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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Hi, Eric — Thanks for that clarification.

—Jeff



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 We must return to sound financial footing

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 If the tax burden is so clearly a damaging problem for
3 Brattleboro, then why do the taxes continue to rise and stay
4 higher than most other towns in Vermont?

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 At the Jan. 13 meeting of the Brattleboro Selectboard, a
7 longtime resident stated: “I really want to give my house to my
8 kids and I've got a daughter who's living in Guilford who's
9 earning, I don't know exactly, but I'm guessing somewhere about
10 \$40,000 a year, maybe \$45,000 a year.

11 "My taxes alone are over \$10,000 on that house," he
12 said. "How do I give it to her? What can I do to make it so that
13 she can at least have a chance of getting it?"

14 Each year that goes by, the town has hired more
15 employees and increased services and capital expenditures. The
16 result is a town budget with year-after-year million-dollar budget
17 increases and double-digit tax increases for its residents.

18 Despite this, to my knowledge, the Selectboard chair and
19 town manager have yet to acknowledge that the town tax burden
20 has created a financial crisis. Tom Franks, a Brattleboro
21 Representative Town Meeting member, has extensively analyzed
22 the numbers and has shown that residents now pay the largest
23 percentage of their income for town services than any other
24 municipality in Vermont.

25 Why is this a problem for the future of Brattleboro?

26 Let's look at some examples of the impact of the high tax
27 burden on Brattleboro residents.

28 * * *

29 WHEN I MOVED into my current Brattleboro neighborhood
30 about six years ago, all the homes were single-family homes,
31 with one also including a small apartment for an elderly family
32 member.

33 I'm now aware of three additional homes that rent to
34 non-family members. In some cases, more than one rental space
35 was added. Several of my neighbors have told me the reason for
36 this change from single- to multiple-family homes is to be able to
37 pay their increasingly large tax bill.

38 My family became close with an immigrant family of
39 seven who settled in Brattleboro. In a short time, the community
40 benefited from their strong work ethic and desire to succeed.
41 They all had jobs and were strengthening our community.

42 Unfortunately, when they were ready to purchase a
43 house, they realized that they would be able to afford a larger
44 and better-maintained home in another part of Vermont. They left

45 their Brattleboro apartment and their jobs, purchased a home in
46 Bennington, and have already entered the workforce there.

47 At that recent Selectboard meeting, a couple introduced
48 themselves to me. They explained that they wanted to stay in
49 Brattleboro but now were looking at moving to a place with a
50 lower tax burden. He said he became a Representative Town
51 Meeting member and started attending Selectboard meetings
52 because of the growing tax burden but that nothing has changed.

53 If the tax burden is so clearly a damaging problem for the
54 town, then why do the taxes continue to rise and stay higher than
55 most of Vermont?

56 * * *

57 THE TOWN'S MANAGEMENT has a strategy to assure all
58 departments either increase or maintain their budgets. This
59 strategy employs shame, guilt, and fear.

60 This became especially clear after the 2026 town budget
61 was rejected, when and the town manager's office issued a [memo](#)
62 [to the Selectboard](#) included in meeting materials for April 1,
63 2025. This report included frightening, outrageous predictions of
64 all the terrible things that would befall the town with every slight
65 budget decrease.

66 These were offered as truths.

67 We were told people would have medical emergencies
68 because they didn't get timely medical info from the Library,
69 utilities would be turned off, and people would die leaping from
70 burning buildings. Chris Grotke of iBrattleboro.com posted a
71 commentary, "[Town of Brattleboro Budget-Cutting Scenarios Win](#)
72 [Award for Short Fiction.](#)"

73 I never thought that strategy would return, but it showed
74 up again in the Jan. 15 Selectboard meeting.

75 When a modest 1.5% reduction to small departments
76 and a 3% decrease to large departments was proposed, it seemed
77 like three Selectboard members were ready to make the first
78 move toward real financial accountability in years. But then the

79 old strategy was put into use and all three Selectboard members
80 were stopped in their tracks.

81 Every department head was asked to speak to the effects
82 of the proposed cut to their budgets. Rather than give a
83 professional explanation of how the department would reduce
84 services or spread out the reduction to minimize the impact, the
85 threat of vast service-cutting steps were described. Shame, guilt,
86 and fear showed up in almost every statement.

87 What was not discussed: how our skilled department
88 heads could adjust their budgets to reduce costs while
89 maintaining core services.

90 * * *

91 HOW DOES Brattleboro return to sound financial footing?

92 The first step is for our town manager and our
93 Selectboard to agree we have a financial problem that must be
94 solved, at least partly, by lowering municipal taxes.

95 This means focusing on essential services, decreasing
96 department sizes, rebuilding the emergency reserves, and
97 building revenue — not by increasing taxes, but by strengthening
98 the financial base of our amazing town.

99 Brattleboro residents need to make their concerns
100 known. The best places to do that are at Selectboard meetings, by
101 writing or speaking to Selectboard members. And by voting in the
102 election on Tuesday, March 3.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

103 **ERIC CARON** is a retired high school guidance
104 counselor.

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

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