

- **Belmont Warrant Committee FY08 Meeting Minutes**
- **FINAL**
- **November 19, 2008, 7:30 p.m.**
- **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

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- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Hofmann, Libenson, Lynch, McLaughlin, Millane, Paolillo, Smith, Widmer; BOS Chair Firenze; School Committee Chair Bowe

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- Selectmen present: Leclerc and Jones

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- Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Accountant Hagg

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- Absent: There were no absent members.

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- The meeting was called to order at 7:31 pm by Chair Curtis.
- Board of Selectmen Chair Firenze called their meeting to order at 7:36 pm.

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- Chair Curtis began the meeting by inviting Dr. David Alper to the WC table and asking him to give a brief Youth Commission update.

- ***Youth Commission Update***

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- Dr. Alper stated that he met with the Recreation Department and discussed having them take over the “Belmont Unplugged” program, which they were receptive to. The DARE Program has offered to help fund the Youth Center and its name may become “The DARE Youth Center.” Member Paolillo said that DARE is optimistic about the funding coming though. Dr. Alper thanked Member Paolillo as well as the WC, and said he was pleased that the Youth Commission’s core activities would be in place for this year.

- ***New WC Member***

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- Chair Curtis introduced Ms. Noreen Millane as the newest WC member. Ms. Millane introduced herself to the group.

- ***Board of Assessors***

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- Mr. Reardon appeared before the Warrant Committee to discuss the Overlay account as well as the New Growth number. The New Growth was \$149K higher than the WC thought it would be when the budget was set last April. Mr. Reardon explained that the amount already in the Overlay is sufficient to cover FY09, but that \$88K of that will be held against the appeal by Verizon (and that case is likely to go on for a long

time). The WC should not expect the \$88K to get released in the next year or so (even if Verizon loses). He continued: To balance the FY09 budget, Overlay reserve accounts were cleaned out, implying that the amount released from the Overlay accounts this year may not be as generous as in prior years. Chair Curtis asked: When will we know what will be released for FY10? Mr. Reardon said it could be June before any money is appropriated, and that nothing at all could be appropriated. He added that the Overlay has to cover taxpayers who do not pay their taxes in a timely manner, if Treasurer Carman does not put a lien on the house. In this market, it's impossible to know if there will be more delinquent taxpayers or not. However, there were only a small number of cases pending this year, and the New Growth number (\$149K) is secure. Member Bruschi said that, since abatement requests are due February 1st, we will know how many people are applying for abatements shortly thereafter.

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- ***Continuation of FY09 Budget Discussion - New Growth Allocation***

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- Chair Curtis: The WC now must decide how to allocate the \$149K. The typical split is 56.2% for schools and 43.8% for the town. SC Chair Bowe: There is low confidence that money expected from the state will come through in FY09, therefore one option would be to "park" the \$149K in the WC reserve account and decide how to allocate after the state's contribution is known. If the schools were to receive the 56.2%, Bowe added, the \$100K freeze on technology could be restored. BOS Chair Firenze: The BOS would like to allocate the full \$149K to fund the street lights shortfall. The town, he continued, has made substantial cuts to address the fuel shortage. The BOS's decision to save \$170K by shutting off half the lights was made with false assumptions. Members McLaughlin and Allison noted that new revenue has historically been divided among town and schools and that changing the precedent means having to examine all such decisions in the future. Member Bruschi noted that the 56/43 split does not account for money spent on schools from the Capital Budget account. Chair Curtis added that the split is a rough way to spend the bulk of the total budget and was not intended to address smaller sums on the margin.

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- Town Administrator Younger stated that he can justify the town applying the entire \$149K to the street lights: the town has made significant eliminations to address the fuel shortage and it doesn't have the same flexibility in shifting money around as the schools do. Chair Curtis said he is comfortable making this decision based on who needs the money more. The typical split, he continued, was never intended to be a permanent principle, but rather a rough guide for money allocation.

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- Member Hofmann motioned to use the \$149K to pay for the under-funding of street lights.

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- After a brief discussion, the motion passed with 10 members in favor, three opposed and one abstention.

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- ***Articles for Special Town Meeting***

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- **Article 2.** Assistant Town Administrator Conti explained that, in order to cover the unanticipated fuel and heating costs for FY09, Article 2 proposes that \$176,907 be transferred from various accounts, including \$51,407 from unexpended accounts in Capital Projects. When this \$51,407 is added to the \$125,500 (made available from various cuts), it totals \$176,907, which is the amount needed to cover heating costs.

- Member Heigham moved that the WC recommend approval of Article 2. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Article 3.** Member Heigham moved that the WC recommend approval of Article 3 - that \$149K be appropriated to the town. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Article 4.** Since the Planning Board has not made a recommendation yet, Chair Curtis stated that the WC will discuss this article when it meets again before TM on Monday, December 1 at 6:30.

Reserve Fund Transfer Request

- A reserve fund transfer request has been put forth in the amount of \$21,621.43 to pay for emergency repairs incurred when the fire station's HVAC system was damaged, explained Assistant Town Administrator Conti. The duct work was filled with smoke, and bills to repair the damage totaled over \$30K. This amount will eventually be covered by insurance, once the claim is settled, less a \$5K deductible. Member Allison asked if the \$21,621.43 will be restored to the reserve fund, once the insurance claim is settled. Mr. Conti replied that yes, with TM approval.

- Member Hofmann motioned to approve the reserve fund transfer request of \$21,621.43. Chair Curtis amended the motion to include the explicit understanding that the full amount of this request is to be restored back to reserve fund when the insurance claim is settled. (Presumably by the April TM.) The motion, as amended, passed unanimously.

Minutes 11/5/2008

- The minutes of 11/5/08 were unanimously approved as is.

Budget Process / Town Budget Comparisons

- Members Paolillo and Bruschi presented an interim report which compared the budget processes of four towns – Arlington, Lexington, Needham and Winchester – with Belmont. Member Paolillo explained that the work of this summer subcommittee combined comparing town budgets with looking at the “best practices” of these towns. The budgets of these four towns were examined, which led to the “best practices” discussion.

- Their budgets are prepared to level service. They might remove a level service item and replace it with a programmatic improvement. All of their budget books were reviewed. Lexington had the most definitive process in getting to January. All of these towns are funding OPEB, although their unfunded liability is less than Belmont's. All 4 town have consolidated building and grounds, and roads are funded via debt exclusion. Chapter 90 money is used for overlay work only, although their roads are in better shape (higher PCI) than Belmont's.

- Member Paolillo said that the subcommittee will continue to meet and will bring other members in from capital budget, SC, and the BOS. Member Bruschi said that FY11 budget process could be impacted with this information.

- ***Executive Session***

- The Warrant Committee moved to enter into Executive Session at 9:19 pm to discuss a litigation issue. The WC will return to Open Session to vote a transfer. A roll call vote was taken and all members voted aye.

- The Board of Selectmen moved to enter into Executive Session at 9:20. A roll call vote was taken and all members voted aye.

- The WC and BOS returned to Open Session at 9:23 pm.

- Member Hofmann moved that the WC transfer \$180K from its reserve fund to the legal budget. The motion passed unanimously.

- Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:24 pm.

- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary