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BELMONT, MA**

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

**Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee Meeting
Wednesday, November 3, 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	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Christine Doyle, Vice Chair	Yes	Lynn Read	Yes
Elizabeth Dionne, Secretary	Yes	Paul Rickter	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Ellen Schreiber	Yes
Jennifer Fallon	Yes	Laurie Slap	No
Elizabeth Goss	Yes	Jack Weis	Yes
Daniel Halston	No	Adam Dash, Ex-officio - Select Board	Yes
Anne Helgen	Yes	Jamal Saeh, Ex-officio, School Com. Chair Appointee	Yes
Andrew Levin	No		
Staff			
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Yes	Anthony DiCologero, Superintendent of Schools	Yes
David DeStefano, Chief of Police	Yes	James MacIsaac, Chief of Police	

1. Report from Belmont Public Schools Director of Finance, Anthony DiCologero, regarding FY22 Q1 financials and enrollment numbers.

Financials: Mr. DiCologero reported that they are projecting to end the year with about a \$797,000 positive balance. Salaries for the elementary and high school are projected to be \$100,000 - \$150,000 positive respectively. What is not typical is a middle school positive balance of just over \$400,000. When he looked into this he found that there are 17 personnel changes. Administrative salaries have about a \$70,000 positive balance because of multiple curriculum directors and assistant principals who left the district after the FY22 budget was done. Substitutes are projected to break even, based on the history of this expense.

Elementary, middle and high school expenses are projected to break even at this time. Transportation is also projected to break even.

Fringe benefits are projected to have a \$50,000 positive balance. This may fluctuate as they are able to fill open positions.

Utilities and maintenance are shown for historical purposes only. These costs were migrated in FY17 to the Facilities Budget.

Special Education expenses are projected to break even in all cost centers, although it's early in the year. Salary and non-salary lines represent practitioners who provide direct services to students. The two categories represented how these providers are paid. Special Education transportation is projected to break even.

Mr. DiCologero highlighted the adjustment below the bottom line and explained that because the EdCo Collaborative is winding down there will likely be some closing costs that will need to be paid.

Ms. Helgen asked if any expenditures for FY22 were prepaid in FY21. Mr. DiCologero responded that it was either a nominal amount or zero. She also asked if the budget shown represents 1:1 FTE's with last year. Mr. DiCologero said for teachers' salaries it reflects the full complement of budgeted FTE's, but for some support salaries (such as aides) it might not fully captures those vacancies.

Ms. Doyle asked about the expense and cost implications of the reduction in enrollment on expenses, and when it would hit on the revenue side. Mr. DiCologero responded that there was a considerable decrease in enrollment FY20 to FY21 of about 255 students which resulted in the release of 4 elementary teachers. This year they are down another 93 students. However, enrollment is projected to increase, and they expect to budget to what enrollment is rather than assume that there will be increases in enrollment.

Ms. Doyle recommended that there be outreach to recover some of the middle school student for high school attendance.

Ms. Fallon asked if losing EdCo would affect budgeting. Mr. DiCologero said that for fuel they had begun transitioning to other procurement methods. For supplies they have not been doing much through EdCo, so he does not expect the dissolution to have a big impact.

Mr. McLaughlin wondered why the town should do outreach to regain lost enrollment when there has been years of worries about budget impact of increased enrollment. He also asked Mr. DiCologero if there would be any monies from the American Rescue Plan. Mr. DiCologero said they have some bigger ticket item expenses that they are hoping to use some of this money for (for example the need to rent function tents in the spring, covid testing for students, etc.).

Ms. Doyle responded to Mr. McLaughlin's comment about enrollment by saying that sudden drops in enrollment have negative impacts on the schools and towns because the system is built to support more students.

Mr. Saeh said he believes they could do better with marketing/outreach. He also pointed out that they have to staff to needs as well as enrollment.

Mr. Lubien said they have benefited in the past from international students, and those students are not back yet but will hopefully return in the new few years.

Mr. Weiss asked if an FY2021 \$600,000 positive variance in Special Education occurred because they dipped into the circuit breaker reserved funds at a higher than anticipated level. Mr. DiCologero explained that they received an increase in the final FY21 circuit breaker allotment. Also, for out-of-district students they set aside enough funds to pay for tuition as well as other services based on a 4-year cycle. This year the costs were different because of Covid. There was also the uncertainty of teaching remotely, hybrid, or in-person expenses, The School Committee indicated that they wanted a specific ending balance in the non-general fund sources which resulted in the volatility being reflected in the General Fund. Mr. Weiss and Mr. DiCologero discussed this issue.

Q2 Revolving and Grants: Mr. DiCologero provided a review, highlighting that the balance from operation on a cash basis showed an increase of about \$171,000 with nothing eventful in the report.

Ms. Helgen asked if there is a plan to spend the outstanding Food Service money. Mr. DiCologero said the meals were free last year and this year, so the reimbursement is higher. Participation is almost double although the same number of staff have been used, which is a strain. They are trying to hire more staff. Mr. DiCologero said the Food Service Director has a capital plan, and equipment for other schools will continue to be looked into. This depends on whether or not the free meals continue into the next fiscal year.

Mr. Weiss asked if the town should be getting USDA reimbursement that would more than cover the costs. Mr. DiCologero explained the Federal and State components and how they work. There was a discussion of reimbursements and projections for food service and busing fees.

Mr. Caputo asked if the town is breaking even on busing right now. Mr. DiCologero said they are expecting to charge the amount budgeted for bus fees to the revolving account and explained the issues around this expectation. There was a discussion of this issue.

Grants: Mr. DiCologero outlined that they are on track to spend the grants they generally receive, plus some pandemic-related grants. He detailed how some of these monies are being spent.

Ms. Helgen and Mr. DiCologero discussed the reserve balance and carryover for FY21.

Bill Anderson, asked how the projected budget savings in salaries relates to FTE's. Mr. DiCologero said that for unfilled teacher positions it is the same as the budgeted number. For admin & support there are

some that may not be carried which could change the positive ending balance, but he does not expect to be able to fill all positions so it will likely end in the positive. They discussed the impacts of teacher and other openings.

Mr. Anderson also asked what the rate of fringe benefits per dollar of salaries is. Mr. Lubien offered to get the response to this question from Mr. DiCologero and forward it to Mr. Anderson.

Enrollment: Mr. DiCologero suggested interested people watch the October 19th School Committee meeting for a detailed presentation on this topic. He gave a quick summary of the current enrollment, showing that there was in FY20-FY21 there was a 255 decrease in enrollment and FY21-FY22 there are 93 fewer students, and provided some information per level. He explained that all elementary classes meet or exceed the class size guidelines, even after laying off 4 elementary educators this year. Middle school generally looks to be within the guidelines although grades 7 and 8 are outliers.

Mr. Weiss pointed out that almost all of the enrollment loss is in grades 5-8 and asked why the middle school is so impacted. Mr. Saeh speculated that the most difficult time that parents had last year was at the middle school. There was a discussion of this loss of enrollment and the possibility of reclaiming these students for high school.

Ms. Doyle said it is difficult for the town to adjust to large changes such as this, and that with 3 years of declining enrollment it starts to look like a school district in decline. She thinks the School Committee should take advantage of the new school and proactively reach out to families who when to private school.

Mr. Halston wondered if there was actually a drop or was it a readjustment after the bubble of those years (which have much larger enrollment). There was a discussion of enrollment, overcrowding at Cherry, the pandemic, etc.

Mr. McLaughlin said he didn't understand why the School Department previously needed more money because of higher enrollment and now they are losing money because of lower enrollment.

Report from Police and Fire Department Chiefs regarding staffing and overtime.

Chief DeStefano told the Committee about new equipment including an engine that was received in August, 2 Hurst "hydraulic" tools, a Zoll cardiac monitor, and new radios. He reported on the use of the regional hazmat vehicle that is housed in Belmont, the new recruit's process/status, and community engagement activities. He also outlined the Strategic Initiatives, and the specifics and results of the Internal Stakeholder Analysis including department strengths and weaknesses. Finally, Chief DeStefano outlined upcoming plans.

Mr. Lubien asked how the open positions were being handled from a budgetary point of view. Chief DeStephano said they are using firefighters on overtime on a daily basis and that they are over budget.

Chief Maclsaac explained their work to fill vacancies in the department and the difficulties and challenges that have been encountered. He said they are also filling open positions with overtime and will likely be over budget.

Ms. Doyle asked if Chief Maclsaac had any information the size of candidate pools in other towns who do not use Civil Service. He gave an example of Norwood where the entrance exam was given to 100 people. Ms. Doyle asked if Chief Maclsaac had met with Diversity Committee, and he said he had.

Mr. Lubien asked if there were discussions about revisiting the Civil Service question. Ms. Garvin said the sentiment at Town Meeting was to try and work it out with the unions. She said they are going down that path.

2. Report from Town Administrator, Patrice Garvin, regarding FY22 Q1 financials.

Revenue: Ms. Garvin reviewed the first quarter FY22 revenues, explaining that there were some slight Covid impacts including investment income, parking, and the lack of building rentals (auditoriums, etc.). Timing also impacts revenue (when state money is received, cell tower payments, etc.). They are on target to meeting estimated receipts, and there are no concerns as of yet.

Ms. Helgen asked if ambulance receipts are a timing issue or is it something else. Ms. Garvin said a payment came in just after the quarter ended which did not show up on these reports.

Expenditures: Ms. Garvin said timing again impacts expenditures especially insurance. Encumbrances impact in Q1 as well, and salaries look slightly larger because there are more pay weeks in FY22. There are minor Covid impacts such as police & fire vacancies, and assessors are being refused entry.

Ms. Garvin said she would have a better understanding of expenditures once Q2 is complete. She hopes to give an analysis of salaries after Q2 because vacancies are being filled.

The legal budget is up slightly because of union contracts and the 91 Beatrice Circle decision. She is watching this line.

Mr. Weiss asked about Information Technologies expenditure of 60% of their budget. Ms. Garvin said this is due to contracts.

3. Reports (if any) from Select Board, Town Administrator, School Committee, and liaisons.

Mr. Dash reviewed the activities of the Select Board.

Ms. Garvin explained the reorganization of her office, especially the changing the of the Assistant Town Administrator/Rec Director position to Assistant Town Administrator/Finance Director. This saves some money even with a higher salary for the position. The Budget Analysis position was brought back which was filled by Matt Haskell. A new administrative assistant will be hired.

Mr. Lubien showed the list of missing minutes which he will send to subcommittees. He will put these on the agenda for the next meeting for approval.

4. Approval of Minutes

October 6, 2021 Minutes: Ms. Schreiber said she does not remember showing corrections of minutes in the minutes. Mr. Lubien said it was done to make it easier for the minute taker. There was a discussion of this issue with Mr. McLaughlin explaining that his motion was unusual which caused the details to be captured.

Ms. Dionne asked where changes would be sent. Mr. Lubien asked that unless there are significant changes, the changes should be verbalized, and the minutes will then be approved as amended.

Ms. Dionne said Line 111 should be changed from "to ensure the priorities are right" to "to ensure that they prioritize projects".

Mr. Rickter said the call to order says 5:30 but should be 7:30.

Mr. Weiss corrected the spelling for Daedalus (which is now called CHA) in line 18.

Mr. Lubien said he had also some minor, grammatical corrections from Mr. Halston.

Motion: *Ms. Helgen moved to approve the minutes of the October 6, 2021 meeting of the Warrant Committee as amended. Mr. Weiss seconded, and the motion passed by roll call vote with Mr. Rickter abstaining.*

7. Adjournment

Motion: *Mr. McLaughlin moved the adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Ms. Dionne seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:46pm.*

8. Next Meeting

November 17, 2021, 7:30PM

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Secretary