TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Tuesday, March 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; Theresa Cofske, Town Administrator Beth Gobeille, Exec. Asst. to TA/BOS; Jillian Patch, Treasurer Collector; Jim Daley, Highway Superintendent; Anne Garwood-Hampp, Highway Secretary; Chief Hagglund, Police Chief; Michelle Durkee, VSO; Cami Lamica, Resident/Advisory Member; Cassidy Culver, Police Officer.

GUEST: Dan McCall, West Brookfield Rescue Squad; Brielle Durkee, daughter to VSO; Jen Dold, Resident, Ben Taylor Resident (Whispering Pines).

ABSENT: Brad Merkel, Clerk

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

6:00pm: Motion to open the meeting

MINUTES OF February 18th BOS meeting (Open Session) FOR APPROVAL.

Motion to approve and sign the minutes of February 18, 2025 (Open Session) made by Mr. Sickenberger, 2nd by Mr. von Bleicken - unanimous.

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

Mr. Hagglund explained that currently the Town pays expenses for all repairs, fees on vehicle, which is used for detail by MassDOT. There is wear and tear on the vehicle as well and the vehicle sits there idling for hours at a time. Now DOT wants 2 cruisers for detail work. He explains further that in January alone there were 118 details, which passed all of last year. With the resurfacing of Rt. 32 and Phase II he'd like to take MassDOT out of the exemption.

Mr. Sickenberger asked why not have a flat rate or a %. Mr. Hagglund is worried about a jump in expenses. He added that Mr. Hagglund had wanted a cruiser to use on details. Mr. Hagglund replied that he if he can get that car back out on the road he will. He further explained that the last vehicle he asked for was a replacement for Sgt. Letendre.

Motion to accept the revised Police Cruiser Charge as presented made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

FIRE TRUCK BORROWING FOR SIGNATURE –

Ms. Patch explained that she was able to get 4.4% interest rate for 1 year renewing band. Hopefully the market will see rates drop. Greenfield COOP Bank is the winning bidder.

Mr. Sickenberger asked when we would expect to see the new firetruck. Ms. Patch explained that as soon as Chief Lapierre puts the warrant through.

Motion to approve the Fire Truck Borrowing loan documents as presented made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

WEST BROOKFIELD RESCUE SQUAD AMENDMENT TO CONTRACT -

Motion to approve the amendment to the West Brookfield Rescue Squad contract as presented made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

Ms. Cofske explained that she has prepared a quarterly payment contract for future years. Legal advised quarterly for the current contract. Mr. McCall spoke with his legal counsel and is waiting for their comments. Ms. Cofske was advised by counsel to go with quarterly payments, so that is what's presented. Mr. McCall added that he had never heard of getting paid after the year of service before and that there were last-minute changes to the contract.

WATER DEPARTMENT USDA LOAN / LETTER FOR KATHY LANDRY FROM BOS TO APPLY FOR THIS -

Mr. Sickenberger asked if Ms. Cofske would be the person signing this. She indicated yes.

Motion to approve Kathy Landry to apply for the USDA loan on behalf of the Water Dept. made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

AIA CONTRACT FOR EXTERIOR WORK/TOWN HALL FOR SIGNATURES -

Ms. Cofske mentioned that she will be sending the contract to the contractor for signature and will set up a meeting with all parties to go through the process and next steps.

Motion to approve the contract for the Exterior Work for Town Hall, Phase as presented and have the Select Board chair, Eric von Bleicken sign on behalf of the Select Board as "owner" made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.

VETERAN FLAG PROGRAM FOR WEST BROOKFIELD –

Ms. Durkee explained that she had met with the Women's Auxiliary unit of the American Legion. They had a grant and were asking how to spend it.

Ms. Durkee explained that the 1st conversation was to fill in the gap with purchasing flags/poles/brackets for the Town. The 2nd conversation was about grants. They discussed a program run by the Legion and other groups and used in other Tows/Cities, which have Facial Flags on the Town Common or another place to be viewed. The flags have a photo of a vet on them. The vet must be from their Town. Usually, the family for the vet will pay for the flag to be produced. Families who have a vet family member who was KIA or MIA will not have to pay the cost for their flag and usually the Legion or other groups will pick up these costs. The Legion will advertise this program to families in the community and those families who respond will send in a check to cover the cost of the flag being printed. Milling companies know what to do with these flags. Ms. Durkee will go through the military photos to make sure they are appropriate. The grants from Legion will probably cover 1 or 2 of the flags to be purchased for indigent families. She will work with the Assessors to determine if the family meets the criteria. Ware, Leominster, Fitchburg have facial flags in their towns and the flag costs are approximately $250 each. The flags would have the credentials of the vet, years served, their rank, etc. They would also need proof of their service. Ms. Durkee would like to get Joe Salvador involved in this program.

The Legion agreed to support the Town to meet a $700 deficit toward purchasing flags/poles/brackets.

Ms. Cofske said we should send a Thank you to the Legion from the Select Board for this.

BROOKHAVEN LAKE ASSOCIATION SNOW PLOWING/REMOVAL -

Jen Dold, resident and President of Brookhaven Association told the Select Board that their group has spent $10,000 on their roads and they are committed to a long-term road to recovery.

She wanted to talk to the Select Board for help with snow plowing of private road. She mentioned that in the winter they had a bus incident with a van and that the Highway Dept.'s response was outstanding. She would like to ask for help with plowing Whispering Pine to the list of Plowed Roads in the Town. She added that there are lots of kids on the road and more and more younger families are moving there. Whispering Pines is also the main road in that area, which would aid cars getting in and out. Ben Taylor, another resident on Whispering Pines lives 1/4 mile from Pierce Road and mentioned that there are big pieces needed to improve the current road situation. He added that Brookhaven was originally a seasonal summer community, but the roads have not built up.

Ms. Dold added that Whispering Pines received a quote for $250,000 to tar. They are focusing on the main road, and have long term plans to target the cross roads, which have been neglected.

Mr. Sickenberger added that the question to plow Whispering Pines is more of a question for Jim Daley/Highway Department.

Mr. Daley replied that he simply does not have the manpower. He will be asking for outside contractors in next year's budget. He added that he is using currently 6 out of 10 of his trucks and needs 1 ¼ trucks specifically to plow private roads in the Town. He added that we could in fact plow all roads, but the work would not be complete. There will be complaints. As it is, he had his plows out last storm for 22 hours straight. He added further that the Town never voted to spend money on private roads. Ms. Cofske is looking into this.

Ms. Cofske explained that what would happen is they would present a list of roads to the Board and they would then vote.

Mr. Daley added that he would like to partner with the Town to potentially fix the roads to get them ok to plow, but again he needs the manpower.

Ms. Cofske added that the Town Clerk is doing research to see if this vote went to the Town and didn't go to the AG's office.

Mr. Daley commented that he is concerned if a Public resident is upset about the roads.

Mr. Sickenberger asked about the number of private roads in the Town. Mr. Daley responded that we have about 10 miles of roads and 2.5 miles of them are private roads. Private roads need extra salt/sand. Highway already does salt/sand some of the private roads, but they need to be treated repeatedly in a storm.

LACK OF HIGHWAY PERSONNEL -

Mr. Daley indicated that he would have only 2 full time guys in 2 weeks. He had 4, but 1 left and 1 is retiring soon. He has been advertising and had received 2 applicants – 1 was qualified, 1 was not. The one who was qualified went back to the Town he was working for and they gave him more money.

Mr. Daley added that some Towns are increasing wages and changing insurance splits to 80/20 to keep, recruit workers. In Spring, 1 man will be mowing almost full time. He may have to sub-contract out to get folks. The Union will be acceptable to this. He added further that the Town of Holden just approved a new wage scale as they were not getting applicants. Other Towns are also increasing rates. He added further that in Spencer, a foreman's rate is $39/hour. To save costs, he took out vehicles out of his Capital plan. He says we need to invest in people and is very concerned.

Ms. Garwood-Hampp indicated that we will need to outsource, and this will be at the prevailing wage.

Ms. Cofske added that she sees a lot of work needs to be done all around and we can't afford to not do this. Prevailing wages is real and turnover rate is costly. We would need $50,000 more a year for $5/hour more for labor.

Mr. Daley indicated that we will open up a can of worms for other departments. Other Towns have problems. It'll get really bad if not.

Mr. Sickenberger said it's already bad.

Ms. Garwood-Hampp added that at least we need to maintain who we have.

Mr. von Bleicken commented that this is like a broken record, going round and round.

Mr. Daley added that his budget for next year is based on current parameters and he needs to put money into the Capital Improvement Plan.

Ms. Lamica asked how many full time and part time positions does Highway have. Mr. Daley replied that they have 3 full time employees, himself and Anne Garwood-Hampp. Ms. Lamica suggested that he take money away of the part time help and move to full time. Mr. Daley indicated that the part-time help is only for Snow & Ice although he could cut services and move money elsewhere.

Ms. Lamica further asked why we were paying prevailing wage and they didn't with schools. Mr. Daley responded that any Public Work Chapter 149 needs a prevailing wage.

Mr. von Bleicken suggested that he could put in a request now in the budget.

Mr. Daley answered that he could either increase the pay, reduce work or increase pay.

Mr. Sickenberger said that we should bring back in 2 ½ Proposition.

Ms. Cofske added that we need full benchmarking and should have a Personnel Committee. She added further that if we go with the override question we need the facts and have everything out there. This didn't work last year and we're not ready. Ms. Cofske said that everybody/department is important. We need a Department Head/Advisory meeting and have Finance's backing. We will start with one department.

Mr. von Bleicken asked Jim Daley what would happen if we don't get the resources.

Chief Hagglund said for his Dept. it's hard to keep people for 4 years at a good rate. He's had to bring in State Police at nights and this was a hard thing to do. Without financial backing it is difficult. Mr. Daley added that there is no state Highway to bail us out.

TREASURY WARRANTS -

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

TA REPORT –

Budget Books: Working with John Madden. Next meeting on March 20th, then 24th or 26th. No numbers from the school yet. Meeting with Mr. Landeau, working on drafts of Annual Town Warrant and Special Town Meeting Warrant. Examining the prior fiscal bills.

Assessors: Pilots/status. Met to discuss Solar projects. Two of the companies should be starting pilots soon. Cronin should be ready. Meeting with Pure Sky next week. Accounting, Treasurer should meet to discuss.

RRG: Meeting with them on 11th with Assessors, Treasurer/Collector and Town Account. Need to identify areas which need service. Looking at structure of service provided to Assessors.

Union: Negotiations are undergoing. Sergeant, Fire Chief, Patrolman's (discussing guidelines), Police Chief (expiring middle of next fiscal year).

Quaboag Regional School District: Would like to jump on their procurement /better rate for purchasing for the Town.

Green Communities Award: Received and sent a copy to Marc Astrella.

Exterior Work Town Hall: Will send to contractor and architect. A pre-construction meeting will be held with all parties. Question if Historical Commission is to be included in this. We will also need a cost estimate for Phase III.

Hazard Mitigation Plan: Deadline was last night. Rich submitted this to MEMA. Working on an updated plan w/ CMRPC and MEMA staff.

OTHER BUSINESS-

Mr. von Bleicken: Rural Farmer's Forum is to be held on April 14th in the Great Hall. Possible time: 5-7:30pm.

NEXT BOS MEETING REGULAR MEETING DATE: APRIL 1st, 2025 – 6pm

7:26pm - ***Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes***

3/12/2025 10:50 Am

Authorized Party for the BOS Date/Time

3/18/25 @ 6:05pm.

Clerk Date/Time