

**THE MINUTES
OF THE
WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING
March 19, 2003**

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:38 PM.

Members absent: D. Kobus

Also present: Town Administrator Melvin Kleckner, Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney, Selectman Paul Solomon, Town Accountant Barbara Hagg, Acting Police Chief Andrew O'Malley, School Committee and Capital Budget Committee member Scott Stratford, and Member of the Police Staffing Subcommittee Ralph Jones

Handout(s) given out tonight:

1. *Town Administrator Kleckner's proposed reduction of \$200K for the Board of Selectmen handed out by Town Administrator Kleckner*
2. *Belmont Police Staffing Statistics in Comparison with Other Towns handed out by Ralph Jones (2 pages)*
3. *Warrant Committee Subcommittee on Town Owned Vehicles Report from Bill Hofmann and Linda Oates*
4. *Snow update memo from Highway Superintendent Castanino handed out by Town Accountant Hagg*
5. *Minuteman School Assessment March 19, 2003 memo handed out by Town Administrator Kleckner*
6. *Potential Town Meeting Articles March 10, 2003 memo handed out by Town Administrator Kleckner*

Acceptance of Minutes

The Committee discussed and the minutes of the March 12, 2003 meeting.

- *Member Heigham made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of March 12, 2003.*

Subcommittee Reports - Public Services

Member Tillotson reviewed the Subcommittee's report giving an overview of each department's impact if a Department of Public Works occurs in Belmont along with the budget funding for FY04.

Buildings & Grounds

In FY04, the cost of Town Hall Annex building maintenance will be eliminated since that building will be under construction, but keep in mind, it will be added back for FY05.

This Department is also picking up the Municipal Light Department building costs at 450 Concord Avenue. Fuel estimates for FY04 are based on the current rates. This may be a concern due to increased possible prices. The Underwood Pool and bathhouse are in need of major maintenance. It is unclear when that maintenance can be done.

Cemetery

The Department expects to begin construction on the new cemetery later this calendar year (early FY04). Fuel estimates for FY04 are based on the current rates. This may be a concern due to increased possible prices. They are projecting 120 interments for FY04.

Highway

Member Tillotson reviewed the different services provided by the Highway Department. The Subcommittee agrees the Highway Department should retain all their full-time staff for FY04. The current state of Belmont roads is a direct reflection of the reduction in staff of the Highway Department over the years. He reviewed the memo (*Handout 1*) focusing on the Highway Department's possible budget reduction amounts. Temporary labor is the seasonal labor doing the "spring cleaning and maintenance" each year. The MWRA assessment for the sewage is only an estimate at this time of \$3.9 million.

Community Development

Costs of building permits have been raised from \$12 to \$15 per thousand \$ in FY03. Member Hofmann observed the Community Development staff spend a lot of time at nightly meetings and dealing with committees. Their biggest concern is if they will need outside engineering assistance depending on when the construction on Pleasant Street and other major projects begin.

Water

This year's budget is being funded at the same level as FY03. The Water Department prefers to absorb costs rather than take increases out of construction or maintenance. The MWRA assessment is estimate at this time. It is an average increase of 3.9% or around a \$2.3 million increase. Their lifeline is fuel. Their trucks all run on fuel. Fuel estimates for FY04 are based on the current rates, and the Water Department only has 75% of prior year's budget amount.

Member Hofmann thinks we need to step back and take look at the heating oil and fuel (including diesel) before we agree to next year's contract amounts. Highway Superintendent Castanino is only working with 27 in his Department. (Town Administrator Kleckner's FY04 Budget recommendation includes funding for 29.) Member Hofmann remarked this is one department that could have been cut less over the years. The Subcommittee recommends the Highway Department be funded for 30 personnel for FY04.

Member Hofmann is also concerned about the level of staffing in the Cemetery Department. He cited that there were 30 interments on Saturdays during the course of the

year. Each interment needs four people to carry a casket. Member McCormick asked if there is any thought by the Cemetery Commission to privatize the carrying of the casket as the funeral home's responsibility. Member Hofmann was not sure if that has been discussed by the Commission, but there may be union issues involved. The hope is with the new cemetery, whatever they charge is closer to what the rate actually is. Member Hofmann noted the cemetery would begin construction this fall. Member Heigham added there is a dispute with McLean on when the land will be transferred to the Town. This is an obstacle, but the single-family residence construction is going forward this summer/fall. Member Bruschi added the construction could take between 6-14 months.

Member Callanan asked for the monetary amount of the Subcommittee's recommendations. Member Hofmann replied they did not have that information at this time.

Chairman Widmer asked Town Administrator Kleckner for the timing regarding the DPW proposal presentation to the Warrant Committee. He responded the Board of Selectmen would be discussing this issue at the March 24 meeting. Town Administrator Kleckner is prepared to make another presentation to this Committee probably on April 2. He reiterated Highway Superintendent Castanino does project significant snow removal savings in the future with a DPW.

Subcommittee Report – Police Department

Chairman Widmer recalled that, as part of the Warrant Committee's cost cutting initiatives, a Subcommittee was formed to look at police staffing issues. Tonight is not a final report on the police staffing issue but an update on the work done regarding this issue.

Mr. Jones presented and analyzed the data gathered by the Subcommittee (*Handout 2*). He reviewed the issues involving comparability with other towns such as fringe benefits, school crossing guards, and capital vs. operating projects. The Subcommittee looked at staffing using the most recent complete data from communities.

Belmont has the 2nd highest number of officers per "UCR" (Uniform Crime Rate) crimes of those compared on the spreadsheet. He informed the Committee the "Traffic Enforcement/Stops" (which increased 459%) is not included in the staffing statistics for comparison with other towns. There is also much more comprehensive reports required for domestic disputes which partly explains the sharp increase (9,588%) in "Report Writing." Mr. Jones noted what it finally comes down to is what services does the Town want the police to offer? Does the Town want simple crime prevention and traffic control? Or does the Town want the police to do community policing and further involvement?

Mr. Jones observed it is hard to know why crimes decrease over the last decade, even though there are no major changes with police departments. Current staffing at the Police

Department is 49. Selectman Solomon added Melrose is down 10 to 44 (FY04 budgeted) in staffing.

Member White mentioned a shift in staffing does not affect the crime rate significantly, but it does influence the level of services the Police Department can provide to residents. The Subcommittee recommends the staffing level go to 48, which is the current level of 49, allowing attrition. He noticed the reality is other towns are probably decreasing staff as well.

Acting Police Chief O'Malley clarified Belmont's increase in the "Reports" category (*Handout 2 page 2*). On Table 1 (*Handout 2 page 1*), O'Malley remarked that, as of today, Melrose is down to 48; Lexington is at 53; Needham is still at 49; and Wellesley is now at 46 officers.

Acting Police Chief O'Malley also clarified the DOR reporting comparisons, noting towns were not comparing apples-to-apples. He pointed out the E-911 Communications Department (an addition of 6 staff) was added to Belmont's DOR report. Crossing guards are also in that situation. They are being added as police per capita for DOR purposes when they are technically not police in Belmont. The noise violations by-law is going to the Police Department instead of Community Development having to work overtime at night. The Police are the first-responders on the scene for calls coming into the Police Department. Acting Police Chief O'Malley observed (using FY03 figures) Lexington has 53 officers, as does Belmont. Their overtime is budgeted at \$337K, while Belmont is around \$99K; Needham has \$500K overtime. Around 12% of their budget is overtime, while Belmont's is only 2%. He added his personal feelings are, at this time and age, the thought of reducing public safety really has to be looked at. The Belmont Police Department just purchased \$30K in protective facemasks, boots, and other gear through a grant.

Member Curtis was curious about the staffing levels of the swing shift (4 PM – midnight) having to be consistent with the midnight shift (midnight – 8 AM) since the contract language does not say the same number of people have to be on both shifts. Acting Police Chief O'Malley replied that having the 4-and-2 shift has been done that way for years. Member Curtis noted this could be an area for savings in future budgets. Mr. Jones added that it is a major constraint for this Department and others.

Member Oates asked if a person could ask for permanent shifts instead of rotating. Acting Police Chief O'Malley answered there has been as many as three working straight shifts, but if they want out, they have to give 10 days notice. He added not many people want to work the straight shifts, especially if they are on nights.

Member Bruschi reminded the Committee how this issue came up to begin with. The prior Chief pointed out it is not written in the contract that the same level of staffing must be maintained in the night shifts. He suggested this was an area for savings that could be pursued.

Member Brusch asked if any of this report writing could be done on the midnight shift. Acting Police Chief O'Malley remarked that reports must be done by the end of a shift.

E-911 Communications

Member McCormick reviewed the staffing level and FY04 Budget request for this department. The Subcommittee recommends Town Administrator Kleckner's recommended budget. He noted the training budget has been cut \$3K. Member McCormick also mentioned a particular contract issue regarding a full-time employee during sick leave and the coverage pertaining to that. He observed that if an incoming call rings more than three times, Cambridge picks up that call. In the future, the Town may want to consider regionalization as a structural change/cost cutting initiative.

Other

Chairman Widmer asked Town Administrator Kleckner to review the Budget discussion from the Board of Selectmen's Monday (March 17) meeting. Selectman Brownsberger noted remaining budget issues expect to be closed by the Monday, March 24 meeting. Member Oates informed the Committee that the Minuteman budget for Belmont might be increased by as much as \$100-\$200K. However, Town Administrator Kleckner and Chairman Widmer remarked this is still subject to State Budget approval which is still early in the process.

Subcommittee Report – Council on Aging

This topic will be discussed next week.

Town Owned Vehicles

Member Oates summarized the recommended policy for Town owned vehicles (*Handout 3*). Member Hofmann surveyed other surrounding towns and reported some results of their vehicle policies. He reviewed the Town's total cost of operating a passenger car is \$7K/year. If the Town used the Subcommittee's elimination recommendations, annual savings to the Town would be around \$160K.

Town Administrator Kleckner remarked the Town has a good policy, but the question lies in how to implement the policy. He agrees a lot of premises the Subcommittee has made. There are a lot of complicated issues however. Management, who do not get paid for coming in, must respond (sometimes quickly) to situations, and therefore, it gets complicated. Town Administrator Kleckner will be responding to this issue before Town Meeting.

Member Brusch agrees with the recommendations and would like Town Administrator Kleckner and the Board of Selectmen to think about when the person on call is not available (i.e., on vacation), then the car should go to the person who is on call.

Member McCormick is frustrated with people who live far distances responding to calls with Town owned vehicles. He also observed he would like the Police Department's fueling station to continue to be used for the Police vehicles.

Acting Police Chief O'Malley reviewed the yearly purchasing of police vehicles for surrounding towns. He also reviewed the internal vehicles used by the Police Department.

Member Tillotson asked Acting Police Chief O'Malley how many cars does the Police Department need to have on the road during a shift. He responded on a day shift (the most being used), there are 10 or 11 vehicles being used. Member Oates noted it is not a question of old vehicles, but fewer vehicles.

Member Heigham reflected that in his Capital Budget Committee days, through those discussions, the Police need three new vehicles a year, but also that they have too many vehicles.

Member McCormick reminded the Committee they still need to make a recommendation regarding the Police Department's request for vehicle replacement in FY04. Member White also suggested the Police vehicle requests be handled through the Capital Budget.

Member McCormick made a motion, and it voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Recording Clerk