TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

TUESDAY, November 26th, 2024 – 6:00 PM

West Brookfield Town Hall, 2 East Main Street, Conf. Room (1st floor).

MINUTES

PRESENT: Roland Sickenberger, Chair (from 6:10pm); Eric von Bleicken, Vice Chair; Brad Merkel, Clerk; Beth Gobeille, Exec. Asst. to TA/BOS; Interim TA, Chief Nathan Hagglund; Chief Lapierre (Fire); Heather Gough, Town Clerk.
GUESTS: Diane Vayda, resident/Committee member; Maggie Clarke, TA candidate; Theresa Cofske, TA candidate.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

6:07: Motion to open the meeting

MINUTES OF November 12th BOS MEETING FOR APPROVAL -
Motion to approve and sign the Minutes of November 12th, 2024 made by Mr. Merkel. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes

TAX CLASSIFICATION for 2025 – Put on Hold by Assessors. Ms. Gobeille will schedule a off cycle BOS meeting if needed for approval prior to 12/10/24 meeting.

CHARTER/SPECTRUM RENEWAL OF CONTRACT – Moved to 12/10/2024 meeting.

VOTE TO AMEND ARPA ALLOCATION FROM 11/12/2024 ADDING LEGAL COSTS TO WORDING. Allocate $190,000 of ARPA money to be utilized for Repairs, Painting and Legal Costs for Phase I and II for Town Hall Exterior Work -
Motion to allocate $190,000 of ARPA funds to be utilized for Repairs and Painting and any Legal costs associated with Phase I and II for Town Hall's Exterior Work made by Mr. Merkel. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes

OTHER BUSINESS – Mr. Merkel asked if we would revisit agenda item from 11/12/2024 meeting re: moving Covid units. He explained that we should support Chief Lapierre's thoughts of moving the units as needed.
Motion to allow Chief Lapierre to move the Covid storage units at his discretion to create more parking in the Town employee lot made by Mr. Merkel. Second by Mr. von Bleicken - 2 yes.

WEST BROOKFIELD POLICE JOINING SOUTH WORCESTER COUNTY DRUG & COUNTER CRIME TASK FORCE – Chief Hagglund expressed that this is something he's wanted to do for a long time. This agreement will allow mutual aid officers to help with investigating operating houses. The task force will also help to pay overtime for officers involved with these operations.

Motion to approve the West Brookfield Police joining the South Worcester County Drug & Counter Crime Task Force made by Mr. Merkel. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

TREASURY WARRANTS –

Motion to approve and sign the Treasury Warrants as presented by Mr. Merkel. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

EXECUTIVE SESSION RE: GRIEVANCE – not needed. Interim TA Chief Hagglund is authorized to work with a resolution re: this grievance.

CURRENT TOWN CLERK POSITION POST FULL TIME ROLE – Chief Hagglund explained the scenarios we could pursue, keeping current Town Clerk Heather Gough in the transition to a new Asst. TC or interim Town Clerk in the Town Clerk's office. If we are able to hire Heather, she would either be a consultant or assistant clerk in that office, being paid $30/hour. We have 2 choices of either hiring an Interim Town Clerk and Ms. Gough train them or hire an Asst. Town Clerk and again Ms. Gough train them. Ms. Gough explained that she is trying to do the "right thing."

Moving to Town Administrator Interviews

CANDIDATE #1, Maggie Clarke –

Background in Math, Computer Software companies. Started in Municipalities in a Senior Center, worked in BOH, Highway. Focus on Communication with residents and Town employees.

Priorities are budgets (there should never be shortfalls in department budgets, you review along the way. Is on Select Board in Plainville currently.

Currently Exec. Asst. for Taunton for 9 City Hall members. Plainville has shared services with towns. Regionalization is good if it works.

Put the information out there for the residents: on town website, Facebook, Newsletters. The more you put it out there, the more you educated the public are.

There will be a learning curve, identifying the biggest players and getting to know them. Need ways to keep communication going.

What would staff say about you? – Good leader of projects – gets/things done. New Public Safety/Town Hall for town. Willingness to do what it takes. *All hands-on deck. Important to deal with the community, the positive and the negative.

Approach and experience of a management team. Recognize the experience of people in their fields.

Seek out grant opportunities, has limited experience with writing grants, but has been involved with Community Compact Grants and State grants – mgmt. grants.

The residents are your bosses. Has had failed override – twice. Difficult for Town, but they were able to work things out.

Build trust with your employees and the Town.
Experience in Union contracts – school contracts (para-professionals)/unions in schools.

CURRENT TOWN CLERK POSITION & POSTING FULL TIME ROLE – Mr. Sickenberger stated that he'd like to see an Assistant Town Clerk hired first and we get them trained. Ms. Gough explained that there is a concern of a person in the Interim Town Clerk role, but does not win the election and someone else does, who has no experience as a Town Clerk. Mr. Sickenberger further explained that the Town had tried to make the Town Clerk position as an appointed one, but that has not passed at Town elections. Mr. von Bleicken added that hiring the Asst. Town Clerk is the priority. Ms. Gough stated that she can I would be interviewing more candidates on Tuesday. Interim Town Administrator indicated that the Town Office clerk's office needs more funds for payroll.

Moving back to Town Administrator Interviews:

CANDIDATE #2, Theresa Cofske

Ms. Cofske stated that it's important a Town Administrator works with the Community, the tax-papers. She noted that she actually worked at Howard's in West Brookfield when she was younger.

Answering questions re: how she would communicate with the Select Board, she stated that she would communicate any way they wished her to do so: email, calling, in person.

Experience in developing budgets. Ms. Cofske stated that they would work with the Financial Team and would compare 3-5 years out. Working with Depts. in the budget process would develop relationships.

Past work in Hardwick – they had a share with their Police Dept. Senior Center building was unsafe – moved them into a municipal office, then formed agreement/COA working relationship of Barre and Hardwick. Being resourceful – worked with Tantasqua forming a shared partnership.

Town Govt/informing the residents. Contacted the schools and sent notices home. Snr. Center had a monthly newsletter. In Brimfield they use announcements online.

Conflict vs. Resolution – If there is conflict within a Financial Team, this can spillover to the Select Board. Work together.

Grants – Was successful at getting a huge grant with USDA.
Work with your outside business community and local businesses. Involved with a Gilbertville TIP project / had easement issues.

Permitting – organized and streamlined Brimfield Fair permitting.

Working with Dept. Heads – does not micro-manage. Open door policy. Every person/dept. who works for the Town is an asset.

Grant Opportunities in past – Used their networks for getting Federal and State grants: MVP/Green Communities/CMRPC/TIPS project, Rt. 9. Hardwick had sewer treatment plants, resolved problems.

If disagreements with the community, give them information.

This will be the 2nd TA for the Town - You need to develop trust with the Departments and Boards. No micro-managing and work with people. In closing, stated that they were the best fit for the Town and they love challenges.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - not needed: Interim Town Administrator Chief Hagglund could deal with grievance issue.

DELIBERATIONS ON TOWN ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS:

Mr. Sickenberger – Both would do well. They both had good examples. Salary negotiations?

Mr. Merkel – Theresa Cofske has the experience to move forward.

Mr. von Bleicken – Concurred with Mr. Merkel. He also stated that there is resistance with employees/residents on having and paying for a Town Administrator, but noted that 93% of Towns have Town Administrators or Town Managers.

Ms. Vayda interjected to state that Heather/Town Clerk will have to resign by January 2025.

Chief Hagglund added that we need to appoint someone pending contract negotiations.

Motion to offer the Town Administrator position to Theresa Cofske contingent on successful contract negotiations made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

Mr. Lapierre wanted to get back to the topic of condensing the Covid units in the parking to give more parking to Town employees/visitors. *This was a discussion point in the previous BOS Agenda (11/12/24) and was approved. Chief Lapierre was unable to attend due to being called out to a fire.

Chief Hagglund added that we will have an Executive Session at a future meeting to negotiate the contract with Theresa Cofske. Mr. Sickenberger asked if Ms. Cofske felt she could start with the Town of West Brookfield in the new year, after January 1st. Ms. Cofske said that would be perfect and that she could sort things with her current Town.

Mr. Sickenberger asked Ms. Gobeille to send Ron San Angelo's contract (previous Town Administrator) to the Select Board members.

OTHER BUSINESS CONT.- Chief Hagglund was asked by John Madden, Financial Advisor to the Town, to get non-union raise numbers for 2%, 2.5%, 3% and 4% for departments to work into their budgets. Mr. Sickenberger asked Chief Hagglund to talk to Lori/Advisory Committee as well and to work with Jillian Patch, Treasurer/Collector to figure out what the total cost to the Town would be for these raises for non-union employees, based on %.

Mr. von Bleicken stated that the next BOS Regular Meeting Date is December 10th, 2024 at 6PM.

8:50PM – ***Motion to Adjourn made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel.***

12/10/24 12/10/24

Authorized Party for the BOS Date/Time Clerk Date/Time