

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 29, 2020, 7:30PM
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL, LARGE COMMUNITY ROOM

2020 MAR 16 AM 9:14

Present: Chair Slap, Members Dionne, Fallon, Gonzalez, Halston, Helgen, Lubien, McLaughlin, Read, Rickter and Weis.
Select Board member Dash. Assistant Town Administrator (ATA) Marshall.
Member Doyle arrived into the meeting.

Members Absent: Alcock, Cragg, Schreiber.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm by Chair Slap.

I-Meet with the Chair of the Board of Assessors

Robert Reardon (Chair, Board of Assessors) and Dan Dargon (Assessing Administrator) were present. Reardon gave a brief overview of the assessment process and explained the drivers of increases seen in recently distributed tax bills:

- Assessments are conducted on an annual basis; the Board of Assessors establishes market values as of the previous January 1. Therefore, assessed values on recent tax bills are based on market activity during 2018, which saw significant increases.
- First two tax bills in the fiscal year are based on the prior year's tax bill; the December bill is where new market data is incorporated, hence the increases in assessed values shows up in the December bill.
- This year's increases to tax bills were driven by two factors: higher assessed values based on market data (supply and demand factors; single family housing stock saw particularly large increases in valuation); and, incorporation of the first half of borrowing for the new middle/high school. On a \$1m home, the estimated tax increase due to the new school project was ~\$600.
- By State law, assessments have to be within 10% of all market value activity within the State; the State conducts audits to ensure this is followed.
- The total taxable value increased from \$8b in 2019 to \$9.2b in 2020. Under Proposition 2.5, the tax rate is decreased such that the total levy can only increase by 2.5%.

WC members raised questions/comments:

- Fallon asked if a foreseen increase to assessed values can be built into the first two tax bills, which would spread out the increase (not all in the December bill).
 - o Reardon answered that, by State law, the first two tax bills must be based on the previous year's tax bill, with a maximum increase factor of 2.5%.
- Helgen asked about increases to land values, and for an explanation of the 'other;' category.
 - o Land values are driven by Belmont's desirable location. Land values for condos are zero, i.e. incorporated into the assessed value of the unit itself.
 - o Other category includes things like pools, outbuildings, etc.

- McLaughlin asked if there was a higher number of abatement applications expected.
 - o There had been a higher number of inquiries, but the number of abatement applications was expected to be similar to previous years.
 - o Reardon encouraged those with concerns about their assessed value to contact the Board of Assessors and file an abatement application. The Board of Assessors happy to walk through how the assessed value is determined based on the model they use.
- Rickter asked about the definition of new growth.
 - o New property, or any meaningful addition to existing property, e.g. not a new roof, but an addition would count as new growth.
- Rickter asked if there was an expected dramatic increase to assessed values for next year.
 - o Reardon said increases were not anticipated to be as dramatic. However, there would be another increase from the second round of borrowing for the new High School.
- Slap asked whether this was a certification year, and if there was anything special about the process related to the certification year.
 - o Last year was a certification year. Nothing is different about the annual assessment process, only additional internal documentation has to be filed with the State.

Reardon commented on the split tax rate for commercial vs residential properties: because Belmont is 95% residential, implementing a split tax rate would not raise any additional revenue, but would place undue tax burden on businesses (particularly small businesses).

[Open public comment.]

- *Jeff North (138 School St.):* How many neighborhoods/districts are there? How are assessments calculated in districts with low market activity? Does the Board of Assessors make the calculations publically available?
 - o There are 16 assessing districts in Town, hasn't change for a long time.
 - o In districts with limited sales, the Board of Assessors look closely at the details of the houses that were sold and also use data from similar neighborhoods.
 - o Board of Assessors has a model it applies across the board and can explain how it is applied to any particular property on request.

[Close public comment.]

[Member Doyle arrive to the meeting.]

Dash noted that Town Meeting had recently approved measures to reduce the interest rate on the senior tax deferral program and to increase the tax work-off amount.

Chair Slap thanked Reardon and Dargon for attending.

II-Approve minutes

- January 15, 2020:

Motion: To approve the January 15, 2020 minutes. Motion passed by acclamation. Members Dionne, Fallon, McLaughlin and Select Board member Dash abstained.

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

School Committee Liaison Crowley was absent as the School Committee was conducting union negotiations.

Dash provided an update from the Select Board:

- Approved a traffic calming policy, which provides a framework and objective process for addressing traffic calming requests.
- Proposal for development at McLean Zone 3 was heard recently at the Planning Board.
- Rink RFP is out to bid.
- Approved charge for Long Term Capital Planning Committee and Economic Development Committee.

IV-Adjournment

Next meeting is Monday February 10, a joint meeting with Select Board, School Committee and Capital Budget Committee to view the FY21 budget presentation.

Motion (Member McLaughlin): To adjourn at 8:15pm. Motion passed.

Submitted by
Christopher S. Henry