

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 4, 2019, 7:30PM
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL, LARGE COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair Slap, Members Alcock, Dionne, Doyle, Fallon, Gonzalez, Halston, Helgen, Lubien, McLaughlin, Read, Rickter and Weis.
Member Schreiber arrived into the meeting.
School Committee Liaison Crowley.
Select Board Chair Caputo and Town Administrator (TA) Garvin.

Members Absent: Cragg.

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

I-Approve minutes

- November 6, 2019: Dionne read aloud comments she had given at the meeting which were not reflected in the draft minutes.
Motion: To approve the November 6, 2019 minutes, as amended. Motion passed by acclamation.

II-Q1 Town and School financial reports

The School report was delayed due to the snow day.

TA Garvin reviewed line items on both the revenue and expense sides which deviated noticeably from a 25% allocation for the first quarter. Most of the deviations were due to timing issues, and were expected to level off throughout the year. Some points highlighted and discussed:

- Earnings on investment up 273%, a result of money market earnings from funds borrowed for the High School project. This revenue would flow back to Free Cash.
- Question raised regarding the transfer to a revolving account for parking meter funds. The purpose of the transfer was to have funds available to cover certain costs, e.g. maintenance, software upgrades. It was unclear why a revolving fund was necessary – could it not be budgeted as a usual line item using expected revenues/expenses?
 - o Fallon proposed to have a future discussion on the level of parking fees.
- Deviations in expenses often reflected encumbrances for Q1, e.g. software licenses and equipment for IT, trash contract for DPW, cleaning/HVAC contracts for Facilities.
- Helgen asked about the increase in COA budget, as well as clarification of a line item for 'salary, health insurance reserve'.

III-Update on re-proposed McLean development

Garvin shared a memo from Northland Residential CEO Jack Dawley. The updated proposal for McLean Zone 3 had been presented to the Select Board at a recent meeting on November 18. Key elements of the re-design included addition of rental units in place of condos, and an increased number of affordable housing units. The Housing Trust was supportive of the re-designed plan.

Garvin was preparing analysis, based largely on the Royal Belmont development, to estimate impact on services and projected revenue; numbers were still being finalized. Potential for a March Special Town Meeting to address zoning matters if the project was ready, otherwise would wait until Annual Town Meeting. Finally, a traffic mitigation plan associated with the proposed development would go before the Select Board in the near future.

IV-Discussion of potential subcommittee benchmarking project

The issue of benchmarking had been raised periodically at Town Meeting, and Chair Slap was inquiring whether there was time/will to take on such a project prior to the budget season / preparing the Warrant Committee Report.

[Schreiber arrived.]

Several WC members weighed in on a potential benchmarking project:

- Fallon: Better done on a case-by-case, for specific issues. If going to undertake more broadly, should focus on the large departments. Benchmarking goes out of date quickly. Key point is what question you are trying to answer via benchmarking.
- Dionne: Concern about efficiency, WC members being stretched too thin; a specific project could be manageable.
- Weis: See value in benchmarking for the annual budget process – help determine areas that are over/under funded. Could also be useful for informing an override justification.
- Caputo: Echo Weis' sentiment, but noted that benchmarking can be very difficult. For school benchmarking, DESE does much of the background work for calculating per pupil expenditures that are comparable across communities. Could be useful for the override to pick out few key areas.
- Doyle: Could see undertaking benchmarking as a multi-year effort, tackling the different areas as part of a rotating schedule. Difficult task but doable, other communities have done benchmarking.
- Helgen: Looked at public safety previously. Important to focus on what are the comparable towns. Difficult and will never be perfect, but can be useful to look at.
- Schreiber: Beyond schools and public safety, other departments are ambiguous; different scopes/responsibilities across different communities. Perhaps look at documenting services provided by each department.

- Halston: Could inquire with other towns to see if any work has been done in benchmarking that could be leveraged.

Next steps were to evaluate available data/resources/other benchmarking efforts; subcommittees would also discuss and recommend areas to focus on for benchmarking.

V-Reports from Select Board, Town Administrator, School Committee and liaisons

Caputo updated from the Select Board:

- Ongoing matter of two grant of location applications by ExteNet Systems Inc., to install small cell wireless facilities on light poles at 19 Moore Street and 223 Channing Road. The applications had been deemed incomplete; ExteNet was working with Belmont Light and the Historic District Commission to complete the applications.
- January 7 meeting scheduled joint with the School Committee to approve the Rink RFP and lease. Currently the School Committee was undertaking prioritization of athletic facilities west of Harris Field which was necessary to finalize the RFP.
- Financial Task Force II meeting tomorrow. Task Force would be focusing on the 5-year forecast model and fleshing out override timeline. Plan to bring preliminary recommendations to Warrant Committee early next year.

Garvin made note of the recent snow storm on December 4, requiring extensive overtime work by DPW for snow removal.

Dionne provided an update from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC):

- Of the 7 preliminary applications, one had been postponed (removal of knotweed from behind library, not eligible) and one withdrawn (Town Clock restoration). Five remaining projects: feasibility study for Belmont Village affordable housing; feasibility assessment for Municipal Light Building; chimney repair at Town Hall; Homer House window restoration; Town Field playground and courts.
- Dionne explained the CPC planned to vote on projects using various levels of endorsement this year, a new approach, e.g. full vs limited endorsement.
- There was discussion about what should be required for the WC to make an informed vote on the projects this year.

McLaughlin updated from the Middle and High School Building Committee that the project was at 90% design with no further value engineering required; almost ready to go out to bid.

Fallon reviewed that the Library Building Committee had presented schematic design and cost estimates to Town Meeting; next phase of the project was fundraising. The Committee would hold periodic meetings to field questions on the project from the public.

VI-Adjournment

Motion (Member McLaughlin): To adjourn. Motion passed.

Submitted by
Christopher S. Henry