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 as presented. Phil Landine second. Vote was 5 to approve as presented and one abstain (Pam Griffing).

SCHOOL: The committee reviewed the latest revised school budget proposal which represents a reduction of West Brookfield’s above minimum contribution from $449,739 to $309,711. Lori Loughlin read the list of reductions which was followed by discussion on potential need for further cuts and on the wording of the override. The Selectboard has previously voted for a $400,000 override for the school. Pam Griffing asked that we get an itemized breakdown of proposed town government budgets and available revenue for analysis before the committee makes a recommendation on the override. Lori Loughlin will ask Johanna Swain to provide this information prior to our next meeting.

BUDGETS:

Water Department #51: Water Commissioners Bob Benson, Lester Paquette and Barry Nadon, Sr. were present. Robert Blozie asked why line item for hired labor was up 50%. The commissioners said they anticipate the need for additional hired labor for the upcoming School Street and New Braintree Road projects. Funding for Ronald Marchessault was eliminated as two water department employees now have their operator licenses. The Water Commissioners said the Zoning Map on the Groundwater Protection District 11 Bylaw was not labeled correctly so it must be voted on again at the Annual Town Meeting. The new well system is currently up and running. Advisory Committee asked for an update on the School Street Project. Water Commissioners also provided an update on the New Braintree Road Project and stated the Board of Health was taking the lead on the project.

Local Access #47: Barry Gillogly was present. Lori Loughlin asked Mr. Gillogly to explain how Local Access works and how it is funded. He provided an overview of local access and said that it is funded through a contract between Charter and the local access office. The funds are directed from Charter to Local Access through the Town Accountant. Local Access is staffed by Mr. Gillogly who hires part time personnel when
needed. Local Access receives operational funding in the amount of $19,000 annually. It also receives funding for equipment; a lump sum at the beginning of the contract and a second lump sum at the five-year mark of the ten-year contract. Mr. Gillogly said the equipment belongs to the town and that the Selectboard has a copy of the current equipment inventory. The contract is currently in its third year. The Local Access budget was submitted to our committee as a zero cost budget with no itemization. The Advisory Committee questioned the manner in which the budget is managed. Mr. Gillogly said the Selectboard approves all of his expenditures. Brad Hibbard asked that if the money is held by the Town, why is it that no budget is developed and submitted at the beginning of each fiscal year. Mr. Gillogly said he will revise his Annual Report to provide a summary and projections. The Advisory Committee is concerned with the apparent lack of oversight of this budget and will discuss it further with the Selectboard.

Mr. Gillogly provided information on the improvements he has made to the system. Programs and meetings can now be broadcast live from the high school and he has made improvements to channeling at the elementary school. He also discussed the difficulty in recruiting volunteers to work on the program. Phil Landine advised him of Article #16, Senior Property Tax Work Off Program, that is currently on the warrant for the annual town meeting. Mr. Gillogly said he would look further into the article.

The Advisory Committee is unable to provide a recommendation on the Local Access budget as no figures have been presented for the upcoming fiscal year.

**Agricultural Committee #53:** Matt Koziol and Tim Morrell were present. The Agricultural Committee budget is unnumbered and the committee requests that Johanna assign it #53.

Matt Koziol provided us with information on the Agricultural Committee. It is composed of five members and five alternate members. The committee attempts to meet once a month. The town currently has 20 farms that produce and sell agricultural products to the public and local area restaurants. Approximately 2,000 acres are farmed in West Brookfield. Through their efforts most of the local restaurants purchase from our local farms. They have associated themselves with the Statewide Agricultural Committee, work closely with them and attend their meetings. Worcester County is 6th in the nation for direct purchases from farmers to consumers.

This past year they held a “Taste of West Brookfield” farm-to-table dinner at Salem Cross Inn with 50 people attending. This was their first attempt at the project and would like to repeat it again. While the dinner was a success, the committee did not make any
money on the project this past year. The committee assists with the Farmer’s Market on the common. They have arranged for the Massachusetts Farm Bureau to meet and provide a presentation on local farming and pesticide use in our town hall this spring. In the upcoming fiscal year, the Agricultural Committee would like to publish a brochure to assist in marketing produce available from the working farms in West Brookfield. The Advisory Committee complimented them on a great presentation and recommends a budget increase to $1500 ($600. wages/$900. expenses) for the upcoming fiscal year.

Recreation Committee #42: Three members of the Committee were present. Committee Chairperson Jerry Czub said the committee was reorganized with new members last year and based upon their experiences and discussions with local residents and youth sports representatives, their budget has been revamped with the goal of providing better services to our residents. The lifeguard program has been modified, summer programs have been improved and they constructed an ice skating rink on the common this winter. They plan on bringing the ice rink back next winter and are exploring the possibility of providing movies on the common this summer. The Town Beach will be staffed this summer with lifeguards Thursday through Sunday. “Swim at Your Own Risk” signs are in place. The committee would also like to make further improvements to the beach this year and said the baseball diamond on the common will be refurbished this summer. Their budget request included funding for the youth basketball, soccer and baseball programs to assist them in keeping registration costs down. Funding will be used to purchase equipment and uniforms for each sport. The Advisory Committee advised them to remove the word “donation” from those line items. The new playground and athletic fields at the elementary school lots of use spring through fall. The committee proposed placing a porta-potty at the playground during this period of time.

The Advisory Committee complimented them on their enthusiasm and recommends funding their budget at the requested $22,328., a 5.8% decrease from last year.

Group Insurance #49: The Treasurer did not attend the meeting. She sent additional information on her budget stating her previous request was $26,371.57 short. The committee was unable to identify the shortfall and asked that she be re-scheduled. The secretary will ask her to attend our meeting next week.

The committee also questioned the status of our recommended changes to employee health insurance. Lori Loughlin will follow-up with the Selectboard.
ADVISORY REPORT: Lori Loughlin presented a copy of last year’s report and asked that the Committee review it and provide suggestions for this year’s report. Phil Landine suggested attaching the Auditor’s Management Letter as an addendum to our report. The letter is a public document and explains the Town’s financial standing in greater detail. Brad Hibbard will edit out the “white space” in the Management Letter and Lori Loughlin will work on a rough draft for the warrant and annual report.

Next meeting will be March 30, 2016 at 6:15 p.m.: Secretary will ask the Accountant, Council on Aging, Treasurer, Hazardous Waste Coordinator and the Fire Chief to attend.

Robert Blozie made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Brad Hibbard second. The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine M. Long
Secretary