

**TOWN OF BELMONT
WARRANT COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 19, 2005**

Meeting was called to order at 7:32 p.m. by Acting Chair Robie White. Minutes of 10/5/05 were approved. Absent: Jones and Hofmann

Also present: Tom Younger, Jeff Conti, John Giorgio, Jeffrey Wheeler, Floyd Carman, Selectman Firenze, Selectman Brownsberger

Handouts:

1. 10/19/05 Letter from Kopelman & Paige addressed to Lawrence Uchill regarding Woodfall Road Land exchange with Belmont Country Club including a 2 page term sheet.
 - 1a. Plan showing Woodfall Road land exchange
 - 1b. Plan showing new configuration of Woodfall Road parcels
 - 1c. Arial view of Woodfall road property in relation to adjacent parcels
2. Provisions to be included in the RFP for the sale of the Belmont Center Fire Station dated 10/18/05
3. Copy of presentation that will be made to the STM on 10/24/05 by Vice Chair White regarding taxes and impact of various projects
4. Letter to B. Hagg dated 10/11/05 from James Heigham with the 2003 analysis of town department fees and charges
5. Letter to B. Hagg dated 10/7/05 from James Johnson at the Department of Revenue Division of Local Services certifying free cash as of 7/1/05 at \$1,723,570
6. Current roster of Warrant Committee members

PRESENTATION TO THE TOWN MEETING ON 10/24/05

Vice Chair White has been reviewing the FY06 tax rate along with the projections for FY07. The tax increase in FY06 is 4.2%. The average single family tax bill increased from \$7,685 to \$8,005. Based on this information and projections of FY07 figures to date, we will need a \$3M operating override in FY07. If approved, this would represent an 8.9% increase next year. In addition the debt service for the Senior Center (if a debt exclusion is approved by the voters) would be another 1% increase on the taxes next year.

For future years, the Wellington School financing would cost another 4.5% or \$353 in taxes for the average single family taxpayer. The cost for the Wellington will be \$40M total with \$16M reimbursement, a net cost of \$24M for the town. A construction manager would have to be hired before the beginning of the project with the new SBA law. Member Bruschi explained that this along with construction cost and the increased square footage for enrollment increases due to the new building developments has caused the total project cost to increase. Since additions will be prohibitively expensive, it was felt that building a school to serve the burgeoning school population would be the best use of resources. Smaller class sizes are mandated by the state for special ed preschool

program. The construction costs were developed by using \$300 - 350 per square foot x 99,000 square feet or 20,000 square feet more than the originally contemplated project.

Vice Chair White continued: fuel costs, construction increase cost, sale of properties, and the mandate to fund the accrued liability for retiree health insurance are all outstanding issues that need to be addressed during budget preparation in FY07.

Selectmen Firenze and Member Bruschi felt that the capital budget at \$2.2M is grossly inadequate. Member Widmer clarified with Tom Younger that the FY07 level service budget would be expected to be complete by the end of December. An alternative budget produced by the WC should be working on the same time line. November 2, 2005, and November 16, 2005, will be the next WC meetings. Member Widmer asked how the WC could have an alternative budget ready within the same time frame. Vice Chair White stated that as soon as Chair Jones returns (at the next meeting) we will begin the process. Member Curtis asked how the school subcommittee would deal with approximately half of the deficit or \$1.5M in cuts (or 50% of the expected shortfall).

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING ARTICLES

Article 3 – Woodfall Road. Selectmen Firenze discussed the terms outlined in a memorandum from Kopelman and Paige presented in handout. The first article shows the land transfers, one parcel to the Country Club and one parcel from the Country Club to the Town. The second article allows the total parcel of four lots to be sold. This could be sold as one lot to a developer or four lots separately. The land does include wetlands that would put some restrictions on the property. The agreement calls for an additional pedestrian traffic light for the Belmont Country Club if the state agrees. The light would be paid for by the developer. The developer would also put in the road but the approvals would already be in place. The Town would be marketing a preapproved subdivision. Expansion of driving range does not call for any zoning changes in answer to Member Curtis's question. Member Bruschi also asked about the liability of being hit by a golf ball on purpose rather than in error. Town Counsel did not feel that this is problem. Country Club is not being held harmless from their members' golf balls that should hit a resident. Heigham recommended that Article 3 be approved for STM. Both of 2 motions under Article 3. 14 WC voted in favor, unanimous.

Article 5 – Fire Stations. The provisions that will be included in the RFP and presented to STM were discussed. The property will be sold under Chapter 30B disposition but with all the requirements outlined in document. This will only be a sale. Originally residential use was precluded but there was a strong feeling that this should be allowed on the second floor. Residential use would be permitted in this building subject to the zoning bylaws and parking availability. Property considerations have been changed from the document that was sent out. Corrections will be sent out in the morning by the Town Administrator. These requirements will be under a deed restriction. The second floor must be used (storage does not count). RFP will maintain the front façade of the fire station to protect the historic nature of the building. The Historic District Commission will decide what will be considered the historic façade. Member Curtis stated that before

we urge STM to endorse this proposal we should have the data on lost opportunity cost (or foregone revenues) because we are maintaining the historic nature of the façade. Member Curtis feels that ignoring the value is not fair to TM. Selectmen Firenze stated that the building adds to the value of the Town. Counsel Giorgio recommended that the Historic District Commission be the one to put restrictions and would make the decisions. Member Tillotson stated that although the fire station is interesting, it stands as an island on a street with many different facades. Member Curtis suggested putting the RFP out with two different alternatives, one with the historical restrictions and one without. Member Paolillo would like to see the RFP with proposed uses that would allow the BOS to decide what is best for the Town. He also does not want to see it leveled but doesn't want the HDC to have total control of this building. He wants to see a middle ground: getting the most money and not having the HDC have control over the property. Member Curtis would like to be sure that we maximize the sources of revenues or at least give the voters a chance to decide if they don't want to do this. Member Tillotson would like the BOS to be the final arbitrator, giving the HDC a seat at the table so that the standards of rehabilitation are heard on an advisory level. Member Doblin would like to have us preserve the unique nature of the building but done in a more flexible way using the same model of oversight as used at Waverley Square. Selectmen Brownsberger explained that this was different from Waverley in that there is no site plan review and Waverley had a special zoning change. Member Callanan stated that the town center has already changed and with the impact of possible service reductions that could be so dramatic to our educational system adds another vote to getting an idea of market value without historic preservation. A tax credit for historic preservation would be only if the developer maintained ownership. BOS Chair Solomon would like to have the WC approve of this RFP and respects the views of the WC to maximize revenues but trading teachers for historic buildings is not being visionary 50 or 100 years from now. Member Brusch stated that when estimates of \$1.2M for the sale of fire stations was given it was based on no historic preservation provisions. The exterior of the original 1899 fire station structure would be preserved subject to approval of HDC based on the standards of historic preservation through a deed restriction. Removal of a deed restriction would require a 2/3rd vote of TM. In favor: Gibson, Solomon & Doblin. Opposed: 11 opposed.

Article 6 will be dismissed. The Planning Board after hearing concerns of WC and others decided to withdraw the article and resubmit in April for the ATM.

Article 7 – Senior Center. Add the following words: providing further that the amount borrowed will be reduced by the grants and gifts received for this project. This would be subject to the approval of Town Counsel. We would be voting the full amount. There will be an article on the STM warrant. The latest estimate is \$6,258,426. The cost of the borrowing would be part of the bond. Member Allison asked about operating cost of the new Senior Center. These new operating costs will be part of the operating costs in the budget going forward. Member Brusch was unsure of how much this would be. Member Doblin stated that there would no longer be a \$90,000 lease going forward. Selectman Firenze stated that there would be no increases in staff, and the existing level of budget should be sufficient to cover the new building. Member Brusch stated that the Building

Committee was still unclear of the heating/cooling etc costs would be. This will be unknown until the Design development phase is complete.

Member Allison continued: this should be put out within the context of the Wellington and High School and Library. A survey of seniors done by the Nelson family is owed a debt of gratitude for their excellent work. We have approximately 6500 seniors living in Belmont but the usage at the senior center is much less. Seniors when asked what they want overwhelmingly look at services (day trips, library, yard work, shuttle bus, home repair), none of which involve a senior building. Only 44 people mentioned a building. More people mentioned the streets and sidewalks. More seniors wanted money spent on youth and education. This study in summary says that seniors want services. The most popular services are flu shots and blood pressure clinics.

BOS Chair Solomon stated that this project has been discussed for years now knowing that we have a long list of capital projects. The mega group meetings had put the senior center at the head of the list. This is the project that is now up. It has already been delayed so that the cost has increased a million in just a year. Further, the survey can be looked at in a number of different ways. The league specifically did not mention the senior center at all so the survey was not leading to the senior center. Right now 30% of the current senior population uses the senior center. Member Curtis feels that a quality facility will have a broader appeal and will result in a substantial up tick in use. Member Heigham stated that the number of seniors changes depending on whether we count from age 60 or age 65. (5,000 if over 60; 4,000 if over 65) With the rising costs of construction, it is important to vote this up or down and move on. Chair White agrees that a building is needed but questions the \$6.3M figure. BOS Chair Solomon feels that the use of this building after hours as a community center would be appropriate.

Member Brusch explained how the senior program as currently presented adding a lunch program would be most advantageous. This was considered along with the numbers for current usage and expected usage when the lunch program is added. A lunch program would also necessitate a kitchen. An exercise room would be added for the younger seniors that are used to using gym facilities. Member Brusch foresees that in ten years the building may be too small. The state has given us a proposed square footage that we have not used (we've planned much smaller).

Article 1 at STM will include a presentation by both Robie White and Selectman Brownsberger on the big picture of operating and future capital needs.

In favor of Article 7: Widmer, Solomon, Fitzgerald, Callanan, Curtis, Brusch, Tillotson, Doblin, Hobbs, Gibson, Paolillo

Opposed: Allison, Oates, White

Abstain: Heigham

The meeting of the WC was adjourned at 9:45.

Respectfully submitted:

Barbara Hagg, Town Accountant & Recording Secretary

