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**BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
FINAL**

**SEPTEMBER 7, 2016, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY COMMUNITY ROOM**

Present: Chair Libenson; Members Dash (arrived at 8:00 p.m.), Epstein, Fallon, Gammill, Helgen, Lisanke, Lubien, McLaughlin, Mennis, Schreiber, Slap; Selectman Baghdady; School Committee (SC) Chair Fiore

Town Administrator Kale, Ms. Pat Brusch (Minuteman Working Group, Capital Budget Committee, Permanent Building Committee), Mr. Jack Weis, Belmont Minuteman School Committee

Members Absent: Alcock and Crowley

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m. by Chair Libenson.

Chair Libenson began by turning to the first item on the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of 8/3/16 were approved with three abstentions.

Introduction of New Members

Chair Libenson briefly introduced the newly appointed members of the Warrant Committee. Selectman Baghdady informed the WC that he will remain the Selectmen's representative to the WC. Mr. Geoffrey Lubien, Ms. Lisa Fiore, and Ms. Laurie Slap then provided some information on his/her background. Mr. Michael Crowley was not able to attend the meeting. Warrant Committee members offered a brief introduction, as well.

Discussion of Minuteman Vocational High School District Referendum seeking approval of \$144.9 million bonding for building a new school

Chair Libenson began by noting that the Minuteman election will take place on Tuesday, September 20 from 12-8 p.m. at the usual seven polling places. He stated that the WC has been requested to weigh in on this issue and may in fact vote on the issue. The League of Women Voters' information night will take place on Monday, September 12, 2016 at the Beech Street Center. Chair Libenson informed the WC that he will be representing the No vote at the League meeting.

Member Gammill noted that he distributed his analysis to the WC today. He said he is willing to explore those documents, if the WC would like. Member McLaughlin asked

several questions which Member Gammill addressed. WC members also asked for clarification on several points, e.g., cost per pupil and capital costs for both member and non-member towns. It was determined that Minuteman is the most expensive vocational school in the state for member towns. The WC explored the costs for non-member towns that send students to Minuteman – state-set tuition, the SPED surcharge, and the transportation expenses paid by sending towns.

It was determined that the current all-in cost for non-member towns that send students to Minuteman is less than the comparable cost for member towns. In response to a question from Member Fallon why the Town Meeting did not consider withdrawing in the spring when seven other towns voted to leave, Ms. Bruschi said that there was a concern that the approval of the new Regional Agreement would fail if Belmont were identified as a departing town. Member Schreiber noted that DESE recently lowered the tuition for non-member towns and will likely not charge a significant capital fee for the non-member towns.

Member Epstein spoke to the historical issues with Minuteman (concerning the operating budget) but added that a new building is necessary and a smaller school will not be funded, so is therefore not feasible. Belmont can continue sending its students to Minuteman as non-member town. However, if a new building is built, it is likely to fill up. Unfortunately, the pricing is unresolved with regard to what DESE will allow for the capital fee.

Member Epstein recommended to vote No on 9/20. Belmont would then have an option to withdraw from the district. This would hopefully put pressure on DESE to set a fair capital charge. If DESE does the right thing, Belmont could vote to remain in the district at STM in the fall.

Member McLaughlin agreed that the DESE situation has been frustrating and dysfunctional. He agreed that a No vote does not automatically mean Belmont will withdraw from the district. DESE may respond appropriately (within the 60 days) and Belmont may opt to remain.

Chair Libenson noted that only 54% of the students attending Minuteman are from member towns. This speaks to the fact that the Minuteman district is broken. Belmont tried to fix the system and the Minuteman administration's answer was no. Belmont does not want to support the broken district.

Chair Libenson then reviewed his materials. Highlights include: the enrollment trends, the costs associated with Minuteman, the member/non-member issue, etc. It simply does not make sense to be a member-town under the current construct. The member towns are unfairly subsidizing the non-member towns. Also, the school is overbuilt. Belmont is being asked to re-up its membership and, from a fiscal perspective, it is cheaper to *rent* seats at Minuteman than to buy into Minuteman. There is clearly a better plan for Belmont, he said, and rejoining the district is always an option.

The WC explored several options that could occur if it withdraws from the district.

Member Gammill then explained why he supports voting Yes. He said he believed that achieving fairness in cost sharing between member and non-member towns is possible, and, while there is still more work to do, he views the financial choice between member and non-member status as a toss-up. He said that budget decisions are statements about values, and his decision to support the Yes position is based on his assessments of remaining a member in terms of strategic value to Belmont, in terms of protecting the Minuteman option for future Belmont students and values, and our values as a reliable regional partner.

Member Dash stated that a debt exclusion for Minuteman will be difficult to pass, and to support this debt without a debt exclusion will cripple Belmont's budget. He said Chair Libenson laid out the very logical reasons to vote No. He concurred with Member Epstein in that voting No keeps Belmont's options open.

Member McLaughlin moved: To recommend a No vote on the Minuteman Debt, election to be held on 9/20/16.

The motion passed with 13 in favor and one opposed.

Updates: Board of Selectmen and School Committee

Board of Selectmen: Selectman Baghdady provided an update on Cushing Village. The P & S was extended until 9/30/16, and it should close. The Planning Board voted to extend the special permit, as well. Cushing Village was briefly discussed; specifically the parking lot.

School Committee: SC Chair Fiore reported that the schools opened today and all went well. The SC meets next Tuesday, September 13.

Public Contributions

There were none.

Adjournment

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:05 p.m.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary