

THE MINUTES OF THE WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING March 20, 2002

Chairman Brusch called the meeting to order at 7:40 PM.

Members absent: Robie White and Linda Oates

Also present: Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney, Selectman William Brownsberger, School Department Director of Finance & Administration Dr. Gerry Missal, Town resident Jonathan Green of Stone Road.

Acceptance of Minutes

1. Member Heigham made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to accept the minutes of January 16, 2002.
2. Member Heigham made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of January 30, 2002.
3. Member Flewelling made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to accept the minutes of February 13, 2002.
4. Member Heigham made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of February 27, 2002.
5. Member Heigham made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of March 6, 2002.
6. Member Heigham made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of March 13, 2002.

Memo Regarding Structural Changes (continued from March 6th meeting)

- Closing the branch Libraries
 - Pro
 - Not going to save us money - The branches are only open limited hours per week with one staff worker and a part-time aide.
 - Member Hofmann was concerned about maintenance of the buildings citing Newton as another Town closing their branch Libraries. It is difficult to maintain all those branch buildings.
 - Discussion ensued on maintaining the buildings long-term. Member Schafer even mentioned selling one of the branch buildings to generate money for the Town.
 - Chairman Brusch discussed the possibility of saving money in the book budget if money was not being spent on duplicate books for the branches.
 - Selectman Monahan informed the Committee the Board of Selectmen are recommending closing both the Waverley and Benton branches of the Library.
 - Spent \$90K on structural improvements in the past few years, along with the Capital Budget Committee having money set aside for the Branches on the long-term Capital Projects spreadsheet.

- Selectman Mahoney offered a possible solution of having the Historic Commission use the Benton branch building as their main meeting area instead of the room in the main Library allowing the building to remain historic as intended.
- Con
 - Member Flewelling discussed the keeping the Benton branch due to the historical value to the Town, even more so than the Annex to him.
 - Member McCormick discussed the need for the other branches especially for logging onto the Internet and using the computers. Closing the branches may be only a short-term solution
- Making someone in the Accounting Office the Purchasing Agent

The Committee discussed the purchasing policies of both the Town and School Department. The idea of a centralized purchasing seems to be lacking in the Town area. Currently, purchases \$500 or more require a purchase order. The School Department does the bulk of their purchasing off a collaborative pricing list.

- Move the School Administration to the Area Behind the BHS

Chairman Brusch will ask Member White for further information and discuss this topic at another meeting.

- Other Issues

Member Hilgenberg discussed the Buildings & Grounds Department setting up a contract with the Nextel phones and communication system. This was to substitute for some various systems that were in place. The advantages to the Nextel: the pool of minutes for the Town as opposed to a certain allotment of minutes per phone, and the ease of direct connect with other Town users. The pagers and cell phones that Department Heads were supposed to have given up in exchange for the Nextels have not occurred very much.

- Establish a Public Works Department

Member Hilgenberg mentioned the need for a combined public works department including: Highway, Water, Buildings & Grounds, Cemetery, and Building Inspection. Selectman Monahan agrees with Member Hilgenberg the Light Department should be omitted from this consolidation. He also observed the Cemetery's different hours, costs of burying someone, and how they do help with other departments (i.e., Highway plowing snow) as needed. The Water Department has shown resistance with consolidating, although they are now agreeing to meet with the Light Department over joint metering. Member Heigham discussed the difficulties of joining these departments such as dissolving the elected Boards of Water and Cemetery. Member Hilgenberg noted these examples are no reason to not move ahead on further exploration of this issue.

Member Flewelling agreed the Light Department should remain separate and independent. Member Freiner agreed with Member Flewelling. The consolidation of a Public Works Department would, at least, bring savings in the administrative area. Other Towns should be looked at regarding Public Works consolidation. Selectman Monahan said the Board of Selectmen would look further into this matter.

Member Widmer said it would be helpful to agree on a subset of suggestions that would be worth pursuing in order to galvanize action. Chairman Brusch agreed these matters will be reviewed to see which would "have legs" and make recommendations on those.

- Outsourcing

- Changing the Group Medical Health Care Provider

- Chairman Brusch informed the Committee this idea is already underway, therefore the Committee does not need to discuss this issue further this evening.

- Replace part-time aides with Temp aides, thereby avoiding the group medical cost for this group.

- Chairman Brusch stated this issue came from three different members of the Warrant Committee. Member Miller clarified the two issues are: what the group medical is costing the Town, and what it would cost to outsource a provider who employs aides to work for the Town.

- The Committee discussed the ERISA statute citing the statute does not include health insurance benefits. Dr. Missal clarified it is state law that employees who work 20 hours or more per week are eligible for health insurance. Member Heigham will look further into determining employee eligibility of health insurance.

- The Committee agrees this is a very good idea, but further information regarding the number of employees/aides is needed. Chairman Brusch will contact Human Resources Director Cindy Gallagher for those figures.

- Grant Funds (School)

Member Freiner discussed the need for a grant writer to be on staff with the School Department. Chairman Brusch and Member Morley offered the suggestion of getting a freelance writer as a consultant to the School Department funded by the Belmont Education Foundation or by other private funds.

- Fees for Services Charged in the Town Clerk's Office (in Conjunction with Opening on Saturday Morning)

Member Morley informed the Committee the issue of increasing fees is on the Town Meeting Warrant. Discussion ensued on possibly closing the Clerk's office early on another day and opening for Saturday morning. The Committee questioned if opening Saturdays is a collective bargaining issue. Chairman Brusch will discuss this issue with Human Resources Director Cindy Gallagher.

- Increase Summer Programs Revenue

This idea came from the School Committee meeting, using the schools and offering more programs that are offered now. Chairman Brusch will ask Member White for further information and discuss this topic at another meeting.

- Belmont Alumni Association Fund Raising

Member Flewelling and Member Freiner informed the Committee the Association is having a get together, not a fundraiser, in the future to see the interest on this topic.

- School Choice/Increase School User Fees

Member Miller informed the Committee the School Committee is looking into this.

- Charge Town Employees for Parking

Selectman Mahoney suggested charging the students for parking at the High School. Chairman Brusch recommends charging the Town Hall as well as School Department employees for those parking all day.

Members discussed a parking area on Royal Road can be created with approximately 40 spots that can be used to charge for parking.

Member Hofmann recommended charging for rink use and other school fees. Also, he noted building permit fees should be increased. (Note: The Board of Selectmen voted to increase fees on April 1, 2002 to \$15 per thousand with a minimum fee of \$50.)

The Committee reviewed a letter from State Representative Anne Paulsen regarding recommendations to raise revenue and/or reduce costs for local communities. A copy is on file with the Clerk. Chairman Brusch will invite State Rep. Paulsen to come to a future meeting to discuss this letter.

Potential FY2003 Override and Timing of FY2003 Budget

Chairman Brusch reviewed the timing of the FY2003 budget with the Committee and asked Member Widmer about the State's Budget timing. He informed the Committee of the scheduled timeline (anticipating the Senate Budget will not be worse than the House Budget):

April 26th - House Ways & Means releases a budget with no additional revenue

Week of April 29th - debating revenues

Week of May 6th - debating a budget

May 10th - presenting a final House budget

Selectman Monahan informed the Committee the Board of Selectmen discussed a proper budget may not be ready for the April 24th Town Meeting. He recommends having a Town Meeting on April 24th with putting the budget off until May.

Member Clark discussed the Town Meeting Warrant. He would like to have an orderly way to discuss the articles. Selectman Monahan offered having the Board of Selectman put a number of resolutions on the warrant discussing the resolutions available.

Member Schafer suggested having a starting point for those discussions with a level-service and a reduced-service budget ready for Town Meeting. Member Widmer agreed and noted the Committee needs to nail down some variables such as McLean tax capacity. Member McCormick reminded the Committee of when the Town Meeting Members got a lot of detail, there were numerous questions about line items.

Town resident Mr. Green mentioned to the Committee there not nearly enough information given to the Town residents regarding the debt exclusion. There is also very little perception or acknowledgement on the three ballot questions. Chairman Brusch informed Mr. Green on the legal implications regarding Town resources publicizing the ballot questions.

Selectman Brownsberger told the Committee he does not object to having options presented to Town Meeting. There is a gap of \$1.7 million between revenues and

expenditures. Selectman Brownsberger believes the Town should borrow money to cover some of this gap, and he offered to put in place a "bedrock budget" putting in place some grim assumptions rather than putting everything in play in May/June when the Town is making those decisions.

Selectman Mahoney agrees there should be a "bedrock budget" presented to Town Meeting in April. An override question should also be on the ballot in order to give residents the option. Selectman Brownsberger firmly believes an override will need to occur in FY2004 if there is not one for FY2003.

Selectman Monahan believes there are some bills with the State (i.e., early retirement) that could really affect the Town and their fiscal decisions. Chairman Brusch asked Selectman Monahan to discuss the budget timeline process during the next Board of Selectmen meeting.

Member Widmer would like clarification on future borrowing and what is currently on the plate for the Town. Chairman Brusch will ask Treasurer Fay to answer this at a future meeting.

Member Hofmann compared the Town to running a business and he does not feel comfortable putting together a budget with so many unknown variables.

The Committee discussed borrowing for FY2003 and the ramifications from prior year's override amount. Selectman Monahan noted if the debt exclusion fails, then the Town will need to go to the residents and ask them to pass the override.

Member Curtis moved to go into Executive Session to discuss the minutes of the Executive Session of February 27, 2002. Member Clark seconded said motion, and this clerk took a roll call vote. It was voted 10-0 to go into executive session at 10:12 PM.

Member Curtis mad a motion, Member Freiner seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to return to regular session at 10:14 PM.

Member Freiner made a motion, and it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 10:14 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Interim Recording Clerk