- Consider making the last segment six bonds bond payment out of 1% money or the fund balance.
- This would remove it from the budget.

### Bond Payment on Police Department

- The police department payment is about \$23,000 a year.
- There is about seven years left on the police station bond payment, ending in December 2032.
- The Segment Six bond balance should be about \$136,000. Police station around \$125,000.

### 1% Fund

- The 1% fund is now pulling in \$300,000 a year.
- The unobligated portion is around \$432,000.
- Pledged from it is \$24,000 for the replacement truck and a soft pledge of around \$100,000 a year for paving.
- Union Street sidewalk reconstruction will also require a match from the 1% fund (estimated at \$200,000).

- The local options tax is going up because inflation is causing people to spend more money and the state has decided to give an extra 5% (from 70/30 split with the towns to 75/25 split).

#### Administrative Position at Police Station

- If anyone in that union works 35 or more hours a week, they are considered full time and receive full benefits.
- The administrative position is union.

#### Painting the Town Hall (Bill Moore responding to question from Jan Coolidge)

- The plan is to mail to anybody who's ever donated to the Friends of the Town Hall.
- Create a sponsorship type program like the Friends of the Town hall did for programming generally, but also, again, with a mission.
- The plan is to raise money for painting and potentially pursue Vermont Buildings and Grounds grants, which can go up to \$25,000.
  - These grants could be used as a match.
- An example was given: \$15,000 in donations + \$25,000 from the state, leaving \$10,000 to be absorbed by the town hall budget.
- Painting the upstairs center green area is planned as a project for the church kids in fiscal year 27 or 29.

#### Budget Discussion

- Appreciation was expressed for the open idea sharing in finding solutions (Barry Varian, Doug Bailey).
- Seth was thanked for the informative capital plan (Brent Buehler).

#### Next Meeting

- The final budget is needed by the first select board meeting in January.
- Discussion about the frequency of meetings, currently every two weeks.
- Health insurance selections are due December 1st.

#### Scheduling the Next Meeting

- December 1st was considered, but there's Thanksgiving in between.
- December 9th, a Tuesday, was chosen for the next meeting at 7 PM.
- The goal is to finalize the budget in January.

#### Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn was made and seconded.
- All in favor said "aye."