

A.T.M. – May 19, 2025 – Annual Budget, Capitals & Ordinances

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING & ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING

Town of Bethany

May 19, 2025, at 7:00 P.M.

Prior to the start of the meeting, First Selectwoman Paula Cofrancesco read a letter resigning from office, effective at the close of business on Friday, June 6, 2025. The letter will be submitted to the Town Clerk tomorrow.

Selectman Robert Brinton called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. There were approximately 170 people in attendance. Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Brinton then called for nominations for a moderator. Sally Huyser made a motion, seconded by Amy Lestinsky, to nominate Carol Goldberg. There were no further nominations. Carol Goldberg was elected moderator by a unanimous voice vote.

Robert Harrison of the Conservation Commission presented Alison Beres-Nork the Conservationist of the Year award. She was nominated by one of her students at Amity High School, where she is an Environmental Science teacher. The award recognized her efforts to clear invasive plants, maintain a campus pollinator garden, and create a food rescue initiative. In addition, Beres-Nork is a member of the Conservation Commission, Sustainable Bethany Committee, and Land Trust, where she works on the trails crew and leads ecology hikes.

Paula Cofrancesco presented the annual First Selectman's Youth Award. Shane Johnson was chosen as this year's recipient. He was nominated by two staff members at Amity and is headed to Northeastern University in the fall. Johnson is an Eagle Scout, has participated in many volunteer opportunities in Bethany and is in the National Honor Society. He received a plaque and a small monetary award provided by Webster Bank.

Board of Finance Chair Sharon Huxley gave a brief presentation of the 2025-2026 Budget.

The audit for fiscal year 2024 revealed \$776,617 more in revenue and \$615,916 less in expenditures, yielding a surplus of \$1,392,533. The Board of Finance proposes to use \$600,000 from the general fund to subsidize the mill rate for next year. The major road resurfacing project is near completion and will transition to ongoing road repair in the operating budget. The town did not receive a grant for the Round Hill Road project, so it has been added to the capital budget. The proposed tax increase is 0.93%. The Grand List dropped over \$8 million, mostly due to state changes in motor vehicle assessments. The tax collection rate was over 100% last year. The proposed mill rate is 29.14.

Following the presentation, the moderator went over procedures for the meeting.

John Garcia made a motion, seconded by Kristine Sullivan, to dispense with reading of the call. There was no discussion. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (1) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To accept the 2023-2024 Annual Report.

Sally Huyser made a motion, seconded by Amy Lestinsky, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (2) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the Capital expenditure from LoCIP of \$12,000.00 for Bethany Athletic Association field fencing.

Alyssia Walowski made a motion, seconded by Elizabeth Thornquist, to consider the resolution.

Bruce Loomis made a motion, seconded by John Garcia, to amend Item (2) to delete "Bethany Athletic Association field" and replace with "town-owned Hoppe-Cofrancesco field."

The moderator called for a vote on motion to amend. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Amy Rushlow – Does the town get any funds from the Athletic Association for use of the field?

David Cote – No.

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There was no further discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (3) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the Capital expenditure from LoCIP of \$35,000.00 for a targeted guide rail project.

Donna Shea made a motion, seconded by Kristine Sullivan, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (4) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the Capital expenditure from LoCIP of \$5,000.00 for horse ring fence repairs.

Amy Lestinsky made a motion, seconded by Lesley Corrone, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (5) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the Capital expenditure from LoCIP of \$15,000.00 for Bethany Volunteer Fire Department HVAC upgrades.

Sally Huyser made a motion, seconded by Caroline Leary, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (6) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the expenditure from the Police Special Duty Fund in the amount of \$75,000.00 for a new police cruiser.

Caroline Leary made a motion, seconded by Kristine Sullivan, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (7) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the Capital expenditure of \$125,000.00 for the new Ambulance and the use of \$250,000.00 from the Capital Reserve.

Margaret Quinn made a motion, seconded by Caroline Leary, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (8) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the Capital expenditure of \$450,000.00 for Road Paving.

Irma Nesson made a motion, seconded by Elizabeth Thornquist, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (9) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the Capital expenditure of \$45,000.00 for Land Use file archival.

Donald Shea made a motion, seconded by John Garcia, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (10) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize the appropriation and approve a transfer from the General Fund to the Land Acquisition Fund in the amount of \$100,000.00.

Robert Harrison made a motion, seconded by Bruce Loomis, to consider the resolution.

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There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (11) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize that up to 25% of the 2026 fiscal year appropriation to the Town Land Acquisition Fund shall be made available to the Bethany Land Trust, Inc., for the purpose of due diligence and transaction costs, such as appraisals, surveys, and contract deposits, for the acquisition of open space land in Bethany.

Kristine Sullivan made a motion, seconded by Rebecca Hildrew, to consider the resolution.

There was no discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (12) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To receive the report and recommendations of the Board of Finance upon the Budget of \$27,227,425.00 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, and to take necessary action thereon.

Amy Lestinsky made a motion, seconded by Alyssia Walowski, to consider the resolution.

Kathryn Sylvester made a motion, seconded by Caroline Leary, to amend the resolution to reduce the first selectman's salary to \$1.00.

Kathryn Sylvester – We can restore this line item at another special meeting. Concerned about safety of computers and impact on future litigation.

Alyssia Walowski – What do you mean by safety of computers?

Kathryn Sylvester – With litigation, discovery includes correspondence, emails, text messages and documents. The report found that computer information is missing. Very expensive to hire forensic expert later to retrieve data. First Selectwoman is not leaving until June 6.

Carol Goldberg – Town Attorney said litigation hold was sent to all town employees months ago.

Robert Brinton – The concern about computers being erased is legitimate, but don't see how reducing the first selectman's salary July 1 has anything to do with it. Paula won't be first selectman then. Recommend not voting for it.

Sharon Huxley – The budget starts on July 1. There is no reason to cut the salary when it has nothing to do with legal concerns.

Caroline Leary – The salary should be reduced to \$1.00 to allow us to decide the appropriate salary.

Constance Royster – If we reduce first selectman, can we adjust second and third selectmen salaries? I believe they are way too low.

Gary MacNamara – We all want efficient, effective town government. Reducing salary may make us feel good, and we want to hold our leaders accountable, but that is what elections are for.

Elizabeth Thornquist – Both parties are now selecting candidates for the next election. We can't expect anyone to take on a full-time job, not knowing what they will be paid when they take office.

The moderator called for a vote on motion to amend. Defeated by a majority voice vote. **Failed.**

There was no further discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the original resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (13) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To empower the Board of Selectmen to authorize the First Selectwoman to enter into any approved contracts or agreements on behalf of the Town.

Amy Lestinsky made a motion, seconded by Christine O'Connor, to consider the resolution.

Gary Cohen made a motion, seconded by Bruce Loomis, to amend Item (13) to change "Selectwoman" to "Selectperson."

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The moderator called for a vote on motion to amend. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Alyssia Walowski – The budget starts July 1, and Paula is leaving June 6. What is the process with no first selectman? Should we amend to allow the two selectmen to sign contracts?

Vincent Marino – Resolution is about the position, not the person specifically. You are authorizing the Board of Selectmen to authorize the office of the first selectman to sign contracts that have been approved. Otherwise, every contract must come back to the town meeting for approval.

Alyssia Walowski made a motion, seconded by Francesca Healy, to table Item (13). The moderator called a voice vote, but was unable to determine the results, so she asked the Registrars to count hands. There were 69 Yes and 58 No votes on the motion to table Item (13). **Tabled.**

Item (14) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To approve the following revisions/updates to the following Town Codes:

- (a) Chapter 20 – Conservation Commission
- (b) Chapter 28 - Economic Development Commission
- (c) Chapter 46 – Inland Wetlands Enforcement Officer
- (d) Chapter 63-4 – Absence ; Resignation ; Vacancies
- (e) Chapter 95 – Zoning Enforcement Officer
- (f) Chapter 97 – Zoning Board of Appeals
- (g) Chapter 102 – Alarms
- (h) Chapter 114 – Building Construction
- (i) Chapter 170 – Sewage Disposal
- (j) Chapter 200 – Wells

John Garcia made a motion, seconded by Sally Huyser, to consider the resolution.

Town Clerk Brinton gave a brief overview of the Town Code Review Committee and approval process. The moderator provided a synopsis of the proposed changes.

Kristine Sullivan made motion, seconded by Norman Cole, to table subsection (c), Chapter 46 Inland Wetlands Enforcement Officer, pending further review.

The moderator called for a vote on motion to table subsection (c). Approved by majority voice vote. **Tabled.**

There was no further discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the amended resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (15) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To authorize acquisition of the 101 Russell Road property by the process of eminent domain, in accordance with the purchase terms approved by the May 15, 2023, Town Meeting.

Linda Francois made a motion, seconded by Donald Shea, to consider the resolution.

Edward Maher – Why are we using eminent domain? Should do a tax sale instead. We don't want to set a precedent. Eminent domain should be a last resort.

Vincent Marino – Town meeting approved the sale in 2023. The owners have been unable to clear title due to existing liens. This will assist the sellers and is being done with their consent.

Seth Harkness – The wording should be different if this is done another time.

There was no further discussion. The moderator called for a vote on the resolution. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Naomi Rosenstein made a motion, seconded by Elizabeth Thornquist, to adjourn the meeting. The motion was passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



William L. Brinton,
Bethany Town Clerk