TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Tuesday, February 18th, 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; Theresa Cofske, Town Administrator Beth Gobeille, Exec. Asst. to TA/BOS

GUEST: Dan McCall, West Brookfield Rescue Squad

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

6:01pm: Motion to open the meeting

MINUTES OF February 4th BOS meeting (Open Session) FOR APPROVAL.
Motion to approve and sign the minutes of February 4, 2025 (Open Session) made by Mr. Sickenberger, 2nd by Mr. Merkel - unanimous.

AMENDING THE POLICE CRUISER CHARGE for the Town of West Brookfield.

Ms. Cofske indicated that we currently, we don't charge MassDOT. We will start to charge MassDOT, but not the Admin fee. Mr. Merkel asked if the is should be put in the contract books. He added that we currently have a 10% detail rate, so should we add this rate to the charge. That way if the detail rate changes, so does the rate we charge to MassDOT. It was clarified that the fee received from MassDOT will go back to the General Fund.

Ms. Cofske says that we should wait until the next meeting to discuss this charge again with Chief Hagglund. She further explains that Chief has been asked for use of multiple vehicles by MassDOT and had wanted to install a fee to offset the wear and tear on his vehicles.

Mr. Sickenberger would like to see a %-based fee.

Mr. von Bleicken asked if we could table this for the next meeting and have Chief Hagglund participate.

Motion to table the Police Cruiser Charge discussion until the Police Chief can attend made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

SELECT BOARD ANNUAL REPORT –

Potential topics: Bill Jankins, start of Rt. 9 project, Water Treatment plant, Grants/Funding initiated, new firetruck, Public Safety committee re: new station/rationalization, challenges ahead funding potential cuts, new TA, updating Town Hall, problems finding staff, etc.

Mr. Sickenberger added that he'd like a letter to be put in the Annual town report from the Select Board, adding all the details that Mr. Merkel has mentioned above.

Ms. Cofske clarified that we will be dedicating the Annual Town Report to Bill Jankins and the backside of this dedication will have a page of item written up about him and note his contributions to the Town.

Mr. von Bleicken added that he will write the Select Board's Annual Report.

LAKE WICKABOAG SPECIAL USE PERMIT / ICEHOLES, BASS FISHING ON April 13, 2025.
Motion to approve Iceholes' request for a special permit to hold a bass fishing event on April 13, 2025 on Lake Wickaboag made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.

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 -

West Brookfield Rescue Squad:

Ms. Cofske mentions that on the current contract with West Brookfield Rescue Squad is to be paid for each year the last day of the fiscal year – this is not typical. Money has been allocated. We would like to create an amendment to this contract for the next meeting so we may pay them now and ongoing, payment will be the 1st month of each fiscal year. Ms. Cofske will prepare the amendments and send to Town Counsel.

Mr. McCall indicated that there were last-minute changes to the contract with the last Town Administrator. He just accepted it after it had been completed and hadn't really noticed that clause of being paid at the end of the fiscal year. He adds that it has been 8 months into this fiscal year and it's been tough getting through with an 8% increase in last year's call volume. There are lots of sick people, type A & B, Covid, Pneumonia. We want to get to all calls and have 2 ambulances going out constantly. We are struggling.

Mr. McCall further continues that he thought a contract form Barnstable County was used, but last minute there were lots of changes. Ms. Cofske added that "We are encumbering the monies at Town meeting – this seems like an error." She added further that the Select Board will vote on the amendment at the next BOS meeting and that there would always be the phrase "subject to appropriation" in a contract.

Mr. McCall added that the Rescue Squad will be needing a new ambulance in 2027 and it should cost around $450,000 although they can go up to $720,000. New cardiac monitors are around $56,000 and new stretchers are about $33,000. Chief Lapierre is getting a Lucas machine, which costs about $16-20,000. This is specifically used for cardiac arrests and we may be able to use this from time to time.

Inclement Weather Policy:

Ms. Cofske explains that most Town offices follow the regional school district for inclement weather and closing Town offices, etc. This would not be a paid day off. Employees would use either a vacation day or work out coverage with their supervisor and work another day in exchange, etc. Ms. Cofske will develop a policy and bring it back to the Select Board.

One Stop For Growth:

There is to be a Public Safety Feasibility Study and this will move forward with this with the Public Safety Committee.

Capital Improvement Committee:

Working through the Town's new processes and have not received a lot of Capital Improvement plans back from departments. Chief Hagglund wants to put more time into developing his. Fire Department won't be submitting one as they're working on the new fire truck. Ms. Cofske to meet with David Brown and will be sending out the original email, which Ron sent out initially in October to Departments.

When Ms. Cofske was sitting with Jim Daley to discuss the budget they were discussing the tarring of the parking lot at Highway. Ms. Cofske identified that we need tarring the Town Hall parking lot as well, so we should work together, getting a better deal and adding it to the asphalt budget and job. Capital Planning thought it was ok to submit this and will call it $50K, but Jim Daley will crunch the numbers. Mr. Sickenberger and Mr. von Bleicken are ok with this.

Ms. Cofske was asking the Select Board if they saw that Free Cash was certified. They all said yes.

Chief Hagglund's CCTV initiative/bids:

Ms. Cofske added that the bids for interior and exterior revamping of the CCTV seem low and she was not sure if that included labor. They are looking at the configuration.

Durant/Berthiaume:

Ms. Cofske has met with both at recent functions/events and will speaking with both re: funding for the Town for this project.

Police/Highway/Fire:

Ms. Cofske explained that there are some increases. She will meet with Sergeant Letendre next week re: his Union Contract. There are also upcoming union contract negotiations with Officers Charron and Culver. Chief Hagglund's contract is up Fall FY26. We should look to negotiate this soon.

Budgets:

Ms. Cofske had mentioned that John Madden had put in all the current numbers and asked her to go through the budgets. They will connect next week re: this.

Health Insurance:

Ms. Cofske indicated that the increase may be 19% and it might be worth looking at government insurance. She added that any changes we make will affect unions.

Schools:

Schools will have a number between 6 -12%. Hopefully the budget will more sensible.

NEIT meeting:

Ms. Cofske mentioned that the Senior Center had not historically in the contract with NEIT. It may have been an oversight, but they had not be included. Question re: if the library was included as well.

Ms. Cofske added that we will be in good shape for 2 years, but after that we will need to move to be either cloud-based or get another server. There is a Community Compact IT Grant, which we can apply for. NEIT will help with the application process, they have grant writers on staff.

DLS:

Ms. Cofske in summary mentioned that she is looking for opportunities missed and weaknesses that we need to strengthen. She has spoken with Zach from the Division of Local Services (DLS). They may do a quick review for us. Ms. Cofske also feels it's important to disclose everything with the financial team before we work with him.

PILOT Agreements/Solar:

Ms. Cofske is investigating this.

Others:

Positive change for the future. Boat excise tax? This would need to be on the warrant for Town Meeting. Ms. Cofske was asking what the meal tax rate is for the Town? She will pull data from DLS. Also, opportunities for any Marijuana Growing/Retail taxes?

Ms. Gobeille mentioned that it had been discussed earlier updating the Gas/Plumbing rates for the Town.

Principal Assessor or contract with a company for the Town. Currently we are working with Roy Bishop/Assessment group.

Water Dept.:

Project awarded is worth 1.1 million, although we will need a loan from USDA. Kathy will need a letter from the Board to apply for this. Ms. Cofske will draft a letter for the next meeting.

Water bills:

Common Committee meeting to meet with Water to plan the repair to the fountain (fix the pump). Ms. Cofske is trying to bring them together. Current Fountain bill for water is high. We will look for the Charter for the Fountain, which may indicate who pays for the water used. Facilities not paying for water.

Library Boiler System:

Funding to replace boiler system. Ms. Cofske spoke with Jeff Robbins/Library Trust. He had a contract for the work, but it will not meet the law for procurement. We are not exempt from this. Tasse, the chosen contractor is not on state contract and does not belong to a cooperative. They indicated that they had an executed contract. Ms. Cofske told them to hold off for now and she will seek a state contract or go for procurement. She would like the Select Board to be aware of this.

OTHER BUSINESS-

Mr. Merkel had mentioned that he had been to a Public Safety meeting recently. He mentioned that had an idea of a Town/State partnership for the Public Safety complex with an extra garage for the state. He also mentioned that Regionalization would be a tough sell and the State would potentially join us. Ms. Cofske to explore this option.

Mr. von Bleicken mentioned that he has been involved with planning the Rural Farmer's Forum. Ann Gobi will be there to speak. He went to the MDAR Forum at Smith Vocation. Among attendees were Mary Jordan/MDAR. They'd like to offer help for Farmers. Involved groups so far are Quaboag Food Council, CMRPC. Need Agriculture representatives for the Town. He's looking to get dates from Ann Gobi for when she's available. So far looks like possibly a Monay or Wednesday in April.

Ms. Cofske mentioned that she was invited to attend the Ware Business and Civic Association. The President of Bay State Medial will discuss the reopening of Mary Lane Hospital. Representatives Donnie Berthiaume and Peter Durant will be in attendance. She'd like to attend if possible. The Board agreed that it was a good event to attend.

NEXT BOS MEETING REGULAR MEETING DATE: March 4th, 2025 – 6pm

7:25pm - ***Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. Merkel – unanimous.***

3/4/2025 10:05 AM

Authorized Party for the BOS Date/Time

3/4/25 6pm

Clerk Date/Time