

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: May 20, 2020
TIME: 8:58 AM

**Minutes
Town of Belmont
Select Board**

Virtual meeting on Zoom

Monday, April 13, 2020

7:00pm

**APPROVED BY
THE SELECT BOARD**

5/11/2020

CALL TO ORDER:

A regular meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Tom Caputo. Vice Chair Adam Dash and Select Board member Roy Epstein were present. Town Administrator Patrice Garvin was present. The meeting was conducted on Zoom and open to the public by remote participation only via Zoom or conference call, as per the Governor's suspension of portions of the Open Meeting Law due to the COVID-19 situation. Caputo reviewed instructions for how to access the meeting remotely.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Caputo recognized a donation from Ken Vona of KVC Builders who had provided Belmont Fire Department with aerosol boxes, an added layer of personal protective equipment to be used by first responders.
- In accordance with CDC guidance, please wear masks when out in public and practice social distancing.
- See the Town website, <https://www.belmont-ma.gov/>, for continually updated information on the COVID-19 situation.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS:

- Caputo relayed an email from a resident asking if there were any plans in the works for cardboard pickups; regularly scheduled DPW events had been cancelled, and the amount of cardboard had increased due to relying on more deliveries.
 - o Jay Marcotte (Director, DPW) said that the options for the time being were to stockpile, or try to fit into the barrel – Waste Management was prioritizing collection of yard waste, recycling, and trash. It was hoped that cardboard events could be resumed in June but that was subject to change.
- Marcotte provided a quick update on today's storm: DPW had been working throughout the day to clear damage including hundreds of tree limbs and twelve downed trees, four of which had hit homes and two of which had hit vehicles, resulting in significant damage. So far the power had been maintained throughout Town, a product of the successful tree maintenance program in collaboration with Belmont Light.

ACTION BY CONSENT:

COVID-19 update and discussion

Caputo invited Wes Chin (Director, Belmont Health Department) and Town Administrator Garvin to provide updates:

- Chin reported that as of today there were 113 confirmed positive cases and 13 COVID-related deaths. Around half of the 113 cases, as well as all of the deaths, were related to an outbreak at Belmont Manor. Chin emphasized that the public needs to remain vigilant in practicing social distancing and wearing masks in public (particularly at places like grocery stores where social distancing can be difficult), as a surge in cases was likely to occur soon.
- Garvin provided the Board with a list of activities of the Belmont Emergency Management Agency, which had been providing weekly updates. Some other COVID-19 related items from the Town Administrator's report:
 - o Town Day had been postponed to September 5, 2020.
 - o Concern had been expressed over off leash dogs at Rock Meadow from Conservation Officer Mary Trudeau. Also, as the weather has gotten nicer more people were using the trails and observing social distancing had become challenging. There were ongoing discussions about potentially closing the parking lot to help keep the numbers down. A notice had been sent to ~2000 dog owners in Town as reminder of the off leash bylaws.
 - o Received a request from Belmont Helps to place 15-20 signs throughout Town. The organization had been formed to connect volunteers with those in need for various things related to COVID-19.
 - *Motion: To allow Belmont Helps to place signs promoting their services at various locations throughout Town as deemed safe and appropriate in collaboration with the Town Administrator and Office of Community Development. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)*

Epstein commented on an email he had received citing people congregating on the sidewalk nearby public parks that had been closed. He urged people to exercise good judgement in practicing social distancing. Caputo said it was the Board's desire to keep public spaces such as Rock Meadow open, but that it would consider closing if necessary due to people not observing bylaws/social distancing.

[Open public comment.]

- *Elizabeth Dionne:* On visiting Rock Meadow with her family had observed less than ideal conditions – crowded trails and many dogs off leash. Should consider more spot enforcement.

[Close public comment.]

Discussion of the financial impact of COVID-19 in FY20 and FY21; possible votes taken

At the previous Select Board meeting Garvin had raised the idea of implementing a spending freeze and hiring freeze to the end of Fiscal Year 2020 – the intention was to slow down spending in anticipation of revenue reductions in the last several months, and to potentially accumulate additional Free Cash for FY21. The specifics of these initiatives had been nailed down and Garvin was now requesting formal approval of the freezes, such that they would be in effect tomorrow (April 14).

Spending Freeze: Non-essential expenses had been identified through June 30, 2020, totaling to \$271k in projected savings. Excluded were revolving/special revenue funds, capital items, existing contractual obligations and salaries. All expenses were to be reviewed and approved by the Town Administrator. Overtime was not permitted (excluding Police/Fire); departments would retain the right to address emergency events, (for example the recent wind storm) but should give due notification to the Town Administrator once funds are expended.

Epstein pointed out that not all of the proposed expenses to be frozen fell under the jurisdiction of the Select Board; Garvin acknowledged this was the case, however the action by the Select Board would provide a strong statement. Also, there had been a good spirit of collaboration in facing the current challenges, and all departments seemed to be interested in helping to slow down spending. Dash suggested to add a caveat to the motion to address this point.

[Open public comment; there was none; close public comment.]

Motion: To freeze all non-essential spending that is funded through the operating budget which is within the jurisdiction of the Select Board and Town Administrator, through June 30, 2020, as outlined above. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Hiring Freeze: Garvin provided a list of 9 FTEs and 4 part-time positions which would fall under the freeze, again covering the time period out to June 30, 2020. Also included would be any positions that open up between now and the end of the fiscal year. Total projected savings from the freeze was \$463k.

To address concerns about positions that may be deemed 'critical', and therefore exempt from the freeze, Garvin was requesting the Board to appoint a 'New Hiring Advisory Committee', consisting of: Assistant Town Administrator Jon Marshall, Assistant HR Director Shawna Healey, Warrant Committee member Geoff Lubien, Town Meeting Member Ralph Jones, former Selectman Sami Baghdady. This committee would provide recommendations on each position, including guidance on how they should be addressed in light of the challenging FY21 budget.

Epstein sought clarification that the New Hiring Advisory Committee would play a very limited role in reviewing positions within the scope of the timeframe for the hiring freeze, i.e. to June 30, 2020 - should not be a delegation of either the Board's authority to make hiring decisions or prerogative to conduct due diligence.

Dash noted that, similar to above, the freeze can only apply to departments under jurisdiction of the Select Board. However, it was hoped that the mechanism of the New Hiring Advisory Committee would be used by other bodies as well to provide guidance on any hiring for FY20.

[Open public comment; there was none; close public comment.]

Motion: To institute a hiring freeze in all departments under the Select Board's jurisdiction for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2020 ending June 30, 2020. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Motion: To create the New Hiring Advisory Committee, to advise elected bodies having jurisdiction over their respective departments on new hiring until June 30, 2020; the term of the New Hiring Committee shall expire on June 30, 2020. Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Motion: To appoint Jon Marshall, Shawna Healey, Geoff Lubien, Ralph Jones, and Sami Baghdady to the New Hiring Advisory Committee to concurrent terms terminating on June 30, 2020. Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Garvin raised an additional item related to FY20 from the Town Treasurer, who had requested that the Board not extend the deadline for paying taxes from May 1 to June 1. The Treasurer had received many inquiries on the matter. The Board agreed to follow the guidance of the Treasurer and leave the deadline at May 1.

Finally, Garvin reviewed work to-date on revisiting the FY21 budget. The first pass included four scenarios reflecting 10%, 15%, 20% and 25% reductions to State aid revenue. Also incorporated were projections for reductions to certain line items on a case-by-case basis, based on judgement and historical data. Overall revenue shortfall from these scenarios projected in the range of \$2.8m-\$4.6m; Garvin thought the higher end was more realistic. Garvin recommended that a complete budget for FY21 be put forth at Annual Town Meeting, planned for mid-June - i.e. not to delay approval of the budget. She promoted taking a conservative approach, where additional items could be added back later at a Fall Town Meeting if revenue projections turned out better than expected.

Vote to accept a grant on behalf of the Town Field Playground Committee in the amount of \$10,000 from the Belmont Savings Bank Foundation

Stephanie Crement (Friend of Town Field Playground) joined the meeting to present the donation, which concluded the private fundraising component of the project. The group had also applied for CPA funds, originally scheduled for approval at Annual Town Meeting but would now be deferred to a future Special Town Meeting. Courtney Eldridge gave a brief update on the project status: final drawings were in hand, all that was left was to pick colors; planning to have one final community meeting (virtual) to get feedback on the final plans.

Motion: To accept the grant on behalf of the Town Field Playground Committee in the amount of \$10,000 from the Belmont Savings Bank Foundation. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Discussion and possible vote on the postponement of 5k Road Races

A date of August 30, 2020 had been chosen and vetted with Town departments for the Becca Pizzi 5K Road Race; similarly, a date of October 4, 2020 for the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts Order Sons of Italy in America 5K Road Race. It was understood by the race sponsors that approval may need to be revisited closer to the race date in light of the COVID-19 situation.

Motion: To postpone the Becca Pizzi 5K Road Race to August 30, 2020. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Motion: To postpone the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts Order Sons of Italy in America 5K Road Race to October 4, 2020. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Discussion and possible vote on the postponement of the Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony

Bob Upton (Veterans' Services Officer) joined the meeting, explaining that he was not seeking approval for a new date at this time. He was working with Belmont Media Center to put together a virtual

recognition event on Memorial Day, and was giving consideration to organizing an event on the weekend following National Purple Heart Day (August 8-9). Upton would bring any necessary approvals back to the Board once more details had been worked through.

Discussion on the Belmont Farmers Market

Hal Shubin (Chair, Farmers' Market Committee) joined the meeting. As markets had been deemed essential businesses during the pandemic, the current plan was to open on as scheduled on June 4. Shubin presented several proposals for how the market could be set up in the Claflin lot with a similar number of vendors, while maintaining social distancing; also included in the plans were designated locations for hand washing stations and one way flow of customers. Shubin further described other safety procedures that would be implemented by vendors, such as pre-bagging groceries.

In order to maintain social distancing the market would require an expanded footprint, therefore Shubin was seeking guidance on the best way to move forward with having one of the amended plans approved. The Board was generally supportive of having the market open, and advised that Garvin would coordinate the vetting of the plan with Town departments and the Belmont Center Business Association. Shubin requested approval by early May so that he could inform vendors of the parameter of operation.

Discussion and vote on Select Board reorganization

Under normal circumstances the Board would reorganize officer positions (Chair and Vice Chair) as well as committee liaison assignments, as this should have been the first meeting following the Annual Town Election. However, the Town Election had been postponed to June 23, and given the exceptional circumstances presented by COVID-19 it was up for discussion whether the Board should still reorganize at this juncture. Some points of discussion:

- Dash noted that he had written the operational rules, and the intent was to reorganize following the Annual Town Election – he had made reference to April only to distinguish it from the election in November. He was hesitant about switching roles during a time of crisis, but open-minded to hear views of the other members.
- Caputo expressed that he was flexible, happy to continue serving as Chair or transition to Vice Chair.
- Epstein argued that the Town would likely still be facing an emergency scenario in June, therefore it didn't make sense to delay the change of officers. He was well versed in Town issues and could quickly come up to speed as Chair.

Consensus emerged that transitioning officer appointments made sense at this time, whereas committee appointments should be maintained in order to preserve continuity.

Motion: To suspend the Select Board operational rules. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Motion: To make Roy Epstein the Chair of the Select Board, and Tom Caputo the Vice Chair of the Select Board, beginning at the conclusion of today's meeting. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Motion: That Tom Caputo stay on as the Select Board representative to the Warrant Committee; that Adam Dash stay on as the Select Board representative to the Capital Budget Committee; that Roy Epstein

stay on as the Select Board representative to the Community Preservation Committee; and that these memberships and all other liaison roles stay as current to the end of the fiscal year, June 30, 2020. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:

Garvin had covered all items under the COVID-related update.

SELECT BOARD COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORTS:

Dash reported the Capital Budget Committee was meeting this coming Thursday. Process for evaluating capital requests had been modified due to COVID-19.

Caputo:

- Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee pushing ahead towards establishment of the Guaranteed Maximum Price, a significant project milestone. Discussions about safety measures on the construction site, engaging with the Board of Health.
- School Committee met last week, took questions/comments from the public on Phase 2 of remote learning.
- Financial Task Force II meeting tomorrow morning.

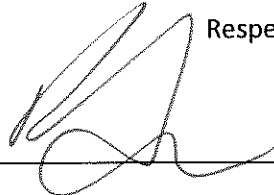
APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

- *April 6, 2020, regular session:* Dash made a correction regarding a comment he had made about the Housing Trust.

Motion: To approve the April 6, 2020 minutes, as amended. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion: To adjourn at 9:21pm. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)

Respectfully Submitted,


PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator