

Town of Brooklyn
Annual Town Meeting Minutes
May 24, 2023 7pm
Brooklyn Middle School Gymnasium

The meeting was called to order by the Town Clerk, Katherine Bisson, at 7:12pm.

1. Sandy Brodeur was nominated to serve as Moderator by Lou Brodeur, seconded by Jeff Arends. R. David Lee was nominated to serve as Moderator by Austin Tanner, seconded by Rick Ives. A vote was taken and Sandy was elected Moderator.
2. A motion was made for the purpose of discussion to approve the General Town Government Budget in the amount of \$6,640,396.00 by Drew Dionne, seconded by Rick Ives. Discussion ensued.
 - Carrie Juhasz-Horton spoke on her concerns with the Brooklyn Fire District and why it was created. The Fire Department budget is supported by the town so why should the District be levying a second tax. She spoke about her concerns with the lack of transparency from the District and the incorrect filings with the IRS that she has brought to the Town's attention. She will not vote for the budget and won't fund the East Brooklyn Fire Department until all financial records are turned over.
 - Jay DeJesus asked why the records are not a matter of public record.
 - Paul Mannochio spoke about questions being deflected and being told his opinion doesn't matter.
 - David Lee spoke about the budget process and that the grant to the East Brooklyn Fire Department was originally 20% and they lowered it to 6%. He stated that problems with the Fire District should be addressed to them and questions on the budget should've been asked at the Public Hearing.
 - Alyssa Arends asked what will voting no on the budget do to the most vulnerable population. Sandy responded that services would most likely be cut.
 - Carrie Juhasz-Horton asked that the maintenance items then be removed from the Grant provided to the East Brooklyn Fire Department.
 - Mike Sneider spoke about his dismay at the lawsuit and in defense of The Ice Box and Suto calling it a frivolous lawsuit funded by tax payers against a weaker opponent. He asked an end be put to the lawsuit.
 - Rick Ives asked if the Town is a defendant or a plaintiff in the lawsuit and if a settlement offer had been made to the Nemeths (owners of the Ice Box & Suto).
 - Paul Mannochio stated we should stop funding the lawsuit.
 - Lisa Herring spoke about using caution when getting information from Facebook and that there are two sides to every story.
 - Joanne Pierpont asked if the budget is passed, are the funds automatically sent out or changes able to be made after the fact. Sandy stated that if it passes the funds will be set aside the way the budget is currently written.

- Sandy Brodeur stated that the town has an obligation to provide fire coverage to the Town. She also stated that the Department is not funding the lawsuit.
- Matt Noren asked if we can make adjustments to the budget and if not, vote it down.
- Kayla Burgess made a motion to amend the budget by removing \$38,000.00 from the East Brooklyn Fire Department budget, Matt Noren seconded.
- First Selectman Austin Tanner spoke about the financials for the District saying he has seen them and they are available. He wishes he could make the lawsuit go away but it isn't as simple as that as the original lawsuit was a declaratory ruling on the right of way which hasn't been solved yet. He says he knows there has been a lot of emotion around this issue and information put on Facebook that might not necessarily be true and wants to encourage folks to understand that the Town is not suing JMN, the Fire District is. He spoke about the different opinions given by tax officials and attorneys and that they are working on an agreement. He is very happy to see how many people showed up to tonight's meeting and hopes that it encourages them to volunteer.
- Jay DeJesus wants to know who is funding the lawsuit and why does someone have to FOI information to have access to it. He will not be voting for the budget.
- Courtney Crofts spoke about the long budget process and how it takes months to get to this point and that this isn't the time for questions. She spoke about personally benefitting from the Fire Departments in Town and how she would hate to see money taken away from the Department because she believes any money that comes from the Town to the Departments has to be used for the protection of the Town.
- Austin mentions that the motion made by Kayla Burgess should be a proposal to amend the original motion already on the floor to approve the budget. Bob Kelleher asked that the question be called, Jeff Arends seconded. A vote was taken to call the question and it was approved.
- A vote was taken to approve the amendment to the budget by reducing the EBFD budget by \$38,000.00. The proposal failed 55-36.
- Bruce Blomfield spoke about the increases in the budget and how it will hurt seniors and families. He had questions about the debt service going up.
- The Finance Director, Shelley Cates, clarified that there are two separate dept services—one short-term and one long-term. One is bonding for some capital projects and consolidated prior BANS which is a firm number that will decrease with interest as payments are made, the other is high schools which also decreased by \$56,000.00 this year.
- Bruce Blomfield asked if we will be in the "red" this year with taxes. Austin replied that we are required to present a balanced budget and will not borrow any more money.

- Scott Cartier asked about the funding for internet services at the Community Center on Tiffany Street. Sandy explained that is part of the Capital budget and will be addressed later.
 - Drew Dionne discussed the contractual increases that are part of the budget along with recycling and payroll increases. Keeping the budget at a 5% increase was not easy.
 - Paul Mannochio would like to know what the Town is doing to help increase revenue down the road. Ocean State Job Lot looks like trash and do we have a blight officer? They should be able to afford cleaning up their building while JMN cannot afford their lawsuit and they're being pushed out. Sandy spoke about working to hire an Economic Development Coordinator and that we need members for the Economic Development Commission.
 - Carlene Kelleher would like to know how voting down the budget tonight will solve the problem with the District and would like someone from the BoS or BoF to explain what happens if the budget is voted down.
 - Austin explains that if one budget fails then all three budgets would have to be voted on again. There is discussion on procedure as to whether or not a budget could be changed that is voted in favor of even if one fails. The answer was yes it could.
 - Carrie Juhasz-Horton wants to address Mrs. Kelleher's question and says that we are looking for transparency from the Department as to what the District is funding for them. She has FOI'd the financials from the District and has not received them. Sandy wants to clarify that voting the budget down will not make transparency happen any faster. Carrie responded that she has tried going to meetings to ask for transparency and has not been given what was asked for.
 - Alyssa Arends would like to call the question, Joseph Schroth seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved.
 - A vote was taken to approve the General Town Government Budget in the amount of \$6,640,396.00 and it was approved 66-27.
3. A motion was made for the purpose of discussion to approve the Board of Education Budget in the amount of \$21,635,600.00 by Drew Dionne, seconded by Joe Voccio.
- Scott Cartier wants clarification about whether or not a school budget can be reduced to lower than the previous budget. The answer was that there were some circumstances where it can be. He stated we are at almost 29 mills which is higher than Pomfret.
 - Bruce Blomfield asked about enrollment.
 - The Superintendent, Patty Buell, stated that enrollment has increased slightly by 5.3%.
 - Bruce Blomfield stated the budget is too high of an increase for a flat enrollment.

- There was discussion about surplus on textbooks and STEAM but increases on others. Patty explained the budget process and how different grants each year will help offset textbook costs.
 - A vote was taken and the budget was approved 79-2.
4. A motion was made for the purpose of discussion to approve the Capital Funding Program of \$213,121.00 and to authorize the First Selectmen and Board of Education to apply for and accept or reject grants-in-aid for the projects by Drew Dionne, seconded by Lisa Arends.
 - Scott Cartier discussed the expense for internet at the Community Center and questioned why it so high and if we get quotes. Shelley Cates explained that its not just for internet it's also for security and that bids will be taken to do the work.
 - A vote was taken and the motion passed handedly with only 2 opposed.
 5. A motion was made to authorize the Board of Selectmen to utilize up to \$110,000.00 along with a STEAP grant to install a generator for the Senior Center and Clifford B. Green Building by Rick Ives, seconded by Lou Brodeur.
 - A vote was taken and the motion passed handedly with only 1 opposed.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 9:01pm by Rick Ives, seconded by Lou Brodeur. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Katherine Bisson, Town Clerk