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—Contributor.....Millicent Cooley
—Contributor email.....millicent.cooley@gmail.com
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Notes from editor (not for publication):

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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 Brattleboro's budget for next year: some preliminary
2 observations

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

3 Representative Town Meeting Finance Committee offers a
4 snapshot of what's on the table as the Selectboard hammers out a
5 budget for representatives to consider this spring

#####END SUBHED#####

6 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

7 THE BRATTLEBORO Representative Town Meeting Finance
8 Committee offers some preliminary observations about the
9 proposed FY27 budget that begins July 1. These comments apply
10 to the initial version of the budget proposed by the Town
11 Manager.

12 The Selectboard will discuss and then possibly revise a
13 proposed version of the budget prior to Town Meeting, where the
14 budget will be presented for ratification by voters.

15 Links to the proposed General Fund budget, along with
16 supporting resources for understanding this year's budget-related
17 issues and decisions referred to below, are found on a Google
18 doc, "[FY27 Budget and finance planning resources](#)."

19 * * *

20 **Budget process and planning:** *The General Fund Budget*
21 *document appears in a new format. Employee benefits (a*
22 *significant expense) used to appear as an independent category*
23 *of expenses, and now appear within each department in order to*
24 *better account for the true cost of operating each department.*

25 We think that this is a beneficial change; however, it
26 makes prior-year comparisons more difficult. We think that the
27 public will be shown additional data during this budget season to
28 allow year-over-year comparison of overall town benefits costs.

29 The Selectboard has held reviews of all the town
30 department budgets during open meetings between Nov. 4, 2025
31 and Jan. 6. The board provided its first comments about the
32 proposed budget from the town manager at the Jan. 13
33 Selectboard meeting, and this has started a phase of budget
34 planning that will result in a (possibly revised) version of the
35 budget proposed by the Selectboard.

36 * * *

37 **Core budget documents:** *The five-year Capital*
38 *Investment Plan shows a projection of future equipment and*
39 *project costs. However, this document does not show fund*
40 *balances, so it is not possible to see to what degree the town is*
41 *saving the monies needed for those upcoming purchases. We*
42 *hope to see that information before the final version of the*
43 *proposed budget is completed.*

44 There is no long-term General Fund budget, which has
45 been repeatedly requested. A long-term financial plan was
46 prepared and maintained until several years ago. The purpose of

47 this type of plan is to help the town to plan for our financial
48 future and to envision the consequences of current financial
49 decisions.

50 The annual financial audit report contains an
51 independent expert review of the town's fiscal health and legal
52 compliance. This report is required every year, in accordance
53 with state statute and with our town charter.

54 In past years this has been completed by October or
55 early November, with a legal deadline from the state of 10 days
56 prior to Town Meeting.

57 So far, the town has been unable to find an auditor.

58 * * *

59 **FY27 budget overview:** The proposed FY27 budget
60 shows an increase in overall General Fund spending of 7.9% and
61 with a corresponding 4.4% increase in municipal property taxes.

62 Note the school tax is a separate component of
63 municipal property taxes.

64 The column heading "FY27 TM Budget" (column G) is
65 the proposed budget from the Town Manager. These numbers
66 incorporate the recent change to the Cigna health care provider
67 for the town.

68 The column heading "FY27 Dept Budget" (column F) are
69 the amounts suggested by departments.

70 The town is negotiating four new union contracts, and
71 the results are likely to impact the budget salary and benefit
72 calculations. New union terms will be effective at the start of
73 FY27 (July 1).

74 * * *

75 **Budget items:** Projected increases in revenues rely on,
76 among other things, an increase in EMS revenue and pay-as-you-
77 throw trash bag revenue, and both of those calculations should
78 be analyzed for realism.

79 Members of the Finance Committee are concerned that
80 some expenses are underestimated and some revenues are
81 overestimated.

82 Projected expenses include 6.7 full-time-equivalent new
83 employees (FTEs) for the finance, fire, dispatch, public works,
84 recreation and parks, and library departments. The continues a
85 trend of adding FTEs to the town budget every year in recent
86 years.

87 Health care provided to town employees has been
88 moved from Vermont Blue to CIGNA to minimize cost increases.
89 Health care, along with other benefits, continues to be a financial
90 challenge.

91 The budget calls for the implementation of a new trash
92 disposal program where the town vendor Casella will pick up
93 recycling and trash, and a new department will be created within
94 the Public Works organization to pick up compost. This new
95 Public Works Department will require additional people,
96 expenses, and long-term capital expenses.

97 Several types of items may be underfunded in the Capital
98 Investment Plan, including DPW equipment, fire engines, and
99 roads. Note that the planned investment in road infrastructure
100 will result in continued town road degradation. (See the [Public](#)
101 [Works presentation](#), pages 58-61, of the Dec. 2, 2025
102 Selectboard meeting materials, on roads and sidewalks
103 infrastructure needs.)

104 The Fire Department requests two additional Fire/EMS
105 personnel to move to an average 42-hour work week through the
106 use of a fourth platoon. Many current positions remain unfilled.

107 The Human Services allocation is 1% for FY27 versus
108 2% for the FY26 budget.

109 * * *

110 NOW IS THE CHANCE for any resident of the town to go
111 through the budget and make your voice heard on the budget
112 items that you want added or cut.

113 You can contact Selectboard members, attend
114 Selectboard meetings, and ask the Town Manager's office to place
115 your name on the email list to be notified of Selectboard
116 meetings.

117 The “[FY27 Budget and finance planning resources](#)”

118 Google Doc provides links to the various documents and
119 presentations for understanding this year’s budget.

120 The Finance Committee will make a more detailed and
121 final report by the end of February.

#####END TEXT#####

Bio/COATTAIL:

#####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL#####

122 **MILICENT COOLEY** chairs the Brattleboro
123 Representative Town Meeting Finance Committee, on whose
124 behalf she sent this analysis. See the committee’s work at
125 brattleboro.gov/finance-committee.

#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####

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LINKS:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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