

**BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
FINAL
NOVEMBER 18, 2015, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY COMMUNITY ROOM**

Present: Chair Libenson; Members Alcock, Dash, Epstein, Fallon, Gammill, Helgen, McLaughlin, Sarno, Schreiber, Starzec; BOS Chair Baghdady; School Committee Rep. Slap

Town Administrator Kale

Members Absent: Lisanke, McVay, Mennis

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Chair Libenson.

Chair Libenson began by distributing the agenda and then turning to the first item on the agenda: the approval of minutes.

Approval of Minutes

Chair Libenson explained that the Town Clerk's office has asked that unfiled WC minutes be re-sent. Member Gammill said he is addressing the missing Ed Subcommittee minutes; he explained a process for approving subcommittee minutes that could be used going forward.

He then moved approval for four sets of Education Subcommittee minutes:

- The Education Subcommittee minutes of March 20, 2012 were approved.
- The Education Subcommittee minutes of June 11, 2014 were approved.
- The Education Subcommittee minutes of June 10, 2015 were approved.
- The Education Subcommittee minutes of October 14, 2015 were approved.

Chair Libenson then addressed the two recent WC meeting minutes:

- The minutes of 10/14/15 were approved with two abstentions.
- The minutes of 10/28/15 (Pension Forum) were approved with four abstentions.

FY16 Q1 Financial Update

Schools Update

SC Rep Slap reported that the end of the first quarter is still fairly early in the school year. At this point, it looks like most line items are falling in line with the budget. The additional FTEs planned in the override budget have all been hired, with the only

exception being that a planned kindergarten teacher was deemed not needed and was swapped out with the placement of a guidance counselor position at the Chenery (which was originally planned to be added in FY17).

There is currently a SPED overrun (estimated at \$500K at this time) that is a result of an increased level and types of services provided. This overage can likely be managed this year, Ms. Slap reported, but the School Committee and School administration recommend that the SPED Stabilization Fund be replenished in order to provide a cushion for future years. Right now, there are 98 students receiving out-of-district placements, up from 97 at the end of last year. Though the population has not grown significantly, services are expensive and are difficult to control. Ms. Slap noted that, at the last School Committee meeting, the Superintendent delivered a presentation indicating that Belmont is in line with comparable towns with regard to SPED spending.

The WC briefly discussed the costs of SPED out-of-district placements.

SC Rep Slap then mentioned that the circuit breaker trends will need to be looked at in the near future to see how much relief they can offer with respect to high out-of-district placement costs. Member Sarno asked whether the legislature is adjusting the threshold at which the circuit breaker money becomes available. Slap responded that she will investigate and report back to the WC.

Other than SPED, things seem to be on track. Concerning the Revolving Accounts, she noted that the SC will examine those more closely in the coming months.

Chair Libenson asked about the utility estimate. SC Rep Slap responded that the estimate is conservative at this early point in the year, perhaps protecting against the possibility of severe weather. Member Sarno asked about the busing line item. Slap explained the challenges with the busing schedule and funding. She said another bus may need to be added for next year, as a result of increasing enrollment.

Town Update

Mr. Kale agreed that Q1 is an early snapshot of the fiscal year.

Revenue: He provided highlights of various line items, e.g., motor vehicle excise, penalties and interest, meals tax, PILOT, ALS. Concerning recreation revenue, he said the late opening of the pool season impacted that revenue. It should be back on track for the next summer season.

He continued reviewing some line items, noting that licenses and permits are on target and Cushing Village is expected to pull permits this year. State aid is also on target, although the budget numbers were slightly off schedule last year. They are expected to be on schedule this year.

He is meeting with Department Heads regularly and things look to be on target there as

well.

Expenditures: Mr. Kale reported that Expenditures are on track with no problems noted there at this time.

The WC asked a few clarifying questions of Mr. Kale concerning his report.

Next Steps on Pension / OPEB

Chair Libenson noted that the Retirement Board (RB) met recently. Member Epstein, who attended the RB meeting, reported that this meeting was mostly routine.

BOS Chair Baghdady informed the WC that the Board will hold a POB (pension obligation bond) exploration meeting on the evening of Monday, December 21, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. The Retirement Board, the Town Treasurer, and the town's investment advisor will all be there. Advantages, disadvantages, and risks of POBs will be addressed.

Mr. Kale provided a brief update on the health coverage increases, expenses, and trends. Claims are currently meeting expectations. He said a 5% increase may be likely next year. There are some high-cost scenarios out there and the town is trying to get a sense of these trends.

The WC briefly discussed health expense trends, health care inflation, and how the data is evaluated.

Discussion of the Warrant Committee Report

Chair Libenson distributed a section of the WC report and asked the WC for feedback on the format the report.

Member Dash spoke highly of the current format. He said it is in a form that is concise and easy to read. He offered a suggestion that each departmental report should be referencing the same numbers, when talking about percentage changes from year to year. Chair Libenson agreed. Member Epstein asked if there is any feedback from Town Meeting members. No one seemed to have any substantive critical feedback to report.

Member Sarno noted that, in addition to the program budget breakdown, the Ed Subcommittee report looks at the School Department budget's major line item groupings – for example, salaries, fringe benefits, technology – in order to clarify the major drivers of budget growth. He suggested that such a presentation might be useful for other department budgets as well. Member Dash agreed that this is useful for Ed, but said it may not be necessary for the smaller departments.

The WC then provided comments concerning the format of the report, the charts, graphs, and overall document complexity, etc.

Chair Libenson summarized that the WC is supportive of the current report format and will likely use the same format in the coming year.

Updates: Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Planning Board, and Minuteman

Minuteman: Member McLaughlin reported that the Minuteman meeting held in Belmont on November 10 was not well attended. The core issues of concern remain the same – that the new school project is being overbuilt, and that the administration is not trustworthy. Belmont has been painted into a corner. The MSBA has approved the new school project at \$145M.

Both choices in front of Belmont are terrible, he said, and at this point we can only pick the least bad option. The non-member towns - with large enrollment - should join the district, and the small member towns that want to leave should be allowed to leave the district, but that is not what is happening. Non-member towns are still not paying their fair share of capital expenses. Renovating the current facility is the other terrible choice, given that it would involve no state aid, it is very expensive to make the repairs, and non-member towns will not contribute.

Member McLaughlin then explained the process for how the new building would get approved. A district-wide vote will need to be held, probably in the spring. Belmont may defeat this vote, but if it passes across the district, Belmont is still on the hook to fund the new school.

Mr. Kale explained TM's role in approving the funding. The Minuteman building costs would become a part of the operating budget, and there are various options for paying for this bill. Belmont would have its usual Minuteman bill for operating expenses, and we would add this capital bill for the new building.

Member McLaughlin added that non-member towns may be asked to pay a "facility fee" to help cover the cost of a new building. He said non-member towns would likely fight this fee. It is unclear if this facility fee would ever get collected. If it is not collected, Belmont will need to pay even more.

The WC briefly discussed the points summarized by Member McLaughlin.

Chair Libenson raised two additional issues: Belmont's potential withdrawal from the district, and the possible dissolution of the current district agreement. The district agreement could be dissolved if all 16-member towns agree to it.

SC Rep Slap stated that while the Superintendent is exploring other vocational tech educational options, it's not clear when he will be ready to make a public report.

Board of Selectmen: BOS Chair Baghdady reported that the BOS held an MBTA forum to discuss options for the Waverley station. He explained the issues concerning this

station, including the MBTA's preference to close both of Belmont's stations and to build one new station on South Pleasant Street. There was overwhelming support from those in attendance to keep both stations open and to upgrade Waverley so that it is handicap accessible. This topic was briefly discussed, including the option of variances.

The Special Permit for Cushing Village, he continued, will be extended for one year. BOS Chair Baghdady explained the extension process, noting that the construction may not be adversely impacted. The Planning Board was able to secure financial commitments from the developer. He explained how this relates to the Land Development Agreement, the sale of the parking lot, and the construction schedule. There are time limits placed in the agreement, which will push the project along.

School Committee: SC Rep Slap reported that the SC discussed technology plans and special education programming at their most recent meeting. She urged WC members to look at the presentation online and/or watch the Belmont Media Center recording for full details.

Adjournment

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

The WC will meet again on December 2, 2015.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary