TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

Joint BOARD OF SELECTMEN/ADVISORY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, May 29, 2025 – 6:15 PM

West Brookfield Town Hall, 2 East Main Street, Conference room, 1st Floor

AGENDA

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

1. ***Motion to open the meeting***
   - ***a.*** Motion Made By Selectboard Member Lamica, Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel. All in favor, 3-0. Board Meeting Opened 6:00 p.m.

2. **Review of June 3rd , 2025 Special Town Meeting and Annual Town Meeting Warrants, Motions and related budgetary items.**

Meeting Document Summary of Advisory-Joint Selectboard meeting.

The meeting focused on finalizing budget recommendations and articles for the fiscal year 2026 town meeting, addressing various financial and administrative issues. Key points include:

1. **Employee Compensation and Longevity**:

   a. Discussion centered on an employee (Jim) with 15 years of service, addressing his salary and longevity bonus. Initially, Jim sought a 7% raise, but the board settled on a 5% increase for the next three years, including a 2.5% longevity bonus consistent with town standards. Concerns were raised about retirement board restrictions on significant raises for a single employee, which could affect pension calculations.

   b. Another employee, Wes, was discussed regarding back pay owed due to inconsistencies in past raises and step increases. The board acknowledged discrepancies in historical records, with no clear resolution on the exact amount owed (estimated around $8,000-$13,000). This issue may require a special town meeting article to address retroactive pay.

2. **Budget Approvals**:
   a. **Highway Department**: Recommended salaries of $417,579 for FY 2026.

b. **Water Enterprise Fund**: Approved salaries of $196,803 and expenses of $42,940, later amended to $599,743 due to added budget lines for legal notices, advertising, and safety equipment (e.g., vests, masks) required by OSHA and state regulations.

c. **Police Department**: Approved salaries of $721,808 and expenses of $73,475.

d. **Library**: Approved salaries of $140,696 and expenses of $74,225.

e. **Medicare**: Approved $35,000.

f. **Quaboag Regional School District**: Recommended a total budget of $5,001,315, addressing transportation costs and assessment increases (approximately $335,090). The board debated funding at the minimum or above-minimum level to avoid a district meeting, given potential mismatches with another town (Warren).

g. **Health Insurance**:- Noted a 19% increase in health insurance costs due to a zero-deductible plan attracting more employees and spouses. The board considered exploring alternative plans to manage costs.

3. **Special Town Meeting Articles**:

a. Article 1: Approved $20,000 from free cash to supplement Massachusetts Interlock Insurance due to under-budgeting from staff turnover and plan changes. Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

b. Article 2: Approved $42,321.58 from free cash to pay unpaid bills from prior fiscal years. Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

c. Article 3: Approved $100,000 from free cash for the Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) Trust Fund, a standard annual contribution to address unfunded liabilities. Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

d. Article 4: Approved $72,000 from free cash to replenish the reserve fund for accrued liabilities (e.g., vacation time for retirees). Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

e. Article 5: Indefinitely postponed transferring funds to general stabilization due to low free cash reserves ($969,596, reduced to ~$12,000 after approvals). Motion Made By

Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

f. Article 6: Established a recreation programs revolving fund with a $15,000 expenditure limit for programs like pickleball, allowing fee collection for equipment purchases. Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

g. Article 7: Set expenditure limits for existing revolving funds (e.g., Cemetery: $16,000, Stormwater: $25,000, Tree: $10,000). Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

h. Article 8: Approved $10,000 from free cash for private way repairs to protect town equipment (e.g., plows). Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

i. Article 9: Approved $25,000 from free cash for town-wide building maintenance (e.g., carpet, ceiling tiles). Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

j. Article 10: Approved $295,000 from free cash for capital projects (e.g., $75,000 for road maintenance, $65,500 for Route 9 phases, $100,000 for senior center safety, $55,000 for town hall security). A second motion approved $200,000 from water stabilization for water-related projects (e.g., treatment, mower, well replacement). Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

k. Article 11: Approved $11,000 from free cash as an in-kind match for a $139,000 grant to update the master plan, including an economic development plan and Route 9 corridor study. Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

l. Article 12: Approved $9,441 from free cash as an in-kind match for a $189,000 Green Communities grant for energy conservation at the elementary school, fire station, and

highway department. Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

m. Article 13: Approved the Leland Road Pump Station upgrade project (~$6 million), requiring a two-thirds vote. A handout is being prepared to address compliance with DEP/EPA regulations to avoid fines. Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

n. Article 14: Approved a 6% local excise tax on hotels, motels, and lodging (excluding Airbnb, to be addressed later). Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

o. Article 15: Approved a zoning bylaw amendment to allow indoor storage in existing buildings by special permit, ensuring fire and health compliance. Motion Made By Selectboard member Lamica Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel all in favor 3-0 Board Selectmen recommends

3. Comments & Concerns

Financial Concerns:

a. Free cash is critically low (~$12,000 post-approvals), with major projects (Route 9, water upgrades) looming. The board discussed potential PFAS settlement funds and SRF/USDA loans with possible loan forgiveness to offset water project costs.
b. DEP non-compliance notices for the water system were highlighted, emphasizing the urgency of the Leland Road project to avoid fines.

Assessors' Budget:

c. Reduced stipends for assessors due to outsourcing, with $48,000 from surplus overlay and $10,000 for a consultant, aiming for improved tax revenue.

The meeting concluded with preparations for the town meeting on June 3, 2025, ensuring all motions and handouts are finalized, with a focus on transparency and compliance

4. Next BOS Regular Meeting Date: June 3rd, 2025 – 6 PM at Town Meeting

5. Meeting Adjourned

a. Motion Made By Selectboard Member Lamica, Seconded by Selectboard Member Merkel. All in favor, 3-0. Board Meeting Adjourned 8:00 p.m.

6/11/25

Authorized Party for the BOS Date

Clerk

Date