

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

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TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: October 13, 2021
TIME: 8:58 AM

Meeting Minutes

Members in Attendance

Warrant Committee: Paul Rickter, Ellen Schreiber, Elizabeth Dionne, Christine Doyle, Jennifer Fallon, Andrew Levin, Daniel Halston, Anne Helgen, Geoffrey Lubien, Robert McLaughlin, Lynn Read, Jack Weis, Jamal Saeh, Tom Caputo (pending official swearing in)

Others Present: Patrice Garvin,

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm. In Ms. Slap's absence, Vice Chair Ms. Doyle ran the meeting.

I. Discuss and establish a Communications Working Group.

The Warrant Committee discussed the merits to create a Communications Working Group/Subcommittee. This group would seek to improve communications between the town and residents regarding important matters such as Town Meeting articles.

- This group would explore how the town can better communicate with residents so that they feel that they are being kept in the loop with how decisions are made in town. Information could be relayed through public forums, articles, etc.
- Information shared with the public should be condensed as people's attention spans are short.
- After misinformation following the fuel tank discussions during Town Meeting, communication should be improved between the town and Town Meeting members.
- The town should prepare a "State of the Town" report to share with the public. These can be done on an annual basis before the budget cycle starts.
- Residents have been communicating about town matters in neighborhood groups. This is where misinformation about town matters can spread.
- Mr. Rickter asked if there was a way to share information, incrementally rather than waiting for a final report. Mr. Rickter referred to the General Government Subcommittee which had information prepared long before the final Warrant Committee Report was available for residents. Could a Subcommittee report be shared before the final Committee report? There are merits to sharing information as it is ready but should be cautioned that sharing information without a complete picture can be misleading and lack context. This can be especially true of sharing figures that are subject to revision.
- Communicating with precinct leaders and taking part in precinct meetings and caucuses may be underutilized opportunities to improve communications directly between the town and the public. Ms. Garvin volunteered to attend all precinct caucuses if it will help

provide answers to resident questions. It is better to share as much information as possible before Town Meeting rather than first hear resident questions and concerns during Town Meeting.

- Next Door is a social media site that could be considered as a means for sharing information.
- Some towns produce a quarterly newsletter through mail (i.e. in utility bills) or via email. There are pro's and con's to sending out newsletters since social media is the big driver nowadays of communication rather than by mail or email.
- Ms. Garvin reported that the Town Website Working Group is analyzing the town website. This group will have a report to present to the Select Board in the next year. There will be public meetings to discuss the town website.
- There is no one person in the Town Administrator's office who is responsible for public communications. The TA's staff is too lean to task someone with monitoring social media. Given Belmont's form of government it is difficult to mesh Belmont's town administration and social media. Before posting on social media, Ms. Garvin must meet with the Select Board to ensure that they are sharing a unified message.
- Ms. Garvin hopes to produce Q&A's for each Town Meeting Warrant Article going forward.
- Ms. Doyle suggested the working group also lay the groundwork for an outcomes-based town budget in an effort to provide the public with more information about services.
- Mr. Saeh recommended using the tools that already exist and that there be an effort to also share information about the process.
- The Communications Working Group/Subcommittee will consist of Anne Helgen, Ellen Schreiber, Chris Doyle, Liz Goss, Laurie Slap and Paul Rickter.

Motion: Ms. Schreiber moved to create a Communications Subcommittee, seconded by Ms. Helgen (Motion passed, roll-call vote: Dionne, Doyle, Fallon, Halston, Helgen, Levin, Lubien, McLaughlin, Rickter, Saeh, Schreiber, Weis, voted yes. Read and Caputo abstained.)

Motion: Ms. Dionne moved that we dissolve the POD Working Group and reconstitute it as a formal Subcommittee, seconded by Mr. Lubien. (Motion passed, roll-call vote: Dionne, Doyle, Fallon, Halston, Helgen, Levin, Lubien, McLaughlin, Rickter, Saeh, Schreiber, Weis, voted yes. Read and Caputo abstained.)

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

Ms. Garvin provided an update regarding American Rescue Plan Act 2021 funds. The funding will be distributed in two allocations. The first one, the Direct Municipal Allocation, totaling \$2.7 million, has been formally applied for. The second allotment which will be distributed by the state, the County Allocation, totals \$5 million. The town has received \$1.3 of their Direct Municipal Allotment. The second half of the Direct Municipal Allotment is expected to be received in twelve months. The town is waiting to see what will happen with the distribution of the County Allocation. Ms. Garvin has spoken with Senator Brownsberger who is assisting in getting answers.

On August 18th, the town will hold a public forum to discuss how the town should use this funding. The Governor is looking to provide communities that were harder hit by COVID with additional funding from the County Allotment. Ms. Garvin is confident that the town will receive their full Direct Municipal Allotment, but the County Allotment is unconfirmed. The town has identified a list of COVID related expenses that this aid can be used for.

On August 3rd, the Select Board will hold a hybrid meeting to discuss the fuel tanks.

The Select Board has asked the Energy Committee to engage in an electrification plan for the town fleet.

The Select Board has created a Solid waste committee to assist the DPW Director in preparing for a new solid waste contract in the next few years.

Ms. Garvin is working to secure a date for the fall Town Meeting.

Mr. Saeh reported that the School Committee has identified the positions that they wish to fund using APR funds.

III. Approve minutes

Motion: Ms. Dionne moved to approve the meeting minutes from 6/2/2021 as amended, seconded by Mr. Lubien (Motion passed, roll-call vote: Dionne, Doyle, Fallon, Halston, Helgen, Levin, Lubien, McLaughlin, Read, Rickter, Schreiber, Weis, voted yes. Saeh abstained.)

Motion: Mr. Lubien moved to approve the Pension, OPEB, Debt Subcommittee meeting minutes from 6/9/21 as amended, seconded by Ms. Dionne (Motion passed, roll-call vote: Dionne, Lubien, Levin, Doyle, voted yes).

IV. Public comment. (none)

V. Adjournment

Motion: to adjourn the meeting (Motion passed unanimously).

9:46pm