



**Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee Meeting
Wednesday, March 27, 2024, 2024
7:30pm**

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: April 16, 2024
TIME: 8:45 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 15 voting members present

Member	Present	Member	Present
Geoffrey Lubien, Chair	Yes	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Paul Rickter, Vice-Chair	Yes	Melissa Morley	Yes
Conor McEachern, Secretary	Yes	Lynn Peterson Read	Yes
William Anderson	Yes	Matthew Taylor	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Marie Warner	Remote
Fitzie Cowing	Remote	Jack Weis	Yes
Susanne Croy	Yes	Roy Epstein, Ex-officio Designee, Select Board	Yes
Deepak Garg	Absent	Amy Zuccarello, Ex-officio, School Committee	Remote
Anne Helgen	Remote		
Staff			
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Remote	Jill Geiser, Superintendent of Schools	Remote
Jennifer Hewitt, Assistant Town Administrator & Finance Director	Yes	Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business & Operations	Remote

1. Review Q2 Financials – School and Municipal

Schools: Click [HERE](#) to see the presentation.

Dr. Geiser introduced the update on the FY24 Q2 budget, pointing out that there is a projected deficit of \$1,324,171 and that there are three major budget drivers.

- Contracted Services for Special Education and other expenses.
- Salaries
- District-wide expenses (software, Chromebook repairs, legal costs, etc.).

Mr. DiCologero provided details on those major cost drivers including the projected deficit for each. He also explained what actions are being taken to mitigate the deficit.

Note: there were technical problems with the sound, so some commentary may be missing.

Mr. Epstein asked for more information on out-of-district tuition, which Mr. DiCologero provided and which was discussed.

There were questions and discussion about the projected deficit, especially around the increase in contracted services.

Mr. Epstein expressed concern that budgeting was not done correctly and asked that the Schools FY25 budget be thorough regarding true, reasonably expected, expenses.

Town: Click [HERE](#) to see the summary document.

Ms. Hewitt provided the Q2 overview, noting that Property Tax receipts are up due to the change in the way that Q1 and Q2 tax bills are assessed. She also spoke about increased Excise Tax receipts. The other point she mentioned was Investment Income revenue increase.

There were questions and discussion about the Revenue side of the Q2 update.

Ms. Hewitt then provided the update on the Q2 expenses, pointing out line items that she is keeping an eye on. There were questions and discussion about the expenses update.

33 **2. Discuss Senior Tax Work-Off**

34 Ms. Garvin explained that the State recently raised the limit for the Senior Tax Work-Off program from
35 \$1500/year to \$2000/year. She explained the program and that previously this change was taken to Town
36 Meeting for approval. However, it was determined that the Select Board could approve this change, which
37 it did at their meeting earlier in the week.

38 Mr. Epstein explained that this will cost the town \$4000 which is charged against the Overlay (which is
39 effectively Free Cash).

40 There were questions and a discussion of the program, including what caps are in place and should be in
41 place, the level of participation, eligibility requirements, proxies, etc.

42 Mr. Rickter suggested that the Town could increase the program by Home Rule Petition. Ms. Garvin added
43 that she would like to look more closely at the program before increasing the limit.

44 **3. Comments on 2022 IRS Fine.** Click [HERE](#) to see the memo.

45 Ms. Garvin explained why this fine was incurred, how the notification was handled by her office, and
46 actions taken to solve the problem. She read the following statement:

47 As several people are aware, there was a recent article in the Belmont Voice regarding Internal
48 Revenue Service fines that the Town of Belmont has incurred.

49 In January of this year the Finance Director and Town Treasurer brought to my attention an issue
50 regarding lack of payment to the IRS of retiree tax withholdings for the period from September through
51 December of 2022, and from January through July of 2023. As a result of this discovery, the Finance
52 Director drafted an internal memo to me, providing a full account of the events along with a detailed
53 timeline.

54 My initial intention was to report this matter to the Select Board at a February meeting. Please note:
55 each board member was individually made aware of the matter. I ultimately decided to hold off for two
56 reasons; the unflattering nature of this information as it relates to the previous Treasurer/Collector, and
57 the fact that at that time, even though an initial memo was prepared, additional issues continued to be
58 discovered. I thought it best to have a full grasp of the entire matter before bringing it before the full
59 board in a public meeting.

60 Prior to the Town voting to make the Treasure/Collector position appointed, the Town Administrator and
61 the rest of the Administration had very little involvement in the day-to-day activities of the Treasurer's
62 office. I understood that once the Town transitioned from elected to appointed, a full review of the
63 practices and policies would be necessary. Upon hiring new Treasurer Leslie Davison, the department
64 review began in earnest. In short order it was discovered that the Treasurer's office did not reconcile its
65 bank accounts after July 2022. As a result, it was impossible to determine what the proper balances
66 should be in these accounts. If the balances were up to date, it would have been obvious that retiree
67 tax withholdings were not being forwarded to the IRS for payment.

68 The [January 26, 2024 memo](#) details the background and actions taken in this matter. Someone chose
69 to send the memo to the Belmont Voice thus forcing this matter to be discussed before all the facts are
70 known. I understand some people in the community are using this issue to try to perpetuate the idea
71 that the Town is mismanaged. I'm disappointed by this, but I take solace in the knowledge that anyone
72 truly paying attention to the conversations that have occurred over these past many months will know
73 how hard the Select Board, Town Administration, and Town Staff have worked these last several years
74 to control costs, improve efficiencies, and be creative in the ways we deliver the required and requested
75 Town services.

76 Mr. Epstein emphasized that this is a tax withholding issue on pensions paid to members of the retirement
77 system only. He went on to speak about the issue, the quality work of the Finance Team, and that there
78 may be future issues uncovered. He took responsibility for assuming that this problem related only to the
79 FY24 financial statement, which he explained.

80 There was a discussion of the issue, the fine, and the impacts on the Town.

81 **4. FY2025 Health Insurance Rate**

82 Ms. Garvin emphasizes that this is good news and highlights good planning by the Town. She reviewed the
83 process used to choose rates over the past several years to build the Health Insurance Trust. Belmont's
84 increase is 4% over FY24 and has been approved by the Select Board. The Trust will be used to help
85 offset some of this increase. She explained that Ms. Hewitt did a review of the insurance budget to ensure
86 it is "right sized" and also that the Schools health insurance budget line has been consolidated with the
87 Town budget line. She cautioned that the Trust needs to be carefully managed going forward.

88 Ms. Hewitt explained that they were told that there should be an 11% increase to ensure revenue into the
89 Trust. Because of lower-than-average employee usage the 4% increase was deemed appropriate. While
90 this will draw on the Trust balance, they will carefully monitor the results of this decision and adjust
91 appropriately for future years.

92 Ms. Hewitt detailed the Town/Employee splits for the Committee, which was discussed.

93 There was also a discussion of whether or not the Town should join GIC.

94 **5. Warrant Committee Report Update**

95 Mr. Lubien explained that the report is due by May 18, 2024.

96 Mr. Rickter explained the use of WDesk, and that he has been advised by the Town Clerk that, in order to
97 avoid Open Meeting Law conflicts, a few designated people (perhaps by subcommittee) can enter their
98 section into the tool. He went on to do a demonstration of the tools and the status of the current report.

99 There was a discussion of the benefits and challenges of using the new tool and how a group could work
100 on the report without breaking the Open Meeting Law.

101 **Liaison & Committee Updates:**

- 102 A. Public Services: Ms. Warner reported that they had met with Department Heads and will start writing
103 their narrative for the report. They are waiting on the budget for the Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund.
- 104 B. Education: Mr. Weiss reported that they are compiling questions for the School Department &
105 Committee and hope to meet with them in early April. He also reported on next steps.
- 106 C. Shared Services: Mr. Morley reported on the work of the subcommittee, and next steps.
- 107 D. Human Services: Mr. McLaughlin reported on the meetings they have had and next steps.
- 108 E. Public Safety: Ms. Read reported on their meetings and next steps.
- 109 F. General Government: Mr. Rickter reported on their meetings and next steps.
- 110 G. Select Board: Mr. Epstein said they would be discussing Town Meeting articles after the Town election.
- 111 H. Town Administrator: Ms. Garvin reported that the Town received a \$1,000,000 award from Katherine
112 Clark's office for Phase 2 Design for the Community Path.
- 113 I. Library Building Committee: Mr. McLaughlin had no new information to report.
- 114 J. Rink Building Committee: Mr. Caputo reported that the old rink is down and there is a value engineering
115 process being down to help identify required adjustments. He also reported on the timeline and
116 materials which were discussed.

117 **Approve Minutes:**

118 March 20, 2024:

119 *Mr. McLaughlin moved to approve the minutes of the date Warrant Committee meeting. Ms. Warner*
120 *seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.*

121 **Public Comment** - None

122 **Adjournment**

123 *Mr. McLaughlin moved to adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Mr. Weiss seconded,*
124 *and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:20pm.*

125 Respectfully submitted by,
126 Susan Peghiny, Recording Secretary