The meeting was called to order by Chair Lori Loughlin at 6:15 p.m.

MINUTES: Brad Hibbard made a motion to approve the minutes of April 4, 2016 as presented. Phil Landine second. Vote was five to approve the minutes of April 4, 2016 as presented and two abstain (Robert Blozie, Richard Gobi).

Budget #39 Veterans Services: Veterans Agent Gary Lapine submitted a Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund for a shortfall in his budget of $13,562.01. He became the Veterans Agent in December 2014, and found that a lot of the paperwork was not up-to-date making it difficult to accurately identify his FY15 budgetary needs. He has since established a new system of month to month accounting to better manage the budget. He said it is hard to accurately predict his annual budgetary needs as clients come and go. The Department of Veteran Services reimburses the Town 75% for most receipts with some at 100%. Brad Hibbard made a motion to approve the Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund in the amount of $13,562.01 to the Veterans Services Account. Tom Long second. Vote was unanimous to approve the fund transfer.

Mr. Lapine completed the application process for the Town of West Brookfield to become a “Purple Heart Town.” A ceremony officially recognizing the Town will take place at the Senior Center on April 26, 2016. Mr. Lapine was commended for the work he does in support of our veterans.

Budget #30 Tree Warden: Tree Warden Jim DiMaio was present. Phil Landine asked if he had used the money he had left over at the time of our last meeting with him. Jim said at the end of March he had $6,000 left but has used almost all of it in addressing damages and downed tree limbs from the recent windstorms. He has been working closely with National Grid toward having them address some of our problem trees. This partnership resulted in significant savings to the Town. He mentioned an unfortunate miscommunication between National Grid and the Police Department over a police detail. Jim is working to re-establish the partnership.
The Tree Warden is requesting $56,000 for tree removal in FY16. Of this amount $16,000 is for trees on public streets and $40,000 for the removal of hazardous trees in two cemeteries. The committee discussed the possibility of splitting the cemetery work over two or three years. Jim stated he had walked the cemetery with Selectwoman Vayda and she agreed the trees needed to be addressed. He further stated that the costs to repair or replace damaged property or claims for personal injury would be far greater than the $40,000 requested to address the issue. Jim understands his budget request is high this year but promised a $20,000 reduction next fiscal year. Brad Hibbard made a motion to approve Budget #30 Tree Warden as presented. Phil Landine second. Vote unanimous to approve Budget #30 Tree Warden as presented.

Each year the Town plants a number of trees to replace some of those taken down. Richard Gobi suggested that if property owners wanted a tree replaced that it be planted on their property with the understanding further maintenance and liability lies with them.

SCHOOL: Warren Finance Committee Member Barry Mongeon was present. He has been working with Madeline on the school budget. Barry explained a $12,000 error has been identified with transportation money. He also has questions on E&D monies and questions related to retirement funds. He said Warren has not yet approved the school budget as the Finance Committee and Selectmen are in disagreement in wording of articles. Both Towns feel there is still room for the school to further reduce its FY16 budget request. Lori Loughlin said she will talk to Director of Finance and Operations Cami Lamica this week and report back at our next meeting.

SCHOOL BUSSING CONTRACTS AND COSTS: WBES Principal Colleen Mucha and School Teacher/Resident Deb Provencher attended our meeting. The committee has previously discussed its concerns over the elementary school budget being cut disproportionately in relation to the high school going forward. The principal was asked if her budget had been cut and the answer was not at this time. Mrs. Mucha said the school district has been working to cut its budget and control costs. She said the district recently re-bid the bus contract. The bid proposal contained a reduction in routes. The bids came in higher than what the district currently pays. She stated that the average cost of bussing in area districts, towns and the state average is approximately $400-500 per student. The Quaboag District is paying $800-900 per student. Why? She also talked about the cost of transportation for field trips and issues surrounding pricing from local bus contractors. Our committee expressed its concerns on the discrepancy in transportation costs for the Quaboag District. At the suggestion of the committee the principal will contact Bay Path and Tantasqua School Districts to explore the use of their busses for out of district field trips in an attempt to lower costs in that particular area.
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TOWN ACCOUNTANT MEETING: Pam Griffing followed-up with the Town Accountant regarding questions raised at our last meeting. She has not received satisfactory answers to all of her questions and will attempt to meet with the Marie when she returns from vacation. Our committee is unable to discuss a recommendation on the Proposition 2 ½ override until our questions on current and future revenues and expenditures can be answered. Pam will attempt to set up a meeting with the Accountant during the week of the April 25th, prior to our next meeting.

ANNUAL REPORT: As a result of an opinion from Town Council, the Annual Report of the Advisory Committee will not be included in the Town Meeting Warrant mailing. The Selectboard will mail our report separately after the town elections in early May. As always, our report will be included in the Annual Town Report booklet. However, it will not be distributed until after the elections. Our committee discussed its concerns over the opinion. Richard Gobi will send the report to the Secretary of State for review and future guidance.

BOARD OF HEALTH: Members of the Board of Health were present and submitted a Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund. They requested an amount of $17,250 be transferred to the Landfill Expense Account. Of this amount $16,250 is for increased testing mandated by DEP and $1000 for mowing. The bids for the New Braintree Road waterline project are expected back by the end of May in anticipation of a June start date. Brad Hibbard made a motion to approve the Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund in the amount of $17,250 to the Landfill Expense Account. Tom Long second. Vote five to approve transfer, one abstain (Pam Griffing) and one not present during discussion and voting (Richard Gobi).

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS: The committee discussed a Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund for shortfall in the Educational Benefits Account in the amount of $1,850. The request is to fully fund contractual education benefits for police officers. Brad Hibbard made a motion to approve the transfer of the requested amount. Tom Long second. Vote was unanimous to approve.

LEGAL COUNSEL: The committee discussed a Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund in the amount of $15,000 to the Legal Counsel account for unforeseen legal expenses due to the establishment of a new union, union negotiations, ongoing personnel and other legal issues. Lacking funds to completely satisfy this request and after discussion Pam Griffing made a motion to approve the transfer of $11,000.00 from the Reserve Fund to the Legal Counsel account. Brad Hibbard second. Vote was unanimous to approve the $11,000.00 transfer.
DEPARTMENT BUDGETS: The committee re-visited the following budgets previously submitted for revision:

BUDGET #2 SELECTMEN: Executive Secretary line item: Previous Permanent Accrual $1,598.82. Advisory Committee questions what this is for and requests it be deleted from the budget pending explanation. Budget to be returned for correction and review at our next meeting.

BUDGET #4 ACCOUNTANT: The hours listed on the budget should be changed to a maximum of 960. The hourly rate listed on the budget request is incorrect and should be adjusted. If the Town Accountant is a contracted position the committee would like to review the contract. Budget to be returned for correction and review at our next meeting.

BUDGET #38 COUNCIL ON AGING BUDGET: Committee would like further clarification on issues surrounding Assistant Director’s step and grade. Budget to be returned for correction and review at our next meeting.

SENIOR BULLETIN SUBMISSION: Robert Blozie said he had spoken with the COA regarding the submission of an article for publication in their bulletin related to the Proposition 2 ½ override and encouraging seniors to vote. He said he was willing to pay for placing it in the bulletin. The committee discussed its concerns. If the bulletin is subsidized with town funds anything submitted in the name of the Advisory Committee would be subject to the same opinion rendered with respect to our committee report. Based upon that opinion, Brad Hibbard suggested that if the committee wanted to proceed with a submission it might be best if a “letter to the editor” were drafted for publication in a local newspaper, keeping in mind the committee has not rendered an opinion on the override. Held for further discussion.

HOUSE BILL #H1860: Phil Landine presented an article that appeared in the Sunday Telegram. The House has passed a bill relating to abandoned buildings. Action on the bill is still pending in the Senate. Passage of this bill may assist the Town toward addressing problems with the Foster Hill property as it appears it would require property owners to safely secure vacant and abandoned buildings. The Advisory Committee discussed passing over the article on the Foster Hill Road property.

Our next meeting will be scheduled for April 27, 2016 at 6:15 p.m. and April 28, 2016 at 6:15 p.m.
Pam Griffing made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Tom Long seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine M. Long, Secretary