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**BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
FINAL**

**APRIL 2, 2014, 7:20 P.M.
SELECTMEN'S MEETING ROOM**

[Note: This was a joint meeting of the Warrant Committee and Board of Selectmen, held as a special agenda item within the regular BOS meeting time.]

Present: Chair Libenson; Members Allison, Baghdady, Bruschi, Fallon, Gammill, Helgen, Manjikian, McLaughlin, Sarno and SC Representative Slap

BOS Chair Rojas; Selectmen Paolillo and Baghdady

Town Administrator Kale

Members Absent: Dash, Epstein, Grob and Mennis

Members of the WC appeared before the Board of Selectmen to discuss issues relating to Minuteman. The BOS meeting was already in progress. Vice Chair Sarno called the Warrant Committee to order at 7:21 pm.

Discussion: Minuteman ~ Agreement

Mr. Kevin Mahoney, Assistant Superintendent of Minuteman, and Mr. Jack Weis, Belmont's representative on the Minuteman School Committee, appeared before the Board and the WC to discuss issues pertaining to Minuteman.

Amended Agreement Overview

Member McLaughlin began by suggesting that the town accept the amended agreement as it is an improvement on the existing agreement. He said there are 16 member towns, each with representation on the Minuteman School Committee. He noted that 313 students attend Minuteman from outside of the district, with about 413 from the 16 member towns. The out-of-district students are paying less overall for capital and operating.

Member McLaughlin highlighted the proposed changes to the Regional Agreement:

- capital cost responsibilities
- operating cost apportionment
- debt issuance authorization
- enrollment-weighted School Committee voting
- withdrawal from district
- capital cost obligations for new members to the district

Mr. Weis noted that the proposed changes weren't entirely within Minuteman's control and that the State (DESE) has been mindful of the precedent that some of these changes might set for other regional school systems in the State.

Member McLaughlin said one goal of the agreement was to attract more out-of-district communities to become member towns (e.g. Medford, Watertown). One incentive was that there is now an "opt out" option. He then discussed the possibility for Intergovernmental Agreements, which are not actually part of the Regional Agreement among member towns, but, rather, are a potential way for member towns to assess non-member towns for a portion of the capital costs associated with a new building.

Member McLaughlin summarized how the new capital cost allocation formula in the revised Agreement worked and how it could impact Belmont. Chair Paolillo raised the issue of what it will cost Belmont to build a new Minuteman facility. Mr. Weis clarified that the numbers presented in the handouts were illustrative only (to show the relative impact on various towns) and were not intended to telegraph the expected size of any future proposed debt issuance.

Member McLaughlin also summarized the Minuteman School Committee and town votes that would be required to approve various matters (annual budget, debt issuance, withdrawal, etc.), including how the new weighted voting within the Minuteman School Committee would work. He also briefly touched on the building project timeline.

The WC asked questions at this point in the meeting.

WC Chair Libenson asked about next steps for the amended Agreement. Member McLaughlin said that there is a Warrant Article that will be voted on at May's TM asking Town Meeting to approve the revised Agreement. The amended agreement will need unanimous support from the 16 member towns, but a simple majority from TM.

Member McLaughlin touched on the issue of the proposed enrollment for the new facility. He said none of the 16 member towns are interested in paying for an 800-student school, since at least half of those projected students would not be from the district.

Issues pertaining to the proposed revisions to the Agreement's capital cost allocation formula (which is how Minuteman's debt service would be apportioned) were discussed, particularly the component that allocates those costs based on a town's enrollment and a town's wealth. Assistant Superintendent Mahoney will provide Member Allison with the assumptions behind the formulaic calculations.

Selectman Paolillo raised concerns about the enticement(s) for non-member towns to join the district agreement. For example, would Watertown be responsible to pay a share of the new facility debt? If they choose not to join, are they not allowed to send kids? He was told that the intent is that they can send kids if they sign the Intergovernmental Agreement and pay a fee. He added that the 800-student sized school is not

advantageous for Belmont. Assistant Superintendent Mahoney said that all of this is still being worked out.

Chair Rojas asked about the withdrawal process for a member town. The withdrawal process was discussed.

Assistant Superintendent Mahoney said that the Warrant Article cannot be amended on the TM floor. Member Bruschi raised several concerns regarding the legal enforceability of the amended agreement and the debt responsibility, in light of the perceived broken promises made regarding the Minuteman feasibility study borrowing.

Mr. Weis then explained why he voted yes on the amended agreement. Member McLaughlin stated again that he supports the amended agreement, not because it's a great agreement, but because it's better than the existing agreement. Assistant Superintendent Mahoney said that the amendments to the existing agreement were created, in part, to entice the non-member towns to join the district.

Member Fallon raised the concern about the relationship between the amended agreement and the new facility. The WC and BOS agreed that there are clear fiscal benefits to sending kids to Minuteman as a non-member town. WC Chair Libenson noted that the option to withdraw is a new one which does not exist under the existing agreement. He expounded on this and observed that having that option is valuable.

Regarding withdrawal, Mr. Kale noted that if a member town withdraws, it is still responsible for its share of any debt service issued while it was a member. Member McLaughlin pointed out that withdrawing towns relinquish their share of any Minuteman assets, like the facility, but are also relieved of any future obligations for pensions and OPEB.

The WC expressed its desire to explore the data more fully. Selectman Paolillo said that the assumption must be that no new towns will join the district agreement. Therefore, the question is: Does this agreement work better than the old one, given that there is an old facility and there is a proposal on the table to replace it with an 800-student facility?

Member McLaughlin suggested that perhaps Belmont defer its TM vote (like Lincoln) until more information is evident. The deferring option was discussed. Selectman Paolillo and others said that Belmont will need legal advice on the deferring option. Member Gammill suggested voting No at TM (to avoid the deferring confusion) and then voting to approve at some point in the near future. Casting a No vote was discussed.

Town Counsel will provide guidance on deferring versus voting at TM.

Budget Discussion

WC Chair Libenson raised the topic of Minuteman's operating costs, which have risen by 5.9%. Assistant Superintendent Mahoney said that technology costs for use in

standardized testing contributed to this rise. Also, more personnel was needed to provide student instructional services as well as to improve district wide communication. Assistant Superintendent Mahoney also addressed WC Chair Libenson's question as to why projected capital costs were declining. Mr. Mahoney explained that some repairs are needed to keep the building running until the renovation/rebuild, but that Minuteman is being careful about those expenses. He also noted that about one-third of the decline is due to a smaller proposed contribution to the stabilization reserve account.

WC Chair Libenson asked about the per-pupil costs. His calculations showed a higher per-pupil cost. Assistant Superintendent Mahoney provided additional information, noting that SPED and transportation costs are not included in the present calculation.

Member Brusch expressed concern about the budget increases, noting that the public schools are facing similar challenges without adding the personnel. She also suggested that the public meetings on the building sizing matter not be scheduled in December – to instead hold them either pre-Thanksgiving or in January.

Adjournment

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn the Warrant Committee at 9:17 pm. (The BOS meeting continued.)

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary