

WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

FEBRUARY 16, 2005

Handout(s) distributed tonight:

1. *Belmont FY04 Actual vs. FY05 Estimated School Related Expenditures*
2. *Warrant Committee – Subcommittee on General Government Report*
3. *Public Works Subcommittee Report*
4. *Fire Department Subcommittee Report*

- 2/23 No Meeting – School Vacation Week
- 2/28 *Capital Budget Committee at Board of Selectmen’s meeting discussing \$900K capital reallocation*
- 3/2 Warrant Committee – Subcommittee Reports
- 3/9 Warrant Committee – put together priorities both FY06 and long-term
- 3/10 *Capital Budget Committee discussing GIS*
- 3/16 Warrant Committee – vote on recommending an override
- 3/22 (Tuesday) Town/School Budget Hearing at CMS
- 3/23 Warrant Committee
- 3/30 Warrant Committee

- 4/21 League of Women Voter’s Budget Night

Member(s) absent: Brusch and Paolillo

Also present: Acting Town Administrator Rebecca Vose and Town Accountant Barbara Hagg

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:38 PM.

Acceptance of Minutes

The Committee discussed the minutes of the February 9, 2005 meeting.

- *Member Hofmann made a motion, Member Oates seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of the February 9, 2005 meeting.*

FY06 Warrant Discussion

Chairman Widmer reminded the Committee that the League of Women Voters Night is April 21 at 7:30 at the Belmont Hill School. We have not yet scheduled the Town/School Budget night that we sponsor. It used to be in January, but it was moved to March last year. It will be helpful to have had at least some of the outstanding issues resolved. For example, what the level of spending would be for the Town and Schools and whether the Warrant Committee is recommending an override. The Committee decided to have this on March 22. Town Accountant Hagg will reserve the CMS Auditorium at 7:30.

Next week (2/23) is no meeting. March 2 will be the next Warrant Committee meeting. There will be meetings every Wednesday in March as well as the Budget Hearing on Tuesday, March 22nd.

On Monday, February 28, the Capital Budget Committee is coming to the Board of Selectmen meeting to discuss the issue of capital and the issue of money allocation within the Capital Budget. There is a \$900K question of reallocation. It may not be resolved, but at least it will be fully aired.

Another piece is the question of the contribution into the Retirement Fund. There may or may not be anything we can do about that. Chairman Widmer is meeting with an actuary next week to see our Town's flexibility. Under the old pension schedule, we were expecting a 4.5% increase for FY06, now it's over 13%. There may not be anything we can do about it, in terms of the Retirement Board, because it is their vote. Our actuarial consultant will look at other funding schedules that would be more appropriate. It does not change the benefit or the long-term funding. There are no policy questions in terms of the retirees.

Member Curtis would appreciate someone telling us our statutory obligations, what is our responsibility, and what is the Retirement Board's responsibility. He would like that on an early agenda in September. Chairman Widmer agreed.

Chairman Widmer visualizes that on March 9th, we will put together the moving pieces (cuts/adds) and have that "up drive" our discussion. Member Stratford added that the School Committee is currently working on a similar schedule.

Member Hofmann introduced (*Handout 1*) the Warrant Committee to something we are discussing on March 2nd. There was a subcommittee last summer regarding an equitable per pupil comparison and what Belmont spends on education. If you use these numbers, we spend almost \$9,700 per pupil. Of our total budget, about 55% is spent on education. This will be discussed further at the next Warrant Committee meeting. The oil spill is included in FY04's costs since it occurred at a School. Member Hofmann thanked Town Accountant Hagg for her assistance on this project.

The Committee discussed how varied the numbers are across the different communities. The variables are all different amongst the communities. Member Curtis believes the issue is what the School Department needs in order to run the School system. Selectman Solomon added that the Benchmarking Study has a lot of information in it about the Schools.

The Board of Selectmen asked Town Accountant Hagg to go to the Department Heads to ask them what programs they could cut if needed. The Board of Selectmen requested a \$750K reduction in total. Town Accountant Hagg is to report in early March.

Chairman Widmer commented on the Hancock decision, which means the State will not have an immediate change in State Aid to poorer communities. However, there is very

limited amount of State Aid available in the near future. For Belmont, nothing changes short-term. We are expecting several years of flat State Aid.

Subcommittee Reports

General Government (Handout 2)

Member Fitzgerald reviewed the Subcommittee's handout with the Committee. On March 2nd, the Subcommittee will make priorities for FY06 and long-term.

Member Callanan wants some mandates that are being required of the Departments included in these Subcommittee reports. It is another variable in making the priorities for Departments. Chairman Widmer clarified he is looking for the Subcommittees to identify long-term needs the departments have, policy issues, and their immediate FY06 needs. A new layer of recommendations, if there were no override, would be the cuts.

Public Works (Handout 3)

Member Curtis said the Subcommittee's take is that all three Department Heads are doing a great job. In all three departments, the level service budget is about the same as their level funded budget, which under our circumstances is a great achievement.

DPW – Staffing levels have decreased in recent years. It shortchanges maintenance of Town assets that will eventually degrade. The Subcommittee recommends adding back those maintenance positions. It will be difficult to quantify the other priorities.

Chairman Widmer asked the Subcommittee if they recommend increasing the Cemetery staff by one as Town Accountant Hagg did. He then asked if the \$30K proposed reduction in sidewalks is something the Committee agrees with. Chairman Widmer expressed it is our absolute responsibility to pull these priorities out for the operating budget for FY06. He cited that one example is in the back of the Budget Book is a ranked series of staff that she recommends be added back.

Community Development – Member Curtis reviewed this Department's needs for FY06. They are recommending adding one staff person to do some inspection and engineering support. The money to pay for this is in the Pavement Management revenue account for sewers (\$55K). Town Accountant Hagg put it in as an add-on in a recent spreadsheet. More long range, the Director is committed to having a GIS system. The Subcommittee is recommending this as well. Vice Chair Jones proposed it comes from the Sewer/Water Enterprise Funds so that it will not cost the taxpayer. Community Development Director Clancy agrees with this recommendation. Town Accountant Hagg added the Capital Budget Committee is discussing this project on March 10.

Selectman Solomon noticed that in Town Accountant Hagg's 4th tier is a Junior Planner for \$42K. He would love to see this extended to the whole idea of future planning. He also thinks we need an economic development officer, not necessarily full-time. He maintained that it would pay for itself.

Building Services – The Building Services budget is difficult to pin down. Director Looney would like an additional custodian, but it is unquestionable he can provide a different level of service with another management position. Member Curtis is not persuaded that the Senior Center custodian is needed full-time. However, Member Doblin is convinced a Senior Center custodian is needed about ¾ time, and would provide a different level of service (i.e., safety) than in other Town buildings. Member Hobbs agreed. Member Doblin added the person could be dedicated to the Senior Center, but also available for other Town needs. Kevin Looney could then supervise that position.

Chairman Widmer would like a Warrant Committee vote by March 16 on whether they recommend an override. Now there is a new piece on the process, which is the Board of Selectmen's request to Town Accountant Hagg on reducing the Town side another \$750K.

Chairman Widmer reminded the Committee to read Town Administrator Kleckner's July 26th memo regarding the FY06 Budget.

Fire Department (Handout 4)

Vice Chair Jones mentioned that the Fire Department has found ways to do things better and cheaper. Regionalization will allow more firefighters with less equipment and still get the job done. Our first recommendation is to go with this, and the Subcommittee recommends it to the Board of Selectmen. Fire Dispatch is the key to this beginning.

Town Accountant Hagg recommended a ½ time position for fire prevention. The Subcommittee also recommends this addition. It is an effective use of time for the professional firefighters. The Subcommittee is recommending this position be filled through a professional staffing firm. Vice Chair Jones also recommended this be thought of for other positions as well. The Subcommittee does not recommend additional staffing on ladder trucks at this time. He also recommended sharing apparatus with other municipalities when a piece of equipment is in the shop.

If one area were to be cut, the Subcommittee recommends the overtime budget. Hopefully, mutual aid could cover this issue if necessary.

Other

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

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina Frizzell, Recording Clerk