BOARD OF SELECTMEN

P.O. Box 372
West Brookfield, Massachusetts 01585

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2023 – 6:00 PM

PRESENT: Mr. Roland Sickenberger; Chairman, Mr. Eric von Bleicken; Vice-Chair, Mr. Brad Merkel, Clerk and Mr. Ronald San Angelo, Town Administrator

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION at 6 PM

MINUTES

Motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of August 22, 2023, as written made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

APPOINTMENTS – HISTORICAL COMMISSION & CABLE COMMITTEE

Motion to appoint the following individuals to the Historical Commission and Cable Committee as presented on Attachment A, made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

WATER DEPARTMENT – VACANCY

With the recent resignation of Mr. Barry Nadon, the Water Department has a vacant seat. With that, Mr. Phillip Guerin expressed interest in filling the seat until the next election. Mr. Guerin comes to us with an extensive background with 38 years for the City of Worcester (Water Dept). With his experience, and on the recommendation of the Town Administrator, the Board made the following motion:

Motion to appoint Mr. Phillip Guerin to the open Water Commissioner seat until the next annual town election in May of 2024 made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

With Chairman Sickenberger's approval, the following items was taken out of order:

WBES CATCH BASINS

Superintendent Steven Duff and Facilities Coordinator, Marc Astrella addressed the Board this evening regarding the condition of the catch basins at the elementary school. Earlier that day, Mr. San Angelo visited the site and took pictures, which was provided in a presentation for the Board. At this time, it was clear that there was a degradation of the infrastructure, however the extent is unknown. Any decisions will be made after they are cleaned out and scoped. Right now, steel plates have been placed over the most critical areas and Mr. Astrella will work with Highway Superintendent Daley on a plan to resolve the issue.

LELAND ROAD WATER PROJECT

Mr. San Angelo provided an update to the Board regarding the presentations by both Tata & Howard and Tighe & Bond. Both engineering firms come widely recommended and both have extensive knowledge in the water industry. Both

proposals were very similar in nature, however Tata & Howard were over $168,000 less than Tighe & Bond. This expense is strictly for engineering cost alone. Considering the difference in price, Mr. San Angelo is going to recommend to the Board that they move forward with a contract with Tata & Howard. A draft contract is being vetted by counsel and this matter will be presented at the next meeting for a formal vote.

TOWN HALL PHONE SYSTEM

Mr. San Angelo provided a summary to the Board of three carriers. Vonage, Intermedia Unite and our current vendor, Ring Central. From its inception, Ring Central has been a challenge to say the least. Little to no customer service and one, if not the most major concern of our residents, is the poor phone system. After a review and discussion with all three vendors, Mr. San Angelo is recommending that the Board enter into an agreement with Vonage. With no objections, the following motion was made:

Motion to approve a three (3) year agreement for phone service for the Town Hall with Vonage in the amount of $22,867.36 (include a one-time set up fee of $100, Year 1 for $5,850.24 and Years 2 & 3 for $8,458.56) made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

TOWN CLERK – VOTING MACHINES

Mrs. Gough was in attendance this evening to request permission to utilize ARPA funds for the purchase of voting machines. The current ones are obsolete and replacement parts are few and far between. West Brookfield is one of the twenty out of the 351 communities in the Commonwealth that still have outdated machines. She wants to avoid any potential failure issues in light of the upcoming primaries and Presidential Election in 2024. With that understanding, the following motion was made:

Motion to approve the use of ARPA funds in the amount of $9,220.00 for the purchase of two (2) Image Cast Precinct 2 Bundles voting machines from LHS made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

TOWN WEBSITE

Committee Chairs, Chief Nathan Hagglund and Executive Assistant to the Town Administrator, Rebecca Acerra provided a presentation and summation of the committee's efforts to date. After several meetings with the committee members and several vendors, the committee unanimously recommended Town Web. They will be new to the Massachusetts market and have a very competitive pricing package. Civic Plus, who without a doubt is a premiere product, was a bit too costly. All felt that Town Web would be able to provide the town with a great product at a very reasonable price. With no objections, the following motion was made:

Motion to approve and sign the contract with Town Web for three years as recommended by the committee made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

GREAT HALL – DISCUSSION ON USE POLICY

Mr. San Angelo provided a copy of the Town of Spencer's Great Hall Use Form. After a review and discussion, the following motion was made:

Motion to adopt the Great Hall Use as provided (adapted for West Brookfield) to allow Wine & Malt only made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

TOWN ADMINISTRATORS REPORT

Department Head Meeting - The Last Department Head meeting was held on September 5, 2023. The main purpose of the meeting was to train all department heads on the State Procurement Process 30B. This is important since they have never been trained on such items as Invitation to Bids, Request for Proposals, how to obtain quotes, the dollar amount of an item and what procurement process needs to be utilized and purchases less than $10,000. It is important that they

have a basic understanding of the law. We also utilized Zoom to have a meeting with a person from the Secretary of the State Office to teach department heads as to record retention and how to get rid of old records.

Hiring of a new Tax Collector/ Treasurer – Jillian K. Patch. She will be starting in a few weeks and will be a huge asset to the Town. See below her current position.

experience Treasurer/Collector, Town of Oxford, MA October 2019 - Present · Collection/Reconciling of all tax payments, sewer payments, parking tickets, and police details · Worked through a large tax title file by hiring a new tax title attorney and moving forward with evictions and auction · Responsible for receipt, disbursement and accounting of all town funds · Worked with the public during covid-19 to assist in timely payment of taxes which included helping departments create online collection platforms · Timely issuance of demands and warrants for overdue taxes as well as tax taking notifications · Issued and consolidated short term bond notes to meet cash needs · Payroll and Accounts Payable processing and reconciling · Management of postage machine for all town departments including implementation of new machine

Earmark with Senator Gobi for emergency management vehicle –The earmark has been approved and the state notified me that we should get the fund within the next 4 weeks. To acquire and or purchase a simple half ton pick-up truck for the purpose of emergency response. This will be a huge asset for emergency management and will be used as a command vehicle for the fire department. Both departments train and work together. $46,045 for us to purchase the truck.

Voting Machines – Heather and I are recommending the purchase of two new voting machines. We will get a significant discount if we purchase them now. It seems our old machines are way out of date and need to be replaced. We had hoped to wait a little longer and use future Free Cash but given the discount and need we decided now was the time to move forward utilizing ARPA funding.

Leland Road Water Department Project – Wes, Lester, and I met with the Two Engineering firms. Tighe and Bond and Tata and Howard. Both firms are highly respected in the industry. After reviewing their presentations and asking a lot of questions the firm that was selected was Tata and Howard for a price of $309,000. We will have to utilize ARPA funds for the difference between what was approved by the Town Meeting and the new cost. Waiting any longer will just mean an even higher cost. This project needs to move forward as soon as possible.

Veterans Service Officer- As you know our current Veterans Service Officer is leaving in November. The Town Administrator of Warren and I met with Ellen Moore who was in the military for over 20 years. She is highly qualified for this position and will likely be the Veterans Service Office for the Town of Warren and Brookfield as well. One of the things she did while in the military was to make sure that military personnel were receiving proper benefits. This is a stipend position.

Water Operator – As you know one of the Water Commissioners who also worked at the water facility has resigned. Wes and I interviewed two candidates for the open position. We chose Mr. Richard Kennan. He has worked per diem in the past for us and is highly trained for the position. He requires no training as is a certified operator, His salary will be $30 per hour which is what he was paid in the past for filling in. This hire can handle any emergency and has the same certification as Wes.

Phone System – Currently we have a company called Ring Central who provides phone service to our Town. As our board members are aware they have provided very poor service to the town and have done so at a high cost. On 9/12/23 I will be recommending a change to Vonage at a significantly lower price, and I believe will provide better service to the town.

Town Clerk Office – Heather and I have been working together to improve the staffing of the Town Clerks office, we have interviewed a few good candidates for a 19 hour a week position to be the Assistant Town Clerk. By law, the Town

Clerk has to appoint an Assistant Town Clerk, but she has chosen to work with me to select the new candidate. We have chosen Anne Garwood-Hampp a resident of West Brookfield, who is a local business owner. The salary is set at $19.68. We will be interviewing the two remaining clerks for the one open spot that we have left. This office should be more functionable in the future and is going to be open 6 hours every day. In the past it was open for like 3 hours a day.

Town Hall – The rubber for the Town Hall stairs has been ordered and is expected to come in 4-6 weeks. Once it is in it will be installed.

Boards and Commissions – Board and Commission members have been trained in Open Meeting Law and Roberts Rules of Order. Packets of information have been developed for each member. This should help boards and commissions to post meetings correctly, take proper meeting minutes, and have a process for running a meeting. This training is long overdue and should help to improve our process.

Town Website- The committee I formed to recommend a new website site host has completed their work and is going to be making a recommendation on 9/12/23 to the Board of Selectmen. The Police Chief and Assistant to the Board of Selectmen has provided leadership to the team and I completely agree with their recommendations. We need a website that highlights what a great Town West Brookfield is.

Water Commission Board Member- I met with Phillip Guerin who is interested in the open Water Commissioner position. He is a high-quality candidate who has years of experience working for the Worcester Water department. He provided the board with a resume and in the interview had a clear understanding of the role of a commissioner. My office attempted to meet with the other candidate who did not feel it was necessary to meet with me.

Storm Sewers at West Brookfield Elementary School – I toured the school parking lot with Highway Superintendent Jim Daley to look at the issue of sink holes around the catch basins. It quickly became clear that a few catch basins need to be replaced. It is my understanding that there are approximately ten catch basins. See Jim Daley's recommendations below:

1. WBES needs to find the drainage plans so we can review.
2. All Catch Basins and Drain Manholes should be cleaned and inspected. This can be done when the Town does its Fall Storm drain cleaning at a very little cost.
3. The Town or the School gets all of the Drainpipes inspected by Camera. I am not sure of that cost without looking at the plans and getting quotes to do this work.
4. Once steps 1 through 3 are done we can start to figure out the scope of work to what must be done.

At this point in time these failed Catch Basins are NO Safety Hazard, and we can monitor them until next year's construction season.

TREASURY WARRANTS

Motion to approve and sign the Warrant No. 24 P #5 and 24 W #5 dated September 7, 2023, in the amounts of $76,827.72 and $150,049.93 respectively made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

PFAS LITIGATION

This matter pertains to the ongoing class action lawsuit that has been filed on behalf of many communities throughout the country. Mr. San Angelo spoke with town counsel and there is no obligation by the town for any fees and suggested that the town join. With no objection, the following motion was made:

Motion to all the Town Administrator to engage with counsel for the Class Action PFAS Litigation made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENTS & CONCERNS -NONE

Next Regular Meeting Date: September 19, 2023 – 6 PM

Motion to Adjourn made by Mr. von Bleicken; second: Mr. Merkel – unanimous at 8:15 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Acerra

Rebecca Acerra
Assistant to the Board of Selectmen/
Town Administrator

Brad Merkel, Clerk

Date Approved: 9/19/23.

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING – SEPTEMBER 12, 2023
AGENDA ITEM #2 – ATTACHMENT A

DEPARTMENT/BOARD/COMMITTEE	NAME	TERM
HISTORICAL COMMISSION	Michael Stroka	Expires: June 30, 2024
	Jesse Morrison	Expires: June 30, 2025
	Heather Walker	Expires: June 30, 2026
	Ann Marie Nolan	Expires: June 30, 2025
	Ryan Gough	Expires: June 30, 2026
COMMUNITY CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE	Drew Douglass	Expires: June 30, 2024