TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Tuesday, February 4th, 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; Brad Merkel, Clerk; Beth Gobeille, Exec. Asst. to TA/BOS; Chief Nathan Hagglund; Rich Lapierre, Fire Chief; Bill Mansfield, Assessors; Wes Slobody and Tim Morrell, Planning Board; Jim Daley, Stormwater/Highway; Cassidy Culver, Police officer; Mary Beth Czaja and Dave Brown, Lake Wickaboag Preservation Assoc.

ABSENT: Theresa Cofske, Town Administrator (sick)

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

6:01pm: Motion to open the meeting

MINUTES OF January 21st BOS meeting (Open Session) and January 7th (Executive Session) FOR APPROVAL.
Motion to approve and sign the minutes of January 21st 2025 (Open Session) and minutes of January 7th 2025 (Executive Session) made by Mr. Sickenberger, 2nd by Mr. von Bleicken - 2 yes (Mr. Merkel not at meetings.

MASSDOT PROJECT NO. 609049 Order of Taking, Dedication, and determination of damages – Vote Expected:

Motion to approve the Order of Taking and Dedication on the properties associated with the MassDOT Project No. 609049; to determine the award of damages as set forth in the Order; and to authorize the Executive Secretary to execute all required notices in connection therewith made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

Ms. Gobeille explained that this paperwork is the same as previously signed, but had been updated and signed in front of a notary.

DETERMINATION OF THE USEFUL LIFE OF A FIRE ENGINE -

Motion to determine that the maximum useful life of the fire engine to be financed with the proceeds of the $510,000 borrowing authorized by the vote of the Town passed November 19, 2024 (Article 4) and January 14, 2025 (Ballot Question) is hereby determined pursuant to G.L. c.44, §7(1) to be 10 years made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

Mr. Brown asked why it is only indicated that the fire truck has a useful life for 10 years. Chief Lapierre answered that it was for the bond as the loan is for 10 years, but paperwork attached will indicated that the fire apparatus has a useful lifespan of 20 years.

PLANNING BOARD/TREE HEARING UPDATE (Tree Hearing Monday, January 27th, 2025) -

Mr. Morrell indicated that although there are 3 Planning Board members at this BOS meeting, there are only 2 from Planning Board, which are there specifically for the Tree Hearing Update, there is no issue with a quorum at this meeting.
Mr. Morrell indicated that the poles to be installed are massive (a lot taller than poles normally installed) with lots of lines going up. There is also a large electrical box on the poles themselves. We have had 2 continuances of the Tree Hearing. Lots of residents from Ragged Hill and Lion have objected to the scenic trees being cut down on their roads. Planning Board has said no to National Grid at their last meeting for cutting the trees down, although Planning Board has indicated that of the 5 scenic roads to have poles installed on them, Beaman and Coy Hill will most likely need to be used for this project.

Mr. von Bleicken asked if there were any specific residents who's property will be affected (disrupting their view, I don't want poles in my yard), etc.

Mr. Morrell said Planning Board asked National Grid to come back with a new proposal after the 2 initial hearings, but they came back with the same one. Nothing has changed. He added that a member of the public, who was also a pole guy came to the meeting and told the National Grid rep present that they could re-run the poles from other locations directly to the substation. Stormwater is looking at the fact that there is no ponding and water source there. Coy Hill is discontinued and no accessibility for fire trucks on that end. Mr. Sickenberger asked if this discontinued portion where people go for off-roading. Yes.
Mr. Morrell noted that it was indicated that we had a very dry season last year and the top of Coy Hill is wide open.

Chief Lapierre said that he had not been involved with this project prior, but he would put in a cistern in the ground to store rainwater up there, to use if a fire happens. He added that the Fire Dept. had a similar situation on Rt. 67 this year with no water supply, but luckily someone helped them out. It was indicated again that Coy Hill will be a problem. I (Chief Lapierre speaking) would like to propose having a cistern installed. Chief Lapierre said that he spoken with the Warren Chief and he is in favor of installing this as well. He added that there is a retention pond, which is currently dry with weeds. This would be a good spot for a cistern. He further added that 1 fire with a battery would use a lot of water, probably 45,000 gallons. Mr. Brown said that a bunch of factors should have been sorted out by the Solar company prior to National Grid coming to the Town with this tree removal proposal.

Mary Beth Czaja, who was the Chair previously for Stormwater originally said that Seaboard was going to go out through the water. Pedro Rodriguez was the contact at Seaboard Solar then and Seaboard Solar owns the land, but leases it out. Mr. Brown added that the solar company should improve the road. It needs water access for Fire Dept. In addition, they should have worked out the issue with running poles on the Scenic Roads, the distribution lines and issues with the batteries. Chief Hagglund asked if they were looking for an alternative – pushing the distribution lines underground.

Mr. Merkel asked where we go with this project? Mr. Brown answered that this project was approved without consideration of these issues.

Mr. Daley said the solar company had indicated that their preference for running the lines was Route 9. He added that the road will have to be 60' wide, poles will have to be installed further in. There will be Right Of Way issues.

Mr. von Bleicken asked what we should say to them. Mr. Morrell answered that we will have a list of what they need to do. Stormwater said they have ideas to move forward. It was asked what the new solar contract consists of and if it's different from the previous one. It was indicated that it would be the same contract with a different owner on it.
Mr. Morrell answered that this is now out of the Stormwater and Planning Boards' hands. National Grid's proposal came to include 5 scenic roads. There is no maintenance plan of the roads and there is a sign-off.

Mr. Daley mentioned that the Boston Post Rd. turned theirs (panels) on without a sign-off.
Mr. von Bleicken indicated that there needs to be a working group of the boards involved with this project.
Mr. Brown said it should be Stormwater as it's comprised of members from Conservation, Planning, Highway, Water, Fire, Health. Mr. Morrell asked if we can get information (minutes) from the Conservation Commission meeting tomorrow (February 5th), which Seaboard Solar is attending.
Mr. Sickenberger asked if they would be amenable to putting in a cistern in and how would this project work, other than running it down Rt. 9?
Ms. Czaja added that there are many factors involved and things have changed (like Boston Post Rd.). Chief Lapierre indicated that the batteries were added later and were no in the original plan. We will need to address this.
Mr. von Bleicken asked if we could move on.

LAKE WICKABOAG PRESERVATION SOCIETY/DAVID BROWN, MARY BETH CZAJA, Water Quality Emergency at the Lake (Fanwort) –

Ms. Czaja says they have an unwelcome guest at Lake Wickaboag and adds that it is like Milfoil, highly invasive and propagates by fracture.

Mr. Brown states that it could have been brought in by boat or birds. There are 4 spots (N, E, S, W) identified where it is on the Lake, but they are not sure how it ended up there. He added that they had a biologist look at the Lake and they will have a look again in Spring to see what has changed. At a meeting with Solitude they indicated that they would use a herbicide treatment or hand removal by divers. They may need 3 rounds of herbicide treatment/removals.

Ms. Czaja added that the 1st treatment on Lake Wickaboag was in 1999 and the first bill was $28,000 to remove/manage all weeds. We will need to fight to remove this new visitor soon.

Mr. Brown added further they have a dredge fund, which was built from donations from townspeople's money. It was a preservation trust for all things related to water quality. They had offered to give the money back to folks who contributed as it was no longer used for that purpose. Some donors had sadly passed, but 4 people said yes to having their balance of what they had donated, which wasn't used returned to them. (Correction, this was a gift account, not a trust). He added that they had $18,569.97 left in that account. They may not be able to repurpose this money if it's not used for what it was initially intended for. Mr. Brown indicated that we may look at the FY26 budget and push some of the FY25 items (removal by divers) off to it.

Mr. Sickenberger added that this line item is under the Board of Health budget (weed management). Mr. Brown added that they wanted to talk to BOS first, then they will speak with BOH. He added that this situation needs to be remediated, and they need to get this done and maybe this topic will also come to a Town meeting.

Ms. Czaja added that she had spoken the Town Administrator and Chief Hagglund (Harbormaster).

> Chief Hagglund added that he will be coming to Town Meeting to get an Assistant Harbormaster. He will put this in his budget for this year. BOS will need to create the job position, etc. and he will work the budget. This position would not be a collateral duty one and is not a sworn-in position, not a post. We are exploring the program.

Ms. Czaja added that the state is requiring classes to operate a boat if you were born after 1989, and you will need to be licensed. She added that the classes locally may operate at the Senior Center. She has already spoken the Kelly there.

ALEXANDER GREEN TO BE APPOINTED as Full-Time Student Officer.

Under the provisions of M.G.L. c.41, § 96B I recommend that Alexander Green be appointed as a "Full Time Student Officer" while in attending the Basic Recruit Academy at Quinsigamond Community College Police Academy, Recruit Officer Class #4 pending the successful completion of a Town Physical, Psychological and Final Chief's Interview for the period February 4th 2025 to June 30th 2025 made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

Chief Hagglund indicated that we had several applications for this role. He added that at Quinsigamond Community College, students pay their own way. Mr. Green will graduate on May 1st and that the Town has not had to pay extra costs for Mr. Green (clothing, etc.). Mr. Green will be going back to American Family Care for a police physical on Thursday. He is currently attending college 32 hours/week at Quinsigamond College, so he will be a ride-along in a car until mid-late April. He will be the 7th officer, but he is a student officer. He added that he sold this position at a job fair as a rural policeman position.

TREASURY WARRANTS - Vote Expected

Motion to approve and sign the Treasury Warrants as presented made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

TA REPORT – Ms. Gobeille explained that the TA, Ms. Cofske was sick, but had sent in a report. The Select Board will read on their own time.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. von Bleicken stated that there will be a rural forum to have Attorney General speak to folks in the Town. He has spoken with CMRPC and MDAR and they are all interested. He added that he will also include the Agricultural Commission in Town.

Mr. Brown added that he had met with the Town Administrator about Fair Housing in Town, which has been carved out for other communities. He added that he had been nominated to be on the committee for the Regional Invasive Species Study.

Mr. Slobody added that he had non-agenda business to discuss. He indicated that his family was withdrawing 5 acres from their property on Long Hill Rd. from the Chapter 61A program. We are converting the 5 acres to residential. As BOS has the first refusal on the land, he wanted to let them know. He indicated that the 5 acres are known as Lot 4 on the maps are considered #213 Long Hill Rd.

Chief Lapierre added that he had been awarded an Earmark of $25,000, which will go toward purchasing a Lucas device/CPR machine. This will belong to the Town, but he would like to lend it to Emergency Rescue Squad if needed. He said it is the same device that other communities are using.

NEXT BOS MEETING REGULAR MEETING DATE: February 18th, 2025 – 6pm

Mr. von Bleicken added that he may not be able to attend this meeting.

7:04PM – ***Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.***

2/13/25 2:30pm

Authorized Party for the BOS Date/Time

2/18/25 @ 1803hrs.

Clerk Date/Time