

**MINUTES OF DECEMBER 9, 2025
FY27 BUDGET WORKSHOP #5**

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: Tricia Welch.

1 Chair Doug Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM. All selectboard members were seated. Motion by Coolidge/Haylon to adopt the 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 previous workshops and updated by the town staff as new assessments, etc., have come in.

General discussion of FY27 budget topics (see detailed discussion in notes below from Minutes AI)

The town manager led overview of options A, B, and C as published in the meeting packet and advised that the differences between them were entirely related to how long-term debt would be serviced.

An "Option D" was suggested by Cecil Reniche-Smith and explored, removing both the police station bond payment and the Swift culvert bond payment from the operating budget to the 1% fund. This would drive the increase in the FY27 amount to be raised by taxes down below 2% but obligate \$82,000+ of 1% funds each year going forward for several years.

Consensus was to remove \$12,000 from the draft under "signs and posts" which the town management had inserted towards procuring two more stationary radar speed signs. It was thought that the presence of the sheriff's department for traffic control and our ongoing restaffing of our police department (plus the two existing radar signs on Grove St and Franklin St) may be sufficient to deter speeding.

As noted on the warned agenda, a vote to finalize the FY27 budget proposal was held toward the end of the meeting. At 8:52PM, **Cecil Reniche-Smith moved and Jeff Haylon seconded adoption of Option C LESS \$12,000 from the signs and posts line, for a total amount to be raised by taxes of \$2,942,153. This is a 2.27% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes over what the voters approved for FY26. VOTED 5-0.**

As noted on the warned agenda, this workshop also included consideration of capital spending for FY27. The town management team had recommended asking the voters for a tax-neutral voted capital appropriation in the amount of \$50,000 (same as FY26) to be used toward Wheeler Road resurfacing, which will be costly. At 8:53PM, Cecil Reniche-Smith moved and Jeff Haylon seconded such an article. The vote was 2-2-1: Reniche-Smith and Haylon in favor; Coolidge and Ethier opposed; Bailey abstained. The motion failed; likely to be revisited.

4 As the entire meeting was a cooperative effort among the board and the public, no additional public comment was offered.

No further FY27 budget workshops are scheduled presently. Next regular selectboard Monday 22 December.

The selectboard will host an informational pre Town Meeting at the Town Hall at 11AM on Saturday, January 31st before early voting starts for the March 3rd election at which voters will see this FY27 budget proposal on their ballots. The traditional evening-before Town Meeting will be held at the Town Hall at 7PM on Monday, March 2.

5 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 Created on December 9, 2025 at 7:01 PM by Minutes AI

- Meeting called to order at 7:02 PM.
- The meeting is a workshop, encouraging participation.
- This may be the last or next to last budget meeting.

Budget Options presented by Town Manager Seth Hopkins

- Three different budget options (A, B, and C) were presented, differing only in how debt service is handled.
- Option A: Keep paying debt service bond payments out of the budget, resulting in a 4.72% increase.
- Option B: Move the police station bond payment to be paid from the 1% fund, resulting in a 3.95% increase.
- Option C: Put the police station bond back in the budget but remove the bond for the culvert and Bridge 114, resulting in a 2.69% increase. This is the town management team's recommendation.

Changes Since Last Budget Presentation

- Fire district to fund \$15,000 toward the town's work on drinking water billing and collection.
- Removed \$5,000 for the workbook project, suggested funding from fund balance if needed.
- Increased highway department signs and posts by \$12,000 for radar speed signs.
- Made reductions to the amount available in police overtime.

Discussion on 1% Fund

- Option C moves about \$58,000 out of the operating budget to be taken care of by the 1% fund revenue.
- The police station bond pays off in FY33 (7 years), and the bridge bond pays off in FY38 (12 years).
- The unobligated 1% fund balance is \$400,000.

Proposal to Pay Off Police Station Bond by Selectboard Member Brian Coolidge

- Suggestion to use the money saved from the vacant lieutenant and officer positions in the police department to pay off the police building bond.
- This could save about $\frac{3}{4}\%$ a year for the life of the bond.
- The police bond was borrowed at a low interest rate (around 3%).
- The balance of the lease fund on July 1st of this year was \$177,500.
- After a payment for FY26, there would be about \$150,000 left on that bond.

Alternative Budget Scenario (Option D)

- Remove both the police and bridge bond payments from the operating budget and fund them from the 1% fund.
- This would result in a 1.84% increase in taxes.
- It would obligate the 1% fund payment at least for the first year.

Options for Budget Cuts

- Option B or C: Move a bond payment on a permanent, recurring basis, so it doesn't need to be built back into the operating budget.
- Option D: Takes \$82.6k out of the operating budget, and at the end of the fiscal year, the surplus is evaluated to determine if it makes sense to pay off bonds with higher interest rates than the police station bond.
 - Option D would be a one-year plan, reverting to option C if the surplus is used to pay off the police bond.
 - This would eliminate the issue of money returning to the operating budget.

Police Department Likely Surplus

- It's suggested to dedicate a percentage of the police department surplus towards paying down debt.
- Cecil's suggestion is a bridge to a decision about where to allocate this year's payments.
- End of August/Labor Day: FY26 numbers will close, providing an idea of the surplus generated.

Loan Considerations

- Loans are viewed as spending tomorrow's income.
- Jan suggests attacking either the smallest loans or those with the highest interest rates.
- Interest rates on town loans are low, under 4%, with the truck payment potentially being the highest at around 5% [Note: later confirmed to be 4.5%].

Cash Flow and Budget Decisions

- Cash flow, in terms of obligations within the operating budget, drives the amount to be raised by taxes.
- Option C or D allows delaying the decision of where to spend the surplus.
- The immediate decision is the plan for bond payments this year.

New Highway Department Building

- Potential borrowing scenarios: \$750,000 or \$1 million.
 - A million-dollar bond would result in \$93,000 annual payments at 4.5%.
- The goal is to have the highway project ready for a bond request when the segment six bond is paid off.
- The focus is on keeping the building at the current site and avoiding overbuilding.

Police Department Staffing and Expenses

- \$115,000 in obligations to come for police wages, meaning \$175,000 of the \$311,000 line will be spent.
- Approximately \$136,000 would remain unspent in that line.
- The oldest cruiser is a 2020 model, and our newest auction-and-replace resulted in a fleet of three cruisers.
 - The chief believes each officer should have a cruiser as part of their dedicated essential equipment.

Water and Wastewater Fees

- The water fee was reduced from \$30,000 to \$15,000, based on what the prudential committee was willing to incorporate into the fire district budget.
- The wastewater department is charged \$30,000 because the town handles more of its budget management and payables compared to the fire district (employees' HR, budget building and management, vendor payments, etc.).
- The \$15,000 reduction was offset by the HPC workbook funding and adjustments to the police overtime line.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

- There is no existing MOU between the town and the fire district regarding billing and responsibilities.
- The Prudential Committee desires an MOU with an index for inflation to avoid annual debates about the contribution amount.
- A comprehensive MOU is needed to outline responsibilities and cost-sharing and cover several other areas.

Time Tracking

- A previous attempt to implement a time tracking system across all departments was unsuccessful.
- Estimates for time spent on water district matters are currently provided by staff, but a more defensible method is needed.
- Both the town and the fire district agree on the need for an MOU.

Speed Carts and Signs

- There is already one speed cart.
- Stationary signs are cheaper than speed carts.
- The possibility of buying two stationary signs is being considered.
 - Potential locations: North Street, Union Street, Champlain Street, and Pearl Street.
- Concerns about the effectiveness of speed signs were raised.
 - One person stated, "I like seeing the thank you."
 - Another person stated, "I slow down. I like getting a good grade."
- Permanent signs may not be valuable.
 - One person stated, "I think it's more of a placebo effect for the people that complain about speeders than to actually deter the speeders."

Sheriff's Department

- Putting money into the sheriff's department is considered more substantial.
- The sheriff's department has a reputation for writing tickets.
- The sheriff's department will be writing tickets based on violating the Brandon traffic ordinance, which makes it a Brandon revenue.
 - The goal is not to raise money via traffic tickets. Town Manager Hopkins stated, "I don't think law enforcement revenues ought to be considered a budget balancer."
- The state gets the revenue if the traffic ticket is written on the state road.
- Local police have more discretion about when to issue warnings versus tickets.

Budget Adjustments

- Option C is being considered, which includes leaving the police station payment in.
- Adjustments to Option C:
 - Removing the Swifty overflow culvert and Bridge 114 (\$58,000), which was being paid from 1% money.
 - Taking off \$12,000 for speed signs.
- The adjusted increase in the amount to be raised by taxes is 2.27%.

Town Clerk's Department

- The HRA (Health Reimbursement Arrangement) for the town clerk's department went from \$4,800 to \$7,700.
- This increase is due to the possibility of a new employee (unknown, replacing a retirement) needing a family plan.
- The HRA gets funded once a year.
- Unused HRA funds revert back to the town.

Recreation Department

- The assistant rec director's pay is going from \$23,000 to \$34,400.
- This is to allow the assistant rec director to work 25 hours a week.
 - Currently, she is budgeted for 20 hours but works about 15-20 hours per week.
- The threshold for benefits is 30 hours per week.
- The assistant rec director has a full-time job outside of this position.
- The figure of \$34,400 is based on 25 hours a week, but she may not actually work that many hours.

Recreation Position

- The extra five hours could provide coverage outside of 9 to 5, especially for events and town hall activities.
- An example was given of an event where "she was here until 9 o'clock" and it "saved me from being here till 9 o'clock because she was here working this event."
- She could also manage events like basketball games on Saturdays, which currently requires paying a contractor \$25 an hour.
- One board member stated, "I see it as a ceiling number that, you know, some weeks she may actually work those many hours but some weeks she might not."

Police Department - Staffing Hours

- The current temporary administrative assistant is part-time. She came on board while the previous full-time administrative assistant was out on family medical leave. That permanent employee then retired.
- The union contract states "Police secretaries shall work the number of hours specified and scheduled by the Town, which in any event shall be a minimum of 28 hours per week."
- The police chief stated that officers are currently doing paperwork that is not optional, such as court orders, which is taking priority over other duties outside the station.

Police Department - Full Time Position

- The difference in wage between the candidate with four years of experience and the lowest wage officer out of the police academy is \$9 an hour, which would be a savings of \$18,000 a year.
- The administrative person qualifies for VMERS retirement C, while officers qualify at VMERS retirement D, which is a 3% savings to the town.
- The candidate already has all the job skills and does not need to go to the police academy or take annual training hours.
- The candidate will free up the chief and Officers Kelleher and Cochrane and Lieutenant Samataro to do more impactful police work.

Police Department - Candidate Information

- The candidate is not interested in a 30-hour-a-week job and is looking for a full-time position.
- The candidate was recently working for the Vermont State Police and has comprehensive training in systems specific to policing and Vermont agencies.
- The candidate is expected to do more administrative tasks, freeing up officers to focus on police work.
- The candidate is described as motivated, organized, and high energy.

Police Department - Sheriff Liaison and Coverage

- The town manager is the town liaison that interacts with the sheriffs.

- If the other officer position is filled, the officers could potentially do more of the work currently done by the sheriff's department.
- The goal is to extend police coverage into the evenings and weekends, reducing reliance on the state police.
- There is a potential savings of \$50,000 by not providing benefits for a full-time position.

Police Department - Paperwork

- An example was given of a recent order from the state to expunge every cannabis arrest made by the town's police department.
- The candidate knows the difference between expunging and sealing records.
- The town is held to a high standard of legal forms being submitted on time and in the correct manner.
- The current part-time employee was hired as a temporary person after Linda retired and knew it was for a limited time.
- The chief has raised burnout, which is partly due to a lack of full-time administrative support.
 - The police station is expected by the community to be staffed from 8 to 4, Monday to Friday.
- Ethan is respectful of overtime concerns and mainly incurs it when in the field.
- Officers address the backlog of calls from the weekend on Mondays and spend time on paperwork after clearing those calls.

Value of Full-Time Admin Support

- Freeing up police officers to do police work is valuable.
- If a lower-paid admin person can handle tasks, it's money well spent.
- There's a question from Chair Bailey of whether the Chief is willing to delegate all the admin work.
- The town manager believes the new hire will be eager to take on the work.

Part-Time Police Officer vs. Full-Time Admin

- The town hasn't had many takers for sworn officer positions.
- Selectboard member Ralph Ethier stated he would like to see more police officers, suggesting hiring the admin lady part-time and two part-time officers.
- Town manager Seth Hopkins offered that hiring a qualified full-time admin person will let us all see more police officers by allowing current officers to be out of the station and in the community more.
- Ralph would like to find someone who can be both a receptionist and a police officer, and Seth hoped it would be acknowledged that that person is a unicorn.

Field Training and Budget

- The chief has been doing field training with Officer Cochrane, but she won't have to repeat it after the Academy.
- Paul also needs field training to learn the local conditions of Brandon.
- The Town manager stated he is pleased with the overall budget and the police department's budget.
- Selectboard member Jeff Haylon offered that good admins make offices enjoyable and efficient, and he wants to avoid burnout for the police officers.

Capital Improvements and Paving

- Seth is recommending an appropriation for paving Wheeler Rd and aprons on Rydon Acres and Stone Mill Dam.
- \$50,000 is requested towards the \$250,000-\$270,000 needed for the project.
- The voters can choose whether to approve the appropriation.
- One board member suggests using the fund balance if Wheeler Road goes over budget.

Appropriation vs. Budget Inclusion

- Including the \$50,000 in the budget could lead to the budget failing due to the increased amount to be raised by taxes.
- The town manager believes voters should be able to partially direct spending through appropriations.
- Asking for an appropriation provides tax relief compared to the previous year, but this won't be reflected in the amount to be raised by taxes.
- The previous year's appropriation was for "capital," while this year's is capital specifically for "paving."

Consistency and Communication (Jan Coolidge)

- The changes in terminology and funding sources (appropriations, budget, 1% money) can be confusing for voters.
- The changes are made to stabilize the overall amount to be raised by taxes (Hopkins).

- One board member prefers discreet appropriation requests with clear identification of what they are for.

Paving Project and Voter Input

- Calling it a paving project and naming it is the most consistent way to communicate with voters.
- The Town's estimate for Wheeler Road was \$230,000 a year ago, and it will likely be more now.
- If the voters reject the \$50,000 appropriation, the project's funding will be affected.

Roads and Funding

- If voters reject funding for paved roads, alternative funding sources will be sought.
- Roads in need of repair:
 - Wheeler Road
 - Apron on Stone Mill Dam to the bridge and apron on Rydon Acres
 - Class 2 roads: Union, McConnell, Pearl, and High Pond Road (ditching/shoulders could cover the match)
- Class 2 funding application deadline is in April, with notification around July 1st.

Consistency in Budgeting

- The request for funds is consistent with the previous year, focusing on a specific capital project within the broader capital category.
- Specificity in budget allocation allows for greater accountability to voters.
- Capital plan every year with an explanation could be an option.

Taxpayer Accountability (Barry Varian)

- Appropriations should be handled like the operating budget, with taxpayer funding and accountability.
- The 1% fund is considered "manna from heaven" and doesn't carry the same expectation of taxpayer awareness.
- Appropriations for specific projects, like paving on McConnell Road, ensure that funds are used for that purpose.

Budget Process (Doug Bailey)

- The budget process is an exercise to estimate expenses and determine the amount to be raised by taxes.
- Management has the authority to adjust allocations within the limits of final budget number.
- Distrust in the past led to tighter budgets and specific allocations for projects like paving.

Budget Vote and Appropriations

- A motion was made to approve option C removing \$12,000 for radar speed signs. Passed unanimously.
- An appropriation of \$50,000 was proposed for capital improvements, specifically Wheeler Road.
- The appropriation would be tax-neutral, as a similar amount was requested the previous year.
- A motion was made to continue with a \$50,000 appropriation for capital/Wheeler Road.
- The vote resulted in a tie, with two votes in favor and two against and one abstention.
- The possibility of tabling the motion until the next meeting was discussed.

Pre-Town Meeting

- A pre-town meeting was scheduled for Saturday January 31st at 11:00 AM at the Town Hall.
- The idea of holding the meeting on a Saturday morning is to potentially attract different voters than can attend a weekday/school night evening meeting. The traditional night before voting Town Meeting will still be held as usual on Monday March 2nd at the Town Hall (7PM). Voting at the American Legion Tuesday March 3rd.