



**Minutes of the  
Town of Belmont  
Warrant Committee Meeting  
Wednesday, February 28, 2024  
7:30pm**

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: March 25, 2024  
TIME: 8:51 AM

**To view the recording of the meeting**, please click [HERE](#).

**Call to Order:** Mr. Lubien called the meeting to order at 7:30pm. There were 16 voting members present

Member	Present	Member	Present
Geoffrey Lubien, Chair	Yes	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Paul Rickter, Vice-Chair	Yes	Melissa Morley	Remote
Conor McEachern, Secretary	Remote	Lynn Peterson Read	Yes
William Anderson	Yes	Matthew Taylor	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Marie Warner	Yes
Fitzie Cowing	Yes	Jack Weis	Yes
Susanne Croy	Yes	Roy Epstein, Ex-officio Designee, Select Board	Yes
Deepak Garg	Yes	Meghan Moriarty, Ex-officio, School Committee	Yes
Anne Helgen	Remote		
<b>Staff</b>			
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Yes	Jennifer Hewitt, Assistant TM & Finance Director	Yes

**1. Override Tax Impact.** Click [HERE](#) to see the document

Ms. Garvin explained that this is being presented because there has been incorrect information distributed in the community.

Ms. Hewitt reviewed the tax impact document beginning with FY24 starting points (although they will be updated for FY25 so the numbers will change somewhat):

- The average single family tax assessment value in FY24 is \$1.6 million.
- Total Average Tax Bill will be \$17,057 in FY24.

She went on to point out that:

- Prop 2.5 would add \$379 to the average tax bill.
- Because of debt service rolling off, this number would be lowered to \$311.
- New debt will add \$201 to the bill.
- This makes the known increase \$513 before the override (which is a 3.01% increase).
- The projected impact of the proposed \$8,400,000 override is \$1200 (for a \$1.6m home). This is an additional 7% to the tax bill.
- The CPA was incorrectly calculated by the opponents of the override. The total cost for that single family home is \$240 per year. This was discussed.

Ms. Hewitt pointed out that the impacts would be different based on the assessment of a home. The document includes the impact for assessments of \$1M, \$2M, \$3M as well as per \$100,000.

Ms. Hewitt explained that the document also shows the information extended over a number of years to illustrate that debt exclusion would not be felt all at once. It shows that the percentage tax increase in FY26 will be 3.3% and in FY27 it will be 2.9%, which she explained.

There were questions, discussion, and recommendations about the impacts and the document.

Ms. Garvin reviewed the document from Budget Summit IV showing the benefits of a successful override and the impacts on the Town side only if it fails. Click [HERE](#) to see the full document, starting on Page 9.

She explained that these are the items that will be debated at Town Meeting if the override fails and went on to outline the impacts if FY26. There were questions and discussion about this information.

**2. Use of ARPA Funds.** Click [HERE](#) to see the document.

Ms. Garvin provided a brief history of the \$7,800,000 ARPA funding the town received, and how those funds have been used. She explained that since many projects were based on estimates, her office is truing up the actual costs of projects and has reallocated some funds. As a result, the Select Board was able to recently approve two projects to use up remaining funds.

Ms. Hewitt explained how the grants must be managed and used before December 31, 2024, and provided details of open and completed projects.

Ms. Moriarty provided details of projects that the School Department used ARPA funds for.

**3. Warrant Committee Report Update**

Mr. Lubien recommended that the Warrant Committee report be transferred to the software [Wdesk](#) which was introduced to the Town by Ms. Hewitt a couple of years ago. He reviewed the benefits of using this software and how the switch would proceed.

Mr. Rickter explained the challenge of using this collaborative software without breaking the Open Meeting Law, and Ms. Hewitt detailed features in the software that would help address this issue. There was a discussion of this issue.

There was a discussion of using the software tool and how the Committee could work with it as well as the report, its content and length, and how to proceed.

**4. Fiscal Compact Discussion**

Mr. Lubien shared the draft Fiscal Compact, explaining that this is high-level and could be flushed out later:

- No additional Proposition 2½ override request for at least three years.
- Reduce annual expense growth rates to bring expenditures in closer alignment with revenue.
- Pursue policies to spur revenue growth and diversify our tax base through zoning changes to promote economic development and business growth.
- Substantially reduce the reliance on one-time sources to fund the operating budget and place excess Free Cash each year generated by turnbacks or excess revenue into specific stabilization funds and capital projects.
- Invest in key initiatives to reduce future expenses, including developing in-district special education programs and identifying Town/School organizational structure efficiencies.
- Bolster much-needed town services, including revamping aging school curriculum and expanding discretionary capital for sidewalks.
- Improve communication and continue to provide transparent budgeting and formalize multi-year financial planning, including the creation of a fiscal planning group with representation from town boards/committees, town and school administration, and town residents with a goal of achieving financial stability and sustainability.
- Protect against future fiscal shocks by maintaining adequate financial reserves and a strong bond rating.

Mr. Lubien recommended creating a task force with representatives from various town functions and departments to work on the details.

Mr. Caputo spoke about creating the task force and achieving its objectives.

There was a discussion of the compact, which Town entities should agree to the compact, how to memorialize it, how to gain voter confidence in the compact, and related topics and questions.

The group also discussed at length the task force, how to get it started, who should be on it, if other existing committees could achieve what this task force would be asked to do, next steps, etc.

Including a bullet point about senior tax relief was recommended and discussed, with Mr. McLaughlin explaining the lack of Town power to enact this type of relief. It was suggested that something like the following be added to the compact:

- Continue to work on developing new senior economic tax relief programs (to the full extent permitted by Mass. Law).

Mr. Lubien offered to reach out to Mr. Epstein and Ms. Moriarty about who should be in the initial working group in order to determine how to proceed.

## **Subcommittee Reports**

- A. Shared Services: Mr. McLaughlin said he had become Chair.
- B. General Government: Mr. Rickter said GG had not met but would schedule a meeting soon.
- C. Library Building Committee: Mr. McLaughlin said the estimates came in within the budget and outlined the bidding schedule.
- D. School Committee: Ms. Moriarty gave an update on some of the topics recently reviewed.
- E. Rink Building Committee: Mr. Caputo gave an update on the project saying that several issues were found during demolition and that some value engineering will be done.
- F. Town Manager: Ms. Garvin announced that the Town has received a Complete Streets Grant of \$432,000, and that the funds will be used for crosswalks on Concord Ave. Also, the Select Board approved a market analysis and fiscal impact study in an effort to increase economic development. Ms. Hewitt spoke about the status of the final audit and outstanding issues.
- G. Select Board: Mr. Epstein said that there is an issue with the Conservation Commission that is holding up the reimbursement for the Middle/High School, which he and Ms. Garvin explained. This will be discussed at the upcoming Select Board meeting.

Ms. Helgen left the meeting at this point.

## **Approve Minutes:**

January 17, 2024: Mr. Lubien said edits were included from Ms. Read.

*Mr. McLaughlin moved to approve the minutes of the January 17, 2024 Warrant Committee meeting as amended. The motion was seconded and passed 14-0-1 by a roll vote with Ms. Morley abstaining.*

January 22, 2024:

*A motion was made to approve the minutes of the January 22, 2024 Warrant Committee meeting. The motion was seconded, and passed 14-0-1 by a roll vote with Ms. Morley abstaining.*

January 24, 2024: Ms. Moriarty said that during her School Committee Update, line 51, she did not say "and test scores". This will be removed.

*A motion was made to approve the minutes of the January 24, 2024 Warrant Committee meeting as amended. The motion was seconded and passed 12-0-2 by a roll vote with Mr. Caputo and Mr. Epstein abstaining.*

February 8, 2024:

*A motion was made to approve the minutes of the February 8, 2024 Warrant Committee meeting. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously by a roll call vote.*

## **Public Comment - None**

## **Adjournment**

*Mr. McLaughlin moved to adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Mr. Anderson seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:03pm.*

Respectfully submitted by,  
Susan Peghiny, Recording Secretary