# TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

## BOARD OF SELECTMEN

**Tuesday, April 1st, 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; Jim Daley, Highway Superintendent; Jonathan Bonin, Fire Dept. member; Cami Lamica, Advisory.

GUEST: Mr. Boos, resident; Ali Smichinski, (appt. for Animal Inspector); Leah Shattuck, former AI/ACO; National Grid rep; Mr. and Mrs. Keith, residents.

ABSENT: Brad Merkel, Clerk

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION**

***6:00pm: Motion to open the meeting***

Minutes for March 18th – skipped, will revisit at next meeting, April 15th.

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING ARTICLE: LOCAL ADOPTION/ROOM OCCUPANCY -
Ms. Cofske explains that this is a simple straight article authorizing the importance of local excise tax, not lodging. We can set a % up to a max of 6%. Some towns are at 1, some are at 3.

Mr. Sickenberger asked if the Short-Term Rental would be at the Annual Town Meeting. Ms. Cofske explained that it would not as there is much more work on that to be done on that first. This is the first step, adding/setting a local excise tax.

Mr. Sickenberger asked if we should vote to support the Town Administrator, adding that setting a % would be good too, but added that he was fine with 6%. Mr. von Bleicken concurred that 6% was fine.

***Motion to place the Article for a Local Option Excise for Rooms tax on the Warrant and setting said tax at 6% made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.***

JOHN BONIN/BOOT DRIVE FOR FIRE DEPT. OUTREACH TO COMMUNITY – John Bonin/Fire Dept. member/volunteer and Union Steward for WBFD Local 1364, explained that a requirement for being in the union is to fundraise. The West Brookfield Fire Dept. union members would like to hold a Boot Drive at the intersection of East Main S., West Main St., Central St. and Cottage St. on April 26th between the hours of 9am – 12pm to benefit Outreach programs to the community and recruitment programs.

***Motion to allow the WBFD to conduct a Boot Drive at the intersection of East Main S., West Main St., Central St. and Cottage St. on April 26th between the hours of 9am – 12pm made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.***

KATRINA KLEIN RESIGNATION ACCEPTANCE-

***Motion to accept Katrina Klein's resignation as Animal Control Officer/Animal Inspector as of March 31, 2025 made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes***

ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER AND ANIMAL INSPECTOR APPOINTMENTS -

Ms. Cofske indicated that we had interviews for both positions and have recommended Leah Shattuck as Animal Control Officer and Ali Smichinski as Animal Inspector to the Board. She added that the Town has a position of Assistant Animal Control Officer, but this is not funded. The current ACO position is funded at $4275 and she would recommend $2200 as the stipend for the Assistant Animal Control Officer. This is not a lot, but will allow the Assistant to help on calls, which the ACO can't attend to, but will give ability to shadow the ACO position as well. She would firstly like to fund the 2nd position (Assistant Animal Control Officer) for FY26 and will advertise for this and then appoint.

***Motion to appoint Leah Shattuck as the Animal Control Officer effective April 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025 made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.***

***Motion to appoint Ali Smichinski as the Animal Inspector effective April 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025 made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.***

***Motion to fund the Assistant Animal Control Officer for FY2026 in the amount of $2200 made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.***

SENIOR CENTER WINE AND BEER TASTING EVENT AUGUST 11TH, 2025 –

Ms. Gobeille explained to the Board of Selectmen that this is a similar event as the Senior Center had held last year with 1 oz pours (limited) and will feature local merchants' beer and wine and the tickets for the event will be limited as well.

***Motion to allow the Senior Center to hold a Wine and Beer Tasting event on August 11th , 2025 from 1pm made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.***

6:15PM: POLE HEARING, WEST MAIN STREET –

National Grid spokesperson explained that the work involved would be mainly; relating to tree wires, barrier wires for storms, shortening spans between poles, fixing brackets, etc.

Mr. Daley added that the Poles (to be installed and relocated) have been approved already by MassDOT for the Phase II Rt. 9 project.

Mr. Boos, a resident at 494 West Main Street, added that he had worked out with National Grid to move one of the poles in the middle of where 2 poles already exist, which he is happy about and will deter folks from turning around in his driveway. He asked the National Grid engineer when they anticipate the work being completed. The engineer took down Mr. Boos' details and will let him know as well as the Highway Dept. Mr. Boos also indicated that National Grid should be careful not to get too close to the iron trough, as it was almost his last time.
Mr. Keith had asked for confirmation that poles #54 and #55 will be set back from their locations and that poles #55-50 and #56 will stay. National Grid confirmed all the pole placements for Mr. Keith. Mr. and Mrs. Keith are ok with the poles.

***Motion to install 7 JO poles and relocate 6 JO poles on West Main Street., beginning at a point approximately 5 feet South Westerly of the centerline of the intersection of Coy Hill Road and West Main Street and continuing approximately 1500 feet in a North Westerly direction. As part of Mass DOT Project #609049, install 7 midspan poles and relocate 6 existing poles – West Brookfield, MA made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.***

Hearing Closed.

KENNETH CHOBOT/JUNKYARD, CLASS III AUTO LICENSE RENEWAL –
Ms. Gobeille explained to the Board of Selectmen that Mr. Chobot had been receiving Class III, Junkyard licenses from the Select Board for years up until his last renewal period in 2024 (for the year 2025) as holding a business at his address was not allowable according to the Zoning Bylaws of the Town. She further explained that in October of 2024 the Zoning Enforcement Officer had issued a cease and desist for the business he had at his property. Debris/car parts were also on site. Mr. Chobot did comply with this cease and desist. Legal counsel has also confirmed that a previous issuance of a license does not preclude him to override the Zoning Enforcement Office's decision or the bylaws.
Mr. Sickenberger asked Mr. Chobot how many vehicles he would have on site at any time. Mr. Chobot indicated that he had between 2 and 3 vehicles each week.
Mr. von Bleicken asked if this agenda item could be tabled until the next meeting, when Mr. Merkel would be present.

REGIONAL RESOURCE GROUP PROPOSALS FOR ASSESSING SERVICES –
Ms. Cofske explained that she met with Advisory, Assessor and Financial Teams with RRG to review their scope. Restructuring the Dept. is necessary. Assessors have given full support. Advisory, Accounting and

Financial have given full support as well. Have involved whole financial team. Important to keep delineation of work to the team. The Assessors bring in the revenue, the "lion's share of it." Need to be on top of it and to have a well-oiled machine.

We had no staff office fluent in software. Mistakes are costly. Mr. von Bleicken added that this could save us. This will fix what's wrong, not in 6 months, but in time.

Ms. Cofske added that we had gone from a full-time person to a part-time person, pulled from inspections and had hired a consultant in to do inspections (with his son) at a rate of about $10,000/year. In review with the dept., we thought we were behind, with about 323 inspections to do, but only just over 100 were done. We are behind in assessing, but could be more behind than that.

Right now, we should have preliminary bills – 2 proposals to finish out our current fiscal year (paying out of consultant fees), but we will still have a balance. I would like to focus on the Preliminary proposal. We could focus on the "hot items."
This office is cannot go forward the way they are. They're underwater. RRG has enough to get the work done and we will get office support.

If we hired a full-time person (assessor), it would be more money - $70,000 for a town of our size.

Mr. Sickenberger asked if we have been paying the consultant (with not working)

Ms. Cofske replied that for FY25 the contract was not renewed.

Mr. von Bleicken added that we do not have to pay for what's not been done.

Mr. Sickenberger replied that they will no longer be working for the Town.

Ms. Cofske added that RRG will start this July 2025. John Madden is revamping the Assessors' budgets. Ms. Cofske further added that she would not restructure the dept. without the vote of the Board. We have no assessors that are certified. Mr. Sickenberger added that we need to move forward with this. These are elected officials.

Mr. Keith asked how often do they reassess properties?

Ms. Cofske answered that there are different cycles – generally 10 years, sometimes if building has been done they will reassess.

Ms. Cofske added that recertification for an assessor isn't a big lift.

She'd like the Board's support to pursue the RRG deal.

***Motion to support Theresa Cofske working with RRG for Assessment Services made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes.***

COMMUNITY/MDAR GRANT POSSIBILITIES –

Mr. von Bleicken commented that we have a Community garden. It is by the island by Lake Shore Dr. Residents had been using it for years. It was a mess. Mark O'Donnell/Highway got involved and cleaned it up.

There is a need. Sharing Cupboard will be losing funding and a greater need will happen in the community. Following that, there are grant possibilities through MDAR.

QUABOAG VALLEY FOOD COUNCIL –

Mr. von Bleicken will be attending this event. There are ways to put together a community garden – purchasing plots to work yourself. Sharing Cupboard could have their own plot.

FLAG AND SEAL PROJECT –

Mr. von Bleicken said that the topic is tabled for now. It had passed in the Town and is moving forward. They're offering samples of what to do with possible changes. Highway is on board to help out.

***The Select Board will enter into Executive Session for a meeting with Highway Superintendent pursuant to G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(2) (contract negotiations with non-union personnel). The Select Board will reconvene in open session following Executive Session.***

***7:53pm. Back in Open Session***

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 –

Green Communities: There will be a meeting tomorrow. Mark Astrella (from the schools) will be in attendance. Donna has already set up accounts.

Town Hall Exterior: Meeting next week possible. Will check with, Historical should be there.

*Next phase discussions w/ architect. Needs to bring forward with Capital Planning. Exposed wood, etc.

Solar pilots: Met with financial team. Coy Hill/Beamis had questions of Assessors. Draft pilot to be sent over. Currently there are 2 going forward.

Annual/Special Town meeting warrants: Ms. Cofske asked How do you want these done? Normally, she would get them ready and go forward to the Select Board. She mentioned that normally before Town Meeting Capital Advisory Committee, Advisory and Select Board will meet. Ms. Gobeille had mentioned that last year the Select Board and Advisory met separately.

For the next meeting Ms. Cofske will bring warrants (3 with Town Administrator), 2 w/ Capital Plan).

Budgets: Worked with most departments. Will need to work with Recreation on their budget.

Attorney/Cable: Meeting went well. Attorney Solomon was very thorough. Different approach. Ascertainment hearing/late March, early April. The attorney would like to know what each department would use Access programming for. Could work with company who works closely with Spectrum/Charter. There is the potential grant to get fiberoptics to Town. Proposal is 0 in capital, 5% fee. Attorney said no. Franchise fee varies. Will go for 4.5% and create capital budget. Capital # will remain.

Quaboag: 5.65% - should get something tomorrow from them.

Contracts: Moving along. Nearly ready to use legal. Patrolman's contract coming.

Sr. Center grease trap: Could be a reverse transfer to pay for this.

Other issues: Has a report of BOS can see. *Will probably need to reschedule meeting.

**NEXT BOS MEETING REGULAR MEETING DATE: APRIL 15th, 2025 – 6pm**

8:10pm - ***Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Mr. Sickenberger. Second by Mr. von Bleicken – 2 yes***

Authorized Party for the BOS Date/Time

Clerk Date/Time