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**MINUTES OF JANUARY 12, 2026**

**SELECTBOARD**

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

Others Present: Seth Hopkins, Bill Moore, Jan Coolidge, Barry Varian, Brent Buehler, Gerad Lowell, Ken Manning, Todd Nielsen, Steve Bissette, Ray Marcoux, Mike Frankiewicz, Jack Schneider, David Kachajian (chief of police), Paul Samataro (lieutenant). By Zoom: Bruce Jenson, Keith Whitcomb, George Wetmore, Chris Powers, Tom Kilpeck.

- 1 Chair Doug Bailey called the meeting to order at 7PM. All selectboard members were seated. Motion by Reniche-Smith/Haylon to adopt the posted agenda. Voted 5-0.
- 2 Bailey offered brief remarks to foster a smooth and courteous meeting.
- 3 Chief Kachajian introduced Paul Samataro as the new lieutenant in the police department. The chair and board welcomed Lt Samataro to the Town of Brandon professional staff with words of welcome and a round of applause. Cecil Reniche-Smith and Seth Hopkins who had participated on the interview panel both expressed how confident they were in what a good fit for Brandon Lt Samataro will be.
- 4 Motion by Haylon/Coolidge to consider items 4a through 4e as a consent agenda. Voted 5-0. Motion by Haylon/Coolidge to approve the consent agenda. Voted 5-0.
- 5 Reports to the selectboard were provided by the town management team. Please see app-generated notes appearing below for topics discussed. No votes were required.
- 6 After discussion of merits of various approaches to paying for paving work in FY27, the board took no action with respect to requesting an appropriation article for paving, so we will forgo an article this year. Since the voters approved a \$50,000 article last year, and that will drop off the taxes this year, this will be another \$50,000 reduction in the amount to be raised by taxes.
- 7 Public comment on other items was called for; none was forthcoming.

The board recessed at 7:32. The board reconvened at 7:38.

- 8 Motion by Haylon/Reniche-Smith to enter executive session per 1 VSA §313(a)(3) regarding the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee, to include the town management team. Voted 5-0. The board entered executive session at 7:39. Seth Hopkins and Bill Moore exited the executive session at 7:41.

Motion by Reniche-Smith/Haylon to exit executive session at 7:53. Voted 5-0. No action required.

- 9 Motion to adjourn by Coolidge/Reniche-Smith. Not debatable. Voted 5-0. 7:53PM.

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 Selectboard Meeting Created on January 12, 2026 at 7:00 PM by Minutes AI

- 1 - Agenda adopted as warned.
- 2 - Select board opening remarks: The speaker hopes everyone treats each other and the board with courtesy and respect.

### 3 Introduction of New Lieutenant

- Paul Samataro introduced as the new police lieutenant.
- He has been with the department for about a month.
- Paul: "Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it. I look forward to working with everybody here."
- He was the result of a one year search.
- He comes from another Vermont agency and has a long history of working in Vermont in small towns.
- He has been doing police work in Vermont since 2016, and in New Hampshire and Massachusetts for another thirty years combined.

### 4 Consent Agenda

- Items 4A through E moved to a consent agenda.
- Motion passed.

### 5 Reports to the Selectboard - Mr. Hopkins

- Select board will host a pre-town meeting on Saturday, January 31st at 11:00 am at the Town Hall to present the fiscal 27 budget proposal.
- Three properties removed from the tax sale: 89 Furnace Road, 225 Furnace Road, and 16 Carver Street.
- The town received \$1,500 as a cleanup payment from the state for local approval of cannabis licenses.
- Equalization study:
  - Brandon's common level of appraisal is 61.86%.
  - The state average adjustment is 70.33%.
  - There will be adjustments based on the number that will affect the school tax.
  - The town is working with assessing folks to go out to bid for reappraisal.
- The town manager will need the select board to finalize the town meeting warning at the next meeting.

#### Questions for the Town Manager

- The pre-town meeting is on a Saturday at 11 am.
- The reason of a pre town meeting is to allow people to get a jump on it or for people that are getting their mail ballots and filling them out before town meeting.

#### Cannabis Licenses

- Question about how many cannabis licenses have lapsed.
  - Mr Hopkins doesn't know off the top of his head, suggests he will get info from the state cannabis commission.
  - No retail licenses have lapsed.
- Select board approves licenses for cultivation or manufacturing.
  - These aren't closely tracked because it's done through the state.
  - The state asks the town if the local commission can review applications.

#### Website Development

- The website will include a community calendar for events by branded organizations, housed at brandon.org.
- The new website will have a meetings calendar specific to town meetings on the front page.
- Training on how to post agendas and minutes, and manage subscription lists will be conducted.
  - Bill, Sue (town clerk), and Seth will be trained.
- People can submit events for the brandon.org calendar.

#### Tax Rate

- Acknowledgment of hard work in keeping the tax rate stable.
- Reference to articles about other towns having significant tax increases.
- The proposed increase is 2.27%.

#### Community Development Report (Mr. Moore)

- Mountainside Flooring is refinishing floors in the Town Hall.
- Next Stop Comedy and Foley Brothers are partnering for a comedy night on January 17th.
- The Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forest is hosting a public meeting on January 21st.
  - Topic: project related to northern escarpment ecological restoration and fire resilience project pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Specifically applies to the Middlebury Ranger District in the towns of Leicester, Middlebury and Salisbury.
- A moderated discussion, "The Vaccine Dilemma," will be held on January 22nd.
  - Organized by concerned citizens, featuring medical professionals.
  - Moderated by Bernie Carr and filmed by Peg TV.

- Dance with Miss Michaela starts on January 27th.
- Otter Valley has a great intern program.
  - Two interns, Ben McGuigan and Braeden Waldie (president and vice president of the senior class), have been assisting the town.

## 6 Capital/Paving Appropriation Article

- Discussion about placing a \$50,000 capital/paving appropriation article on the town meeting ballot.
- This could be used for paving or resurfacing Wheeler Road.
- If approved, it would reduce the amount needed from other sources like the 1% fund.
- If not approved, it would result in a \$50,000 cut in taxes collected for capital projects.
- Bailey stated that if there is an appropriation for paving and a specific street is named, he would vote for it. However, if it's only for capital, he will vote no.

- If the article is "\$50,000 for the purpose of paving Wheeler Road," Bailey is in favor.
- Bailey believes that the appropriation should have a defined use and be followed accordingly.

### Capital Plan and Local Option Tax

- Cecil Reniche-Smith communicated with Seth about towns raising taxes for specific capital appropriations within their operating budget.
- Cecil is unclear about the necessity of a separate capital fund, given the local option tax.
- There is a question of whether to have both the local option tax and separate capital appropriations.
- Ralph Ethier is in favor of paving roads but believes it should be a maintenance item in the budget, not an appropriation.
- The board member suggests starting with \$20,000 in the budget for paving.
- The 1% fund was initially intended to partially fund paving.

### 1% Fund and Budget Reduction

- Bailey agrees about putting something in the budget for paving, especially since a bond payment will be completed next year, reducing the budget.
- There is a consensus that paving should be in the budget along with 1% money being used for paving.

### Capital Resources and Options

- Seth stated that there is no wrong answer regarding the appropriation, as Brandon is in a good position with its capital resources.
- The town can use the 1% fund to complete the Wheeler Road project, but it will reduce the reserve.
- The capital fund balance is currently \$70,500 and is expected to increase by \$5,200 from the cruiser pickup.
- The town has good resources and the decision is about what is most prudent.
- The decision is whether to have an appropriation or not, but paving will still be done on Stone Mill Dam Road bridge and Rydon Acres entryways.
- Paving decisions can still be made regarding Carver and Union streets (eligible for Class 2 grants) instead of Wheeler Road (Class 3 so not eligible).
- Wheeler Road is a large project due to its length and will likely not qualify for state grants.
- Brian Coolidge offered that the town should receive two more quarters of 1% money before spending it, totaling around \$145,000.
- Jan suggested pavers may have revised estimates since fuel costs have come down.
- Estimates are based on numbers from last summer, specifically from quotes obtained when deciding between Town Farm Road and Wheeler Road last year.

- The estimates have not been updated.
- Bids will be obtained when a decision is made to proceed.
- The difference in cost on the two bids for Town Farm Road was minimal, around \$100 on a \$150,000 job.
- Jeff Haylon is unsure about the need for a separate appropriation, suggesting voters could decide.
  - "I'm pretty agnostic about appropriations. If the voters want to vote on it, I'm happy to let them."
- The consensus is that an appropriation is not needed.
- No vote will be taken, meaning no appropriation this year.

7 - Public comment was sought; none forthcoming. - A five-minute recess was called.

8 - A motion was made to enter executive session per 1 VSA 313 (a)(3) appointment evaluation of a public officer, including town management staff.

- A motion was made to come out of executive session with no action taken, which was seconded and approved.
- A motion to adjourn was made, seconded, and approved at 7:53.