TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Monday, May 27th, 2025 – 6:00 PM

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

MINUTES

PRESENT: Roland Sickenberger, Vice Chair; Catherine Lamica, member; Theresa Cofske, Town Administrator; Beth Gobeille, Exec. Asst. to TA/BOS; John Madden, Consultant (via phone).

GUEST: Diane Vayda, Common Committee; Lori Loughlin, Advisory Committee; Melany Gronski, St. Luke's Guesthouse

ABSENT: Brad Merkel, BOS Clerk.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

6:01pm: Motion to open the meeting

Mr. Sickenberger announced that this meeting will be recorded.

MINUTES FOR April 29 BOS MEETINGS and May 19th (Open and Executive Sessions) for approval.
Tabled minutes from 4/29/25 as Mr. Merkel who was not able to attend tonight's meeting.

Motion to approve the BOS Open minutes for May 19th made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger – 2 yes. All in favor, aye.

Motion to approve the BOS Executive Session minutes for May 19th made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger – 2 yes. All in favor, aye.

Mr. Sickenberger asked to move the reorganization of the Select Board until the end of the meeting.

ST. LUKE'S GUESTHOUSE PRESENTATION –

Ms. Gronski (representing Friends of St. Luke's Guesthouse) – The only temporary homeless shelter that serves single men, women and families in Southern Worcester County in Southbridge. Short-term shelter (not emergency) and supporting self-sufficiency. We would like to establish a community partnership and are sharing with the Town who we are. St. Luke's Guesthouse contains 7 bedrooms, 13 beds -fully furnished, common spaces: kitchen, bathrooms, laundry rooms. Provide free housing/utilities/laundry/educational tools. Case manager on site. People must work and they provide help to acquire work. People apply for their program through grants to help before becoming homeless. Also people have to be sober or in a program (at least for 30 days) and manageable mental health. Their length stay is based on them becoming self-sufficient. Donations accepted through their website or at special events, etc.

Ms. Gobeille to put out leaflets and flyers in Town Hall/Offices, on community board outside Town Hall and on the Community tab on the Town's website.

Mr. Sickenberger commented that they are providing a wonderful and necessary service.

LIEUTENANT POSITION CREATION, JOB DESCRIPTION AND SERGEANT JOB DESCRIPTION FOR ACCEPTANCE -

Ms. Cofske explained that these are pretty straight forward, boiler plate, except for revisions Chief Hagglund had put in to tailor it to West Brookfield.

Mr. Sickenberger asked Ms. Lamica if she had any reservations on accepting these without the Chief present. She answered that no, we had talked about these when she was with Advisory. Have a question about the Lieutenant being part of NEPBA 83B. Ms. Cofske answered no, that this was not an issue.

Motion to accept the creation of the Lieutenant job description made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger – 2 yes. All in favor, aye.

Motion to accept the revised Sergeant job description made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger – 2 yes. All in favor, aye.

Motion to accept the Lieutenant job description made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger – 2 yes. All in favor, aye.

CONTROL OF THE WILLIAM KING TRUST FOR TOWN COMMON –

Ms. Vayda explained that she was notified of the Trust coming into the Town in December by Ms. Gobeille and there has the question of who controls the trust and questions regarding the restrictions. She asked if it was an interest-only thing, as is the case with other trusts. Ms. Vayda indicated that she'd like her committee to have control over the trust, but would run projects and costs by (BOS). Crumbling water fountain by the bandstand - bricks have been removed. We'd like to get that project up and running. Quote is $5500.
An electrical panel on the Common is exposed - an electrician is getting a quote to fix that (bandstand trust money should cover it). There is also like to get a new case for it as the current one is rotting. Unsure of the cost.
Trying to beautify the fountain. Replacing the actuator and another part on the fountain – work should be done tomorrow. The large Fountain also needs sandblasting and repainting. Quote for sandblasting is $9500 only.

We're getting a Christmas tree too – might be donated. Potentially to be placed between the 2 pines.

Some sidewalk replacing/repair too – speaking with Jim Daley about this.

Ms. Vayda explained that they will focus on using $5500 from the Trust on the fountain initially.

Mr. Sickenberger asked that the Common Committee would be in control of the Trust for 3 years. Ms. Vayda explained that the Common Committee works together well. Mr. Richards also has history and knowledge of previous projects on the Common and which vendors were used. Cassie Paolucci has many business connections, which are helpful.

Motion to approve the Common Committee having control of William King Trust for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2025 and through Fiscal Year 2026 made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger – 2 yes. All in favor, aye.

REVISITING FY 26 SALARY BUDETS FOR HIGHWAY DEPT. –

Ms. Cofske mentioned there was a question about the legality of coming out of Executive Session and into Open Session without a vote on the salary in Open Session in the April 29th BOS meeting and it was determined that it is not necessary. When you enter back into Open Session you would announce if it was approved in closed session, technically not a vote. Both Select Board members believe they had announced that, but there is no record of this occurring in the meeting minute notes. Town counsel felt that the vote stands. Board could vote to amend the minutes to reflect the approval. The BOS Board will meet with Advisory in a joint meeting this Thursday.

Concerns re: Highway Secretary salary line in the budget. Ms. Cofske indicated that it was based on AFSCME steps, and not based on the Collins Center report. An email was also sent over from Jessica/AFSCME stating that they had no problem with the grade and step change for this position.

Ms. Cofske added that with the Asst. Treasurer position, that position is a clerk, not administrative. Nicole has been working on her certification. This will be a welcome change to the Dept., but this will not happen in this budget. The position will not be a union position in the end.

There were discussions and concerns about compensation for Jim Daley/Highway and the vote previously taken by BOS on 4/29/25 and if they could rescind the vote and alter the increase %. There were also questions/conversations about developing a contract for him and salary increases via longevity, which would count towards his retirement contribution. Ms. Cofske commented that longevity in the current personnel policy refers to those working for the Town for 18 years and that Jim had been with the Town for 15. There were also discussions about where in the budget any longevity decided upon would be put.

Ms. Cofske added she could create a contract for the Highway Superintendent position.

Financial councilor John Madden joined the meeting via phone and added that they can move down salary line increase to 2 ½ % and then add 2 ½ % ($2606) as longevity. Mr. Madded added that for Police and Fire (public safety) the longevity if built into their overtime.

Motion to rescind the April 29th Executive Session Highway Superintendent salary increase of 7 ½%, which was voted on in the Executive Session budget made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger – 2 yes.

Mr. Sickenberger stated that we (BOS) will vote on the new budget Thursday with new numbers and will then enter into contract with Jim, getting it done really quick.

TREASURY WARRANTS – Votes Expected

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

TA REPORT –

Town Meeting - Town Meeting preparations are all set. Recording by Ryan/Ry Guy Digital (Cable Advisory Committee) and using the school's PA system.

Green Communities – Received contracts for vendors for Green Communities. Will be executed and out this week, so we can these projects underway.

Library – Library boiler project should be underway. Went with BEG. They came in at a good rate too and they are on State Contract.

Article for Funding for Master Plan Update/Town's portion of the plan – We have changed direction and will update the previous Master Plan (to be submitted June 4th). Using DLTA funds for the CMRPC to provide public outreach and publication will go towards the implementation of the existing Master Plan. Pre-Master Plan information to better-levy the application for the uptake. Received approval.

A committee had been established and it went nowhere with Covid, etc. Will use the DLTA funds to work with CMRPC for the implementation of the Master Plan. Update is going to encompass needs that have not been met: Economic Development Plan, Rt. 9 Corridor study, bringing in new businesses, not changing the character of the Town. Ms. Cofske added that people are moving into the Town, but are working in the city. Rt. 9 is here and this may become a real desire. Getting Chamber of Commerce involved.

Strategy is to get in a better position for a Public Safety complex. 3 years ago a bill went through the State for rural facilities funding. The average time to get approval (if it makes it) is 5-7 years. Positioning ourselves to be "shovel-ready."

In August we can pursue a Compact Community Best Practices grant to submit application for a Feasibility study. Should not require any money from the Town. Would then like to work with Andrew Smith/Municipal Vulnerabilities Program to apply for the Action Grant for the engineering. Will also identify the sites through the Feasibility study and go from there. Will work with David Brown/CPC and Safety Complex Committee, but would like to have grants in place before. If the Federal and State funds move forward we can apply, but we need to get ready.

Mr. Sickenberger added that a Safety Facility is huge for this Town. Ms. Cofske said there is definitely a need and perhaps we have an additional bay for EMS. Mr. Sickenberger added that they used to be housed here prior to their expansion.

REVISITING of REORGANIZATION OF SELECT BOARD –

Mr. Sickenberger explained that traditionally the Board is organized with whoever's position is up for election next is the Chair, then then Vice Chair and after that the new person is the Clerk. Mr. Sickenberger added that he'd like to not follow with the traditional organization and would like to be Chair for the fiscal year and Ms. Lamica to be Chair next year. He would ask Mr. Merkel to be Clerk now.
Ms. Lamica asked if we could reorganize at this meeting and at a future meeting to revote if needed for reorganizing again.

Motion to have Mr. Sickenberger be the Chair. Second made by Ms. Lamica – 2 yes.
Motion to have Ms. Lamica to be the Vice Chair. Second made by Mr. Sickenberger – 2 yes.

Mr. Sickenberger added that as Brad is the 3rd member, he will be the Clerk.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Cofske - A lot of work to be done this Fiscal Year. Would like on the next agenda to create a Personnel sub-committee under the Select Board. Duties: Work on benchmarking, updating personnel policy. This sub-committee would come forward with work done. Proposing that the committee would be small and it would include the Treasurer, Town accountant, 1 Select Board member (Camie), Town Administrator (non-voting member). Will run this by Town Counsel first.

Mr. Sickenberger did not have any problem adding it to the next meeting's agenda, but added that he would not be in attendance for the meeting on June 10th.

COMMENTS & CONCERNS

Mr. Sickenberger - Comments/Concerns of a question whether the Election Warrant had been posted illegally. Ms. Cofske confirmed with the Town Clerk that the Election Warrant was posted legally. Mr. Sickenberger asked if this question should be addressed, but Ms. Cofske felt that we didn't need to address it, unless it is an issue on social media.

Mr. Sickenberger - Town of West Brookfield Town Administrator Facebook acct., an issue of postings as Town Administrator. Ms. Gobeille is working to change rights with the account or set up a new one under Ms. Cofske.

Fire Dept. grievance/complaint. – Ms. Cofske indicated that we have worked with Town counsel on this and will follow their lead.

Fire Chief budget and contract – Ms. Cofske explained she worked with Advisory for the budget for FY26. Discussions about his contract and it's duration and contents.

NEXT regular BOS MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 3RD (Town Meeting) Special Town Meeting at 6:00pm, Annual Town Meeting at 6:30pm.

8:27pm - Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger – unanimous.

6/9/25 — 7/15/25

Authorized Party for the BOS Date/Time — BOS Clerk Date/Time