

Town of Brentwood Municipal Budget Committee
Minutes of February 3, 2025 Meeting held at Town Office

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

Members Absent, excused: Alina Arida, Gabbie Kelly

Jack called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm. The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Meeting Minutes

Motion by Jack, seconded by Jennifer, to approve the January 13, 2025 meeting minutes; passed 4-0-1.

Selectboard Report - Jennifer Jones

No report.

Warrant Articles

Article 4: Front end loader purchase up to \$190,000, proposed by Highway Department

Highway Superintendent Wayne Robinson said our current loader is 23 years old, needs a new hydraulic unit, parts no longer available. There may be an option to lease a machine, which would require different wording; this will be decided prior to public hearing. Wayne said the machine is used weekly for recycling and always for snow removal. Wayne said if they don't get a new loader, they can use other equipment. Replacement of this item is on CIP for 2029, but the need is now.

Resident Brett Ramsdell asked if the BOS is recommending, answer yes. Brett felt this type of vehicle should last longer; Wayne said salt is an issue. Brett asked if old trucks are kept for spare; answer yes.

Michelle urged the Committee to think long and hard about approving everything.

Michelle asked the Highway Department to initiate the GreenSno program to potentially extend the life of our vehicles and to better serve the town and our environment.

Motion by Kat, seconded by Brian, to support Article 4 at \$190,000; passed 4-1.

Article 5: \$150,000 for Highway Vehicles/Equipment Purchase Capital Reserve Fund, proposed by Highway Department

This CRP currently has \$8,800; the target amount is \$870,000. Most of this fund was used in 2024 to purchase a truck. The Town's Capital Improvement Plan includes a \$300,000 truck purchase in 2026. Kat suggested lowering this number esp if we get a new front end loader; Jennifer said we've historically underfunded these CRFs.

Resident Jim Mlchaud suggested we find a used piece of equipment; Wayne and Jennifer said they are looking at used options.

Motion by Jack, seconded by Kat, to support Article 5 at \$150,000; passed 4-1.

Article 8: New Program Director Position for Recreation Department, proposed by Recreation Department

This would make the current seasonal position a full-time position. The total annual cost for this position

would be \$61,854, but the additional ask for 2025 would be \$26,226, as there are already some funds for this position in the budget.

Jack asked what would this provide that is not currently provided; Rec Director Andy Gray said it would make the department run more efficiently. This person would take over all summer camp and youth programming; but would also assist with other day to day tasks. Jack asked if this would bring new programs, Andy said the focus is efficiency. Michelle asked how many hours Andy works; he replied 40 hours per week, mostly at office.

Michelle said she doesn't understand why this department needs 2 FT people. Andy said nothing gets done if he's not here/out.

Resident Liz Faria asked about work-at-home employees, aren't they supposed to be full-time in?

Jennifer said Andy is allowed to stay home for bad weather.

Resident Jim Michaud doesn't understand why we need 2 people to run a Rec in a town this size; maybe we need to downsize programming. Andy said we provide service to people from other towns; there are resident and nonresident fees. Jim suggested an apprentice/intern.

Resident Ward Byrne said our tax rate is not sustainable; tough decisions need to be made; cuts or spending cap; evaluate wants vs needs; consider hiring freeze like State and Federal. Ward also expressed his outrage that the Jon Olsen memorial baseball field was replaced by a pickleball court; that field was named after a person who died in a car accident. Andy said the memorial field is relocated. Ward asked why the Town Shed has not been completed, but money is spent on unnecessary things. Motion by Kat, seconded by Brian, to support Article 8 at \$26,226 to hire full-time a program director position for recreation department; passed 4-1.

Article 1: General Municipal Operations \$6,827,043.

No vote required, as this Committee has supported this amount by approval of individual budgets.

Article 2: Adding \$170,000 to 5 Capital Reserve Funds, proposed by Selectboard

Information Systems Hardware. Asking for \$30,000; fund currently has \$96,115; goal is \$150,000. This is for computers/servers; a server is needed this year.

Revaluation. Asking for \$35,000 (increased from last year); fund currently has \$152,000; the previous goal was \$153,000. The bid for this year's revaluation is \$155,000, which is likely to be higher at next revaluation.

Maintenance of Town Buildings: Asking for \$25,000 (reduced from last year), fund currently has \$125,000; goal is \$150,000. This fund is for any town building needs. Expect to replace Rec windows (\$40K) this year (delayed from last year); will need new furnace in town office within 2 years.

Fire vehicles: Asking for \$50,000; fund currently has \$364,000, goal is \$1M. This is for truck purchase and repair.

Public Safety Radios: Asking for \$30,000; currently has \$32,000; goal is \$240,000. This covers radios for police, fire, highway. Question if all departments use the same radios, answer unknown. Jennifer said highway and police are due for new radios.

Resident Jim Berlo thought the Server fund was way too high; has anyone looked at what is really needed? Jim said the ambulance revolving fund should cover radios; asked for the actual usage of Ambulance revolving fund; Jennifer said that revolving fund would only cover fire/ambulance, not

highway or police. Jim urged the BudCom to dive into these goal amounts to determine what is really necessary.

Resident Liz Faria asked why Fire bought 50 radios when they don't have that many people; suggested some extras be used for highway.

Resident Ward Byrne compared the ask for 2022 to 2025 – a 58% increase in spending, not including warrant articles.

Resident Letty Bedard asked what the original budgetary increase was; Jennifer said it was a 15% increase, but the BOS brought it down to 8.39%. Some increases are a result of what the state is no longer, covering such as retirement. The BOS did a deep dive into each budget, which has not been done in recent years.

Resident Brett Ramsdell said that % is over what was approved, not what was spent. Jennifer said there is an amount that pays down the tax rate. So the tax rate is not what was spent, it is the total appropriations minus whatever the BOS uses to spend down. The ask is a 25% increase over what was SPENT last year. Brett asks that we PROVIDE THE PEOPLE WITH THE INCREASE OVER WHAT WAS SPENT, NOT what is ASKED FOR; there should be a hiring freeze.

Resident Liz Faria asked how raises/COLA were determined; Jennifer said department heads did their evaluations to determine raises; without a Town Administrator department heads were not evaluated but were given a flat 1% merit + 3% raise.

Motion by Michelle, to reduce this ask to \$105,000; there was no second.

Motion by Kat, seconded by Brian, to support Article 2 at \$170,000; passed 4-1.

Resident Ward Byrne said refusing to second a member's motion was unacceptable.

Article 3: Adding \$25,000 to the Multi-purpose Municipal Building Capital Reserve Fund, proposed by the Municipal Building Committee

Fund currently has \$144,587; goal is \$150,000. \$10,000 was expended last year for preliminary site review. Any excess funds would go toward the building. A building plan will not be presented this year. Motion by Jennifer, seconded by Kat, to support Article 3 at \$25,000; approved 3-2.

Article 6: Closing Solar Capital Reserve Fund, proposed by Energy Committee

Fund currently has \$23,974, which would be moved to the Solar Maintenance Fund. Question as to how much is being produced by the panels; Jennifer did not have exact numbers but said they cover the electricity in all town-owned buildings. Michelle requested those numbers be available for Town Meeting.

Motion by Jack, seconded by Kat, to approve Article 6; passed 5-0.

Article 7: Closing Library Amphitheater Capital Reserve Fund, proposed by the Selectboard

Fund has \$0. This Committee does not need to vote on this article, as it has no tax impact.

Article 9: Create a Capital Reserve Fund for the Master Plan, proposed by the Planning Board

Traditionally we have updated the master plan in pieces. This fund would provide the ability to update the whole master plan at once. Total cost of updating the Master Plan is around \$42,000. This article asks to create this new CRF and fund it with \$8,500 from unreserved fund balance. (That amount has been removed from the Planning Board budget.)

Resident Liz Faria is concerned this would not be legal, as 2024 has been closed. Jennifer will double check with DRA and Town Counsel. Michelle said she supports this idea, but does not support the warrant due to the questionable language.

Motion by Kat, seconded by Brian, to approve; approved 4-1.

Swasey School Report - Brian Duffy

Maintenance Capital Reserve Fund currently has \$152,000 with a \$150,000 goal; no funding request.

Safety/Security Capital Reserve Fund currently has \$52,000 with a \$50,000 goal; no funding request.

There are warrant articles for two capital reserve funds, with funds being taken from unreserved fund balance. If there are no unreserved funds, these will not get funded:

Special Education CRF: Goal is \$250,000; fund currently has \$197,000; asking for \$20,000.

Motion by Kat, seconded by Brian, to support; approved 5-0.

Technology CRF: Goal is \$50,000; fund currently has \$10,000; asking for \$10,000.

Liz Faria asked how much was in the budget for computer services; answer \$114,637 for computer services, aides, new equipment. Letty suspected funds from this CRF was for routers.

Motion by Jennifer, seconded by Jack, to support; approved 5-0.

Solar Panels are installed, not visible from the road. Final connection to grid should be completed any day. Pre-application has been submitted for rebate.

Resident Brett Ramsdell asked how the panels will be cleaned after snow, at the pitch they are at; Brian will find out.

New Business

Resident Jim Hajjar shared a municipal comparison slide presentation he created, using towns with similar valuations and similar populations (Candia, Chester, Danville, Deerfield, Fremont, Greenland, Newton, Northwood, Nottingham). He noted that many comparisons used in the past have been to towns not comparable to Brentwood in these ways. One would expect that a town with a similar geography, similar population, and a similar valuation would have similar town budgets appropriations.

His data analysis found that Brentwood ranks as follows:

- o Population ranked at 44th percentile (in middle)
- o Valuation ranked at 33rd percentile (in lower third)
- o Valuation per capita (per person) ranked 44th percentile (in middle)
- o Total Tax commit ranked 88th percentile (second highest)
- o Town Tax commit ranked 77th percentile (third highest)
- o Town total appropriation ranked 88th percentile (second highest)
- o Police, Fire, Library appropriation ranked 88th percentile (second highest)
- o Highway appropriation ranked 22nd percentile (third lowest)
- o Recreation appropriation ranked 50th percentile (in middle of those similar towns that fund a rec department)

In summary, comparisons are very useful in evaluating how a town operates relative to other very similar towns. This specific data does NOT identify any specific issues, nor does it make any judgments on our

town or on our departments. This data is very valuable in identifying areas that need to be more deeply analyzed to understand the reasons why we are so different than other similar towns whether we are much higher or much lower in any budget area or department. Jim urged the budget committee to investigate these findings further and make recommendations based on the results of those investigations.

In reference to the fire department, FD Administrative Assistant Katarina Tennant feels those comparisons may not be comparable because of the way each town is set up. Some towns contract to private ambulances & pay fees. She stated in 2024 Brentwood had almost double the number of calls of neighboring towns (1030), and noted all towns may not count their calls the same way.

There was discussion about various ways to compare and by different parameters.

Letty asked if the Public Hearing will be livestreamed; answer yes.
Meeting adjourned at 8:34 pm.

A recording of this meeting can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/@townofbrentwoodnh>

Upcoming Meetings - meetings are open to the public and livestreamed on Brentwood YouTube channel

Feb 10 2025 at 6 pm: Regular Meeting at Rec Center

Feb 10 2025 at 6:30 pm: Public Hearing at Rec Center

Feb 17 2025 at 6pm: Subsequent Public Hearing if necessary, at Town Office

Mar 3 2025 at 6 pm: School District Meeting at Swasey School

Mar 11 2025 7 am to 7 pm: Town Election

Mar 15 2025 at 9 am: Town Meeting

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Siudut, Secretary