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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Nice story, G. Nicely and clearly written.

I did check the report Elizabeth cited, and she didn't quite remember it correctly. It was a letter from Levenbach. (Link added in text for website only.) You'll see how I fixed it to nudge the actual source into the piece.

**HEADLINE ELEMENTS:**

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1 Brattleboro's FY27 budget plan? Keep it sustainable.

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2 First draft aims to keep property tax increase to 4.4%

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3 TEXT BODY:

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4 Public discussion about the fiscal year 2027 budget has  
5 started with the intention, Town Manager John Potter says, not to  
6 increase property taxes more than about 4.4%.

7 "It keeps the town working for its residents but in a  
8 balanced way," said Potter at the Nov. 4 Selectboard meeting,

9 noting “deeper dives” are coming up for each department as  
10 personnel meet with the board in the coming weeks.

11 Overall, the proposed budget would need a \$861,000  
12 increase in property taxes to be in balance.

13 “We’re trying to be totally transparent about what we’re  
14 doing and what the need is what we’re able to afford,” he said  
15 after Chair Elizabeth McLoughlin said, “so you’re letting us see  
16 the sausage being made,” referring to the budget process and  
17 presentation.

18 A second public budget listening session is set for  
19 Wednesday, Nov. 12, at 6:15 p.m. in Brooks Memorial Library.

## 20 **‘Stability, predictability, and 21 sustainability’ are key**

22 Potter characterized the proposed budget plan as:

- 23 • Maintaining core municipal services that residents rely  
24 on,
- 25 • Holding any property tax increase to about 4.4% while  
26 absorbing significant health care cost growth,
- 27 • Prioritizing solid waste disposal, public safety,  
28 infrastructure, parks, and fiscal stability,
- 29 • Continuing disciplined debt management and building  
30 of reserves,
- 31 • Funding essential capital needs and deferring selected  
32 transportation projects pending further discussion.

33 “The FY27 budget proposal represents continued  
34 commitment to Brattleboro’s long-term financial principles:  
35 stability, predictability, and sustainability,” Potter wrote in the  
36 budget memo. “It protects essential services, funds critical  
37 infrastructure, upholds the town’s fiscal position, and manages  
38 increasing costs while adjusting to a changing community  
39 environment.”

40

## What's out, what's in

41 The proposed budget — like the current budget — does  
42 not include an assistant town manager, IT coordinator, data  
43 analyst, or a finance director, which Potter called “pretty  
44 significant positions.”

45 “We’re finding other ways to manage those needs,” he  
46 said.

47 The budget does include money for a fourth platoon in  
48 the fire department, more hours to cover some finance  
49 department needs, added help for park maintenance, 1,100 extra  
50 on-call library hours, and funding for enough public works staff  
51 to take on compost collection if need be.

52 For the first time in the town’s budgeting history, every  
53 staff benefits have been distributed by department rather than in a  
54 central line item so that the public can see each.

55 The proposal includes a 2% cost of living increase for  
56 town staff members, a new health-care provider and adjustments  
57 to employees’ health-care costs, a reduction in human services  
58 funding, and an increase in capital investment of 30% over this  
59 year’s budget.

60 The latter, Potter said, is still “underfunded,” and he  
61 intends to discuss with the board the potential for a supplemental  
62 request to potentially present to voters.

63 The proposed five-year capital investment plan shows  
64 several years of increase and then a decrease for equipment  
65 replacement and projects.

66 Revenues in the proposal include adjusted fees to  
67 “reflect the actual cost of service delivery” in solid waste and  
68 planning, notably.

69 Also, a 3% increase in EMS reimbursement over the  
70 FY25 actual reimbursement is expected in FY27.

71 The proposed budget includes a \$861,000 increase in  
72 property tax, a 4.4% increase from the current year.

## 73      Initial reactions by board

### 74      members

75      Board members noted various aspects of the first draft in  
76      which they said they would be interested to hear more: notably,  
77      human services, the capital fund, not having a finance director,  
78      and expanding the fire department.

79            "I always find it peculiar that during budget discussions it  
80      always seems to ignite 'cut' conversations and it never seems to  
81      include 'growth' conversations," said Board Member Peter Case,  
82      acknowledging, however, that last year the board had to go back  
83      to the drawing board after voters rejected a budget with an 8.9%  
84      increase to the previous year.

85            Case said he's also "often baffled" around first-responder  
86      overtime and that he will advocate for the human services to go  
87      to 1%.

88            "No matter how you slice it, it's a burden to the  
89      taxpayer," he said.

90            Case said he "always finds it funny" that "we're always  
91      talking about where to cut" but that the area of the budget to  
92      fund human services seems "bulletproof."

93            McLoughlin cited a letter to the editor earlier this year  
94      [["Human service spending by the numbers,"](#) March 11] from F.  
95      David Levenbach, the chair of the Representative Town Meeting  
96      Finance Committee.

97            In that letter, Levenbach said that he and another  
98      committee member analyzed the human resources spending of  
99      Brattleboro and 13 other Vermont towns: five nearby towns and  
100     eight comparably sized municipalities elsewhere in the state.

101           Levenbach reported that of those towns, Brattleboro  
102     spent the most money on human services, both in bottom-line  
103     terms and on a per-capita basis.

104           "One might conclude from these data the Brattleboro  
105     residents have more need for social services or, and this might  
106     lead to a different conclusion, that people in Brattleboro can ill-

107 afford the current allocation of their town budget to support  
108 social service organizations," he wrote. "Citizens of Brattleboro  
109 will differ on the right figure for human services spending, and  
110 that is rightly so because people have different values and  
111 perspectives."

112 McLoughlin said that discussion had centered around the  
113 need to "bring back a level of respect — for the townspeople  
114 [and] for the taxpayer — and that the nonprofits have to be really  
115 mindful of what they're asking and who they're asking it from."

116 She said that "there are a lot of people in this town who  
117 really need to keep the tax rate down, and we on the Selectboard  
118 have great respect for that."

119 The chair said she continued to note the process will  
120 continue and every aspect will be reviewed and discussed.

121 "Everyone wants what they want, and it's a very difficult  
122 thing not to give people what they want," McLoughlin added.

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