

WARRANT COMMITTEE FY07 MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 24, 2007
7:30 P.M. TOWN HALL
BOS MEETING ROOM

Meeting was called to order at 7:30 by Chairman Jones; he noted that a quorum was present.

Present: Town Administrator Younger, Town Accountant Hagg, BOS Member Firenze sitting in for BOS Chair Solomon, Town Treasurer Floyd Carman, School Committee Counsel Bob Fraser, and Dr. Gerry Missal, School Director of Finance and Administration, School Superintendent Dr. Peter Holland, Assistant School Superintendent Dr. Pat Aubin, Julie Silverman, and School Committee Members Miller, Bowe, Stratford, Stafford, Rittenburg.

Absent: Members Christensen, Allison, Oates and BOS Member Solomon

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests by Department of Public Works

Peter Castanino, Director of the Department of Public Works, requested two reserve fund transfers:

1) Belmont received 4-1/2 inches of rain last July during a storm that also had very severe winds. Calls came in with reports that trees were down on houses. The Department of Public Works removed 30 trees. The department is asking for funds to cover highway department overtime hours and crane rental fees for tree removal services. This amount - \$32,368.27 - is above and beyond regular working time hours.

2) The second request \$32,500 pertains to the new football field on Concord Ave., which was installed in 2002. Heavy rains have caused the need for repairs. The problem seems to be (sample of turf shown) that rubber material floats with a lot of rain, leaving humps of rubber on the field. The contractor says it's an "Act of God" and they are not responsible. Money was therefore spent to get field repaired before September High School season. Castanino noted that we need to talk about replacement and/or reimbursement - should it happen in the middle of the season, there are lots of concerns regarding field rescheduling. BOS member Firenze asked about the history of other fields, and inquired whether this was an unusual problem. Castanino replied that other fields do not have the same problems and that, yes, it seems unusual.

Appropriation of fund transfers was motioned and Chair Jones noted that it was unanimously approved.

Executive Session for Collective Bargaining

At 7:36, a roll call vote was taken to enter Executive Session to discuss collective bargaining of health insurance. Motion to come out of Executive Session was put forth by Chair Jones at 8:40 and was approved.

Presentation of School Department Budget for FY08

Dr. Holland presented the School Committee's recommended school budget for FY08 (details were provided in an accompanying PowerPoint slide handout):

The total for the proposed budget is \$37,896,162 (see Slides 2, 4, 5, and 6). The proposed budget will cover mandated cost increases, programmatic improvements, and restoration of FY07

losses in non-salary accounts. It will also allow for moderating class sizes and increasing instructional support to ensure that all students have access to quality curriculum and the schools have enhanced opportunities to meet state and federal performance standards.

The budget also proposes instituting a full-day Kindergarten program for next year. There are a number of reasons why this is important: the "Tough Choices for Tough Times" program and Governor Patrick's education plan both point to full-day Kindergarten; students need extra support for learning readiness (see Slide 9); Kindergarten teachers want full-time positions (leading them to transfer to other positions or other communities if full-day K employment is unavailable); and the US and Massachusetts' trends are to have full-time K.

Town Administrator Younger asked if all four schools would be interested in full-time Kindergarten. Yes, answered Dr. Holland, it is full-day K for all schools - a town wide initiative. Dr. Holland continued his presentation:

The proposed budget also requests funding for a Director of Guidance and Assessment position due to, among other reasons, a need to evaluate MCAS testing at all levels (Slide 10). The budget also requests funding to restore FY 07 losses (Slide 11), to address increases in Special Education demands (Slides 12, 13), and to meet increased utility costs (up 50 percent, Slide 14).

Chair Jones invited questions at this time.

Member Paolillo asked if salary increases have taken into consideration the collective bargaining outcome? Gerry Missal replied that a reasonable outcome of collective bargaining has been assumed with a continuation of existing health plans. School Committee Chair Gibson and Missal explained the per-pupil expenditure comparisons with regard to "All Funds" (see Slide 16) and that Belmont is 20% below the State average. Chair Jones asked if this was a level-service budget proposal. Dr. Holland replied yes, with the exceptions of full-day Kindergarten and the specific programmatic improvements. Member Heigham asked how teacher turnover affects compensation? Holland replied that it can be a money saver, as new teachers enter lower on the pay scale. Missal noted that younger teachers will often opt for family insurance plans and that this fact, combined with the insurance coverage extending to age 65 for retirees, adds to our costs.

Member Doblin said that her research has indicated that there is a good return on investment for full-day Kindergarten, but wondered why we need two Guidance positions. Missal replied that a Behavioral Support Specialist is needed at both elementary and middle school levels. It has been a contracted service, we're now bringing it back to a staff position. Doblin thought this could be further analyzed at the subcommittee level.

Firenze asked if there are any charges that are used by other communities in their "cost per student" statistic that Belmont does not use? Town Accountant Hagg said sometimes. Lowell schools, for example, are adjacent to community parks that the Town of Lowell maintains. Firenze brought up that crossing guards (which the police department pays for) have always been included, but it is a Town expense that is allocated to the schools. Missal replied that the State requires a detailed report outlining costs and the newer reports let you compare better by category.

Firenze asked if Belmont taxpayers are paying a high percentage of school budget? No, Dr. Holland replied, not when compared to western suburbs. Missal went on to explain that the Chapter 70 formula (which determines how much state aid a community can get) was changed recently, and Belmont received extra aid (\$341,000) to be phased in FY 08.

Member Paolillo asked about our production - how are we measuring output? Chair Jones said that the value of a Belmont education is measured by standard tests and ranked by community. Firenze added that the education level in Belmont is impressive.

At this point, Chair Jones moved to continue with the agenda, Town Accountant Hagg wanted to first thank Dr. Missal and Julie Silverman for their invaluable help with the implementation of the new software system.

Reserve Fund Transfer by Department of Community Development

The Planning Director Jay Szklut requested \$22,000 for review of the first two zones of the Northland Construction Condominium Development. The total cost is expected to be \$75,000 overall. This had not been included in the FY07 budget as an estimated cost but the future consulting costs for this project will be, according to Town Administrator Younger. Member Bruschi said that these requests did not qualify as "emergencies", and that money in free cash should fund this - in other words, the department should spend what it has. Hagg replied that they don't have that much money for expenses in their planning account. Younger suggested that this request be postponed to allow time to go back and look at the numbers. Chair Jones offered that if it can't be funded, it could become an "emergency".

Member Heigham moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:41.

Submitted by

Lisa Gibalerio
Recording Secretary