

**BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
FINAL**

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**OCTOBER 5, 2016, 7:30 P.M.  
CHENERY COMMUNITY ROOM**

Present: Chair Epstein; Members Dash, Crowley, Fallon, Gammill, Libenson, Lisanke, Lubien, McLaughlin, Schreiber; Selectman Baghdady; School Committee Chair Fiore

Town Administrator Kale

Members Absent: Alcock, Helgen, and Mennis

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by Chair Libenson.

Chair Libenson began by turning to the first item on the agenda.

***Introductions***

The newest member of the Warrant Committee (WC), Michael Crowley, introduced himself to the WC. He noted his budget experience. The WC then introduced itself.

***Nominating Committee Report and Election of Officers***

Chair Libenson turned this agenda item over to Member McLaughlin, Chair of the Nominating Committee.

Member McLaughlin explained the process by which the slate of nominations came to be.

*Member McLaughlin moved:* To nominate Member Gammill as Secretary of the WC.

The motion passed unanimously.

*Member McLaughlin moved:* To nominate Member Dash as Vice Chair of the WC.

The motion passed unanimously.

*Member McLaughlin moved:* To nominate Member Epstein as Chair of the WC.  
The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Epstein stated that he is honored to accept the position of Chair. The WC is open to thoughtful, reasoned analysis with the hope of getting to the best answer.

## *Approval of Minutes*

Concerning Minutes, Chair Epstein stated that they will be reviewed promptly. Meetings will end by 9:30 p.m. Public contributions are welcome and will occur before 9:30 p.m.

The minutes of 9/7/16 were approved unanimously.

Ms. Gibalerio provided an overview of the Minutes process for the WC.

## *Discussion: Special Town Meeting (STM) Warrant Article (Withdrawal from Minuteman)*

Chair Epstein framed the discussion by stating that he is not expecting to have a vote this evening. The BOS will discuss the issue tomorrow evening and the League of Women Voters will hold a forum (Monday, October 17). The WC may vote at a very short meeting on Tuesday, October 18 or at the LWV night.

Chair Epstein reviewed that Belmont recently voted to not approve the Minuteman debt and there will be a Special Town Meeting (STM) on Wednesday, October 19 to vote to leave the Minuteman district. He added that DESE has assigned a capital charge for non-member towns. The Education Subcommittee has met to review the recent DESE ruling and other issues related to Minuteman.

Member Gammill explained the process by which the Ed Subcommittee prepared its documents. He said they began with an apples-to-apples comparison of the FY17 operating costs from a member and non-member perspective, based on Minuteman's FY17 budget. The goal was to see the burden (per-pupil cost) that would be borne by the member and non-member towns.

Member Libenson stated that he is focusing on what Belmont would pay as a member-town versus what Belmont would pay as a non-member town. As a member-town, Belmont pays \$27,436 per student. As a non-member town, Belmont would likely pay under \$20,000 per student. (These figures include transportation costs.)

Member Gammill stated that this analysis responds to a different question than the one he explored, which was to better understand the FY17 budget and how assumptions about Minuteman's overall financial operations flowed through to member operating assessments. He provided additional information (e.g., enrollment projections, the foundation budget, the tiered tuition, the 125% cap on non-member tuitions) to explain his analysis.

Chair Epstein then explained the new capital charge policy, as put forth by DESE just before the election. There are Type A and Type B towns. The proposed capital charges – which are likely to be imposed – will vary based on member and non-member status, town Type, and enrollment.

Member Libenson agreed that DESE will potentially allow the district to charge the capital fee based on the town Type. However, there is reason to believe that the capital charge may not, in fact, be imposed. Non-member towns, he said, would pay more to send to their children to Minuteman, than to Cambridge, for example.

SC Chair Fiore explained the scenarios by which students will attend Minuteman or receive vocational education via other communities. She said the town will make decisions concerning districts that it will enter into agreements with, if there are not suitable programs available at Belmont (or at Minuteman). If Cambridge and Minuteman both offer the same vocational program, it is not clear who picks where the students will go (parents or town).

Mr. Kale reviewed data pertaining to member and non-member enrollment at Minuteman in light of the size of the new school building. There should be ample space for Belmont (as a non-member town) to attend Minuteman, for the next several years, anyway.

Member McLaughlin then explained the withdrawal process. Belmont is about halfway through the process. The STM vote will need to prevail by a 2/3 vote for Belmont to withdraw. The member towns (via a town meeting vote) and DESE will need to give permission for Belmont to leave. (If a town does not call a Town Meeting to vote to let Belmont out, it is deemed approval for Belmont to get out.) If it leaves the district, Belmont, under the new agreement, will not be liable for the new building debt.

Member Fallon suggested that perhaps it makes sense for Belmont to leave the district and then see what the options are in three years – perhaps rejoining at that time. Member Crowley noted that Belmont will be increasing the remaining member-town costs while it sees a savings as a non-member town. Belmont may not be welcomed back to Minuteman in three years. Member McLaughlin noted that Belmont tried very hard for 20 years to work with both Minuteman and the member towns. Belmont was shut out by Minuteman and by the member towns.

Member Dash noted that the DESE memo pertaining to charging a capital fee (to non-member towns) is not at all a sure thing. DESE may not follow through, or Minuteman may not implement this. Member Gammill said that DESE has issued its implementation regulations to follow through. Member Libenson stated that Belmont can either lock itself into the debt for 30 years, or it can withdraw and have other options, as well as pay \$5-8K less per student for the foreseeable future and avoid the debt. Other schools could be significantly less expensive. Furthermore, Belmont will more than likely be allowed back in should it choose to do so in three years. Belmont, he said, has a chance to leave the district and save money in doing so.

Member Crowley expressed concerns if Belmont withdrew from the District but continued sending students because it would amount to shifting some of Belmont's cost to member towns. Belmont would save money, but other towns would pick up the cost. Chair Epstein terms this "arbitrage" of tuition and estimated it might shift \$200,000 in costs to the other member towns. He was concerned about fairness and suggested that

remaining a member and absorbing \$200,000 is a number we could live with, but not \$500,000 or \$700,000.

Member McLaughlin noted that the \$200,000 would likely need a debt exclusion and this debt exclusion is unlikely to pass given the 72% who voted recently *not* to support the debt. Member Slap suggested that the WC focus its efforts on the financial impact of withdrawing from the district. Member Libenson stated that \$200,000 over 30 years is \$6M, which is a lot of money. If Belmont withdraws, it may send a portion of its students elsewhere, which will save a lot of money. Taxpayers are feeling stretched already and there are more fiscal demands looming that may soon be placed on taxpayers, e.g., a new high school, a new library, a new DPW.

The WC continued discussing issues relating to the vote to withdraw from the district, e.g., the capital charge for non-member and member towns, the timing of the building debt, the assessed fees during the construction phase, the incentives to leave, as well as the WC's obligation to vote on this issue (or not).

### ***Updates: Board of Selectmen and School Committee***

**Board of Selectmen:** Selectman Baghdady updated the WC on the recent escrow closing with Toll Brothers and Mr. Starr concerning the P & S of the parking lot. The documents are signed, the money has been forwarded, and all of this is in an escrow account. The new delay was due to the new Starbucks lease, which is awaiting execution at Starbucks' headquarters (in Seattle). The deal will need to be officially recorded with the Office of Deeds by October 21.

**School Committee:** SC Chair Fiore reported that school enrollment is continuing to rise, which presents challenges. She noted that Butler received a blue ribbon award and that Belmont did well, overall.

### ***Public Contributions***

Mr. Jack Weis approached the table, and noted that Minuteman does not do enrollment projections. Also, he noted that the Minuteman Superintendent did quash the discount to non-member towns. He said that DESE assigning a capital fee to non-member towns is meaningful, as it evens out the capital debt. However, there is still no equity adjustment on the operating side. The WC discussed the process by which a capital charge may be imposed.

Chair Epstein encouraged WC members to attend the upcoming meetings on Minuteman: one hosted by Minuteman and the LWV Briefing Night.

### ***Adjournment***

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:31 p.m.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio  
WC Recording Secretary