

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: March 25, 2021  
TIME: 10:27 AM

**Warrant Committee  
February 17, 2021 7:30pm  
Remote Meeting via Zoom**

## **Meeting Minutes**

### **Members in Attendance**

**Warrant Committee:** Laurie Slap, Paul Ricketeer, Mike Crowley, Ellen Schrieber, Elizabeth Dionne, John Alcock, Christine Doyle, Jennifer Fallon, Elizabeth Goss, Andrew Levin, Daniel Halson, Anne Helgen, Geoffrey Lubien, Robert McLaughlin, Lynn Read, Jack Weiss, Roy Epstein, Michael Crowley

### **Call to Order**

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

### **I. Approve minutes.**

*Motion: to accept the POD Subcommittee Meeting minutes dated February 10, 2021. (Motion passed unanimously, roll-call vote:., Dionne, Doyle, Levin, Lubien, voted yes.) 4-0-0*

### **II. Review of no-override budget.**

Ms. Slap reviewed the findings from the Warrant Override presentation. Presently, the FY'22 budget is expected to produce \$157.2 million in projected revenues compared to \$163 million in expected expenditures, resulting in a deficit of \$5.7 million. Free cash reserves will be used to reduce the deficit to \$3.45 million. The Town would need to cut costs to meet 40% of this remaining deficit and school to meet 60%. Details for both situations where an override is approved or turned down were presented and are available to the public online.

Regarding the proposals should an override fail:

- Reductions in the school services would not be distributed evenly across the entire school system but would prioritize certain services.
- Police and Fire Departments, if faced with reductions, will not result in unfulfilled shifts, minimal staffing requirements will continue to be met.
- The Committee raised concerns that there is a lack of trust in the Town's fiscal management, which the Committee referred to as a 'trust deficit'.
- The group concurred that the problems causing a financial deficit, such as increased school enrollment, are not going away and there is no simple answer to the solution.
- It was pointed out that town staffing has remained level for ten years. Town Departments have experienced additional mandates that are unfunded by the Federal government.
- The Committee seeks to help the public understand what an override would mean for them in a "real" way.

- The proposed cuts to town services includes the elimination of two current DPW positions.
- The Town has completed an exercise to see how a 20% cut would affect all Town Departments. Ms. Garvin stated that there are many unknowns that the Town is dealing with when considering an override including future revenues and free cash. While town staff has an understanding of the potential cuts, town management wishes to avoid a mass exit of valuable town employees.
- The Committee understands the sensitive nature of the override/no override possibilities for town employees and does not want to risk overly concerning employees.
- There was support for the Financial Task Force to continue to look ahead three to five years in the future.

### **III. Budget roadmap discussion.**

Chairwoman Slap has sent a rough calendar to the Committee for the next few months. The Warrant Committee's report will be due in early May. Regarding state aid, the Governor's budget for Chapter 70 aid for the school department is included in the model projections. The COVID-19 pandemic complicated the transition away from kindergarten fees because of an unexpected drop in the enrollment of 96 Kindergarteners. Mr. Crowley stated that DESE will complete a computation for Belmont if they had not eliminated the full day kindergarten fee. Enrollment guides Chapter 70 aid but does not determine it.

Budget binders will be given to the members of the Warrant Committee.

### **IV. Review school staffing questions.**

The Committee inquired how school staffing has been affected by the pandemic.

Changes to school staffing are as follows:

- Three tech specialists were hired with COVID relief grants to aid in the transition to remote learning.
- A paid stipend was given to the School Nurse Director for the increase in workload.
- There has been significant staff turnover.

### **V. Discuss assessments.**

Mr. Bob Reardon will join the Committee at their next meeting on March 3rd, 2021 to explain the work of the Board of Assessors and field questions.

### **VI. Reports from Select Board, Town Administrator, School Committee, and liaisons.**

The Select Board will be holding a public forum on leaf blowers.

The School Committee is still holding negotiations regarding the reopening of schools. They are hoping to bring younger students back to in person learning soon.

The Structural Change Impact Group will hold a community meeting on March 4, 2021 to encourage new ideas.

The Community Preservation Committee has postponed their vote on the tennis court project. A final decision has not been made regarding the feasibility of the high school site.

Chairwoman Slap informed the Committee that they will be voting at their next meeting on March 3, 2021 on the operating override.

## **VII. Adjournment.**

*Motion: to adjourn the meeting at 9:00pm (Motion passed unanimously)*

Submitted by  
Katie Luczai

## **Documents Used:**

1. Excerpts from A Warrant Committee Forum: Understanding the Override Decision, dated February 11, 2021