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BELMONT, MA**

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

**Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee Meeting
Wednesday, January 26, 2022
7:30pm**



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

Call to Order: Mr. Lubien called the meeting of the Warrant Committee to order at 7:31pm.

Call to Order: Mr. Epstein called the meeting of the Select Board to order at 7:31pm.

Call to Order: Ms. Mahoney called the meeting of the Capital Budget Committee to order at 7:32pm.

Call to Order: Ms. Checkoway called the meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:32pm.

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	Select Board	
Capital Budget Committee		Adam Dash, Chair	Yes
Anne Marie Mahoney, Chair	Yes	Roy Epstein, Vice Chair	Yes
Rebecca Vose, Secretary	Yes	Mark Paolillo,	Yes
Patricia Brusch		School Committee	
Jennifer Fallon	Yes	Amy Checkoway, Chair	Yes
Karl Haglund, Planning Board Representative		Meghan Moriarty, Secretary	Yes
Staff		Catherine Bowen	Yes
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Yes	Michael Crowley	Yes
		Jamal Saeh (Representative to the Warrant Comm.)	Yes
		Ralph Jones	Yes

Joint Meeting with the Select Board, School Committee, and Capital Budget Committee to review and discuss the Financial Indicators presentation by the Communications Working Group.

Ms. Schreiber (Chair of the Communications Working Group) explained that their goal is to communicate financial matters to residents and Town Meeting Members. One of the ways the Subcommittee has approached this goal is to create a 10-year financial history of Town finances to provide a new perspective. The audience for this endeavor is the Committees, Town Meeting, and the community at large. The plan is to update this history each year and have it available in early fall, before the budget process begins. This should be particularly helpful for Town Meeting Members.

Ms. Helgen said this type of report was a recommendation of the Financial Task Force, which helped jump start this effort. She explained how they had looked at other towns to get ideas on the history.

Ms. Slap pointed out that the document is still in draft form, and they are looking for suggestions and input.

She provided an overview of the document, which includes:

- Population growth information.
- Revenue picture in total.

- Revenue details including:
 - Property Tax
 - State Aid
 - State & Federal Covid Funding
 - Economic Growth
- Expenditures including:
 - Personnel Costs
 - Collective Bargaining (including contract details)
 - Employee Benefits
 - Full Time Equivalent Employees (FTEs)
 - School Enrollments
 - Pension Liability
 - Retirement Participants
 - OPEB Liability (Retiree Health Insurance)
 - Long Term Debt Detail (Excluded & Non-Exempt)
 - Long Term Debt (Percent of Total Assessed Value)
 - Debt Service
 - Appropriated Discretionary Capital
 - Other Capital Funds (non-general fund)
- Certified Free Cash
- Total Operating Reserves
- Use of Non-Recurring Funds in Budget
- Appendix
 - Info on comparison towns and how they were chosen

Ms. Slap said the Committee hopes to add a feature allowing items to be flagged for deeper consideration.

Ms. Schreiber said the goal of this report was to present just the facts, but the Committee hopes that when it is finalized there can be a process to interpret this information for use in budgeting choices. They see this as a way to see the trends and then in the future discuss what they mean.

Mr. Paolillo said the data is great, but interpretation of it in the future is critical. He talked about a Financial Summit to do priority-based budgeting, which this information could support.

Ms. Checkoway asked which committees were involved in the Financial Summits of other towns and said that she would like to hear more about that. Ms. Helgen explained Lexington's Financial Summit process.

Mr. Levin said he would like to see the Scorecard implemented which would be very helpful to Town Meeting members, which may lead to more productive Town Meetings. Ms. Helgen said they will develop a process to do that and explained how other Town's did it.

Ms. Schreiber reviewed some of the components of a Financial Summit that would need to be worked out. She said pulling together the data is the "easy" part (although it was a very big job) but interpreting it is the big job.

Mr. Crowley said he thinks this information is great as context but isn't clear about how it relates to the budget and assigning resources. Mr. Lubien explained that this provides the groundwork for other conversations, but how to incorporate this and create a better process going forward is being discussed.

Ms. Schreiber said use will also change as people become familiar with using history and more comfortable with the information.

Ms. Fallon said that as a communication tool it might be useful to include fees and outside grants.

Mr. Epstein asked if the indicators used are more or less than used in other towns and asked what the basis for selection was. He also asked if there are examples of analytical conclusions reached by the other towns.

Ms. Helgen said the Belmont report is very similar to other towns and explained some of the minor differences. She said trend summaries are used as a basis for their budget discussions. Ms. Slap provided some examples of how this could be done in Belmont and was done in other towns.

Mr. McLaughlin asked how this can be made attractive so other people will read it. Ms. Helgen explained some ideas the Committee has to achieve this.

Ms. Schreiber added that the interpretation of the report is what's important rather than the physical report, especially the conversations that are started. This is where people will be pulled in.

Ms. Read asked if they saw any measurement of efficiency in other town's reports. Ms. Helgen said there is some data from the DOR, but it's unclear that comparisons (for example between school systems) are accurate.

Mr. Halston said the appendices are something that anyone can easily understand. He thinks including some of these in the newspaper would be helpful to the larger community.

Ms. Bowen pointed out that the designation "Single Family Tax Bill" might not be clear and asked if there is another way to identify this type of domicile since about half of the residents in Belmont live in multi-family dwellings. Ms. Helgen said she doesn't think there is data that breaks that down.

Ms. Goss said there could be an "Ask the Expert" article and said there are a variety of ways to share this data.

Public Comment

Bill Anderson asked Mr. Halston to clarify his comment about assessed property values. Mr. Halston said he was looking at the appendices showing tax bills and values going up. Mr. Anderson said the rate of income increases and their disconnect between values needs to be considered. Mr. Lubien said the point of the graph in the appendix is to reflect the assessed market value forces, which are out of the control of the Town.

Ms. Dionne clarified how the tax levy works on individual homes and the impact on tax bills: The town's overall levy can rise by only 2.5% per year (excluding new growth). Individual tax bills may change by more than that, depending on how house valuations change relative to one another.

Mr. Saeh said it might be worthwhile to add information about taxes as percent of income, with other towns as a comparison.

Mr. Epstein pointed out that Mr. Anderson's question has launched the type of discussion that the Committee hoped would start because of the document.

Ms. Bowen asked if broader historical context should be included such

Adjournment

Motion: Mr. Paolillo moved to adjourn the meeting of the Select Board. Mr. Epstein seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by rollcall vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:31pm.

Motion: Ms. Mahoney moved to adjourn the meeting of the Capital Budget Committee. Ms. Moriarty seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by rollcall vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:32pm.

Motion: Ms. Bowen moved to adjourn the meeting of the School Committee. Ms. Checkoway seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by rollcall vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:33pm.

The Warrant Committee continued its open session.

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

Select Board: Mr. Dash reviewed the Board's forum from the previous night on a proposed leaf blower bylaw. He said the Board also discussed handled fire fighter overtime, water/sewer rates, and budget recommendation from the Town Administrator.

Town Administrator: Ms. Garvin reported that she had reviewed the department head requests and gave them her recommendations. She explained the process that was used, and that she saw the department requests exceeded the budget model so asked the departments for adjustments and now they are tied to the model. She will present on the budget on February 16, 2022. Mr. Dash pointed out this is town-side only.

Ms. Garvin explained that Fire Department overtime line has been expended due to injury and sickness, plus vacancies, all of which required overtime expenditures. She discussed the issue of filling positions because of the Civil Service system. She plans to transfer about \$600,000 from the FY22 Surplus Salary line to the

overtime budget. The total overtime expenditure for FY22 will be about \$1,1M. The Police are also about to expend their overtime budget, but they have some flexibility to address this. The cause of the Police expending their budget is 4 vacancies and 2 employees who are out on extended National Guard tour.

Ms. Slap asked if the model projections will be part of the budget presentation. Ms. Garvin said she will touch on that and can provide that information.

Ms. Garvin said they are slightly over on the facilities budget and explained what this is.

There was a discussion of the overtime issue in general, as well as what funds could be used for the overtime.

Mr. Lubien said they also need to track the cost of the Brave Act.

Ms. Doyle asked how sick leave is monitored, which Ms. Garvin explained.

Long-Term Capital Budget Planning Committee: Ms. Doyle reported that their mission is to work through the proposed bylaw change that will come before Town Meeting and how that would be done.

Ms. Fallon asked if the Warrant Committee could be engaged in discussions of Unexcluded Debt and explained why she made the request.

Ms. Saeh said Mr. DiCologero (Director of Finance, Business and Operations) would be coming to the Warrant Committee with a budget update. There is a draft, and it is close to the Financial Taskforce model. Key considerations are the growth of English language learners, ASPED changes, and covid-related items.

Ms. Helgen asked if the Schools are close to the Financial Taskforce model that was presented before the override vote. Ms. Saeh said it is a reflection of existing staff and provided details. Mr. Lubien provided other details and there was a discussion of this issue.

Mr. McLaughlin provided an overview of the Middle & High School project and said there is a reconciliation that is happening now and he will report more in-depth at the February 9th meeting.

Ms. Doyle asked about solar at the high school. Mr. McLaughlin said it has not even been bid yet, but he thinks it will be about \$2,000,000 and he discussed financing it.

Public Comment: Bill Anderson asked Ms. Garvin what model she used. Ms. Garvin said it was updated since the FY22 finalization of the budget and taking the assumptions without the override. He then asked if the fire overtime is a movement of budgeted expenditures. Ms. Patrice said no and explained why. There was a discussion of overtime.

Mr. Anderson then asked where Ms. Garvin expects the budget to end up. Mr. Lubien said this will be discussed at the February 22nd meeting.

Lisa Pargoli said at the last meeting of the School Building Committee the budget did not look good and was getting worse. She asked if something has changed since then. Mr. McLaughlin explained the process that the Committee is going through now to address the reconciliation.

Adjournment

Motion: Mr. McLaughlin moved to adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Ms. Helgen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:05pm.

Next Meetings:

Wednesday February 9, 2022

February 16, 2022: Budget Presentations with Select Board, Capital Budget & School Committees.

February 23, 2022: Q2 Report-Outs for the Town and the Schools.

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Secretary