TOWN OF WEST BROOKFIELD
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
December 22, 2015

Present: Brad Hibbard
         Tom Long
         Richard Gobi
         Lori Loughlin
         Robert Blozie

Absent: Phil Landine
        Pam Griffing

The meeting was called to order by Chair Richard Gobi at 6:17 p.m.

MINUTES: Lori Loughlin made a motion to approve the minutes of November 17, 2015 as presented. Robert Blozie second. Vote four to approve the minutes of November 17, 2015, one abstain (Brad Hibbard). Lori Loughlin made a motion to approve the minutes of November 18, 2015 as presented. Robert Blozie second. Vote three to approve the minutes of November 18, 2015, two abstain (Brad Hibbard and Robert Blozie). Brad Hibbard made a motion to approve the minutes of December 8, 2015 as presented. Lori Loughlin second. Vote four to approve, one abstain (Richard Gobi).

ANNUAL REPORT: Richard Gobi said he has spoken with the Secretary of State relative to the censorship issues surrounding the publication of last year’s Advisory Committee report. Richard said if there is a problem with the content of the report this year to get in contact with him and he will reach out for a second opinion.

ARTICLES FOR FISCAL YEAR: An Article requesting a Study Committee for a Town Manager was discussed. Lori Loughlin said she will do the draft an Article. Articles for the Warrant will be reviewed in March.

REQUEST FOR TRANSFER FROM THE RESERVE FUND: The Electrical Inspector has requested $4,075.20 for inspections of the Brookfield Wire Solar Project. The Selectboard recommends transfer of funds from the Reserve Account to the Electrical Inspector’s Salary account. Lori Loughlin made a motion to approve the transfer of $4,075.20 to the Electrical Inspector’s Salary account. Robert Blozie second. Vote unanimous.

COMMITTEE CHAIR POSITION: Richard Gobi asked the committee to consider another person for the position of Chair as he will be away and unable to attend meetings this winter. After discussion Robert Blozie made a motion to appoint Vice Chair Lori Loughlin as Chairwoman. Tom Long second. Vote was unanimous for Lori Loughlin to be Chairwoman of the Advisory Committee.
6:40 p.m.: JOINT MEETING WITH SELECTBOARD AND QUABOAG SCHOOL OFFICIALS:

Present: Selectboard members Diane Vayda and Jack Tivnan  
Executive Secretary Johanna Swain  
Dr. Bret Kustigian, Superintendent of Schools  
Cami Lamica, Director of Finance and Operations  
Colleen Mucha, Principal, WBES

The Selectboard made a statement regarding the upcoming budget year which was followed by general discussion by those in attendance. Superintendent Bret Kustigian provided a Power Point presentation on projections for the upcoming budget cycle which he stated is available on the QRSD.org website. Dr. Kustigian stated he has been directed by the School Committee to prepare a level funded budget with no cuts to current programs or services. Based upon the directive, the preliminary estimate for West Brookfield’s portion of the regional school budget is $519,000 above the required minimum contribution. Dr. Kustigian stressed that the Quaboag District is providing an excellent education and he would like to maintain current standards. Jack Tivnan said the Selectboard initially voted to support a $400,000 override and stressed a portion of any override must be committed to support town government budgets. Jack Tivnan said the Town cannot raise enough money to support the school system at current levels. Brad Hibbard said we have outstanding schools at both the elementary and high school levels but the Town can’t continue to sustain the recent annual school budget increases. Dr. Kustigian spoke about Chapter 70 formula discussions at the state level and was hopeful that things might stabilize in the future. The probability of an override passing was discussed. Superintendent Kustigian said if we are going to propose an override, both the Town and the School must let the residents know why we need the money. He suggested educating residents that Chapter 70 formula is broken and that we need to “weather the storm” until it changes.

Jack Tivnan said increases in our tax rate are a big burden for some people especially the elderly. The Selectboard is researching the possibility of establishing a Senior Property Tax Work-Off Program similar to the one adopted in the Town of Barre. The program allows senior citizens to earn an annual credit off their property tax bill by completing work projects for the Town. Jack Tivnan suggested implementing a meals tax and asked the Advisory Committee for their thoughts. The Committee stated they had brought the suggestion forward a couple years ago and a previous Selectboard was not in favor of pursuing it. Tom Long suggested encouraging businesses to come to Town as a way of expanding our tax base.
Director of Finance and Operations Cami Lamicia described some of the options the School Department is exploring to reduce or slow the rate of budget increases. These include re-bidding the school bus contract with changes to the contract length, the manner in which it is awarded and including a fuel cost clause. Dr. Kustigian said the school will continue to search for ways to reduce the budget and is open to any suggestions toward that end.

Lori Loughlin reiterated the need for continued cooperation toward developing a plan for the upcoming budget cycle and asked if the school and selectboard would be available to meet on January 12, 2016. Meeting confirmed for the 12th in the Town Hall.

Lori Loughlin asked if there was any more information on the New Braintree Road water line project. Jack Tivnan said an agreement has been made that the Board of Health will drive the issue and the Water Department will work with them. Brad Hibbard asked if there had been a decision on the scope of the project; would the line stop at the Sportsman’s Club or continue further up New Braintree Road as initially proposed should other wells become affected. Jack Tivnan said he would follow up.

Brad Hibbard made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Robert Blozie second. Meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine M. Long
Secretary