

## **Town Council Meeting 2-25-25**

**Open Town Council Meeting:** Councilor Chair Mark Ketch opened the Town Council meeting; all members were present. Also present was Town Manager Melissa Doane

**Matthew Cyr and Jon Doty-RSU 34:** Mr. Cyr, Superintendent of RSU 34, and Mr. Doty, Assistant Superintendent of RSU, presented information to the Town Council regarding the 2025-2026 budget development process. They detailed the information given to the school board on February 12, 2025. This information is posted on the Town of Bradley website and Facebook. Highlighted information provided includes:

- Birth data and school records show a considerable decline in student enrollment.
- The community valuations for Alton, Bradley, and Old Town have significantly increased. The Department of Education uses a 3-year average of municipal valuation to determine educational funding.
- The State has shifted \$328,000 of responsibility to the RSU, the Maine FMLA cost to the RSU is \$101,500, workers' compensation is estimated to increase by \$34,000, special education costs are rising an estimated \$100,000, adoption of elementary math program is estimated to be \$100,000, Title IIA is increased \$10,000 and negotiated wage/benefit packages are expected to increase.
- There are several federal funding issues yet to be determined, which will greatly affect the RSU budget.
- The first draft of the budget is \$25,724,771, an increase of 6.89%. Before applying EPS, the impact on Bradley is an additional \$178,807.
- Education looks very different than in the past. Special education needs are much higher, which not only adds significant costs but also requires additional updated space.
- Due to the decline in student enrollment, it has been determined that all elementary students can be well served at Old Town Elementary School.
- Either Alton Elementary or Viola Rand could serve RSU 34's Early Childhood Center, serving all the RSU's 34's Pre-K and, as required by the state, case management services for 3-year-olds from Child Development Services. This would follow with the closure considerations for an empty school, either Alton or Bradley.
- If the RSU School Board determines that Viola Rand will close and the building be returned to the Town of Bradley, a warrant (ballot) article will be presented to Bradley's voters. This article would provide the cost savings generated by the closure. If Bradley voters approve the closure, the process moves forward. If Bradley rejects the closure, Bradley taxpayers will be responsible for the loss of cost savings. This cost would be borne entirely by Bradley taxpayers and not shared with the RSU.
- The RSU board will be making the closure determination on March 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Staff at the closed school would not automatically lose their jobs; the RSU has seniority clauses to determine job placement.
- Viola Rand currently occupies two classrooms, both for PreK, with 16 students; 9 of those students are Bradley residents, 19 are Old Town residents, and 4 have superintendent agreements. Old Town students are bussed on regular runs to Old Town Elementary, served

breakfast, and then transported with Pre-K staff to Viola Rand. They are bussed back to Old Town Elementary at the end of the day and then placed on the appropriate bus home.

- Residents and taxpayers are strongly encouraged to participate in this process. There are several ways to accomplish this:
  - Complete the online survey (posted on the RSU website, Town of Bradley Website, and Facebook).
  - Attend RSU budget workshops and meetings
    - March 4<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>.
    - March 19<sup>th</sup>

The Town Council was very appreciative of the information provided. They hope that residents will engage in the process and educate themselves on it and the benefits provided to the students.

**Review of Minutes:** Councilor Ketch motioned to accept the minutes of 2/11/2025 as presented, seconded by Councilor Wade, vote 5/0.

**Citizens Request:** None

**Managers' Report:** Melissa stated that the court had scheduled a pretrial status conference regarding 114 Cram Street for March 13, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. at the Bangor District Court. Melissa will be in Washington, DC, for the National League of Cities Conference. She will see if Dean is available to attend. However, the attorney stated that there would not be any testimony; it would be a trial to get an update on the guardianship and the process of how to move forward with the contempt of court. Councilor Lugdon noted he will try to attend.

Melissa said she met with Consolidated Communications on February 13, 2025. Not many details were provided; however, the representative, Simon Thorne, stated they planned a build to upgrade fiber in Bradley within the next 12 to 14 months. This will allow residents to have another vendor for high-speed internet.

Melissa researched the legislative bill establishing a regional ambulance service in Southern Penobscot County, LD 176. This bill was brought forward to establish a regional entity for EMS service in Newport, Corinna, Plymouth, Etna, Dixmont, and some adjacent towns in Somerset. Melissa emailed the bill sponsor and offered support, though she has not heard more. The public hearing was on February 10, 2025. She further stated that this establishment would likely not benefit Bradley; it could be a good model for EMS service.

Melissa contacted six communities that are currently doing an alewife harvest. Each reported very similar information, which she summarized in a memo to the Council. She would recommend that the warrant article be placed on the June referendum, and she will use the next year to work on finalizing a plan and all that would be needed for a 2026 harvest. She has contacted the Museum President, Mike Weatherbee, and scheduled a phone call with him tomorrow. She would like to speak to the MFLM board about the opportunity available to the Town and them. The fish agent from Benton, Dwight

Gagon, was very helpful and invited her to the Town's yearly Alewife Festival on May 17<sup>th</sup>, which she has on her calendar. She plans on going on the 16<sup>th</sup> to meet with the representatives before the festival.

**New Business:** Councilor Ketch asked if the road postings would be done soon. Melissa stated she has them written out and will post them tomorrow.

Councilor Ketch asked for additional thoughts regarding the possible closure of Viola Rand. Melissa stated she was part of the RSU consolidation process; Viola Rand was not expected to stay open this long. It was well known that the building was in poor shape and outdated. She spoke of one of her first days as the manager. The town was the owner of the school, and it was hers to manage. She was forced to deal with a flooded basement where the water was almost at the first-floor level. She also confirmed what Mr. Cyr had stated about the septic system being an overboard discharge system that goes into the stream. Councilor Ketch noted that Viola Rand is closer to Old Town, which would be a consideration for the new development center. Councilor Lugdon was unsure if the Town should take ownership of the property. Melissa stated that would be discussed at length. However, it is real estate and could be used for the benefit of the residents.

**Unfinished Business:** None

**2025-2026 Municipal Budget:** Melissa presented an updated budget with only minor changes. The budget, as presented, is now \$133,207.55 above the budget cap. She was asked to provide an impact on the tax rate. She has determined that the budget itself would be a .80 mill increase using current valuation figures. She reminded the Council that the remaining RSU surplus funds of \$54,913 were used last year. With the loss of these funds, the budget increase is \$207,060, equating to a 1.00 mill increase. Councilor Lugdon stated he has reviewed each line item and is unsure where there could be decreases. Melissa noted that she had suggested that road capital projects, municipal capital reserves, and fire department reserves not be funded. That is not a good budgeting practice as road projects will be needed, repairs to the municipal buildings will be needed, and upgraded equipment for the fire department will be required; however, it is a consideration.

**Municipal Warrants:** Councilor Ketch motioned to accept the municipal warrants as presented, seconded by Councilor Lugdon, vote 5/0.

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting was set for March 25, 2025

**Adjourn:** Councilor Wade motioned to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Clemons, vote 5/0.