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

Bob Blozie’s service will be November 18, 2017 at 10 AM at the West Brookfield Congregational Church. A search for new member will be posted on the Website.

MINUTES: Brad Hibbard made a motion to approve the minutes of October 16, 2017 as presented. Dan Bigda second. Vote 5 to approve 1 abstain (Pam Griffing) the minutes of October 16, 2017 as presented.

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING DEADLINES: Lori Loughlin read the Annual Town Meeting Deadlines (to be updated for 2018),

2018 BUDGET LETTER: Lori will forward members a copy of the 2017 letter via email with request for suggested updates. Letter to be reviewed at next meeting.

FY17 BUDGET: Pam Griffing reviewed FY17 Budget, Actual and Surplus/Deficit figures. On September 12, 2017, the committee received the Ledger History-Allocated Summary-Expenditure Ledger for 2017 beginning 07/1/2016 through 06/30/2017 from the accounting firm.

ENCUMBERED: Lori Loughlin spoke with the Electrical Inspector about the encumbered funds for a town hall generator. He suggested scrapping the project at this time and returning encumbered funds to the general account. The project can be visited again in the future if necessary. The committee will draft articles for the spring ATM to revert all monies previously approved by article that are no longer needed.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS: General discussion held pertaining to the 2015 excise tax bills sent out by Jeffrey & Jeffrey Collection Agency (deputy collectors for the town) and issues raised by numerous residents. Tom Long suggested putting this out at a Selectboard meeting. Phil Landine said Justin Cole, Baystate Municipal Accounting Group will be at their next meeting on November 7th to discuss the issue. The committee decided to recess this meeting until 5:30 pm tomorrow to meet with the Selectboard and accountant regarding financial matters. At 7:30pm Pam Griffing made a motion to recess
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ADVISORY COMMITTEE
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Tonight’s meeting until the BOS meeting tomorrow evening at 5:30 p.m. Dan Bigda second. Unanimous vote to recess the meeting until tomorrow, November 7, 2017 at 5:30 p.m. to meet with the Selectboard.

November 7, 2017

Continuation of recessed November 6, 2017 meeting
Selectboard Meeting
Lower Level Meeting Room
5:30 p.m.

Present: Selectboard: Diane Vayda, Phil Landine, Deb Provencher, Executive Secretary Johanna Swain
Advisory Committee: Richard Gobi, Tom Long, Brad Hibbard, Dan Bigda
Jeffrey & Jeffrey Collection Agency
Justin Cole, Baystate Municipal Accounting Group

Continuation of meeting called to order by Vice Chair Brad Hibbard at 5:30pm.

Phil Landine asked representatives of Jeffrey & Jeffrey to explain the excise tax billing process for the benefit of residents and those present. It was explained that the Registry of Motor Vehicles begins the process by forwarding the Tax Collector a list of vehicles registered in the town. The Tax Collector reviews the list and removes exempt vehicles, i.e. town vehicles. The assessors also have the opportunity review the list. The bills are then printed (by Jeffrey & Jeffrey) and forwarded to the Tax Collector for mailing to residents. Residents have 30 days to pay the bill before a demand notice is generated. It is the Tax Collector’s responsibility to generate a request for a demand notice in a timely manner. If the bill is not paid within 14 days, the Tax Collector forwards a second list of unpaid bills to the collection agency. The collection agency (Jeffrey & Jeffrey) prints the demand notices and sends them to the Tax Collector for mailing. This process is followed up by a hand delivered demand to the last address on file before registry notification.

When asked, Justin Cole said his company has cleared up the backlog of unpaid 2013 and 2014 bills and is currently working on 2015 demand notices. 2016 demands will follow. Mr. Jeffrey said their company is the deputy collector for 35 towns and acknowledged the problems experienced in West Brookfield are far greater than those in other towns. He also acknowledged that since the Baystate group took over the Town’s tax collection
responsibilities things have greatly improved. Justin Cole said it is going to take some
time (months) to work through past deficiencies.

Diane Vayda asked Jeffrey & Jeffrey if they could remove the Tax Collector hours from
future bills since the office is currently not staffed during those hours.

Phil Landine asked if the Town could establish a payment plan, particularly for those
residents on fixed incomes. The excise tax process is governed by MGL chapter 60 and
there are no provisions for such a plan.

Justin Cole said they are currently working through a three-year backlog and asked the
Selectboard to expand their services to include an office person available to town
residents on a 40 hour per week schedule for the next six months. This would be at
additional cost to the Town and would ensure residents have someone to go to in town
hall while the backlog of issues is addressed. He further stated that he would draft a
notice to be placed on the town website providing guidance on how residents should
proceed to resolve specific payment issues.

Brad Hibbard spoke on behalf of the committee and voiced our frustrations over inept
financial management issues which had been brought to the Town’s attention by our
committee and the Town Auditor for several years in past annual audit reports. We are
encouraged that the current Selectboard is addressing these difficult issues. He further
stated it is important for residents to know that there will be a question on the spring
election ballot to change the tax collector and treasurer positions from elected to
appointed. An article in support of these changes was approved at the past annual town
meeting. This will provide that in the future our town will be able to seek out individuals
with the proper qualifications to manage our finances rather than relying on the election
of individuals who may not possess the necessary financial knowledge and experience.

Tom Long expressed concerns that the resolution of the excise tax issues is costing
residents lots of money. He further stated that the Selectboard’s hands are tied in
managing elected individuals and the change to appointed positions would give them the
ability to manage and hold them accountable.

Justin Cole provided information on the FY17 and FY18 department accounts and said
the October reports will be going out this week. All FY17 entries have been completed.
Since this is the first year of the new reporting system, he is requesting to meet with
department heads in the next week or two to answer any questions and concerns before
finalizing reports.
6:15: Selectboard addresses appointments and resignations

6:30: PUBLIC HEARING - Foster Hill Road Bridge

6:35: Selectboard convenes to Executive Session #3

Meeting adjourned at 6:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine M. Long,
Secretary