

Minutes of the Belmont Council on Aging Meeting,

Thursday, August 6, 2015 at 5 p.m.

2015 DEC 10 PM 3:01

Present: Michael Cahalane, Chair, Ethel Hamann, Chao Qiang Lai, Jim Staton, Maryann Scali, Joel Semuels, Carolyn Bunyon, Ted Dukas, Tomi Olson, Judy Singler

Absent: Penny Schafer

Chair Michael Cahalane called the meeting together at 5 p.m. The only agenda item was the Belmont Center Reconstruction Project and the position of the Board to be delivered at the Special Town Meeting. Three citizen amendments had been filed with the Town Clerk on this issue after the Board had taken a position at its July, 13, 2015 meeting.

Mr. Semuels sought to determine the Board's position as he was to speak that evening at 7 p.m. at the Special Town Meeting and had prepared a draft speech based on the Board's 10-0 with one person absent July vote in favor of the Selectmen's revised Plan (a/k/a Plan B). "for the benefit of seniors and others who use Belmont Center, the Council on Aging Board supports the Selectmen's Revised Belmont Center Renovation Plan (May 28th). In addition, the Board recommends traffic mitigation measures (such as a speed bump) on the pass-through road."

Prior to 5 p.m. on August 6th, Ms. Niv-Vogel had electronically distributed to the Board drawings and descriptions of all five options as available to Town Meeting members. At the Board meeting, she also distributed paper copies to Board members. Mr. Semuels also distributed a short written description he developed of all the design plans and amendments.

Mr. Semuels described all the options and amendments and asked the Board what its position was. Chairman Cahalane opened the floor for discussion. Discussion focused on the need for seniors and disabled

persons to have access to parking spaces near to the front of the Belmont Savings Bank, (Plan B had 4 parallel plus one handicapped), the need to keep the pass through street to alleviate traffic gridlock westbound and under the bridge and ease senior access (with a traffic calming device westbound on the pass-through street on the Moore Street side), the unwieldy nature of the Plan A access to Belmont Savings through Concord Avenue and its parking space design) and the need to support the business center of Belmont through close-by parking foot traffic.

After discussion, the Board voted 10-0 with one person absent as follows: "The COA Board, after due consideration, confirms its support of the roadway and parking space configuration identified as Plan B, May 28, 2015."

The Board then read and heard Mr. Semuels' draft and amended it by suggesting changes in wording to sharpen its focus.

The final speech as amended at the meeting by Board members and to be delivered by Mr. Semuels at Town Meeting is as follows:

"Good Evening. I am Joel Semuels, Town Meeting Member Precinct 6, an attorney, former General Counsel of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs and a member and former chair of the Belmont Council on Aging (COA) Board. The Council on Aging is an eleven member Town Board charged with the responsibility of advocating on behalf of the seniors of Belmont as well as overseeing programs and policies of the COA at the Beech Street Center. I have been authorized by the Council on Aging Board to speak on behalf of the Council on Aging on this issue this evening.

As you may recall, at our November 17th, 2014 Town Meeting where the appropriation was voted, I and others raised the fact that many seniors and disabled persons had expressed concerns about the proposed Belmont Center Reconstruction. These seniors sought to continue the parking spaces next to the Belmont Savings Bank because it "gives

access to the center to people who may be disabled or who have some need for assistance." In my testimony, I also stated that "people are concerned about the loss of the travel lane." People will be parking up the hill if they can't find a space in the center." As result of these concerns, I raised this issue at the Council on Aging Board at our December 1st, 2014 meeting. At that meeting, other Board members discussed hearing similar concerns as well as concerns about the accessibility of the 3 new parking spaces to be created near the exit of the Belmont Savings Bank. As a result of the proposed loss of access to the bank and nearby stores for seniors and those with wheelchairs or walkers, a Working Group of several members of the Board was formed to meet with and discuss their concerns with Glenn Clancy, Director of Community Development of the Town. Our minutes reflect the fact that because it appeared that the design of the project would be completed by January, 2015 (before our next meeting) the Working Group was authorized to discuss concerns with Glenn, but not make any recommendations from the full Board. Several members of the Working Group met with Glenn on December 3rd and expressed our concerns. Glenn discussed possible changes which might occur on the configuration of the proposed parking spaces within the Concord Ave. access to the bank. Several members of the Working Group also attended the Final Traffic Advisory Committee meeting which approved the Town Meeting discussed Design on December 11, 2014.

It is important to note that the COA Board has not met with the Selectmen as a Board on this issue nor has it as a Board engaged in any petition campaigns. However, at our July 13, 2015 meeting, when the issue was raised and discussed, the COA Board voted 10-0 with 1 person absent as follows "for the benefit of seniors and others who use Belmont Center, the Council on Aging Board supports the Selectmen's Revised Belmont Center Renovation Plan (May 28th). In addition, the Board

recommends traffic mitigation measures (such as a speed bump) on the pass-through road."

The COA Board met earlier this evening in a posted August meeting and has taken the following position on the three amendments offered.

"The COA Board, after due consideration, confirms its support of the roadway and parking space configuration identified as Plan B, May 28, 2015." The vote was 10-0 with one person absent.

I would like to briefly explain the comments and concerns raised to and by Board members which have led to these votes:

Experts agree that the senior population is ever increasing and young disabled persons are increasingly mobile.

1/ Plan B restores 4 parallel parking spaces and 1 handicapped space and a pass through road which will continue to allow convenient access to shopping and smooth egress from the bank parking lot.

2/ Plan B resumes a pass through street which will continue to act as a safety valve for west bound Leonard Street traffic headed up past the police station. It will continue to serve as a safety valve for Moore Street which is 2 ways with parking on one side.

3/ Plan B supports the businesses in Belmont Center. Seniors and others come to Belmont Center to shop and do business. Belmont Center is and should continue to be the commercial center of our town. Most people come to Belmont Center to pass through as commuters and/or shop, dine or bank by car. The short term spaces in front of the bank may turn over multiple times a day bringing hundreds of people by foot traffic to Center merchants.

4/ Plan B provides the best option for easing traffic congestion. The westbound traffic congestion problems with the railroad bridge intersection will be exacerbated if Plan B is not implemented (that is without the pass through road and with a bus stop being placed at the

bottom of the green space area). In our opinion, traffic will become gridlocked if Plan B is not implemented.

5/ Plan B preserves the nearby parking. Many of our seniors have told us that they would like the parking spaces in front of the Belmont Savings Bank preserved and that they want to continue to shop locally.

The C.O.A. Board recognizes the fact that many seniors walk through Belmont Center and would appreciate the expanded green space with benches and one less street to cross. However, we believe that placement of a speed bump before the west bound pass through road will calm traffic while still allowing close access to persons needing it. We believe that Plan B is the best Plan for the Town of Belmont going forward, is a compromise Plan and should be confirmed by your votes tonight. Thank You.”

The meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Note: The last three paragraphs were not delivered at Town Meeting because of the 5 minute time limit. The entire speech was handed to Town Clerk for the record.

Respectfully Submitted:

Joel Semuels