

Warrant Committee
February 3, 2021 7:30pm
Remote Meeting via Zoom

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TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: April 13, 2021
TIME: 9:25 AM

Meeting Minutes

Members in Attendance

Warrant Committee: Laurie Slap, Paul Rickter, Mike Crowley, Ellen Schreiber, Elizabeth Dionne, John Alcock, Christine Doyle, Jennifer Fallon, Elizabeth Goss, Andrew Levin, Daniel Halston, Anne Helgen, Geoffrey Lubien, Robert McLaughlin, Lynn Read, Jack Weis, Roy Epstein, Michael Crowley

Call to Order

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

I. Approve minutes.

Shawna Healey is working to hire a Recording Secretary for the Warrant Committee.

II. Review Q2 financials - Town & School.

Review of the town's Q2 financials:

- Regarding revenue, the town is on target for the percent of taxes collected compared to last year's collection timeline.
 - Some estimates of the local receipts were lowered last year to reflect the state of the economy. For example, the town lowered the town meal tax to reflect the local restaurants who were struggling.
 - Revenue collection will surpass what the town initially estimated. This revenue will be directed into the town's free cash account.
 - Parking fees and fines as well as facility rental revenues are significantly lower than usual.
 - It is unclear when the town will receive revenue from the state.
 - The reported revenues show higher police and fire alarm fees collected. This is due to a timing issue as revenues are collected during the turnover of the fiscal year.
 - Fees collected from the Treasurer's office from late paid property taxes have increased as well as liens on town properties.
 - Recreation Department generated revenue is down due to the reduced number of programs offered, decreased participation and revenue collection from the town pool. The Recreation Department hopes to open the pool this summer.
 - Ambulance receipts are down as people are more hesitant to go to the hospital for care.
- Town expenditures have remained stable given where the town was last year.

- Town election costs were over budget from last year because of the Presidential election and increase in mail-in voting efforts.
- Police salaries are down due to several vacancies. These vacancies remain while candidates are within the Academy. The town is trying to hold hiring for non-urgent vacant positions.
- The town is continuing to hire Department Head positions which are critical positions. There will not be a cost-of-living increase for employees in the proposed FY22 budget.
- The Health Department received funding for salaries through supplemental COVID relief.
- Overall, town expenditures are trending a little lower than typical years which shows that there is a town wide effort to limit spending.
- Spending on facilities will pick up when a Facilities Director is hired.
- The Public Works Department is experiencing a difficult winter for snow and ice spending; however, they can deficit spend to manage winter operations. Ms. Garvin will be connecting with the Director to discuss their budget.
- The IT Department appeared to spend significantly during the first two fiscal quarters. This is due to the timing of their contracts and encumbrances.

Review of the school Department's Q2 financials:

- The school salaries show a projected positive balance. There have been savings due to turnover but there are also several vacant aide positions. The Department expects to break even at year-end.
- There is a backlog of SPED testing and other related expenditures that is being worked down.
- Regarding leave of absences among school staff, the town is saving money. There are about 10 teachers who are on leave without pay. Other teachers who chose to take a leave of absence with pay were allowed 12 weeks of paid leave. This offer is now expired. Most teachers have returned to work.
- Less income was collected for school bussing fees.
- The schools have continued to provide meals to families. These costs have been fully reimbursed. The costs and reimbursements are not a part of the CARES Act funding that the town has received.
- The school's revolving accounts have a total balance of \$363,000.
- Across the state there has been a dip in public school enrollment. The expectation is that most students will return to the town's school system. The school will be making a contingency plan if the enrollment does not return to expected levels. About 40% of the reduction in enrollment was in Kindergarten which is consistent among neighboring communities.
- Not all COVID relief related funding is reflected in the school's Q2 financials.

III. Override discussion – reserves & FY22 budgets.

The Committee discussed free cash needs in an override v. no override situation. If an override fails, then the town will need to pull \$6.6 million from free cash instead of \$4.7 million. This would leave the town with \$400,000 in free cash above guideline levels. The town does have a stabilization fund but does not intend on touching it as it is meant for emergencies. If an override passes, then the town intends on spreading free cash resulting from higher-than projected FY21 state aid over the next two years. The town will face an unstable path if the override fails and it is forced to use a significant amount of their free cash.

The town is seeing if it can get a revised Chapter 70 estimate since the amount currently proposed is significantly less than expected. Over the coming weeks town department heads will provide more details for a “no override” budget. These details will be presented before the Select Board and School Committee.

The new positions that are being proposed in the FY22 budget will add productivity and long-term savings for the town. Additionally, the town will be required to spend money on capital and road projects to avoid greater costs in the future.

The Town Administrator’s office has created an override calculator on the town website which property owners can use to see how an override would affect them.

IV. Update on Forth Warrant Committee Budget Forum.

The Committee is still working to arrange a fourth budget forum. This forum will provide details on an override/no override budget and will attempt to answer some of the recurring questions that residents have. It was recommended that the forum integrate a comparison to other towns to put Belmont’s override into perspective.

The Structural Change Impact group is getting off the ground and will continue their work into FY22. They will be meeting with Department Heads soon.

Recommendations from Committee members:

- Include investments related to the Retirement Board.
- Provide short- and long-term context by providing a budget document that shows output and efficiency measures.
- Schedule additional forums for the public with the same information since different community members can join meetings at different times.

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

The Select Board did not have any news to report that related to the Warrant Committee.

The School Committee is looking to return to in person learning for students. A committee has been formed to prepare for in person learning.

The Long-Term Capital group's work is underway. They will be looking at policies at how to deal with capital decisions.

The next Warrant Committee meeting is scheduled for 2/17/2021.

VI. Adjournment.

Motion: to adjourn the meeting at 9:07pm (Motion passed unanimously)

Submitted by
Katie Luczai

Documents Used:

1. Q2 Financials (Town & School)