

- **Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**
- **FINAL**
- **June 17, 2009, 7:30 p.m.**
- **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

-
-
- Present: Chair Curtis; Members, Brusch, Callanan, Heigham, Hofmann, Libensen, Lynch, McLaughlin, Millane, Paolillo, Smith; BOS Chair Leclerc, SC Chair Rittenburg

-
- Town Administrator Younger, Town Accountant Hagg

-
- Members Absent: Allison, Epstein, and Widmer

-
- The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Chair Curtis.

-
- Chair Curtis noted that the first agenda item was a follow-up to a question raised at Town Meeting regarding the need for a five-year budget projection plan. The WC will take a look at a budget forecast spreadsheet Town Accountant Hagg has put together using FY10 as a base. This is a reduced-service budget which includes the stimulus money.

-
- ***Five Year Forecast Scenarios***

-
- Town Accountant Hagg: There are three categories for the five-year forecast using the FY10 actual voted budget: revenues, non-discretionary expenditures, and discretionary expenditures. Discretionary expenditures are divided between the town and the schools and have 3%-6% increases included within. In FY11, there will be at least a \$3M deficit using the 3% increase figure; if a 6% increase is used, there will be a \$4M deficit. In FY15, the 6% increase leads to a \$14M deficit.

-
- WC Discussion:

-
- Chair Curtis noted that the total town budget generally increases by more than 3%. He added that some form of this document should be handed out to TM members at the fall meeting. Member Brusch said that the Capital Budget should not be in the non-discretionary column and she added that a 3% increase for Minuteman is unrealistic; it increased by 17% this year. Member Hofmann suggested that the WC be aware of what's happening in the private sector where raises are at 0%. Many of our residents received 0% raises and it is untenable to ask them to pay for 3%-6% raise increases for town/school employees. Member Heigham concurred: salaries are a huge part of this budget; we have got to hold the line on wages, and automatic raises must stop. SC Chair Rittenburg noted that the SC is well aware of this issue and that new contracts will be negotiated this year.

-

- Town Accountant Hagg continued with a second projection: If we assume for FY10 that we had voted level service on the school side, we are \$900K in the hole in FY10, which means that even a \$3.9M override for FY10 is funding a reduced-service budget. SC Chair Rittenburg wondered what it would mean for the school side if the fees that were instituted for FY10 were undone for FY11. The IDEA money will be filling the circuit breaker hole and special education will see a much higher increase than 3%. Chair Curtis agreed that this spreadsheet was an “optimistic starting point” given that a \$3M override gets us another reduced-service budget. Belmont is likely to have an override next year – for how much is not yet known. Member Millane noted that there will be resistance from many residents. In planning for an override we must also plan for what to do if it doesn’t pass, she said.

- BOS Chair Leclerc: I would like to see an override amount established sometime in the fall. That way we can begin early to develop a campaign for it. We need to start to sell and market it early. The Wellington group were very well organized and executed a well-run campaign. Something similar will be necessary to pass an override. Member Bruschi responded that the WC won’t know state budget picture in the fall and we can’t even say what that \$3M will get you in the fall. It will most likely be changing again in March. SC Chair Rittenburg agreed and added that it is impossible to define what will be lost (in the fall) if a \$3M override doesn’t pass; the SC will be in contract negotiations for much of the year.

- Member Paolillo: We will know the revenues at some point in the fall, the expenditures are much more volatile. If we show voters what will be cut, we can then start the override campaign from there. People will reach into their pockets if they feel enough pain – and next year’s cuts will probably be very painful. BOS Chair Leclerc noted that the Wellington committee provided a message that was clear and consistent throughout the entire campaign. It would behoove the override committee to model its efforts after the Wellington group. Member Hofmann noted that overrides usually cover a multitude of things and become more difficult to sell to the public than a debt exclusion. Member Callanan added that while one hears about “frequent, smaller overrides” there is no such thing as a small amount of money and that overrides every year are not sustainable. I would hope to have a one big override and not pit department against department. The WC has to be very transparent and look at core services. We are going to have to decide if we do more in a mediocre way or less in an excellent way, she said. Member Heigham added that there was no organized opposition to the Wellington; an operating override will have an organized opposition and an override for salary increases will be a hard sell.

- ***WC Summer Projects***

- **Minuteman**

- Chair Curtis: There are people in town who would like to examine Minuteman, including the Board of Selectman. The BOS should convene a committee to cover Minuteman with WC members included. The committee should try to understand why

Minuteman's costs are so much higher than everyone else's. Member McLaughlin: We need to get a fireball to overhaul Minuteman; they have 600 students with a budget geared for 1000 – someone must attack those numbers! BOS Chair Leclerc: We need to meet with Representative Brownsberger to get the formula changed. Members Millane, McLaughlin, and Paolillo agreed to be on the Minuteman summer committee.

-

- **Structure and Format of WC Report and Subcommittee Reports**

-

- Chair Curtis said that Member Allison (who will chair this project) is looking for some additional WC members to help design subcommittee reports that are timely, useful, and consistent. Member Allison intends to restructure the reports and also look at the subcommittee role. Members Heigham and Hofmann agreed to work with Member Allison on this summer project.

-

- **FY11 Budget Framework**

-

- Member Brusch informed the WC that there is a group of people, including the Chairs of the various departments (Rittenburg, Curtis, Leclerc, Younger, the new Superintendent, etc.), who are working to develop a calendar with an available-funds budget, a level-service budget, and then an override budget. The group will develop a framework for analyzing these three budget scenarios.

-

- **Budget Book**

-

- This summer committee will follow up the work done last summer in looking at other town budgets (Arlington, Winchester, etc.). We would like to borrow a format for budget books, said Member Brusch. Members Epstein, Lynch, Paolillo, and Brusch will work on this summer project.

-

- **Override Scenarios**

-

- A group is needed to look at different override scenarios: menu, pyramid, etc. The WC discussed fees, roads, core services, and the override possibility. Member Libensen offered to work on this summer project.

-

- ***School/Town Consolidation Memo***

-

- Chair Curtis: Several of us have been meeting to study how the town does business and how to make the town more streamlined. When considering streamlining, the issue of consolidation of school and town functions always comes up. In fact, there is a Consolidation Committee report which dates back to 1993 and this report (as well as our group) has come up with two recommendations:

-

- ***Recommendation 1:*** Consolidate labor contract negotiations under one roof – i.e., have a single labor counsel (rather than several counsels) handle the various bargaining units.

-
- **Recommendation 2:** Have the BOS, the SC, and the single counsel agree to meet in September to discuss collective bargaining strategy for the upcoming year.

- Member Hofmann moved that the WC adopt both of the above recommendations.

- The motion passed unanimously.

- **Recommendation 3:** Have the BOS and SC coordinate all maintenance and custodial functions under the control of one department, which will report to the director of the DPW, who will report to Town Administrator and the school superintendent.

- (Chair Curtis noted that while the study did not mention cost savings, the town will be more productive and run more efficiently.)

- Member Hofmann moved that the WC adopt recommendation number 3.

- The motion passed unanimously.

Reserve Fund Transfer

- Member Hofmann moved that the WC approve the reserve fund transfer request of \$141K to cover the snow shortfall.

- The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes of May 20th and June 1st

- The minutes May 20th were approved with one abstention, and the minutes of June 1st were approved with two abstentions.

Discussion on Controlling Growth in Expenses

- Chair Curtis noted that this agenda item was informal and that the WC could feel free to make comments in a “free form conversation”. Member Paolillo noted that the SC, WC, and BOS worked well together this year. Member Libenson noted that there was movement going forward with regard to making structural changes. BOS Chair Leclerc commended Chair Curtis on his excellent leadership of the WC and added that recommendations will be made by the Government Structure Committee at the fall TM, but that it will take some time to implement these recommendations. Chair Curtis said that the functions of the Town Administrator will continue to be streamlined. Member Paolillo acknowledged Member Widmer on his years of valued service to the WC.

- Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:21 pm.

- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio

- WC Recording Secretary