

**BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**  
**FINAL**  
**APRIL 11, 2012, 7:30 P.M.**  
**CHENERY COMMUNITY ROOM**

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BELMONT, MA  
JUN 25 1 36 PM '12

Present: Chair Allison; Members Baghdady, Becker, Bruschi, Dash, Epstein, Grob, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, Millane, Sarno; School Committee Member Scharfman

Members Absent: McHugh and McLaughlin

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 pm by Chair Allison.

Chair Allison began by reviewing the evening's agenda, noting that the WC will hear from two special guests: Mr. Jack Weis will offer a Minuteman update, and Senator Brownsberger will address the details concerning additional state aid that is expected to come to Belmont.

***Discussion of Warrant for April Town Meeting (Articles 15, 16, 17, 19)***

Chair Allison began with Article 17.

**Article 17: Minuteman School Capital Building Stabilization Fund**

Mr. Jack Weis, Belmont representative to Minuteman School Committee, joined the WC at the table. Chair Allison informed the WC that he has received the questions generated at last week's WC meeting. Mr. Weis began by stating that the main reason for the stabilization fund request is to provide a more stable and predictable source of capital to address the ongoing needs for equipment. He said another reason is to have funding for general building-related repairs. He said there is no source of money for capital repairs, e.g., the roof is in dire need of repair. This specific request is to create a mechanism (a structure) to allow Minuteman to have the funding in the future. He said there is no funding going forward for this year, just the structure. A majority of the 16 towns (which is nine) will need to approve this; he had been told by Superintendent Bouquillan that seven have voted, with one town against.

He noted that Minuteman's physical plant is being evaluated by a consultant. He said that a two-thirds vote would be required by member towns to take money out of this stabilization fund.

The Warrant Committee discussed.

Member Lynch voiced opposition to a consideration of a formal stabilization fund before the needs have been analyzed and identified. He asked how Minuteman has acted on emergencies in the past. Mr. Weis replied that all this does is smooth out the contributions to the capital fund by members' funds by creating the necessary structure.

Member Lynch said TM will want to know why this new structure is now necessary.

Member Grob asked about why the language “school improvements” was included. Mr. Weis said this stabilization fund relates to renovations, not additions. Member Brusch asked what Minuteman’s definition of “capital” is given that there is a line item in the budget for capital needs. Weis replied that they had some standard around the \$5K mark. Member Millane said this feels like an open checkbook for Minuteman to do what they want, e.g., build a new school. Weis replied that this is not a back-door way to get a new school. Member Manjikian asked if there is currently a reserve set up to deal with these needs. Weis replied that this request for a stabilization fund is to formulate that reserve.

Member Brusch offered Belmont’s definition of capital: a major, non-recurring capital equipment item, at the \$10K mark, and items are not allowed to be bundled.

Member Sarno said that this fund is being established with a backlog of needs in place. Thus the line-item for next year could be big.

Member Epstein offered that this feels like an insurance fund for emergency capital needs and that another piece of this is to fund additional items related to Minuteman’s programming. He added that there is probably another way to fund programming needs.

Chair Allison added that Minuteman hands in its budget number before the needs of other town departments are even known. She asked about the \$850K for roof repair last summer: why was Belmont not informed of this expenditure sooner? Mr. Weis answered that Belmont was tangentially informed.

Chair Allison then asked about the state of the enrollment study. Mr. Weis replied that the enrollment study was never substantively discussed at Minuteman. He said that Belmont has stated it will not invest in capital to benefit non-member students. He said he has told Minuteman that member towns need a specific plan detailing the scope of work, before granting approval and before spending any money on a feasibility study. Minuteman has not put this plan together as of yet.

Chair Allison said the WC will take a straw vote on this article next week.

### **Article 16: Incinerator Site**

Chair Allison began by noting that last week Member Grob had stated that paying for a study of the design that will depend on the site’s eventual use does not make sense. Member Epstein observed that this has been the sticking point of this article, and that there was a chicken/egg problem: a constructive discussion on uses requires an estimate of costs. Member Epstein said he does not have a quote, but that \$25K should fund a very general approach to this. Member Grob added that environmental issues should be explored for this site. Member Dash asked what the deadline would be for receiving state funding on this. Community Development will be asked to provide this information prior to the next meeting.

## **Article 15: Trapelo Road and Belmont Street Improvements**

Chair Allison said that this article will be taken up at the April TM. She asked: how much money is being considered here? She said a map is on its way. Member Millane suggested that the WC analysis should include a determination of what tax revenue would be reduced by such purchases. This article will be addressed more fully next week.

## **Article 18: Demolition By-Law**

Chair Allison noted that the redline changes that the WC received did not reflect substantive changes. She informed the WC that Member Dash would provide additional information on this article.

Member Dash distributed a handout. He said there are two main factors to consider: the type of building that this pertains to, and the length of delay. He said there is often a list of properties that are subject to the demolition delay. He compared Belmont to other towns. He said most communities have a 6- or 12-month delay, with six months being the norm. He reviewed various aspects of the handout. He said the financing often goes away because of the delay period. In other words, this can be a disincentive to development.

Member Lynch asked if a town subjects itself to litigation in having generated a list (of properties subject to a demolition by-law). Member Dash said that a list is often very controversial. Member Baghdady added that the PB supported this by-law as a concept, since some buildings have historical value and add character to the town. He said the PB was concerned with how this impacts areas in Belmont that have already been targeted for development. Town Counsel has, in fact, reported that specific areas cannot be exempted from a by-law such as this. He said that municipal buildings were another consideration, potentially holding up development. The age of the property was also an area of concern. The PB favored having 1921 be the cut-off year. The HDC did not agree and kept it at 50 years.

Member Grob asked about the delay time. Member Baghdady said the delay time makes less difference if the appropriate properties were selected (e.g., using 1921). The WC discussed this issue.

Member Lynch noted that, at the 50 year cut-off, at least 60% of the properties in Belmont would fall into this category. He said there will need to be amendments to this article, as well as specific exceptions.

The following questions were generated by the WC:

- How many houses/buildings would have hit this criteria over some period of time?

- Will by-law enforcement cost the town money?
- What impact on growth will this article have, should it pass?
- What is the extent of coverage?
- Would a shed/garage on a property trigger this?
- How many demolition permits are allowed, assuming the correct definition?
- Do assessors have a view on the impact of this on property values?

### ***Senator Brownsberger - State Aid***

Senator Brownsberger joined the WC table and Chair Allison asked him to explain the nature of the state aid, the process that lies ahead, whether this is recurring or non-recurring, and when would Belmont receive the cash distribution.

Senator Brownsberger: The House Ways and Means has released its budget. The Governor proposed to give money back to municipalities; Belmont received \$138K last October. The Governor put additional money into Chapter 70 for a minimum per-pupil increase: \$150K for Belmont. The total is \$291K, and there is additional circuit breaker money (4%).

He said it is unlikely that the Senate will challenge these numbers. However, this budget is not attractively balanced, as the current budget includes cuts in health and other social services. The House will release its budget at the end of April, and the Senate will release its budget in May. Belmont should expect the \$291K.

Regarding the chance that this money is recurring, he said that, if the economy does well and if health care costs (Medicaid) are contained, Belmont could see local aid numbers like this again. The WC agreed that those were two considerable “ifs.”

Member Lynch asked about the likelihood of mid-term cuts if the revenue assumptions change. Senator Brownsberger believed such cuts were unlikely.

### ***Subcommittee Updates***

All subcommittee chairs reported that a draft would be available next week.

### ***Review of Investment Requests/New Programs, Town Departments (continued)***

Chair Allison said this will be deferred until next week noting that there are some changes and the Board of Selectman are looking at particular sections. She said the subcommittees can look at the recommendations that were imbedded in the January budget, and also the supplemental items that were not included in the budget but were submitted as special requests. She noted that almost all of these requests involve recurring expenses. She said these investments should be looked at to see if they impact revenue, are cost saving, etc.

Next week's subcommittee reports will offer insights into these requests (by department), as well as a draft report overview.

### ***Updates by Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, School Committee***

BOS: In his absence, Selectman Jones asked that Member Brusch provide the update. The BOS did not take any votes, those are planned for Friday, April 20. They discussed using one-time funds to begin a building maintenance reserve fund, and so were able to reduce the SC budget by \$39,000 (the actual amount discussed for the fund will be \$100,000 and will be used by the new director of the consolidated department to fund both school and town needs). They will also use one-time funds to pay for supplies and equipment, both are operating line items, but the funding differs each year.

They are suggesting that the town begin a Special Education Stabilization Fund and plan to put \$250,000 in one-time funds into this fund. They requested that the schools then reduce their request by \$200,000, and that unexpected special education needs be supported with this fund.

The first year of plan design health care changes will save the school department approximately \$212,000 in the first year, and another \$86,000 in FY 14. Because the savings will be there in FY14, the BOS feel comfortable in funding another \$86,000 in one-time funds for the school operating budget with the understanding that the health insurance additional savings will replace them in the following year.

If all the items discussed on Monday morning proceed, then the gap would be reduced to about \$68,000. However, following this discussion the Selectmen were made aware that a math error had been made in terms of new revenue. The WC figure of an additional \$150,000 is the correct figure, so the available revenue is about \$25,000 to \$30,000 lower than the BOS anticipated. This is likely to change some of the figures.

The Board also discussed Public Safety enhancements. And they are hoping to have a OPEB policy in place.

Planning Board: Member Baghdady reported that the PB has been working on the Solar Energy by-law draft. This will not be on the Warrant, but will come up as a special TM issue in May.

School Committee: SC Member Scharfman distributed copies of the School Department's budget presentation given last night. He said the gap has been substantially reduced from \$650K to under \$100K. He said the meeting was interesting as the attendees expressed concern about the list of cuts over the years. If new revenues materialize, the Superintendent has generated a list of priorities.

Chair Allison asked Member Brusch about the Special Meeting within TM. Member Brusch explained the uses of a Special TM.

### ***Public Contributions***

There were none.

### ***Wrap Up/Announcements***

Chair Allison thanked those who reviewed the draft presentation for new TM members. She said the feedback was helpful. She also noted that the Warrant Briefing will be held on Thursday, April 19.

The WC will meet on Wednesday, April 18, to review the budget and review new stabilization funds.

### ***Approval of Minutes for April 4, 2012***

The minutes of 4/4/2012 were approved with two abstentions.

### ***Adjournment***

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:37 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio  
WC Recording Secretary