TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Tuesday, January 7th, 2025 – 6:00 PM

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

MINUTES

PRESENT: Roland Sickenberger, Vice Chair; Eric von Bleicken, Chair; Theresa Cofske, Town Administrator; Beth Gobeille, Exec. Asst. to TA/BOS; Chief Nathan Hagglund; Craig Charron, Police officer; Heather Gough, Town Clerk; Pam Searah, Assistant Town Clerk; Paul Lapenas, Cable Advisory Committee.

GUESTS: Scott Morris, resident.

ABSENT: Brad Merkel, Clerk

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

6:03pm: Motion to open the meeting

MINUTES OF December 19th BOS MEETING FOR APPROVAL -
Motion to approve and sign the Minutes of December 19th, 2024 made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS, Mass DOT Rt. 9
Motion to approve the alternatives analysis for 652 West Main Street - Mass DOT Route 9 Project as presented made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

SPECIAL USE PERMIT FOR ICEHOLES' BASS FISHING AT LAKE WICKABOAG 4/20/25 -
Motion to approve the Special Use Permit for Iceholes' bass fishing event at Wickaboag Lake on 4/20/2025 made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

CEDAR DRIVE POLE HEARING – Moved to 1/21/25 meeting

GAS/PLUMBING ALTERNATE INSPECTOR – Ms. Gobeille explained that after speaking with Mr. Mike Pluta, current Gas/Plumbing inspector in Town that we have a need for an alternate inspector, as his department is very busy. There is only 1 line for an alternate inspector, for Plumbing and not Gas. Mr. Pluta recommended Mr. Troy Allen, who is currently working with other Towns as the Alternate. Mr. Sickenberger asked if we can adjust the budget next year for this position as we have a similar alternate role for the Electrical Dept. Ms. Gobeille explained that if the board is happy with this position being appointed she will speak with Mr. Allen and have him come into the next BOS meeting for appointment, pending his acceptance of this position at the current stipend.

APPOINTMENTS FOR THERESA COFSKE AS TOWN ADMINISTRATOR, RECORDS ACCESS OFFICER, ADA COORDINATOR, SEXUAL HARRASSMENT OFFICER -

Motion to approve the appointment of Theresa Cofske as Town Administrator, Record Access Officer, ADA Coordinator from January 7th - June 30th, 2025 and Sexual Harassment Officer from January 7th 2025 as an indefinite appointment made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

CIVILIAN TRAFFIC UNIT –

Chief Hagglund explained that the Traffic Constable will be used for the TIPS project on West Main Street. Retired Police or Active Fire personnel. Fire personnel to be paid the regular rate of a police worker according to the contract. Traffic Constables will be used in the foreseeable future. Order of opportunity to sign on is Police first, then will go down the ranks. Chief Hagglund would like to have a physician certify on a yearly basis. For training, it will be an online course and to review policies and procedures. Firefighters currently direct traffic on the scene. Mr. von Bleicken added that sometimes it's hard to see hands for those directing traffic. Mr. Sickenberger asked about using the stop/go signs, which are used by some groups currently. Chief Hagglund answered that they would not have used by a TIPS (Transportation Improvement Project). He added that he would be paying for these personnel with a grant. Mr. Sickenberger stated that we would first need to adopt the policy, then create the position. This will be added to the next BOS Meeting on January 21, 2025. Mr. Sickenberger asked what we would do with an incident if someone from Fire was working and a call comes through. Chief Hagglund felt that we would look at the severity of the call to see if the Fire personnel had to leave to attend the call. Mr. Sickenberger asked another question if a Traffic Constable worked a lot of overtime is the Town obligated to pay overtime or benefits? Chief Hagglund indicated no. This position does not qualify for overtime.

Reiterating what is needed to do at the next meeting: Create the position, Approve the position, Approve the policy.

Town Administrator Theresa Cofske added that these positions are needed and that we will invite the Fire Chief to the next BOS meeting. Ms. Cofske explained that the policy has been fully vetted with looking at 3 other towns' policies.

Chief Hagglund would like to have the word Traffic on the back of the uniforms. The Traffic Constables will be responsible for purchasing their own uniforms. All footwear and uniforms will be indicated in the paperwork. He added that the Police Dept. is the controller of this detail – background checks will need to be done on all folks. Everyone will be vetted.

TREASURY WARRANTS -

Motion to approve the Treasury warrants as presented made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken 2 yes.

Ms. Heather Gough, Town Clerk came in to swear in the Town Administrator for the 4 appointments: TOWN ADMINISTRATOR, RECORDS ACCESS OFFICER, ADA COORDINATOR, SEXUAL HARRASSMENT OFFICER.

Motion to Enter Executive Session

I move that the West Brookfield Select Board enter into Executive Session for the purpose of Meeting with NEPBA Local 83A Pursuant to G.L. c 30A, sec. 21(a)(2) re: Step II Vacation Grievance of Officer Craig Charron. Further, I move that we reconvene into open session after the Executive Session. (Roll Call Vote) Aye, Mr. Sickenberger; Aye, Mr. Eric von Bleicken – 2 yes.

Motion to close Executive Session (Roll Call Vote) Motion to close Executive Session made by Mr. Sickenberger (Aye). Second by Mr. von Bleicken (Aye) -2 yes.

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Motion to open BOS regular open session (Roll Call Vote) made by Mr. Sickenberger (Aye). Second by Mr. von Bleicken (Aye) – 2 yes.

Discussion and possible vote on Step II Grievance of Officer Charron.

Mr. von Bleicken indicated that this is a very difficult decision. Mr. Sickenberger added that he'd like to have Mr. Merkel here to make this decision, but he might have had to exclude himself. Mr. von Bleicken added further that Mr. Merkel was supposed to call in for the Executive Session, but has not. Mr. Sickenberger and Mr. Merkel agreed that it was best to come to a decision today.

Mr. Sickenberger indicated that although Officer Charron submitted a request for Christmas day off earlier in the year, he did not try to secure coverage himself as other colleagues had done and felt that Chief Hagglund had the right to not approve this request based on meeting the operational staffing needs of the Police Department.

Therefore,

Motion to Deny the grievance from Officer Charron made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

FORMER INTERIM TA REPORT -

Fire Dept – 1 more quote coming. 2 in so far to fix pipe issue in the station. Ms. Cofske to make the decision on which vendor to go with for the work.

Snow Removal /Salting Sidewalks – Union is happy with the current job description for Janitor for Town Hall. The phrase "and other duties.." covers this extra work without having to edit the job description.

Berry trees/front of Town Hall – These have been removed.

Great Hall – Bathroom finally fixed and work is ADA compliant.

Mr. Sickenberger and Mr. von Bleicken both stated that Chief Hagglund did an excellent job as the Interim Town Administrator after Ron retired. He jumped right in.

TA REPORT – Ms. Cofske explained that she has reached out to Departments by Phone to introduce herself. She has also completed a CMRP Commitment Letter after meeting with Janet Pierce. She added that she is getting a feel for what we need and then address needs with the Capital Improvement Plan. Current hot topic is Unions (Police). We will have 2 Union contracts (Sergeant and Officer / 83A and 83B) to negotiate. Mr. Sickenberger added that he'd like to be involved

with this. Ms. Cofske asked if the Board would waive the fees for the Building Permit submitted by the Emergency Rescue Squad for building modifications at their new location. She added that both Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals are waiving their fees as the Emergency Rescue Squad, although is not a Town department, they are serving the residents of the community. Mr. von Bleicken said he would be inclined to waive the fees as well. Mr. Sickenberger stated, "Generally speaking, I am opposed to it."

Motion to waive the Building Permit fees to the Emergency Rescue Squad for building modifications at their new location made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. von Bleicken stated that CMRPC has an Equity Housing Initiative. They are helping to find affordable equitable housing. He will also attend the next meeting with Finance.

NEXT BOS MEETING REGULAR MEETING DATE: January 21st, 2024 – 6pm

7:28PM – **Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.**

Authorized Party for the BOS Date/Time 1/21/25 12:05pm

Clerk Date/Time