TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN JOINT MEETING WITH ADVISORY

Thursday, December 4, 2025 – 6:00 PM

West Brookfield Senior Center, 73 Central Street, West Brookfield

MINUTES

STAFF PRESENT: Roland Sickenberger, Chair; Catherine Lamica, Vice Chair; Theresa Cofske, Town Administrator; Beth Gobeille, Exec. Asst. to TA/BOS; Jillian Patch, Treasurer Collector; John Madden, Financial Advisor; Donna Allard, Town Accountant; Jacob Conway and Ryan Shepard/CAC.; Advisory: Lori Loughlin/Chair, Alex Price/member (virtual), Dan Moberg/member, Michael Audette/member, Melinda Barnes/Clerk; David Brown, CPC; Klarissa Rose, Town Clerk; Alex/BOH;

ABSENT: Brad Merkel, Clerk

CALL MEETING TO ORDER IN OPEN SESSION

6:00pm: Meeting called to order.

FY2027 BUDGET -

Mr. Madden - *2 attachments (Addendums A, B) from Mr. Madden with minutes.
scenarios:

1) With salaries at 2 ½% and expenses at 0 this would have little effect on deficit. This model leaves the Town with $20k. This is level funding and with what the Town has no control over: insurance, pension, the deficit would be roughly $560,00. *Addendum A.

2) School model: 2 ½% salaries, expenses at 0, school assessment at 2.5% (as opposed to 5%). This brought us down to $437,996. *Addendum B.

   Not providing the impact that the Town needs. Town has fewer accounts that they have control over between contracts and above items. Budget season will be painful if we want to get ourselves off free cash. Will be looking to the School for help.

Ms. Lamica - *Clarifying for listeners*. The topic for using free cash to balance the book is not an option this year. We don't have enough free cash to take care of these deficits.

Mr. Madden - 50/50 responsibility between the school and the Town. There is a difference of $300,000. Reducing the budget will not get us to 0. It means cuts. Free cash doesn't come back once you use it as part of recurring expenses. They're now part of tax levy and not part of free cash, so you have to come up with more free cash the following year in order to fill that void. And that's what we've been doing. Amount of free cash has been on the decline because of how we've used free cash and now we've bottomed out. We need the school's help.

Mr. Sickenberger added that holding the Special Town Meeting will cost $2000-$3000.

Ms. Lamica – *Clarifying for the public.* With the 2 ½% increase and new growth, we only have $250,000 additional revenue this year, which has already been accounted for and we're still short. We need to live with a $250,000 increase each year to live within our budget.

Mr. Madden - Revenues in 2025 went down 4%. (*Ms. Patch clarified that revenues were up in FY2024 as she collected 5 years of taxes previously not paid.) We will need to start with the override. This override is to sustain services that we've provided. There will be level funding and cuts, although staffing is already thin.

Mr. Brown asked if we could show the Town what we can/can't afford for the Town for the rest of the year. He further added that "thank god for ARPA funds." Mr. Madden agreed that ARPA saved our necks, but it also raises our expectations. No more ARPA and no more free cash.

Mr. Sickenberger stated that he does not want to touch stabilization. Ms. Lamica agreed.

Ms. Loughlin noted essential repairs needed for the Town: Library – 700k, Town Hall (exterior) – 500k, HVAC - 100k, Rt. 9 Phase 3 - 500k, West Brookfield Elementary School windows/doors – up to 1 million for Town share.

Mr. Madden asked Ms. Patch if we were to cover all of these projects, we would need debt exemptions and would have to go back to the Town each time for further monies needed.

Mr. Price added that opportunities like this joint meeting are important to discuss the budget and the challenges and cuts prior to Town Meeting. Ms. Lamica added that communication is key with the Town. We need to get the information out there and get the residents to understand it.

T. Cofske – Needs instruction from BOS/Advisory for Dept. heads.
Topics:

Dept. Operating Expenses: Freezing of purchases for Dept. operating expenses effective pretty immediately. Non-essential spending including office supplies, beyond basic operational needs. Training conferences/travels that aren't absolutely necessary. Purchases not tied to safety, legal compliance or emergency repairs.

Overtime: Should be restricted to public safety and emergencies, weather-related response, mandated minimum staffing. Situations requiring necessary overtime should be bought to the Select Board or Town Administrator for approval. (This should be tracked as well.) If we are to do freezes there should be monthly data to share with Advisory, so the freeze can be lifted if needed.

Hiring Freeze: No new hires/backfill without Board of Selectmen approval.

Capital Spending: Placed on hold for now. Some expenditures may require funding. Unspent articles are under review.

Duration and Review: Monthly review on data. Again, Board will lift freeze if applicable.
Communication and Compliance: Distributed to all depts. and shared if any conflicts with Union contracts, ZBAs. This will be posted. Spending freeze will be made very public. A big move for this Town. It's necessary.

Discussion followed regarding Grants received in the past and not needed in the end. Ms. Lamica also mentioned that grants can come with additional costs not covered by the grant itself. Ms. Allard added that the matching portion of grants, which come out of appropriated budgets can be expensive. Ms. Cofske added that multiple grants can work together, covering monies not covered by the initial grant.

Select Board will address the freeze at next meeting on December 9th.

Direction for the Town Budgets – Need to start ASAP for Ms. Cofske to provide clear direction to departments.

Ms. Lamica – School needs to share the budget cuts with the Town as it's 50% of the Town's budget. The school is willing to help to approach the challenge together.

Questions about renewable revenue and taxes not paid. Treasurer Collector/Tax office need more funds for auctions, tax collecting, etc. Ms. Patch indicated letters will go out early 2026 for non-tax payments as well. Ms. Patch indicated that there is $600,000 sitting in tax title. Costs $680 to file in land court. Additional costs involved. Will seek legal opinion on the amount which would be needed for tax title auctions. Land of Low value process is not as favorable. Funds needed for Treasurer Collector/Tax Collector required for legal, etc. could be approximately $25,000.

Future revenue ideas – Master Plan updating for Economic Development (light industrial area), Short Term Rentals, Accessory Dwelling Units. Meals excise tax increasing. Regional Resource Group (RRG) capturing new growth. Regional shared service for departments. Looking at putting out contracts for services (IT, etc.). Conversations with school in partnering up for services and procurement.
The current insurance split 75/25 (Town has 75%) is usual for Towns. Ms. Cofske stated there is a process if we were to look into changing anything with the current plan.

Mr. Madden commented that the school assessment has gone up an average of $200,000 a year for the last 5 years. We need to spread the debt with the school. Ms. Cofske indicated that there is a meeting next week with the school and they are looking to partner with us. A dollar figure is needed for the override ballot question. Prepare 2 budgets (1 is override passes, 1 if it does not). Mr. Madden suggested we present 1 budget at the Annual Town Meeting (ATM) after voting on the override at elections in May, as the override decision will determine which budget is presented to the Town. Ms. Cofske to meet with Mr. Madden, then department heads one on one and set out the process and strategy for the override. Will also work with Ms. Allard to see which Articles we can close out.

Special Town Meeting scheduled January 27th.

T. Cofske – Will create a level-funding budget: 2 ½ salary increases and 2% increases (normal yearly). School would get 5% increase. Mr. Madden recommended 1.4 million for an override. No directive for Capital Planning currently.

Need override announced by Board of Selectmen to be held at the elections in May.

Directive: Post ballot question
How much is it?
Meet with Depts.
Go after schools

Advisory are in agreement that we go for an override for 2 years (All in agreement: L. Loughlin, D. Moberg, M.J. Haesche, M. Audette, A. Price).

$588,470 to fund FY2027. $871,993 to fund FY2028. The need for $588,470 will be needed yearly. If the ballot passes at Town meeting a new tax levy will be set.

Next Board of Selectman's meeting is Tuesday, December 9th at 6:00pm.

7:53pm – Motion to close meeting made by Ms. Lamica. Second by Mr. Sickenberger. All in favor – aye (2 yes)

Respectfully submitted,

12/22/2025 — Authorized Party for the BOS — Date

12/23/25 — BOS Clerk — Date

A.

TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD
FY 2027 Renewable Revenues vs. Advisory Committee Recommendations with Anticipated Assessments
Town Departments 2.5% Salaries/0.00% Expenses
3-Dec-25

Tax Revenue	
Tax Levy	7,542,012
2.5 % Increase	188,550
New Growth/Economic Development	61,988
Debt Exclusion	84,915
Reserve for Unused Levy Capacity	0
	7,877,465
State Aid Revenue	
Chapter 70	332,006
Lottery, Beano & Charity Games	624,529
Veterans' Benefits	22,325
Exemps: Vets, Blind & Spouses	12,687
State Owned Land	115,224
Public Libraries	12,839
	1,119,610
Local Receipts	
Motor Vehicle Excise	566,053
Meals Excise	66,000
Penalties & Interest on Taxes	89,250
Payments in Lieu of Taxes	3,050
Charges for Services - Water	0
Fees	55,650
Rentals	1,920
Other Departmental Revenue	1,000
Licenses & Permits	138,000
Fines & Forfeits	3,350
Investment Income	183,600
	1,107,910
Total Renewable Revenue	**10,104,986**
Other Financing Sources	
Overlay Surplus	0
Cemetery Perpetual Care	0
Total Oth Financing Sources	**0**

Operating Expenses	
General Government	964,866
Public Safety	1,175,425
Education	5,491,010
Public Works	908,895
Library & Recreation	273,604
Human Services	184,093
Unclassified & Shared Costs	204,612
Member Benefits & Insurance	1,183,416
Debt Service	106,600
Water	0
	10,492,521
State & County Assessments	
Air Pollution Districts	1,232.05
RMV Non-Renewal Surcharge	5,160.00
Regional Transit	6,681.96
School Choice	98,026.50
Miscellaneous Assessments	
Est Snow and Ice Deficit	0.00
Lunch/Libraries Offset	12,839.00
Abatemnts & Exemptions	
Abatemnts & Exemptions	53,960.10
	177,899.61
Total Ongoing Expenses	**10,670,420.29**
Surplus/(Deficit)	**(565,434.61)**

B.

TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD
FY 2027 Renewable Revenues vs. Advisory Committee Recommendations with Anticipated Assessments
Town Departments 2.5% Salaries/0.00% Expenses School Assessment 2.5
3-Dec-25

Tax Revenue	
Tax Levy	7,542,012
2.5 % Increase	188,550
New Growth/Economic Development	61,988
Debt Exclusion	84,915
Reserve for Unused Levy Capacity	0
	7,877,465
State Aid Revenue	
Chapter 70	332,006
Lottery, Beano & Charity Games	624,529
Veterans' Benefits	22,325
Exemps: Vets, Blind & Spouses	12,687
State Owned Land	115,224
Public Libraries	12,839
	1,119,610
Local Receipts	
Motor Vehicle Excise	566,053
Meals Excise	66,000
Penalties & Interest on Taxes	89,250
Payments in Lieu of Taxes	3,050
Charges for Services - Water	0
Fees	55,650
Rentals	1,920
Other Departmental Revenue	1,000
Licenses & Permits	138,000
Fines & Forfeits	3,350
Investment Income	183,600
	1,107,910
Total Renewable Revenue	**10,104,986**
Other Financing Sources	
Overlay Surplus	0
Cemetery Perpetual Care	0
Total Oth Financing Sources	**0**

Operating Expenses	
General Government	964,866
Public Safety	1,175,425
Education	5,365,977
Public Works	908,895
Library & Recreation	271,316
Human Services	184,093
Unclassified & Shared Costs	204,495
Member Benefits & Insurance	1,183,416
Debt Service	106,600
Water	0
	10,365,083
State & County Assessments	
Air Pollution Districts	1,232.05
RMV Non-Renewal Surcharge	5,160.00
Regional Transit	6,681.96
School Choice	98,026.50
Miscellaneous Assessments	
Est Snow and Ice Deficit	0.00
Lunch/Libraries Offset	12,839.00
Abatemnts & Exemptions	
Abatemnts & Exemptions	53,960.10
	177,899.61
Total Ongoing Expenses	**10,542,982.40**
Surplus/(Deficit)	**(437,996.71)**