

**Town of Brentwood Municipal Budget Committee
Minutes of April 21, 2025 Meeting held at Town Office**

Members Present: Michelle Siudut (Secretary), Jim Hajjar, Alina Arida, Kat Niemiroski, Gabbie Kelly, Letty Bedard (Selectboard rep), Dan Hebert (Swasey rep)

Michelle called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm. The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Elections

Motion by Siudut, seconded by Niemiroski, to nominate Jim Hajjar as Chair. Concerns raised that Jim is newly elected. Request by Arida for Siudut to run for that seat, due to her tenure on the board and ability to remain calm; Siudut declined. Bedard asked if any longer-standing committee member would be willing to run; none were. Hajjar presented his desire & qualifications for the position.

Bedard and Arida expressed a preference for Siudut. Motion to elect Hajjar as Chair passed 5-0-2

Motion by Bedard seconded by Arida to nominate Siudut as Secretary; motion passed 7-0-0

Minutes

Motion by Siudut, seconded by Niemiroski to approved the minutes from the Feb 10 meeting; passed 4-0-3

Motion by Bedard, seconded by Arida to approve minutes from the Feb 10 public hearing; passed 5-0-2

Selectboard Report - Letty Bedard

The Selectboard put out a RFQ for 2-3 options for a Municipal Building, to be presented at the Town Meeting next March. Bedard is concerned the bond payment will not fall within the 4% cap that was passed at the last Town Meeting. Kelly asked if any current bonds will be paid off this year; Bedard doubted if there were that they would make a big enough difference. Hajjar asked what bond amount is being used; Bedard said NH Bond Bank provided rates for a \$10M bond at \$1M/year for 15yrs, \$957K/year for 20yrs, \$784K/year for 25yrs, \$728K/year for 30yrs.

The cap law is newly enacted so NHMA is unsure if there is an override for more than 10%. It is also unclear if the total tax commitment will include the unreserved fund balance or amounts for warrant articles that were paid by fund balance. Further inquiries will be made to town counsel. Kelly said that by voting for the cap the voters are asking us to prioritize what will be funded. Bedard said cuts will be necessary.

Arida asked this discussion be tabled for now, until we get more information. Hajjar said he will find out how we account for warrants that were funded by fund balance, in regards to the cap, and also, if there is any way to override the 10% limit. Discussion that If we will be unable to fund the building at this time, we may need to stop pursuing options. Next Municipal Building Committee meeting is May 6 at 1:30, Bedard hopes for an answer to these questions before that meeting.

Audit. There is an audit happening, that is separate from the annual audit. Reconciliations had been outsourced up to Dec 2023/Jan2024, but have not been done since then. It is unclear why the outside contract was terminated. Kelly said reconciliations have been noted as a problem in previous audits.

Arida said this was brought up in the past, but there was pushback from people who are no longer here. 2024 is being addressed now. It is unclear how long the process will take; it is one person who is handling the whole thing. It is also unclear who would do them going forward. Kelly asked who is managing the audit; Bedard suspects it is the Town Administrator.

Arida said there are two systems, one for accounting and another for payments. Our software is very outdated.

Discussion of the town needing a financial officer, which we do not currently have.

Swasey School Report - Dan Hebert

1. School Board/school organization is the same as last year with re-election of Kate Bonafede. Duffy is chair, Fitzgerald is vice chair. Chris Adriski will replace Esther Asbell as Superintendent of SAU16.
2. Swasey budget- Hebert expressed thanks for passing the budget as presented.
3. Solar Panel project- the panels are active and generating power. Financial implication forthcoming. Rebate is in process; it is unclear how long it will take to receive this.
4. Academic performance- early to mid-year assessments show an increase in math scores.
5. Hebert shared information about pending state legislation which could have a large financial impact. * Open enrollment would require schools to accept students from any other district at 80% of sending school district cost. This was bundled into the budget bill passed by house (now before senate). * SB297 (passed by Senate, now before House) would regulate pooled risk management programs by requiring towns/schools to pay into a health trust stabilization fund. HealthTrust has not been holding enough funds for emergencies. This bill would require they hold more, which would be a higher cost to us, for both SAU and employee health insurance. HealthTrust has said if the bill passes, they will cease to exist as of Dec 31. Kelly asked if the school/town could self-insure. Question as to how many cities/schools use HealthTrust; Bedard said she believes most.

Kelly shared a link to a letter from Sec Scanlan regarding pooled risk management programs <https://www.sos.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt561/files/inline-documents/sonh/soss-packet-relative-to-rsa-5-b-pooled-risk-organizations.pdf>

Bedard said our town handbook requires we offer health insurance; she believes we are pooled with other small towns for comparable market options. Arida said we need to consider alternatives if HealthTrust could potentially go out of business at year end. Kelly suggests a sub-committee on HI. Hajjar will invite Reps Litchfield and Turer to attend our next meeting.

Old Business

None

New Business

Due to the changes that were made at Town Meeting, Hajjar suggests we re-evaluate the potential tax impact prior to when summer tax bills go out, and notify residents. Discussion about what numbers and calculations to use. Hajjar will present options at next meeting.

Public Comment

Dave Masse - Attended Swasey meeting, has 2 kids at Swasey. Is concerned about HB741 open enrollment, which would go into effect 1/1/2026 if passed; impossible to predict impact; could encourage districts to send their students elsewhere in order to decrease their school budgets. HB115 Education freedom accounts- have little oversight. Masse knows we don't have jurisdiction over this but encourages us to reach out to Sen Gannon, as both of these are included in HB2 which has passed the house and is now before the Senate. Masse is also concerned about HB675 which would impose a tax cap for school funding.

Ched Miller - * Offered to help with benefits issues (has experience in HR/Benefits); can use buy-ins for Exchanges. * BOS claim to hear the people, but a BOS member previously said if you can't afford to live here, leave. That is the wrong attitude, we need to budget responsibly so people can afford to stay. * He thinks the fear of cap is overrated and must be kept in perspective. He hopes all involved (dept and boards) will respect the cap and work together rather than BOS push off the hard decisions to BudCom. He challenges BudCom to make the town affordable.

Bedard noted that the people at Town Meeting ultimately vote on what we spend. Tax increases would have been within the cap in most recent years except for one year. She further noted not many elderly apply for abatement. Arida said we have raised exemptions for those who need them. Hajjar said the cap was approved by the town; and we will work within those parameters to prioritize. Kelly brought up the cost of her house 6 years ago compared to now. Siudut thanked and encouraged those who came to talk tonight, and hopes that will continue.

Motion by Siudut, seconded by Bedard to adjourn; meeting adjourned at 8:46 pm.

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

May 5 at 5 pm - Regular Meeting

June 9 at 5 pm - Regular Meeting

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Siudut, Secretary