

Warrant Committee
April 14, 2021 7:30pm
Remote Meeting via Zoom

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: April 29, 2021
TIME: 9:05 AM

Meeting Minutes

Members in Attendance

Warrant Committee: Laurie Slap, Paul Rickter, Michael 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, Adam Dash

Other: Aaron Pikcilingis

Call to Order

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

I. Approve minutes.

3/17/21

A revised version of the meeting minutes was shared with the Warrant Committee. The revisions included the clarification of the CPC proposals, PILOT program and middle school return to in person learning date.

Motion: Ms. Helgen moved to approve the meeting minutes from March 17, 2021 as amended, seconded by Mr. McLaughlin. (Motion passed unanimously, roll call vote: Alcock, Dionne, Doyle, Fallon, Goss, Halston, Helgen, Levin, Lubien, McLaughlin, Read, Rickter, Schreiber, Slap, Weis voted yes, Dash abstained)

II. Town Meeting updates - vote/discuss articles for Special Town Meeting

The Special Town Meeting Article Two amount of dollars to be approved still needs to be determined so the Warrant Committee will discuss this topic at a later meeting.

III. Discussion of BRAVE Act Citizen Petition.

Mr. Aaron Pikcilingis presented before the Warrant Committee the BRAVE Act Citizen Petition. This citizen petition would adopt four provisions of Mass General Law as amended to benefit veterans and their families.

- The first part of the provision allows the town to pay employees during their first 40 days of service and for employees to continue to accrue certain benefits while they are out on military leave. Employees on military leave would receive full pay for the first 40 days of full-time service. Active military members would receive both pay from the military and

the town during this time. Currently, the town pays for the first 17 days for employees who are a part of the Public Safety union. Following the first 40 days the town would make up the difference in pay, if their military pay is less than their town pay.

- This provision extends benefits to town employees not covered under the Public Safety union, such as employees in the DPW and School Department.
- The town currently has four employees who may be affected by this.
- It is estimated that it would cost the town a maximum of \$20,000 per employee.
- It was suggested that a reserve fund might be helpful to mitigate unexpected costs. It is unknown what this program would ultimately cost the town.
- Mr. Picilingis is still gathering aggregate data, in addition to anecdotal data about similar programs in neighboring towns.
- Examples of the continuation of benefits are the continuation of seniority and continued town matching for employee health insurance.
- The second part of the provision is to expand the existing senior volunteer tax credit program to include veterans. The senior program has about 15-20 participants per year. Veterans would be able to volunteer for tax credit for a value of up to \$1,500.
 - Language could be added so that people can only participate in one program. Eligibility for veterans could include means testing.
 - Arlington, Bedford, and Newton have similar programs. Bedford has a fixed amount of \$10,000 each year and runs the program until the funds run out.
- The third part of the provision extends tax exemption and tax credit eligibility status to veterans who live in and pay mortgages in homes that are owned by trusts.
- The fourth part of the provision extends eligibility to parents and guardians of veterans who have fallen in the line of duty (Gold Star families). This benefit currently extends only to spouses.
 - Currently, only one household in Belmont would qualify for this program. This would make them eligible to move from receiving a \$400 property tax credit to a full property tax exemption.
- This four-part provision is being brought before Town Meeting as a singular item to be voted up or down. Mr. Picilingis can opt to withdraw this citizens petition or separate for future vote if any of the four provisions need to be changed.
- Committee member comments and questions:
 - It was recommended that this Act include a cap as to how many days or how many times an employee in reserves can benefit from the first part of the provision. Members of the reserves may be required to return to duty or may have the option to volunteer. Members called up to duty for unknown periods of time can have a challenging impact on organization's staffing and costs.
 - Could a sunset clause be included in this provision? This way the town could run the program for a few years and then use hard data to see what the impact is on the town.
 - Is there any provision to handle an extraordinary circumstance such as a military draft? The town could always withdraw from the program if it proved to be too costly.

- More information is needed regarding how these types of programs are run in Massachusetts communities and what the impact is.

The Warrant Committee members will discuss this Citizen Petition at a following meeting before the June Town Meeting session.

IV. WC Report format.

Chairman Slap brought up the possibility to delay the release of the Warrant Committee Report by one week to gather additional information.

Mr. Rickter asked what the historic practice has been regarding how much time the Warrant Committee allows for Town Meeting Member review? It has typically been three weeks and the Warrant Committee is asking to reduce that to two. The report is typically around 70 pages in length. The Warrant Committee discussed the merits and challenges of delaying the release of the report.

Ms. Garvin noted that the budget numbers have not changed. Town Departments are trying to fully explain the impact that the FY22 budget will have on their departments.

The School Committee will not vote on its budget until May 25th. Many expressed concern that this date is too late in the cycle and will not allow the Warrant Committee or Town Meeting to prepare adequately for budget consideration.

Ms. Slap will reach out to the Town Clerk to see if releasing their recommendations later is possible.

V. Review outline for WC Report Executive Summary.

This year's WC Report Executive Summary will include what the impact of the FY22 budget will have on residents.

It is difficult for the Warrant Committee to issue an executive summary without the School Committee approved school budget. Mr. Crowley will relay the concerns of the Warrant Committee back to the School Committee and Superintendent for discussion.

Ms. Schreiber asked what the timeline is for town and school layoffs? Ms. Garvin has reached out to the Unions for the town layoffs and hopes to have layoffs wrapped up by the 2nd or 3rd week of May. Mr. Crowley reported that Superintendent Phelan has spoken to all people whose school jobs are at risk. COVID related hires have a date of April 30th to be informed of layoffs and the remaining layoffs end date is May 15th.

VI. FY21, FY22 Budget updates.

Federal aid has yet to be determined for the FY22 budget.

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

The Select Board met on 4/12/21. They renamed the new Veteran's memorial area. They had to cancel the Memorial Day parade again but will have a ceremony with a limited audience. The Board filled a vacancy on the Structural Change Impact group and voted favorably of all Segment A articles for Town Meeting. They did not vote on any citizen petitions.

The School Committee held an organizational meeting to select new officers. A vice chair position may be created to lessen the workload of the Chair. The Chenery School will be beginning full time, in person learning on April 28th and High School students will begin on the 29th. 30% of high school students opted to continue remote only school.

- Ms. Dionne noted that the town is going to need to show serious efforts to gain support for an override in the future. Significant savings can be found in school compensation. Ms. Garvin will be sitting in on the school's union discussions.

The Structural Change Impact group is going through ideas submitted by residents.

The Capital Budget Committee will be finalizing their recommendations for the coming year.

The Long-Term Planning group has drafted bylaw language to create an enhanced Capital Budget Committee.

The Financial Task Force II is working to update the financial model to reflect the true FY22 budget. They will present their findings to the Warrant Committee after their recommendations are complete. They are having discussions regarding the future of the Financial Task Force II.

The BMHS School Building Committee reported that 19 weeks from 4/14/21 the first phase of the school construction will be complete. They have used 49% of allocated funds. The Committee will tour the school on April 27th.

Human Services Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

On a motion by Ms. Fallon and seconded by Ms. Read, the Human Services Subcommittee voted to approve the meeting minutes from Thursday, March 25th, 2021. *(Motion passed unanimously. Fallon, McLaughlin and Read voted yes.)*

On a motion by Ms. Read and seconded by Ms. Fallon, the Human Services Subcommittee voted to approve the meeting minutes from April 2nd, 2021. *(Motion passed unanimously. Fallon, McLaughlin and Read voted yes.)*

On a motion by Ms. Fallon and seconded by Ms. Read, the Human Services Subcommittee voted to approve the meeting minutes from April 7th, 2021. (*Motion passed unanimously. Fallon, McLaughlin and Read voted yes.*)

The General Government Subcommittee will discuss and approve the meeting minutes dated 4/8/21 at a later meeting.

VII. Adjournment.

Motion: to adjourn the meeting at 9:11pm. (Motion passed unanimously)

Submitted by
Katie Luczai

Documents Used:

1. 2021-04-13 Warrant Committee – Mass. BRAVE Act for Belmont Presentation (Pikcilingis)