

**Town of Brentwood Municipal Budget Committee**  
**Minutes of February 10, 2025 Public Hearing Meeting held at Rec Center**

*Members Present:* Jack Mitchell (Chair), Michelle Siudut (secretary), Alina Arida, Gabbie Kelly, Kat Niemeroksi, Jennifer Jones (Selectboard rep), Brian Duffy (Swasey rep)

Jack called the hearing to order at 6:30 pm. The pledge of allegiance was recited. He introduced the committee and gave an overview of the committee's activities over the past year.

Jack began a slide presentation (which will be posted on the town website). Starting with the bottom line, combining Town, County (estimated), Swasey & Co-op budgets brings a 6.2% increase over last year, for a total of \$26,357,688. This is not an estimate of our 2025 taxes, just the difference from last year. Tax rates are not set until the fall, so the numbers provided are just estimates.

Town Operating Budget \$6,870,672, which is an increase of \$571,910 or 9.1% over last year. \$43,629 of ARPA funds will be used to offset the Waste Collection/Disposal.

Town Warrant Articles \$561,226, which is an increase of \$176,226 or 46% over last year.

County Budget \$648,706 (this is an Estimate) which is an increase of \$44,311 or 7.3% over last year. This increase is up more than any other town, and we are working to find out why.

Swasey Budget \$7,338,783, which is an increase of \$281,401 or 4% over last year.

Swasey Solar Panels \$120,962 which is an increase of \$99,712 or 469% over last year

Revaluation will be completed by fall. This will have an impact on the tax rate and your November tax bill.

The total debt principal is \$2M. Outstanding debt include:

- \$525K for the fire station
- \$405K for the purchase of land easements
- \$200K for the restructure of Prescott Road
- \$250K for the Fuller easement
- \$662K for Swasey solar panels

The way the estimated tax was calculated was new this year, resulting in a 7.1% increase. Generally we've presumed variables remain the same as the previous year; using the former method would be an 8.1% increase. It is estimated the tax impact will be \$2/thousand.

Questions from residents:

\*Liz Faria: Questioned why 33 budgets were listed but there are 40 budgets; response was some budgets such as trash/recycling and debt/debt interest were combined. Liz wanted to articulate that Swasey warrant articles do have a tax impact, but they won't raise taxes (it could go back to the taxpayers). Liz noted warrant articles aren't included in Co-Op budget; response was 3 would take from unreserved funds and there was one for \$923,316 for collective bargaining. Liz questioned the slide that had been presented that showed a \$1.6M savings; Jack explained he averaged the cost per pupil in other towns,

found the difference between our CPP (cost per pupil) and theirs, and multiplied it times the number of Swasey students.

\*Rebecca Dunham requested an explanation of slide 24, which showed the tax impact. Jack said he estimated town revenues (primarily car registrations, pet licenses) and the fund balance.

\*Tara Haley questioned some expenditures by town which were never voted on by towns people, such as pickleball court.

\*Jim Michaud commented that BudCom seems to support every increase. He feels the BudCom should be looking to make cuts, stated they are not doing their job.

\*Question if unspent money gets returned to taxpayers. Selectboard member Jennifer Jones said yes, money is returned every year unless there is not enough available (they “hold” an amount every year).

\*Question about spending money on pickleball and amphitheater. Responded the BudCom had no part of those decisions; neither project came from taxes, instead they came from ARPA funds. Statement that ARPA funds IS taxpayer money.

\*Ethan Schweitzer asked what metric we use to determine the value of the grant writer, to which there was no answer. He stated the bottom line is “taxes are substantial increases” and he suggests cutting 5% from each budget.

\*Mike Kirby suggested we not keep machines as spares, but sell them! He noted there are companies that can refurbish anything; asked how hard did you try to find parts. Wayne Robinson responded.

\*Ward Byrne stated increase percentages are Crazy. Increases in this amount wouldn’t happen anywhere but here.

\*Chief Bird defended his increase request, and labor increase request.

\*Scott Brunell (?) said to consider wants v needs; these increases are running people out of town.

\*Lt Justin Doty said PD are expected to be at all calls. Rise in mental health issues make calls more complicated; need to have two officers for such calls. Sheriff’s department is not available for day to day backup as they are doing other things; State Police is understaffed. Our PD is fully staffed; additional officers are not anticipated for the next few years. Residents were invited to ride alongs or PD visits.

\*Kate Parks asked about types of calls for Fire and PD; response was they could be anything from animal control to traffic accidents.

\*Question of where does traffic fine money go; response all ticket monies go to the state.

\*Gabbie Kelly said Brentwood is in the top 10 most affluent towns.

\*Fire chief said other small towns experience less than half the calls Brentwood has.

\*Jim Michaud said he does not want to cut fire/police, but consider wants v needs; cut instead of spend.

\*Jim Hajjar questioned how Jack estimated a 10% revenue increase on slide 24. He also questioned the large fund balance to reduce taxes; how could you return that much and still have some saved? At this point a spending cap won’t even help; we need to lower taxes.

\*Steve Dawson said the BudCom and Selectboard are elected; if you don’t like what they are doing elect someone else.

\*Eric Turer (state rep) said the town has costs which the state used to share, but no longer do such as retirement. The budget we are discussing plays a role in our property values. He urged people to talk to him about what is happening at the state level. The state doesn’t have money to hand down.

\*Patrick Marcoux said we’re here trying to cut nickels when we should be at the Co-op cutting dollars. He suggested taking your anger to Selectboard and to Co-op.

\*Brett Ramsdell said increases should be based on EXPENDED not appropriated amounts. Those percentages are much different. FD budget is 50% over last year's spend. A 21.2% increase in Hardware/software support should make us more efficient; maybe we could minimize staffing. Questioned who oversees the grant writer and what they bring in.

\*Daphne Woss (town clerk) asked that all be respectful of town employees - they are your neighbors.

\*Mark Hanik asked what COLA increase was; Jennifer Jones (selectboard) said Three Bearings financial advisors gave 2.9% COLA; the town added merit of 0%-2%; for a total of 3-5%. He also said once a cost is added, it will never go away.

\*Erica Kelly asked if ALS was included in Fire; response no. We may make money in the first year to house them, but after that, it is unclear; we may use ambulance fees. She asked why we didn't go to market for other trash companies; Jennifer Jones (selectboard) said all 3 companies are priced similarly, they were on a time crunch for a contract due to former administrator not pursuing bids, so they re-contracted with Casella.

\*Debi Laroche questioned if it is cost effective to recycle, if it is not we should stop recycling.

\*Jim Berlo said the town population in 2021 was 4710, last year it was 4712. Jennifer explained "town growth" is based on number of house lots, not population. Jim stated the town budget has increased \$2.5M in just 2 years.

\*Bill Dunham asked does recycling pay, since it probably ends up in landfill. He questioned if Swasey pays for DEIJ, extra psychologists, etc?

People with additional questions were urged to talk with BudCom chair Jack Mitchell or Selectboard chair Jennifer Jones.

Jack said slides will be posted on the town website by the end of the week.

Meeting adjourned at 9:08 pm.

**Upcoming Meetings** - meetings are open to the public and livestreamed on Brentwood YouTube channel  
Monday, Mar 3 2025, 6 pm: School District Meeting at Swasey School  
Tuesday, Mar 11 2025, 7 am to 7 pm: Town Election at Swasey School  
Saturday, Mar 15 2025, 9 am: Town Meeting at Swasey School

Respectfully submitted,  
Michelle Siudut, Secretary