

**THE MINUTES OF THE
WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING
NOVEMBER 12, 2003**

Handout(s) given out tonight:

1. *Warrant Committee Subcommittee listing*
2. *Warrant Committee Schedule for 2003-04*
3. *Reinstatement of Bill Morris, Council on Aging memo dated 11/12/03 from HR Director Diane Jenkins*
4. *B Street/Brighton Street Homeownership Units: Property Taxes/Sales Value presentation*
5. *Housing Proposal at Public Works Yard memo dated 11/7/03 from DPW Director Peter Castanino*

Members absent: None

Also present: Selectman Paul Solomon, Town Administrator Mel Kleckner, Assistant Town Administrator Joyce Munro, Town Accountant Barbara Hagg, Treasurer Susan Kendall Freiner, COA Director Nava Niv-Vogel, Roger Colton from the Belmont Housing Authority, and Paula Harrington – Financial Consultant to the Belmont Housing Trust

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:36 PM.

Review of Special Town Meeting Articles

Early Retirement – Article 3

Town Administrator Kleckner spoke on the background of this article and previous legislation regarding early retirement. In order to pass this legislation, we need not only the Board of Selectmen's vote, but Town Meeting as well.

The Town created the way departments are defined – by payroll – since that is the most flexible way to do it. The incentive will add five years to your age or service or a combination of the two.

Assistant Town Administrator Munro discussed the costs regarding this article, such as continued health insurance and incremental pension costs because of a person leaving earlier than expected.

Member Brusch, as the Warrant Committee's liaison regarding this article, agrees with Town Administrator Kleckner and Assistant Town Administrator Munro's recommendation to the Board of Selectmen.

Member Hofmann is concerned with the DPW area. The staffing is already tight now, and he wants to see this used as a better way to organize rather than just reducing Town employees.

- *Member Heigham made a motion, Member Brusch seconded said position and, with 16 members present, the Warrant Committee **unanimously** voted in favor of recommending Article 3 to Special Town Meeting.*

Reserve Fund Transfer – Council on Aging

Member Brusch led the discussion with the Committee regarding the previously distributed memo and *Handout 3* from COA Director Nava Niv-Vogel to the Warrant Committee requesting a transfer from the Warrant Committee Reserve Fund. The Committee briefly discussed those handouts.

- *Member Heigham made a motion, Member McCormick seconded said motion, and the Warrant Committee unanimously voted to transfer \$7,055.53 from the Warrant Committee Reserve Fund to the Council on Aging.*

Review of Special Town Meeting Articles

Health Department Fees – Article 4

Member Heigham said the fees for sealers are typically set by statute, but may be varied by Town Meeting. The Health Department proposed a higher fee for Belmont.

- *Member Hofmann made a motion, Member Flewelling seconded said position and, with 16 members present, the Warrant Committee **unanimously** voted in favor of recommending Article 4 to Special Town Meeting.*

Other

Chairman Widmer informed the Committee regarding an earlier discussion on getting the awareness to Town Meeting regarding the FY05 Budget. Selectman Brownsberger and the Board of Selectmen are open to finishing the Special Town Meeting in one night. If we were able to achieve that, we would still have a room reserved at the Chenery Middle School for a voluntary presentation of the FY05 Budget issues on Wednesday night. Chairman Widmer reminded the Committee that under Article 1 we will have a brief budget presentation, but the possible Wednesday meeting would be more in depth.

Member Brusch added that the initial hope was to have a meeting in January, after the holidays. At our December Warrant Committee meeting, we could organize the logistics of a January budget meeting. Member Brusch suggested having the Monday STM adjourn until 8:30 pm on Wednesday night, leaving the Budget meeting for 7:30 pm in order to get more people.

The Committee continued to discuss suggestions for when and how to have the budget discussion. Many members believe a voluntary meeting would be the best idea. Member Callanan said the one point people might listen to is the new approach this year for the budget with information earlier than usual.

Chairman Widmer said we will plan on having a Wednesday night discussion. He reinforced the Warrant Committee will be meeting Monday night before Special Town Meeting will be at 6:30 pm. It will be a joint meeting with the Capital Budget Committee.

Minuteman Update

Member Callanan reviewed the Minuteman allocation from each community changed dramatically earlier this year. The culprit in all of the estimates and amounts was the “municipal revenue growth factor.” This “growth factor” comes from the Department of Education over a three-year average. Fourteen of the 16 communities involved with Minuteman talked about having a change in the allocation. The DOE does not take into account the number of students that will be attending Minuteman. Roger Hatch, from the DOE, talked about an error that the DOE did not discover until May. The one town that benefited was Arlington, even though their bottom line stayed the same. The DOE will try to correct the error. There was a second meeting yesterday in which six of the towns did not reach a compromise. There is a tentative date for another meeting, in which they will continue to get the DOE to correct the figures properly.

Member Stratford wonders whether if there is any mechanism to meet with our representative from Minuteman to express our concerns. Member Callanan volunteered to contact the Belmont representative.

Review of Special Town Meeting Articles

Housing Trust Articles (#5, #6, #7, and #8)

The Board of Selectmen is in unanimous support of the proposal because they do see financial benefit from it, and it is in Belmont’s best interest to improve our goodwill.

Mr. Colton introduced Paula Harrington, the financial consultant to the Belmont Housing Trust, and distributed *Handout 4*. He pointed the Committee to the “Worst-case Combined Costs: B Street & Brighton Street” page. When all is said and done, for the typical single-family homeowner in Belmont is \$0.50 per month increase in real estate taxes.

Vice Chairman White asked what would be the annual tax revenue loss to the Town. Mr. Colton answered a net difference of approximately \$8K for B Street and \$3.7K for Brighton Street.

Member Curtis asked the rational for a 35-year capitalization. Mr. Colton answered that is approximately the same time as the mortgage. Member Schafer asked the annual rate of amortization. Mr. Colton answered it was a straight line of the total amount over 35 years.

Member Kobus asked if the Town Meeting realized this would cost residents in any way when it was originally presented to them. She is with the costs of legal, developer, and overhead fees. Member Schafer agreed and pointed to the slide titled, “The Costs of the Alternative: Rehabbing Five Affordable Units.” She asked the home money presented on the pro-forma since last week is different. Why the difference? Ms. Harrington said Belmont has about \$100K to use on home consortium. The State gives \$50K per affordable unit in addition to our home consortium funds.

Mr. Colton spoke regarding Chapter 40B. The original intent was to put two units of housing on the Brighton Street lot. We could have made that unit indistinguishable from a single-family home, but the neighbors still opposed that idea. The 40B part has been taken out of that article.

Member Curtis reinforced the need to be clear about the opportunity costs. He would like a word more specific than “insulate” regarding the last slide. Would we in fact lose Local Aid or discretionary State Aid? We need to be very clear of the benefits and costs of doing it or not doing it. He cautioned Mr. Colton to be very careful about overselling it.

Mr. Colton informed the Committee of petroleum found in the groundwater of the Brighton Street lot. We were concerned that if it were there, the Town would have to clean it up. At this point, it’s not clear if the Town would or would not have the responsibility to clean it up. For instance, Habitat for Humanity would have its own stream of revenue to clean it up. Mr. Colton added that Habitat would still be involved with a single-family unit on Brighton Street. Ms. Harrington said it appears there will be no abatement costs, but Habitat said they funds available through the EPA to cover any abatement costs.

Mr. Colton reinforced this is the time we have the opportunity and the means to go forward on this project.

Member Brusch has some concerns about the opportunity costs to the Town with Brighton Street. There is something to be said for packaging these two projects along with Woodfall Road. She does not feel the same way about B Street. The land should not be taken from the Highway Department until the feasibility study is done. DPW Director Castanino said he could live with the loss of land, not that it would have no effect on the Department.

The Committee continued to discuss this proposal and its ramifications.

Articles 5 & 6 – Brighton Street

- *Member Heigham made a motion, Member Oates seconded said position and, with 16 members present, (5) Warrant Committee Members: Heigham, Brownsberger, Widmer, Curtis, and Oates voted in favor of **recommending Articles 5 & 6 (as a preliminary vote, subject to further information)** to Special Town Meeting.*

- (8) Members: Hofmann, Stratford Callanan, Kobus, White, Flewelling, Tillotson, and Hobbs voted in favor of **not recommending Articles 5 & 6** to Special Town Meeting.
- (3) Members Brusch, McCormick, and Schafer **abstained** from said vote.

Articles 7 & 8 – B Street

- Member Heigham made a motion, Member Oates seconded said position and, with 16 members present, (8) Warrant Committee Members: Heigham, Widmer, Brownsberger, Curtis, White, Flewelling, Stratford, Hobbs, voted in favor of **recommending Articles 7 & 8 (as a preliminary vote subject to further information)** to Special Town Meeting.
- (4) Members: Kobus, Hofmann, Tillotson, and Brusch voted in favor of **not recommending Articles 7 & 8** to Special Town Meeting.
- (4) Members Oates, McCormick, Callanan, and Schafer **abstained** from said vote.

Member Flewelling made a motion, and it voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:51 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell
Recording Clerk