

- **Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**
- **FINAL**
- **January 14, 2009, 7:30 p.m.**
- **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

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- *[Note: This was a joint meeting including the Warrant Committee, the Board of Selectmen, and the School Committee.]*
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- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Lynch, McLaughlin, Millane, Smith, Widmer; BOS Chair Firenze, School Committee Chair Bowe
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- Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Assistant Town Accountant Martin, Treasurer Carman
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- BOS Member: Leclerc
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- SC Members: Superintendent Aubin, Finance Director Missal, Assistant Superintendent Fitzpatrick, Graham, Gibson, Walker, Vose and Rittenburg
- Capital Budget Committee: Clark, Fallon, Mahoney, (Brusch)
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- WC Members Absent: Hofmann, Libenson and Paolillo
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- The WC meeting was called to order at 7:34 pm by Chair Curtis.
- BOS Chair Firenze called the BOS meeting to order at 7:38 pm.
- SC Chair Bowe called the SC meeting to order at 7:38 pm.
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- Chair Curtis began the meeting by stating that the reason for the joint meeting is to address how the town has done and will do business in light of the \$5M structural gap. Both the town and school budgets have been presented and have cuts within them. Overrides have not yet been discussed. The identified “irritants” are impediments to increasing taxes to cover the gap.
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- ***Consolidation of Town and School Functions***
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- Superintendent Aubin noted a report on consolidation which outlined a three-phase plan for buildings and grounds consolidation. Regarding legal consolidation, the school department has a new contract with Morgan, Brown, et al. This firm is known for its expertise in negotiation counsel. For human resources, Julie Silverman has been automating much of the paper work; however, the state demands written reports. Member Epstein asked if the school and town have together discussed consolidation. Superintendent Aubin said yes but that the cost savings have never been significant. Member Callanan asked what’s the wall that keeps getting hit and is it the same wall? Why not move forward on this? Member Brusch replied that the obstacles were personality and turf driven and the lack of evident significant cost savings. Chair Curtis

added that Belmont has done things the same way for a very long time and the political will to tackle consolidation has not been present. BOS Chair Firenze reviewed the school's report on consolidation and said it was clear, from their perspective, why it shouldn't be done. What is needed, he said, is a report that is thorough, objective, and detailed on the reasons to move forward or not move forward. We need to remove the turf battle and this issue needs to be analyzed objectively, much like the recent ALS report, he said.

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- Town Administrator Younger said that the top two departments for consolidation are IT and Facilities. The issue of who oversees the program remains. With regard to Facilities, BOS Chair Firenze added that there is a lot of segmentation going on and it would make sense to have facilities under the direction of one group.

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- In answer to a question as to how their report achieved a high degree of detail and objectivity, Member Allison, who chaired the ALS study group, offered an explanation. Three factors are necessary and we had all three: we had analysts on the team, we had data which could be tracked, and we had Chief Frizzell (who was very supportive of the study and provided much of the data). Allison continued: the committee had an open-minded approach – “follow the data and it will lead you somewhere”. BOS Chair Firenze added that nobody on the committee had an agenda or a preconceived notion.

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- Ms. Fallon: Under consolidation, the person in the job needs to know who he/she is working for. This has to be planned for with an understanding of the personnel structure. BOS Chair Firenze: It's true that we may not save a lot of money, but consolidation will allow us to face the residents and tell them that we are looking at this from a common sense perspective. A lot of people don't understand why there are two departments in HR, IT, etc. SC Chair Bowe cautioned that it could result in no money savings and less service for residents. Chair Curtis said that there is an informal group presently looking into this. He asked them to move this forward and to start fresh from a structural standpoint. Member Allison advised them to look at non-profit organizations in the \$60-80M range and see if they have 2 by 2 organizations. If none have the 2 by 2, consolidation may be reasonable, she said.

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- Member Epstein said he would like to know that these departments are fully utilized, e.g. each HR director (for example) working 40-50 hours a week. If hidden downtime exists, then consolidation would pay off. It would be useful to have the manager's frank assessment.

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- ***The School Available Budget Review***

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- Superintendent Aubin noted that the available funded budget leaves the schools with more than \$2.5M less than what is needed for FY10. The schools, she said, will change tremendously in order to deal with that loss. Aubin said she wonders if the town will accept those changes? Member McLaughlin said to give the town a chance to vote on an override and find out.

- Superintendent Aubin continued: Personnel is the last thing we want to cut. We have made the reductions in tiers, so as to know what we'd return, if any funding was restored. The reductions in tier 7 represent our highest priority and include the loss of 20 professional positions which are spread out across the schools. There will be no new text books, a 20% reduction in supplies, after school activities will be eliminated, athletics will be reduced by 50%, secretary and staff positions will be reduced as well as supplies and equipment. The reductions will cut across all areas of school life. We will also be increasing fees in transportation, athletics, and remaining activities.

- Capital Budget Member Clark said that he hopes both the town and schools are prepared to tell the residents what will happen if an override doesn't pass. Word needs to get out about the cuts. Town Administrator Younger agreed and added that, in addition, the town and schools need to be clear about the cuts and then make them happen. We must then follow through with those cuts or voters will lose faith. Member Allison: Given the limited resources, why not look first to positions such as "coordinator, assistant, director" as opposed to "teacher"? Why are there more teacher cuts than assistant titles on this list? Superintendent Aubin replied that administrator positions have been cut; every year we have lost a variety of administrators. SC Vose added: There is a long list of administrator/director positions that have been eliminated in Belmont. These positions still exist in other comparable systems. Belmont's system is already very lean and efficient. Also, the state mandates that reporting requirements be done by administrators, not teachers. Member Epstein: It is a reasonable budget, given the constraints. Consolidation won't save \$2.5M and SPED is a gigantic, uncontrollable cost that is growing exponentially. Since labor is a huge expense, is it appropriate to revisit the union contract? Maybe the 3.5% pay raise is not attainable to do. Chair Curtis: It is impossible to reopen a collective bargaining agreement unless the union agrees to open it – even with 20 teacher layoffs pending. Member Bruschi: What if we requested the bargaining units of the town and schools to voluntarily enact a wage freeze? Both sides would have to agree to do it. The answer may be no, but we could ask.

- Capital Budget Member Mahoney: The school and the town have both made painful cuts. Consolidation has a symbolic purpose for residents; it builds tax payer confidence and can create town side efficiencies. Capital Budget Member Fallon: This has been coming on for a long time and the consequences are very serious for Belmont. We have prided ourselves on excellent schools and that will change fundamentally. SC Member Rittenberg: Quality services require that the town invest money – are we willing to invest money to keep quality services? WC Member Millane: It is hard to ask for an override with unemployment so high. It will be a publicity nightmare. BOS Member Leclerc: An override is needed and we must show the community that we are looking into every possible efficiency. I propose a June override and not for the full amount. We have made painful cuts. If the override is rejected, the community will have been in on the decision process.

- Member Callanan: An override has a better chance of succeeding if residents know what is coming in the way of cuts, if they know what is at stake. We must educate

the tax payers. Member McLaughlin: We can put it on in April, if it doesn't pass, we can put it on again in June.

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- ***Capital vs. Operating***

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- Capital Budget Member Clark: We can't finance the town on the back of the capital budget. If we take from capital for operating, we will be spending down the town's capital. We must keep capital projects going, otherwise it is short sighted. The capital budget spends only about 1/3 of what it ought to be spending, given the requests it gets.

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- ***Planning for January 21 Budget Forum***

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- Chair Curtis: The fear is that no one will show up next week. We need to put the forum off and do a better job of publicizing it. The school committee recommended February 4th as a possible meeting date.

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- ***Representative Brownsberger***

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- Representative Brownsberger: The state is not offering any good news. It has already cut 3-4% of its budget. The legislature just voted to authorize the Governor to make local aid as part of a second round of cutting. Local aid cuts are limited to 1/3 of all cuts – so local government will be cut less deeply than state government. The rules regarding Chapter 70 cuts operate to protect Belmont from any cuts in Chapter 70, but cuts are likely in both additional assistance and lottery. Rep. Brownsberger got an amendment passed that removed language that would have directed the Governor to consider community financial reserves in targeting cuts.

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- Member Widmer: There will be cuts in local aid for FY10, including Chapter 70. The state's revenue estimate may be too high. There may be need for a fourth round of cuts. This will be a 36-month problem.

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- Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:32 pm.
- BOS Chair Firenze moved to adjourn the BOS at 9:32 pm as well.

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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary