

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes
FINAL
February 17, 2010, 7:30 p.m.
Chenery Middle School Community Room

Present: Members Allison, Becker, Brusch, Dash, Epstein, Hofmann, Libenson, Lynch, McLaughlin, Millane, Paolillo; School Committee Member Graham

Town Administrator Younger and Town Accountant Hagg

Members Absent: Chair Curtis, Members Callanan, Manjikian, Smith and BOS Chair Leclerc

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by Vice Chair Allison.

Vice Chair Allison began by stating that there are four substantive items on the agenda. She then turned to the first agenda item.

Discussion of Subcommittee Process

Vice Chair Allison distributed materials relating to the WC subcommittee reports. She highlighted the following sections that the materials will review in detail.

- Resource Materials
- draft table of contents of the overall WC report
- organization of subcommittee reports – Use bold headings
- standard tables to use in the report
- 2001 budget copy (for a historical perspective)
- adding total expenditures (operating, capital, retirement, etc.) and make those available
- 2009 numbers for medical benefit payments by department
- utility and maintenance costs by building

In terms of subcommittee report process, where are people and what are people's thoughts, asked Vice Chair Allison? Is any subcommittee on a path to give a report in mid to late March? (There was no response from the WC.) Member Brusch suggested that WC members begin meeting with department heads as soon as possible. Subcommittee chairs can take that as an "action item", added Allison. She noted that while there is a template to fill in with raw data, there is still quite a bit of data gathering to do. Brusch asked about the due dates for the reports? Allison replied that she and Chair Curtis will work out a calendar and get those dates out by email in the next week. Member Paolillo asked if WC members should share the reports ahead of time (whenever possible) to allow for maximum preparation? Allison replied that that would be great.

Discussion of Recommendation to Town Meeting(TM) for Town Clerk Salary

Vice Chair Allison asked Member Bruschi to give the background on this issue. Member Bruschi: the Town Clerk and the Treasurer, unlike the Selectmen, are full-time positions and therefore receive a full salary. Because they are elected to their positions, Town Meeting approves the salary for these positions. The WC began paying attention to the salaries several years ago. The current Town Clerk has been in her position for 10 years and is now leaving. Every two years, the WC has done a market rate survey to compare salaries of various Town Clerks. From this data, the WC was able to come up with a low, mid and high range salary. There will be a new Clerk as of April 5th and the WC needs to see what the appropriate salary should be. The WC will need to re-look at the position, its requirements and the duties. The WC will then recommend a salary to TM. Member Hofmann noted that it has been difficult to compare salaries of Clerks across communities as Clerk positions vary a lot from town to town. And in Belmont, he continued, registrar and parking duties are a part of the salary of the Clerk. Vice Chair Allison informed the WC that in the past this task has fallen to the General Government subcommittee. Member Paolillo said that the subcommittee can review the job responsibilities and set the salary range, but it does so without knowing who is going to be elected. Member Dash said that it is probably appropriate to set the salary lower than the current salary and that in doing so those slated to run can continue to do so or not. Member Epstein noted that the current “market rate” for this position could be below what the Clerk is now making. He suggested the salary be set at on the lower end of the range. He added that the skills for Town Clerk are not all that different from state positions that are comparable to Town Clerk and that the WC should not limited itself to what clerks are making in five or six nearby communities. Member Millane suggested that the WC also look within Belmont to see what the salaries are compared to comparable management positions. Member Hofmann suggested to start on the low end of the salary range and let the new person grow into the job.

Suggestions for Structural Change / Reform

Vice Chair Allison noted that structural changes as opposed to cost cutting are a viable way to go about reducing the budget. We can't keep on cost cutting forever, she said, but structural changes you can do forever. Last week the WC was instructed to come in with structural reform suggestions. She passed out cards with sub-headings so that the suggestion cards could be placed under the appropriate sub-heading. Sub-headings included:

- All Town (covers both Town and School)
- Town
- Education
- Public Safety
- Public Works
- General Government
- Cultural/Recreation
- Other

Vice Chair Allison read the cards aloud and the cards were passed to the appropriate heading. They are listed below, though not in any particular order within categories.

1. All Town

- Sell naming rights (e.g., Senior Center)
- Make all elected offices (with exception of BOS and Moderator) appointed instead
- Increased fees (and fines) for services
- Email notification of paycheck stubs for employees with direct deposit
- All new employees mandated to direct deposit
- Determine core services required by residents (those required by statute and all others); have public meetings with residents
- Combine HR and building services
- Consolidate all administrative town / school functions and outside labor counsel (building services, HR, IT, Financial); consolidate buildings
- Eliminate citizen building committees and hire good project managers
- Change structure of appointed building committees so that permanent building committee has detailed manual of procedures and stages of construction; appoint trained professionals, not just good citizens
- Allow Town to unilaterally approve health plan design (or consider a 50/50 split for medical benefits)
- Institute HRAs (Health Reimbursement Arrangements) like done in Wellesley and Northampton to seek savings in health insurance and OPEB costs; would have higher co-pay and cap on employee costs per year (when employee reaches cap, town reimburses over cap)
- Fire inefficient personnel / eliminate unneeded positions / have each department list at least one role to eliminate
- Legislators must be required to limit or eliminate unfunded mandates from the state government
- Implement programmatic approach to developing budgets for town and schools; measure output and ROI of programs
- Eliminate step increases and create merit pool
- Convert all non-union salary increases to merit-based
- Have newly elected town officials take office on July 1
- Institute online bill paying for most / all tax or fee collection
- Change open meeting law to allow municipal gov't to operate more like private enterprise

2. Town

- Stop allowing town employees to take town owned cars home.
- Move to Town Manager
- Make Town Treasurer or Town Accountant CFO and consolidate financial organization
- Give the Town Administrator the power of hiring and firing for all paid town employees

- Redraw town organizational structure so all town department report to Town Manager
- Increase decision making authority of department heads
- Limit number of citizens committees on which department heads must serve
- Dispose of all town property outside core area (historic preservation on exterior allowed)

3. Education

- 2 Seek waiver of State requirement from MCAT remediation (we think it meant MCAS).
 - A Performance Pay for Teachers
 - A Impose a flat limit on administrative costs in school system (admin is defined as non-teaching, non-maintenance)
 - A Move non-core high school courses to on line.
- 2 Make METCO a scholarship program only. No overhead administration.

4. Public Safety

- Fire Department: Regionalization of Fire Suppression services
- Fire Department: Regionalization of EMT Services
- Fire Department: Allow households five free false alarms and after that then charge fully loaded cost of subsequent false alarms
- Fire Department: Require Fire Dept. to charge for non-emergency service calls
- Fire Department: Add ALS for Fire Department

- Police Department: Eliminate the DARE Program
- Police Department: Eliminate the School Resource Officer
- Police Department: Eliminate Quinn Bill Payments
- Police Department: Regionalize dispatch/911 Calls

5. Public Works:

- Consolidate billing for utility services
- Cemetery charges should cover full operating costs
- Privatizing cemetery, rink, and pool
- Charge for garbage pick-up
- Reduce redundant senior staff in public works dept.
- Less frequent yard and lawn care
- Privatize rink, pool, and other rec. dept. programs
- Regionalize snow plowing
- Outsource mechanics work in DPW

6. General Government

- Regionalize more functions in general government (IT, Legal, Assessing, HR)

- Close most or all of Town Hall and look for a small startup from Cambridge to lease space
- Cut salaries and benefits for elected officials (Selectman, Town Moderator, Clerk)

7. Culture and Recreation

- Health Department: Regionalize health services.
- Health Department: Regionalize sealer of weights and measures, veterans services, health services and combine COA and Health Social Services position (Social Worker and Youth and Family Services Coordinator) (All in works).
- Council on Aging: Charge users a membership fee, similar to recreation fees.
- Council on Aging: Require users to cover full operating costs through fees.
- Library: Change FT/PT personnel mix and keep library open on weekends.
- Library: Move Children's Room at the Main Library to Benton, to allow growth at the main branch.
- Recreation Department: Eliminate department, allowing groups to rent fields, rink ... Privatize pool, rink ...

8. Other

- 2 Tax commercial properties at a higher rate
- 2 Centralize and streamline administrative authority
- 2 5 BOS / 1 Town Manager
- 2 Moratorium on special elections
- 2 Ask high income residents to pay more taxes (like a PILOT program)
- 2 Fees for services
- 2 A better appreciation of the town employees
- 2 The Boards should understand better what is actually done within the Town
- 2 Change Open Meeting Law to allow municipal government to operate more like private enterprise but only successful private enterprise – no Enrons or Wang Computer models
- 2 To help ease structural deficit – consider a 50/50 split on medical benefits
- 2 Pragmatic approach to developing budgets for both Town and School; measure output and ROI on programs
- 2 Employee support from above equals resident confidence
- 2 Eliminate the town meeting form of government – switch to a town board with 1 representative from each precinct! – The town meeting are so bad

they have driven many outstanding Belmont residents out of town government

2 Get new blood on the Warrant Committee

[Note: Member Libenson is preparing a spreadsheet incorporating all these entries and collecting additional information about each item. The above entries are listed simply to document their presentation at the meeting.]

WC Comments

Member Becker noted that there were lots of duplicate suggestions, which hints at a positive reception in implementing some of these ideas. Member McLaughlin observed that to implement some of these suggestions would require a new statute e.g. legislative change. Member Libenson suggested that the cards be broken down by the mechanics of what would be involved in making a change. For example, some are state, some are BoS, some are TM. We should also estimate the potential impact of a suggestion (high, medium, low) in terms of annual savings, he said. Town Accountant Hagg added that some are financial savings and some are management savings. Member Bruschi asked about the timeline for this. Vice Chair Allison replied that it all depends on what kind of budget the WC will be creating and when? Member Dash noted that if some changes could be implemented by the Spring TM, this would impact the timeline and the FY11 budget. Member Paolillo added that TM should – at the very least – be made aware that the WC is looking closely at structural issues.

Discussion of Expense and Revenue Estimates

Vice Chair Allison informed the WC that the intent of this agenda item was to ask WC members their thoughts on the two budgets that were presented last week. Member McLaughlin commented that both the town and schools presented a budget bigger than what they knew they would get. We now need to compromise and cut it down. Member Libenson noted that the budgets as presented would require an override and that the WC will need to prepare a budget in the event that an override bid is unsuccessful. He added that an actual “available revenue budget” should be prepared soon. Member Millane asked if the school budget is realistic given that it omits salary raises. Vice Chair Allison noted that more detail on the school budget is clearly needed. She also asked about the collective bargaining timeline. SC member Graham said that school budget books are coming soon and that the school department is in conversation with the bargaining units. Member Paolillo asked about the budget process from the BoS’s perspective. Town Administrator Younger said that he has asked the Board to more clearly articulate where they are heading with regard to the budget. He added that he was asked to present needs budget, but he needs to know where to go from here e.g. scale back to an available revenue budget or pursue the “needs based” override budget? Either way, he said, an available revenue budget must be prepared in case an override fails.

Vice Chair Allison informed the WC that she asked former WC member Mike Widmer about the projected state aid numbers and if they were a reality. Mr. Widmer replied that it is hard to gauge. The Governor depends heavily on one time money, and that this is an election year. Widmer said he gives the current numbers a 60/40 chance in favor of sticking. However, he warned that there will be serious consequences for state aid in 2012, as this is one time money. Allison concurred that 2012 could create a financial perfect storm with state aid cuts and pensions due.

Member Libenson noted that structural changes could impact the 2012 scenario. Member Epstein concurred that it may not be impossible to restructure for this year (FY11), but that quantifiable changes may be possible for FY12. He added in order to have an available revenue budget for June, the present budget would need to be trimmed by at least \$3M. Vice Chair Allison added that some elements of structural reform may depend on how bad the alternatives are. It is the WC's responsibility to make the least damaging cuts and preserve key functions.

Minutes

The minutes were postponed until next week.

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:11 p.m.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary