TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN Joint meeting with ADVISORY

Wednesday, November 12, 2025 – 6:00 PM

West Brookfield Senior Center, 73 Central Street, West Brookfield

MINUTES

STAFF PRESENT: Roland Sickenberger, Chair; Catherine Lamica, Vice Chair; Brad Merkel, Clerk; Theresa Cofske, Town Administrator; Beth Gobeille, Exec. Asst. to TA/BOS; Donna Allard, Town Accountant; Jillian Patch, Treasurer/Collector; Melinda Barnes, Lori Loughlin, Alex Price, M.J. Haesche, Dan Moberg/Advisory; Ryan Shepard/CAC.

ABSENT: Mike Audette/Advisory

GUEST: John Madden/Financial Consultant for West Brookfield

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

6:00pm: Meeting called to order.

FY2027 Budget Process.

Work session for the FY2027 budget. Open discussions re: options. Ms. Cofske stated that West Brookfield will have a deficit of almost $600,000 going into FY2027. She further stated that each year the town has used free cash. Using one-time revenue year after year is poor practice, although we may not get away without free cash, and she is looking for a process to proceed following discussions between the Select Board, Advisory Committee and all in the Financial Team in Town, so she may instruct departments on how to prepare their budgets. Ms. Cofske created and handed out a FY2027 Budget Development Calendar and a Memorandum to summarize the process for determining the FY2027 budget ceiling.

Mr. Madden stated you need to determine where the revenue will come from: 1) taxation, 2) local receipts and 3) state aid. These are the most important as they're renewable. Non-discretionary expenditures are: Health Insurance, Town's share of retirement. School budgets have increased each year as well. Mr. Madden further explained that we need to determine how we got to where we are, discuss and consider all options to close the gap. Squeeze the budgets, identify discretionary we can cut back on and get closer to the subsidy being zero. This will give you a more robust Capital program.

Discussions were about trends on increasing spending in budgets and for a potential Override for saving services in the Town.

Mr. Merkel asked about potential auctions on properties owned by the Town. Ms. Patch stated that the properties, which are available to be auctioned off are not attractive to auctioneers. Ms. Patch will look into offering them to abutters, who may want to purchase them, but added that this would require attorney fees for the Town.

Ms. Lamica added that there are many capital projects, which will require money from the Town including: West Brookfield Elementary School's windows and doors project, Town Hall Exterior work (including roof replacement), Library building repointing, Rt. 9 Phase III project, Town Hall HVAC replacement, among others. Mr. Moberg asked which of the capital projects will have to happen this year and what can be put off.

Ms. Cofske added that we need to look at other revenue sources, like the Short-Term Rental Bylaw, which would generate money for the Town.

Mr. Madden asked about the water rehab project and if there would be a debt exclusion. Mr. Guerin, Water Commissioner indicated that it is intended that the water users pay for that. They are also looking at possible Federal and State aid and funding. Will look at several financing options. Project will go out to bid soon as well.

Mr. Madden indicated that we need to project out three years, so if you were going for an override, you are not going back to voters for additional money. We would also need to make cuts each year in order to bridge the gap, so you are not using free cash. Mr. Madden also asked about incrementally reducing the deficit over the next 3 years.

It is reiterated that we can go for an override, but we should be prepared if it does not pass. More than 1 budget will be prepared by departments.

Mr. Sickenberger suggested that we have a Prop 2 ½ override and use Mr. Madden's numbers if it passes and another budget with 5% cut of what we can control if it does not pass (5% overall in each budget). It was suggested that budgets cuts are based on the size of the department.

Ms. Cofske added that whatever is decided at the meeting tonight she will then modify the packet, which will go out to departments. Narratives have already been included, so dept. heads can use them to describe how the cuts will impact their department. We will use this data in our presentations to the Town's residents.

The previous 2 ½ Override presentation will be revisited by Mr. Madden and will be updated accordingly. Mr. Sickenberger added that services will have to be cut. Ms. Loughlin said West Brookfield's situation is not unsimilar to other Towns across the State. Many are in the same situation.

Ms. Cofske summarized that everyone has to be on the same page with this - every single department counts.

Ms. Loughlin added that if there are questions, please come and talk to us. Mr. Price reiterated that this is all in the name of transparency. He would encourage anyone to attend their meetings and ask questions.

It was stated that the Select Board will have a deadline to get this on the ballot to the Town's residents on a Special Election after Town Meeting.

Ms. Lamica suggested that we prepare a budget with 2 columns for residents. One column with the override, one without.

Ms. Cofske confirmed with Advisory and the Select Board that the budgets should be prepared with an overall 5% cut from each department's budgets.

Ms. Loughlin asked Ms. Patch what the limit is that the Town cannot go below (from the Stabilization account(s). Ms. Patch will look into this and indicated that she has also been talking to Bond council about getting a bond rating for the Town. She reiterated that with more money in stabilization, the Town would receive better rates for borrowing.

Motion to adjourn meeting at 7:28pm made by Ms. Lamica. Second made by Mr. Sickenberger. All in favor, aye (2 yes).

Respectfully submitted,

11/25/2025

Authorized Party for the BOS Date

BOS Clerk Date