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Minutes

Town of Belmont

APPROVED
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
DATE: 8/12/19

Joint Meeting: Board of Selectmen and School Committee

Beech Street Center, Multipurpose Room

Thursday, May 30, 2019

7:00pm

CALL TO ORDER:

A meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order at 7:03pm by Chair Tom Caputo; the meeting was joint with the School Committee. Vice Chair Adam Dash and Selectman Roy Epstein were present. Town Administrator Patrice Garvin and Assistant Town Administrator John Marshall were present.

Susan Burgess-Cox (Chair, School Committee) called the School Committee to order.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The thickly settled speed limit on Town-owned streets is 25 Miles Per Hour (MPH).

ACTION BY CONSENT:

Belmont Ice Skating Rink Presentation

Garvin gave a presentation covering the following topics:

- Recap of existing rink location and conditions, items discussed to date.
- Town's options: 1) let rink fail; 2) debt exclusion to fund new rink; 3) public-private partnership to fund new rink.
- Detailed comparison of the current building model process (via debt exclusion) versus a proposed model in the case that a public-private partnership is pursued.
- Advantages of public-private partnership over a debt exclusion: private developer covers maintenance obligations; new rink could be built much faster; private developer provides funding.
- Next steps: School Committee and Board of Selectmen vote to approve/disapprove of undertaking a public-private partnership approach; if approved, School Committee vote on rink size and location; Town Staff write RFP over the summer with public input; go out to bid, negotiate contract and lease for Fall Town Meeting.

Garvin noted that the School Committee and/or Board of Selectmen could decide to stop the RFP process at any point, if it was felt that this approach for the rink would not serve the needs of the Town.

Discussion / Questions

[Caputo first opened up discussion for the Board of Selectmen and School Committee.]

- Epstein expressed being stunned by the schedule/timeline, given he had not seen any background material. He raised several questions/comments/concerns: 1) under what terms would a developer make ice time available to the School?; 2) heard that 400 parking spaces would be

required; 3) a key threshold question that had not been addressed was whether something could be done with the existing structure, or, what were the relevant parameters for replacing the existing structure with something similar in scale; 4) concerned about control issues with a public-private partnership – had anyone tracked down possibility of obtaining private fundraising? 5) what would happen if the private entity fails - would the Town be required to buy out the facility?

- Marshall advised that fixing the existing structure would be throwing good money after bad, given the current state of the rink. He estimated a bare bones rink with a single sheet would cost in the range of \$7m-\$10m.
- Dash noted there had been private fundraising for the Underwood Pool, but not near the same magnitude of what was required for the rink.
- With respect to 5), Dash said that these terms would be negotiated with the developer as part of the lease.
- Garvin noted that even if the Town fundraises for the rink, there are still uncovered and ongoing maintenance costs.
- Dash highlighted the deplorable conditions of the current rink, and argued the Town does not have the money to build a new one at the current time. In pursuing a public-private partnership process, the Town can set requirements for the needs of the Town/School, verify whether the economics of the project make sense, and can always reject unsatisfactory bids. Owe it to taxpayers to run down this option.
- Tara Donner (School Committee) asked if Staff had looked into the economics of having the extra half sheet on an upper level, which would reduce impact to surrounding field space.
 - Garvin noted examples existed in major cities, but it would likely increase costs substantially.
- Michael Crowley (School Committee) requested further detail on how soon the existing rink was likely to fail, magnitude of the problems?
 - Marshall had conducted a walk through with Frank Santori (Parks Manager, DPW), identifying three major problems that required immediate action: 1) chiller barrel; 2) piping to the slab; 3) slab had raised 6 inches this past year, subsequent settling may make it impossible to put ice back.
- Andrea Prestwich (School Committee) said that minimum requirements for an RFP should be outlined in advance; in addition to size and location, should be restricted from 24 hour operation, for example.
- Amy Checkoway (School Committee) asked what the public's role is once the company is selected with respect to responsibilities, oversight.
 - Garvin noted the Town is losing a measure of control once Town Meeting leases the land.
 - Dash relayed from his professional experience that some control can be built into the lease terms, e.g. require maintenance, set hours, timing of lights, etc.
- Burgess-Cox stressed that the scope of the present meeting was to determine whether or not to initiate the public-private partnership process, not necessarily to iron out all the details, which could be worked out in the process of drafting the RFP. Her opinion was that this is the path forward to getting a new rink.

[Open discussion to the public.]

- *Dante Muzzioli (Hockey coach in Town for 40 years, 20 years on the Recreation Commission):* A new rink should have been included with the new High School project. The rink should be a facility that serves the community and schools first and foremost (as it has been historically - originally the School Committee managed). Timeline is too aggressive, need to get a few more years out of the existing rink, slow down the decision process. Public-private partnerships do not have a great track record.
 - o *Caputo:* With respect to the High School, the MSBA would not allow funding to include a new rink.
 - o Marshall discussed some examples of successful public-private rink partnership in other communities such as Arlington, Natick, and Burlington.
- *Kate Bowen (School Committee):* Unclear why we are deciding to move forward with the RFP process without first determining the site location.

Through the MSBA process a costing was done for renovation of the existing rink; public should be made aware of these costs and how they compare with new construction.
- Burgess-Cox pointed out the School Committee and Board of Selectmen have been looking at options for a new rink for the past four years; even though the issue may seem new to some, the bodies have looked at many options prior to considering a public-private partnership.
- *Fred Paulsen:* Have to address the existing issues of traffic on Concord and abutter concerns over athletic events – new rink will only exacerbate these problems.

Rep. Rogers had mentioned additional State funding was forthcoming; or, could utilize savings from the recent Bond premium to help the Town finance the cost of a new rink.
Hope that Epstein's questions are addressed in the process.
School Committee and Board of Selectmen should be aware that once the RFP process is started, there will be pressure to see it through.

 - o Garvin noted the additional State funding was already earmarked. With respect to the Bond premium savings, this is money that comes off taxes from previously issued debt, should not be viewed as cash.
- *Tim Flood:* Do not support a public-private partnership for the rink: project is not realistic, needs to be a larger scale to be successful (e.g. Wellesley) and Town will end up on the hook; will require long hours of operation; no plan for coordinating construction with High School; schedule is too aggressive.
- *Epstein:* Understand the Bond premium is not cash, however, given that voters approved a certain amount for the new High School, might make sense to go back to voters and add on a new rink - could be viewed as part of the new School after the fact. Also, there are other components of the school project not reimbursable by the MSBA, and the rink could be similarly viewed.
 - o Caputo and Dash expressed concern that it would still be necessary to go out for another debt exclusion, especially with a potential override looming for FY21.
- *Julie Campesato (Cottage Street):* Make sure other needs for rink (figure skaters, community events, etc.) are taken into account in the RFP process.
- *Frank French:* Existing rink conditions are deplorable. Like the concept of a public-private partnership but devil is in the details.

Rink is similar in nature to the Underwood Pool – like Roy’s idea of applying the Bond premium savings towards a new Town-owned rink. The Town should explore the public-private partnership option but also explore more in-depth the possibility of asking for a small debt exclusion.

- *Gail Mann*: A key threshold question is the size of the rink – 1.5 sheets would entail reduced field space, more parking required, and added demands on traffic. Suggest spending more time determining whether 1.5 sheets is actually feasible for this site.
 - o Epstein echoed this concern, elaborating that it may not be practical in the given timeframe for the School Committee to properly assess whether 1.5 sheets was feasible.
 - o Caputo noted that a previous proposal from Belmont Youth Hockey had included 1.5 sheets, while still granting prime hours for School and Community programs. Further, the Belmont High School Building Committee had presented options for west of Harris Field, several of which allowed for a rink with 1.5 sheets in addition to preserving three fields (though the fields would be overlapping).
- *Art Kinzinger*: One problem with the existing rink from the perspective of Belmont Youth Hockey is that the High School had added another team, pushing back the start times. A larger facility, i.e. 1.5 sheets may help alleviate this problem.

[Caputo invited John Phelan (Superintendent, Belmont Public Schools) to share perspective of the School Administration.]

Phelan reiterated that options had already been discussed for preserving field space (JV softball, JV baseball, soccer) with a 1.5 sheet rink, and that the High School programming could work with either 1 or 1.5 sheets. If a public-private partnership process was approved, the Administration would work to put together requirements from the School side and ensure that any proposal would meet these requirements. Phelan felt it was worth it to at least run down this option, so as to not further burden taxpayers of Belmont if possible.

[Close public comment.]

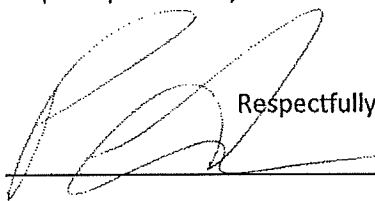
Crowley expressed openness to exploring the RFP process, but cautioned that the process can carry its own set of pressures – e.g. scenario where bids meet some but not all of the requirements. Important to be aware of such pressures.

Checkoway stressed importance of figuring out how to get proper community input – especially over the summer – and manage the process in general.

Phelan and Caputo thanked Garvin, Marshall, and the Office of Community Development for their work on the rink to-date.

School Committee adjourned.

Motion: To adjourn the Board of Selectmen meeting at 9:07pm. (Vote passed 3-0)


Respectfully Submitted,
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator