

**Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee—General Government Subcommittee**

2020-2021

MEETING MINUTES

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: April 26, 2021
TIME: 2:20 PM

Thursday, April 8, 2021, 8:00AM-10:45AM
Zoom (per the Governor's Executive Order regarding Open Meeting laws)

Attending: John Alcock, Elizabeth Dionne, Paul Rickter (9:00-10:30), Ellen Schreiber
Guests: Ellen Cushman (8:00-8:30); Glen Castro (8:30-9:00); Shawna Healey (8:30-9:00);
Dave Petto (9:00-9:30); Floyd Carman (9:45-10:15), Charles Clark, Dan Dargon,
Charles Laverty, Robert Reardon (10:15-10:45)

Meeting called to order at 8:00AM by Elizabeth Dionne

8:00 Town Clerk, Ellen Cushman (Bob McLaughlin led questions)

- Pivot during covid; shared data system allows people to order and pay online for vital records (several years in making); used GIS (Town's provider), no extra cost
- Proximity to front door, can do everything outside; issued a lot of marriage licenses (not all Belmont residents)
- Budget near flat; down due to fewer elections this fiscal year
 - would prefer greater budget decline, but unfunded mandate of early elections
 - applied through Division of Local Mandates for reimbursement for early voting
 - hard on office staff, 12,000 ballots in November (shortly after September primary)
- Working with Town Clerk's Association to standardize whether it's early voting or absentee voting; need consistency; state registry system for voters antiquated
- Work for Town Meeting; email communications; maintaining data systems; surge of support during town meeting season; Patrice Garvin and George Hall prepare the warrant
 - Town Moderator and Town Meeting expenses in Clerk's budget
 - Remote voting was free, already included in our clicker system (Turning?); Covid expense for consultant \$400
 - Outdoor Town Meeting; renting equipment, screens, huge logistics challenge; renting and moving chairs; remote makes more sense; final decision up to Mike
- Grant \$11,700 Center for Civic and Tech Life offered to every city and town to encourage free elections; non-partisan, acceptable group with which Clerk's office could work; used money for early voting (advance opening and tabulation); overtime to be available during certain periods
- \$1,000 grant from state to watch over ballot box; used police officer during final weekend
- CARES Act money? New federal funding? No information as of yet; waiting for advice from Town Administrator

- Bought plexiglass shields early to deploy out to polling locations; \$3800 for 32 of them; grant from state for additional 16; sanitizer \$400
- cash box at front counter, goes into vault at night; receipt sheet for every transaction; every payor in cash receives duplicate; most business by check and credit cards on-line; takes time to reconcile receipts with three forms of payment
- work funded by CPA funds for digitalization is all outsourced
- Public records requests: June 2017 4800 records requests; 2020-21 try to make bigger requests public; fund entire system; police provide crash reports; concerns about redacting information; people asking for many more documents, deep reaches, emails between individuals over a period of time; documents that may have supported a decision; requesting text messages
 - people who have to compile information; each department has an account on “Next Request”; Clerk manages, but target office must comply; 2 free hours of labor, \$25 per hour or salary thereafter of lowest-paid person
- Problems, complaints up to AG? AG has been very supportive; municipal law unit; Campaign finance and ethics
- Still working on census data and redistricting process, which begins April 14; Belmont has had significant development; every Town Meeting member may need to run again
- School verification dropped due to Covid; want to resume once it’s safe to do so
- next generation voting machines; approval of \$70 contract from Capital Budget Committee to buy new machines; must be certified by state, concerns re cybersecurity requirements so holding off on federal action; paper ballots here for the foreseeable future; security training

8:30 Human Resources, Shawna Healey, Glen Castro (Ellen Schreiber led questions)

- Jess left in November 2020; recently promoted to HR director
- Jess prepared the report with Shawna’s input
- Potential of restructuring and merging with school HR Dept; schools did not desire to combine; Town still handles all benefits enrollment for schools; Mike McAllister Director of Human Capital; more than just HR; Phelan has different vision, different processes
- Unemployment or layoffs from failed override vote; fraudulent claims due to Covid; starting to quiet down
- Discussions with union and positions that will be impacted; okay during FY22 (won’t fill vacant positions); FY23 will have greater impact; follow lay-off language in union contracts
- Any pandemic layoffs? Town employees able to work remotely; part-time library employees furloughed (not paid for no work); part-time employees came back when library resumed some services; admin at fire department furloughed; DPW remained on-site; since July 1 mostly at full capacity; stretch in winter return to 50% capacity; high-risk employees on paid admin leave for short periods of time; able to adjust because buildings not open to public, not as much day-to-day upkeep
- Other pandemic impact? Managing day-to-day of staff calling in with illness, determining Covid risk and testing; worked closely with health department, sending close contacts home

- Emergency paid sick leave and family medical leave act, federal; staff got 10 Covid days (not personal sick or vacation time); EFMLA for daycare issues (closed, half days, hybrid)
- Union negotiations: all contracts expired July 1 2020; unions wanted to wait until after override vote; at the table or scheduled meetings with most unions; beginning stages of negotiations; even if override passed, there wouldn't be additional money
- Police and fire typically bring lawyer; SCIU has a rep; Town does have labor counsel sitting in for police and fire
- Work rules (not money) of conditions of jobs; how does this change mid-cycle? Town side really just provided information and education around Covid measures; working conditions or hours; didn't have a remote work policy
- Are we competitive financially? Why do people leave? Tends to be due to location, finding something closer to home; do comp studies for contract negotiations; decoupled from personal information
- Health benefits coordinator is paid out of health insurance trust fund
- Trying to reduce insurance claims through disease and treatment management

9:00 Information Technology, David Petto (Paul Rickter led questions)

- Multiple layers of security from user to edge of network; systems on managed services; alert and immediate notification; MS problem with software in January, didn't come up with patch until March;
- Are staff working remotely using their own hardware or is it provided by the town? Any security concerns around that?
 - Very limited staff now working from home (approx. 12). Hardware is provided by Town (refurbished desktops for staff and laptops for Department Heads.). We use LogMeIn with 2-factor authentication or Virtual Private Network (VPN) into the Town's network.
 - When using LogMeIn there is no direct connection from client PC to host in Town, therefore no transfer of files or malware. VPN connection is a secure connection to network and the laptops are kept updated and virus scanned.
- Have you noticed any trends in training needs for staff in use of technology?
 - Due to rapid technology changes, minimum staff time for training, and general anxiety caused by COVID, the need for personal training is paramount.
 - IT provides documentation where available and invests much time one on one via Zoom, Phone and LogMeIn. This is not sufficient. The hope is when in person training resumes, the comfort levels with technology changes will increase.
- Have you done any work on sending mock phishing emails to staff to check their preparedness?
 - Absolutely! We have invested in an application (KnowBe4) that is our security awareness training system. It provides Phishing testing as well as 'bite size' interactive training videos for up to date security alerts.
- Any status on using Zoom or other technology going forward as we open up to more in person meetings? Are there ways to use technology to allow remote participation by the public even when COVID is over?

- The short answer is yes. We have been working with Belmont Media Center to test equipment and develop plans for hybrid meetings. Currently the Board of Health will not allow inperson meetings to occur during April and May.
- Also, changes to the Open Meeting Law, and Town bylaws need to be in place to allow hybrid meetings.
- On cybersecurity issues, are threats growing arithmetically or geometrically? Are you able to keep pace with them?
 - Threats, especially aimed at government have grown approx. 400% in the past year. IT devotes 80 – 90% of time to cybersecurity.
- On multifactor authentication for staff, how far along are you in implementing this?
 - The plan is to implement within 60days. I have to first submit the password policy to Town Counsel through the TA’s office for review. This will be done next week, after which I would need to schedule to have the Select Board sign off on the policy.
- Are there options for hardware purchasing where we buy hardware in bulk with other municipalities?
 - We already purchase under State Contracts for best pricing.
- In prior years, the need for part-time office support was mentioned, but not this year. Presumably this is still a need, but it's a very lean year.
 - It is very much a need. As time is devoted to admin duties, less time is available for the increasing need for cyber alerts and training.
- Very specifically on the form created using maponline.net for the Structural Change Impact Group: it looks like we're using a third party tool to generate forms like this. It's functional, but the look and feel dated compared to Google Forms. Is there any consideration for upgrading these tools?
 - This application ties in with our Geographical Information System (GIS) which houses all our mapping information, permitting systems, and parcel information. To use a different application would involve significant configuration changes with resources we do not have. The current application is easy to use, functional and multiple depts. use it with minimal IT involvement. The vendor (PeopleGIS) informed us yesterday 4/7 that a significant upgrade has been created and will be beta tested in Melrose within the next few weeks. They have asked Belmont to be one of the first 5 to upgrade after the beta test.

9:30 Treasurer (John Alcock)

- Discussion of the Tuesday election results.
- Status of bond rating? Where are we with reserves?
 - \$16-17MM undesignated fund balance
- Tax collection rate for 2020 was 99.503%, has this changed during the Covid-19 pandemic?
 - Part of free cash certification for each year, critical component
 - Thursday 31 advertised tax takings; put lien on property; May notice, January notice
 - Another 20 working on payment plan
 - Significant increase; norm 10-15
 - May 1 due date: payment plans 200-250 prior to Feb 1 (typically 30-40)

- Excise tax bills
- Treasurer is the tax collector; 50% of his time on collection; one of the more important aspects of the job
- Communities run on a cash basis (financials on accrual basis, Sullivan & Powers)
- Do you see an increase in requests for payment plans from tax payers?
- Better answer May 5-6
- What impact will outside dining have on parking revenues?
- Small impact, but get food tax and commercial buildings generate tax revenue, decreased value with vacancy
- Business also impacts state aid
- Do you anticipate any bond offerings this year?
 - Depends on master plan for Chenery Middle School
 - High School no debt service 2021; March-April 2022 some small amount of borrowing
 - MSBA reimbursement supposed to be \$80.5MM; cash flow to pay contractors; \$1MM no longer coming from state; where do you make it up? Emma Thurston is HSBC treasurer

10:00 Assessors Office, Charles Clark, Dan Dargon, Charles Laverty, Robert Reardon (Elizabeth Dionne led questions)

- Expected new growth for FY2022
- Current "typical" new growth average or baseline (based on experience of recent years)
- Status of the Bradford coming on-line
- Any other major projects coming on-line (and timeframe)
- Abatements and Exemptions reserve; where it stands in relation to state guidance of 1-5%
- Status of the software contract with CAMA
- Any shift in balance between business/residential property tax receipts
- Recommendations for pulling together town-wide PILOT study group (representing various constituencies for coordinated effort); status of requested information from the Assessors Office
- Description of assessment process, compliance, and monitoring. (I am very familiar with this, but it's helpful to walk through it with the entire Subcommittee, as this may become an issue at Town Meeting.)
- Explanation of decreased assessments for the Royal Belmont and/or any other apartment buildings
- Explanation of decreased assessment for the Belmont Country Club
- Possible next steps for amending MGL 61B CLASSIFICATION AND TAXATION OF RECREATIONAL LAND, as a means of obtaining additional tax revenue from the Belmont Country Club
- Status of abatement and deferral requests, especially as compared to prior years

The meeting adjourned at 10:45AM by unanimous consent.

Minutes unanimously approved at a duly posted meeting of the General Government Subcommittee of the Warrant Committee on April 26, 2021.