

- **Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**
- **FINAL**
- **September 23, 2009, 7:30 p.m.**
- **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

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- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Epstein, Hofmann, Libenson, McLaughlin, Millane, Paolillo, Smith; BOS Chair Leclerc, SC Chair Rittenburg

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- Town Administrator Younger, Town Accountant Hagg, School Superintendent Entwistle

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- Members Absent: Callanan and Lynch

- [Members Brusch, Smith and SC Chair Rittenburg left at about 7:50 pm to attend another meeting.]

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

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- Chair Curtis began the meeting by having Member Brusch provide WC members with information about the upcoming Association of Town Finance Committee conference. The conference will be held on Saturday, October 24th in Franklin, MA. The town covers the conference fee, Member Brusch explained, and WC members will need to let Town Accountant Hagg know if they can attend.

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- Chair Curtis then introduced the new superintendent of schools, Dr. Entwistle, who reviewed the school department's budget process and calendar for the upcoming year.

- ***FY11 Budget Process and Calendar***

- **School Department**

- Superintendent Entwistle presented a month-by-month schedule that outlined the department's proposed budget development process. He highlighted the "Community Dialogue" meeting scheduled for October 27th at 4:30. This event aims to bring the community together to engage in a conversation about pertinent issues that impact the school department and members of the community. The dialogue that gets created from various stakeholders from within the community will help with the overall budget design and will be connected to a focused plan, Entwistle explained. By the end of November, we should have the 18-month Improvement Plan, he noted. In December, we will look for innovative programs and staff proposals because "innovation will lead to efficiencies". He said that some zero-based budgeting will occur to examine costly areas, e.g. special education placements, support for staff resources, and professional development. In January, a student needs-based budget will be developed and the state

budget, federal funding, and local projections will be better known. In February the Leadership Council's Recommendations will be presented, and in March the School Committee will have a budget presentation. The SC will present this budget at April's Town Meeting. This process, he concluded, is both rational and thoughtful.

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Town Budget

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The town budget, Chair Curtis noted, will be presented to the BOS on Monday, February 8th and to the WC on Wednesday, February 10th.

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Town Administrator Younger said that he had been planning to present the budget in April and that he would work toward meeting the new February deadline. BOS Chair Leclerc noted that the Board of Selectmen intends to meet with town department directors on weekday mornings in November and December. He said the Board missed out by not having the Saturday morning meetings last year. He said it is important that department heads get to show the Board of Selectmen all that they are doing. These meetings will be televised and broadcast.

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Chair Curtis: Both the schools and town will budget on a "needs basis". The WC will offer its best judgment as to what the revenues will support. We will certainly have less in revenue than the needs budget will request, he said. The WC will keep a close eye on both the revenue picture and on how those revenues will be allocated. After the budgets are presented in February, Curtis said, the WC will discuss and debate whether more taxes will be asked for in May/June.

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SC Chair Rittenburg asked BOS Chair Leclerc if the WC subcommittees would be present at the weekday department head meetings? He replied that, no, these meetings will be "selectmen driven". Member Allison noted that the WC subcommittees would not have reviewed the budget by November and that the WC subcommittees had in fact acted as BOS staff during the Saturday morning meetings. This is a entirely different model, she said, one that will require the BOS to independently review departments at a level of considerable detail. WC Chair Curtis added that the WC will discuss how to participate in this model as well as the WC subcommittee role in this process. This model, offered Town Administrator Younger, allows the BOS to have some input at an earlier phase in the budget process.

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FY11 Early Revenue Projections for Discussion

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Chair Curtis turned to Town Accountant Hagg for a report regarding how much money (revenue) the town currently has projected for FY11. Ms. Hagg began by highlighting various areas. Property tax growth, for example, is anticipated at \$600K. Motor vehicle excise is projected at \$2.4M, while earnings on investments are down to \$325K (versus the \$500K originally forecast). These changes will be reflected in the FY10 budget as well. State aid is level funded. Potential October 9 C cuts are unknown at this point, but Chapter 70 is expected to be level funded in future years. Free cash is approximately \$2.8M (\$1.2M was carried forward from last year). The estimated

revenue at this point is \$81.4M, which is up slightly from last year – but last year’s revenue on the chart includes the Stimulus money, which is not expected in FY11.

- On the expense side, Town Accountant Hagg noted that a 3% increase is expected for salary and wages. Health care is on track and retirement is presently unknown. Minuteman was at 17.8% last year, but since it needs to be reigned in, Hagg explained, the increases are calculated at 4% for this year. Member Paolillo and other WC members noted that a 4% increase from Minuteman is highly unlikely, regardless of what should happen. Chair Curtis agreed and added that salary and wage increases are a “wildcard” this year as the town enters contract negotiations. It was noted that SPED will probably go up more than the allotted 3%.

- **Budget Split**

- The WC spent a few minutes discussing the fact that last year’s split was artificial since the available revenue split included \$1.7M in stimulus money – all of which was directed toward the schools. Member McLaughlin suggested an alternative way to represent the budget split so as to distinguish between the split from the regular town budget and fiscal stimulus money. Member Allison agreed, pointing out that the stimulus money went 100% to the School budget since, unlike many towns, Belmont did not offset the earmarked stimulus money by a reduced town contribution.

- Chair Curtis noted that the 52/48 split will be the prospective split used for budgeting purposes. The split will be fine-tuned during the final budgeting phase. Member Hofmann stated that the school budget should reflect all of the school expenses. Minuteman, he continued, should be in the school budget as should pension money for school department employees and school crossing guards.

- Chair Curtis concluded the budget conversation by emphasizing that the revenue picture is murky and that it is dependent on unknown state figures. He added that 9 C cuts would be known in October.

- ***Preliminary Reports from Summer Projects***

- Chair Curtis noted that at least three WC subgroups met this summer: Budget Book, Minuteman, and Override. Member Allison noted that she also led a group charged to look at WC Subcommittee process itself.

- **WC Subcommittees:** This group looked specifically at the subcommittee structure, the process, and a template for submitting subcommittee reports. In terms of structure, Member Allison reported, the group suggested that the WC “return to a more robust subcommittee structure whereby the Chair appoints the subcommittee and the subcommittee holds departmental meetings”. Each WC subcommittee should try not to overlap with the BOS’s department head meetings. Subcommittees, she continued, need to “forward look” to the following year in the capital expense area – i.e., they need to assess what will be needed down the road. As for a template for submitting reports, she

handed out a draft template for WC members to review. As a final suggestion, she requested that the WC discuss the role of the WC subcommittees early in the calendar year. Chair Curtis replied that the role of subcommittees as well as subcommittee assignments would be discussed at the next meeting: 10/14/09.

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- **Budget Books:** Member Paolillo spoke on behalf of the summer subgroup that met to look at the town Budget Book. A budget book, he said, serves four purposes: it's a policy document, a financial plan, a programmatic guide, and a communications tool for the community. It is necessary to have a programmatic perspective and to ask "How it is that programs are defined?" This will help to prioritize the programs and measure productivity. A budget book needs an "executive summary" from its Town Administrator. This helps identify key revenue and expenditure issues. A budget book needs to also look out long-term (5 years) at various programs to assess the delivery of services. Member Allison added that long-term planning can include anticipating who is going to retire, and Town Administrator Younger added that small capital projects can be planned for, as well.

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- **Override:** Member Libensen (a team of one) researched overrides across the state from the years 2000 through 2009. During this time, there were 1,183 individual votes on overrides. He discussed the number of elections, the override categories, single-issue votes (e.g., school or government or roads) versus line-item votes, as well as town/school split notions. 51% of overrides have passed, and the lowest-spending option typically is the one that passes. Libensen noted that he is still working with the data; there is a lot of data and it can be sorted in many different ways, he said.

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- **Minuteman Study Group:** BOS Chair Leclerc explained that this group had trouble getting going, but that they have met and will continue to meet to examine 1) what students receive for the amount of money spent; 2) what actual costs explain the \$26K per student figure; and 3) how to penetrate to have an impact in making changes. There is also a legislative component and he has been in touch with Representative Brownsberger to discuss this.

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- ***Minutes (6/17/09)***

- The Minutes of June 17, 2009 were unanimously approved.

- Member Hofmann moved that the WC adjourn at 9:17 pm.

- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary