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BELMONT, MA

DATE: February 14, 2022  
TIME: 9:36 AM

Minutes of the  
Town of Belmont  
Warrant Committee Meeting  
Wednesday, December 15, 2021  
7:30pm



To view the recording of the meeting, please click [HERE](#).

Call to Order: Mr. Lubien called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

Member	Present	Member	Present
Geoffrey Lubien, Chair	Yes	Andrew Levin	Yes
Christine Doyle, Vice Chair	Yes	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Elizabeth Dionne, Secretary	Yes	Lynn Read	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Paul Rickter	Yes
Jennifer Fallon	Yes	Ellen Schreiber	Yes
Elizabeth Goss	Yes	Laurie Slap	Yes
Daniel Halston	Yes	Jack Weis	Yes
Anne Helgen	Yes	Roy Epstein, Ex-officio Designee - Select Board	Yes
<b>Staff</b>		Jamal Saeh, Ex-officio, School Com. Chair Appointee	No
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Yes		

### 1. Review the work in progress of the communications subcommittee

Ms. Schreiber, Chair of the Communications Subcommittee, reviewed the creation of the committee and their mission of improving communication. The committee chose 3 types of communication to try:

- Explainers: one or two pages explaining a particular topic. The first one was on ARPA. They found that information continues to change on this topic which has been a challenge.
- Podcast: Ms. Goss has interviewed Ms. Slap talking about Free Cash. This episode is in the editing process.
- Financial Indicators Presentation "The State of the Town": This looks at 10 years of history of various metrics in a new way, without recommendations or analysis.

Ms. Slap presented the draft of the first Financial Indicators presentation and asked that suggestions be sent to Ms. Schreiber directly. The presentation included historical information on:

- Population Growth
- Revenue Overall
- Revenue Breakdown
- Uncollected Property Taxes
- State Aid
- State & Federal Covid Funding
- Revenues Related to Economic Growth
- Expenditures by Major Departments
- Personnel Costs including salary & wages
- Employee Benefits
- Budgeted Full Time Equivalent Employees
- Enrollment
- Pension Liability
- Retirement Participants
- OPEB Liability (Retiree Health Insurance)
- Current Long Term Debt Detail
- Long Term Debt
- Debt Service
- Certified Free Cash
- Other Operating Reserves
- Use of Non-Recurring Funds in the Budget
- Appendices showing comparisons to other similar towns

There was a discussion of when this report would be prepared every year, and how this living document could grow and evolve as a useful tool for the Warrant Committee.

Mr. Lubien and Mr. Weiss said that they think this presentation should be part of the yearly Warrant Committee Report.

Mr. Weiss said he thinks the Warrant Committee needs to maintain neutrality, and said he thought he saw some "lobbying" in the presentation, perhaps positioning for future overrides or other action.

Mr. Epstein offered to help edit the presentation. He also said it's important to acknowledge the financial metrics that the Town is trying to follow and that these might be included in this report.

Mr. Epstein asked who the audience is for this presentation and said he didn't think Town Meeting Members or most of the public would read it carefully. He did think there are others who would be very interested, especially the Committee for a Fiscally Responsible Belmont, and urged that this draft be shown to some representatives from that committee to get their response. Ms. Helgen explained that the audience is the Select Board, Capital Budget, department heads, etc. - basically people who will be looking at the budget for the next year. She said there was discussion about taking this information and creating "explainers" on specific topics to share more broadly.

Mr. Epstein also agreed that the presentation should be objective, but the financial future is tied to projections so budget issues should be addressed frankly. There was a discussion of this issue.

Mr. Caputo said that the report should be unbiased but should help people zero in on the things that matter. He suggested that some areas that are outside of the norm or present special risks should be highlighted in order to point out the areas that people should really pay attention to.

Ms. Fallon said Town Meeting members are the audience and that they can be trained to look at more details earlier than just before Town Meeting. She also pointed out that there is nothing in the presentation about capital needs becoming more and more important to the Town's financial health. She feels this should be reflected in the presentation. She also suggested that the fluidity of State funding (ARPA, CARES, etc.) should be explained.

Ms. Doyle suggested some ideas for presenting capital information and asked that there be a slide showing the list of unions, contract expirations and lengths, and numbers and type employees under each contract.

Ms. Goss said the presentation would be a good training tool for new Warrant Committee members, and that parts of it could be broken out and used in other situations that require some context or education.

## **2. ARPA & Revenue Update**

Revenue: Ms. Garvin reported on FY23 Revenue Estimates. She reviewed the process and resources used to build the budget. She provided an update on funding estimates for FY23.

Next steps include determining ARPA uses in the operating budget, determining the amount of free cash that will be needed to balance the budget, receive the State Aid number in late January, and finalize expenses with all departments.

Mr. Weiss made some suggestions about the presentation of the information.

ARPA: Ms. Garvin recounted the history of ARPA and the categories of funding that the Town was told they would receive, and how her office worked with this information. Revenue loss calculations posed a special challenge with guidelines coming late, especially the definition of what qualified as revenue. She also discussed the impact of debt exclusion and MSBA being categorized as revenue, which limits how the Town can use ARPA money. She will be working with the auditor on how to tie ARPS funds to FY23 expenses.

Mr. Lubien pointed out that it's possible the Town cannot spend all the ARPA money.

Mr. Caputo asked if FY22 expenditures after March 1<sup>st</sup> could be looked at. Ms. Garvin said they will do this.

Ms. Helgen asked if the Town would have to refund the ARPA money, and Ms. Garvin said if it's not used by December of 2024 it will need to be returned. Ms. Helgen asked about using the money for capital expenses, and Ms. Garvin said this is being discussed.

Ms. Slap suggested that FY24 free cash might be looked at along with FY23.

Ms. Doyle asked for clarification on the potential use of ARPA funds for capital uses which Ms. Garvin answered. Ms. Doyle asked if any towns were documenting the inequity of the revenue exclusion situation which the group discussed, as well as what other areas this funding could be used for.

Ms. Helgen said this issue should be communicated to the public, even before there are answers. Ms. Schreiber said the Communications Sub-Committee is unable to do things in a timely manner (because of

open meeting laws, etc.) so should not be the body do it. She suggested the Town Administrator or Select Board communicate this information. Opportunities to communicate was discussed.

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

Select Board: Mr. Epstein reported that Ms. Garvin will remain as the Town Administrator, and there was enthusiastic support from the Committee.

Town Administrator: Ms. Garvin reminded the group about the cardboard recycling event.

High School Building Committee: Mr. McLaughlin reported that the High School project is 78% completed overall. Phase 1 is 99% complete, and Phase 2 is 22% completed. There is a community tour on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 4-6pm.

### **4. Approval of Minutes**

**Motion**: *Mr. Halston moved to approve the minutes of the **June 19, 2020 meeting of the Public Safety Committee**. Ms. Fallon seconded, and the motion passed by roll call vote with Ms. Doyle abstaining.*

**5. Public Comment**: There was no public comment.

### **6. Adjournment**

**Motion**: *Mr. McLaughlin moved the adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Mr. Rickter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:12pm.*

**Next Meeting**: January 19, 2021 at 7:30pm

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny  
Recording Secretary