

**Town of Belmont
Capital Budget Committee
Belmont Town Hall, Conference Room 1
Thursday Evening, March 16, 2006, 6:30 p.m.**

Mrs. Brusch called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. All the members of the Committee were present at the meeting. Also present at the call to order were Frank P. Martin, Assistant Town Accountant and acting staff liaison to the Capital Budget Committee, and Thomas Younger, Town Administrator. Various other Town employees and others (identified below) participated in the meeting when their capital budget requests were discussed.

In addition to the original department requests for fiscal 2007 capital expenditures and a chart, prepared by Barbara Hagg, Town Accountant summarizing those requests, the Committee had the following material before it:

1. An Internal Memorandum from David L Frizzell, Chief of Department, dated March 12, 2006, concerning the Fire Department Responses to Capital Budget Committee Questions.
2. Interdepartmental memo from Peter J. Castanino, Director, dated March 13, 2006, concerning Department of Public Works Responses to Capital Budget Committee Questions.
3. Memo from Department of Public Works sent March 13, 2006, concerning Town of Belmont Chain Link Fencing Repairs 2006.

Other items, noted below, were distributed in the course of the meeting.

Action on Minutes of Previous Meeting

(Item 2 on Committee Agenda)

Meeting of 3/2/06

The draft minutes of the meeting of 3/2/06 were unanimously accepted as presented.

General Discussion

(Item 3 on Committee Agenda)

The Committee noted that there had been considerable discussion among the Warrant Committee and the Board of Selectmen as to whether the budget for fiscal year 2007 should be adopted at a special town meeting to be held after the Annual Town Meeting, perhaps in June. Ms. Fallon noted that a competing commitment had developed for her on the evening of March 30, the next scheduled meeting of this Committee. Mrs. Brusch pointed out that if, indeed, the presentation of a budget for FY2007 is delayed until a special town meeting, perhaps it will be unnecessary to meet on March 30.

Mrs. Brusch distributed and explained a worksheet that she had drafted to assist her in responding to a Warrant Committee request that she provide further guidance with regard to an appropriate capital budget for the Town. On the worksheet, which contained entries for all the capital requests now pending before the Committee, Mrs. Brush had

organized groupings of requests according to groupings that were created by the Committee at its February meeting, and reflected whether the requests seemed to fit the by-law definition of a capital item. She asked that during the course of the meeting all members of the Committee indicate how they would deal with various requests as those requests are listed on her worksheet. She emphasized that this would be a preliminary indication only and that a vote would be taken after full discussion of each request. During the discussion, Mr. Firenze remarked that certain requests that are not appropriate for the Capital Budget Committee should be sent back to the department heads, indicating their inappropriateness for a capital request.

The Committee also noted that it had received a new quotation obtained by Wm. Kevin Looney, Manager of the Building Services Department, with regard to adding snow guards to the Homer Building. The newest quotation indicated that the cost could be as high as \$44,000, considerably more than first estimated. There ensued a general discussion concerning the Town Hall Complex during which Mr. Firenze indicated that the Board of Selectmen would review the issue raised by the question of what to do, if anything, regarding the doors on the ground floor of the Town Hall.

Fire Department *(Item 4 on Committee Agenda)*

The Fire Department was represented by Chief David L. Frizzell and Assistant Chief Angus Davison.

Mrs. Brusch began by asking the Chief about previous capital appropriations that still showed a positive balance. As she has done in previous instances, she took notes for later follow-up.

Discussion of the Department's requests began with a discussion of what to do about items that are recurring and in some sense capital but are not within the by-law definition of capital for the purposes of the Capital Budget Committee. In the context of a five-year plan, a category like turn-out gear appears as a "spike" in expenditures for a future year. Mrs. Brusch pointed out that if an item like turn-out gear had been treated in the operating budget, and some turn-out gear had been purchased every year, there would be no "spike." The Chief responded that there had been no room in the operating budget for turn-out gear so he had turned to the capital budget, and much of the existing gear (except for outfits new recruits) had been purchased at once. That meant that replacement gear would all come due at the same time. He further pointed out that from the department head's point of view, the budget label or category is not so important as the issue of whether the funds will be made available for necessary purchases. Mr. Clark indicated that prior Capital Budget Committees had become concerned that necessary purchases were not being made through the operating budget and had recommended some purchases through the capital budget that might not meet the by-law definition of a capital item. Turn-out gear is an example of that phenomenon.

Mr. Bowe inquired who, on behalf of the Town, is going to make decisions about items that should be purchased but do not fit within the by-law delegation to the Capital Budget Committee.

The Committee turned to the list of replacement vehicles that the Department had submitted. Mr. Clark asked whether, as a result of past Capital Budget Committee actions in requiring that vehicles be used for a longer cycle than the Department had planned, the Department had now concluded that it could indeed stretch its replacement cycle. In response, the Chief said that the 1998 shift commander's vehicle (fifth priority among the Department's requests) could be delayed but the 1999 vehicle and the 1996 vehicle (second and third priorities on the Department's list) should be replaced. In fact, the 1999 vehicle had been a problem vehicle since it had been purchased.

Discussion of replacement vehicles led to a general discussion about use of "hybrid" vehicles in the Department. The Chief responded to a suggestion that the Department consider hybrid vehicles that the Department had looked at the experience of the Light Department. His own view is that the Fire Department should not be an industry leader and should wait until hybrid vehicles are perfected to the point where one can be absolutely certain that a vehicle will perform as expected in an emergency situation. Mr. Firenze agreed that the Department mission provides no room for risk.

Mr. Bowe raised the issue of vehicle maintenance. In response, the Chief pointed out that routine maintenance can be accomplished by the Town at the Town Yard but a specialized maintenance on fire vehicles often requires outside contracting.

There was considerable discussion of the request for a vehicle that can be used as a reserve pumper and a "brush truck". The Chief explained that the Department is now relying on a 1986 engine and a 1988 engine as spares, neither of which is suitable for off-road fires and neither of which meets modern safety standards. Currently, if an off-road vehicle is needed, the nearest one must be summoned from Lexington, if it is available. Belmont needs its own "brush truck" for the close interface between developed and undeveloped land proposed for the McLean property and, perhaps, for an Uplands development. Ms. Fallon inquired whether leasing might be more favorable to the Town than financing a purchase through a bond issue. It was observed that Town has an advantage in being able to issue bonds into the tax-exempt market. Mr. Conte pointed out that it could be that the transaction expenses of a bond issue would add so much expense to a bond financed purchase that leasing would become an attractive alternative. The Chief pointed out that costs for specialized equipment are rising more rapidly than interest expense accumulates and that there is a long lead time for the purchase of specialized, custom equipment. Therefore, it might be wise to incur an interest expense promptly in order to lock in a price and a delivery date.

In response to a direct question, the Chief indicated that an ambulance should be replaced on a five-year cycle. He pointed out that, with hospital closing and emergency diversions, the Town ambulance is traveling further each year than in the past.

The discussion turned back to issues raised by the request for a new pumper/brush truck. The Chief made the following points. Lexington is the nearest community that maintains a brush truck. Closer communities do not need one. Furthermore, the Chief is not always pleased by the standards of maintenance achieved by other communities. Thus, sharing a back-up engine and brush truck with another community, such as being proposed with Watertown regarding a ladder truck, is not really a satisfactory solution. Besides, Belmont could not necessarily avoid buying a truck in a cooperative arrangement. For some kind of cooperative arrangement to work, Belmont must have something to “bring to the table” and cannot always be in the position of needing other communities to supply equipment. In the case of Watertown, Belmont has something that Watertown wants (room to store a ladder truck).

Regionalization can be distinguished from mutual aid because with mutual aid back-up resources are not called upon until they are really needed and are not made available by responding communities unless they are not needed in their own communities. There is, therefore, often considerable delay in the arrival of supporting resources. With regionalization, on the other hand, resources are shifted around as soon as a situation anywhere in the expanded district begins to develop. Thus, there is less delay and more certainty in the availability of supporting resources.

Department of Public Works
(Item 5 on Committee Agenda)

Peter J. Castanino, Director of the Department of Public Works, Gerald E. Schultz and Michael R. Bishop, respectively Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of the Water Division, and Michael A. Santoro, Director of the Highway Division, represented the Department.

Mrs. Bruschi began by reviewing with Mr. Castanino remaining balances of previous appropriations. Since these appropriations had been made before the creation of the Public Works Department by consolidation of previous departments, some of the discussion involved tracing responsibility for an appropriation now that previous departments had been consolidated. Mrs. Bruschi took notes for later follow-up.

Mr. Castanino began by distributing a new “Schedule of Major Capital Equipment Replacement Costs.” This one-page sheet shows a five-year plan for the Department and adds to it a chain link fence replacement program. Much of the discussion between Mr. Castanino and the Committee continued to reflect the fact that the new Public Works Department is still in the formative stage. In particular, the priorities of the new Department are presented separately for each of its divisions, many of which were formerly separate departments.

The Committee had a number of questions regarding the tennis court repair program, which is shown as the first priority of the Parks Division. Mr. Castanino indicated that he could decide among the existing tennis courts which needed the most immediate attention but it was not up to him to decide whether the Town should have

public tennis courts. He indicated that, as he sees it, it is his job to maintain the assets that the Town has; it is the job of others to decide which programs the Town should pursue.

The conversation next took up the chain link fence program. The discussion included the observation that this is a safety issue, particularly for younger children, that some of the fence had been installed with sharp edges up, and that some towns have sold advertising spaces on their fences.

Discussion of the requests for the Water Division, particularly the water main replacement program, triggered a longer discussion that included coordination with the pavement management program. Ms. Fallon pointed out that such coordination was very desirable but had seemed to be lacking in some instances. Mr. Castanino explained that at one time the pavement management program had been designed to resurface streets that had been torn up in connection with the water main replacement program. The Board of Selectmen had later indicated that priority in the pavement management program should be given to roads that are arteries and collectors. The oldest, and therefore the neediest, water mains in Town are not necessarily under the streets that are arteries and collectors. Therefore, streets might get torn up in connection with the water main replacement program that are not a high priority in the pavement management program. Coordination has become a much more difficult matter. Mr. Castanino pointed out that there is also an issue of who should bear the cost burden involved. If the Water Division, and therefore the water rate payers, bear the cost of repaving a road because the main has been replaced, the cost is born by a group of people in proportion to their use of water which is not necessarily in proportion to their use of a street. In Mr. Castanino's view, the water rate payers should pay for only a good patch where the water main has been dug up and replaced. This is a problem if the rest of the street is in such poor condition that it will not take a patch.

Mr. Firenze emphasized that the water main placement program should not be used as an excuse for delaying the repair of streets that need repair. Mr. Castanino assured the Committee that the Town's consultant is working on a plan to coordinate street repair and water main replacement. He pointed out to the Committee, however, that this sort of planning takes a three-or four-year cycle, which can only be achieved in an atmosphere of stable budgeting.

The Committee briefly discussed other responsibilities of the Department of Public Works. Mr. Castanino indicated that the Department would make appropriate rate recommendations to those who set water and sewer rates. The Town's water system is in pretty good shape; its sewers are in fair shape; but its streets are not in satisfactory condition. Mrs. Mahoney observed that lots at the new cemetery were selling briskly.

Mr. Castanino concluded his remarks by turning to the list of Department vehicles that he had supplied to the Committee. Earlier in the meeting he had indicated, in response to a question by Mr. Younger, that vehicles acquired from consolidated departments were being repainted in the orange and black colors of the Department of

Public Works as they are scheduled for repainting in the normal course. The Committee observed that the list of vehicles is very extensive now because of the consolidation. Mr. Castanino observed that he would make some changes in terminology as on the vehicle list; in particular, amounts that are indicated as “oil” are routine maintenance while amounts that are referred to as “maintenance” are specific repairs.

Library
(Item 6 on Committee Agenda)

Maureen Connors, Director of the Belmont Public Library, and Jil Westcott, Mary Keenan and Heli Tomford, respectively the chairperson, the secretary and a member of the Board of Library Trustees, represented the Library.

Mrs. Brusch and the Library Director began with a discussion of outstanding balances of previous appropriations. This discussion included a discussion of the difficulties in completing required alterations of the elevator in the main building.

The Library Director had with her a new, updated Exhibit 1 to her memo to Mrs. Brusch dated 11/23/05. (This Exhibit 1 is entitled “updated for FY07 Capital Budget” and indicates that it was revised in January of 2006.) The Exhibit lists all needs in each year for FY07 and the next five years with the prices associated with those needs shown in each year in escalating amounts. The costs in FY2007 for the requested items are in bold.

Ms. Fallon raised the issue whether use of a van could not be shared between the Library and some other department since the currently proposed budget contemplates the closing of the Benton Branch. The Library Director replied that a van is, indeed, needed for transport between the main library and the Benton Branch. She hopes that the closing of the Benton Branch is temporary. Use of the Benton Branch is part of the plan for accomplishing the proposed library building project.

Mrs. Brusch explained the definition of capital expenditure which, according to the Town by-laws, the Committee is supposed to be following. She observed that a number of the Library requests fell outside that definition as being small, routine or maintenance. Mrs. Brusch pointed out that the Library Department was certainly not alone in making requests that fell outside the by-law definition but the Committee is unlikely to recommend funding from the capital budget. Other funding sources should be sought. In particular, maintenance should not be neglected.

The Committee raised some questions concerning those requests that are capital. Ms. Fallon inquired whether granite, as opposed to asphalt, was appropriate for the parking lot curbing in view of the fact that it would have to be torn up as part of the proposed building project. The Library Director responded that she had been advised by the Director of Public Works that granite curbing would be more appropriate. In response to a question, the Library Director indicated that the furniture she had requested could be used in a new building. Mrs. Brusch noted that the proposal to reconstruct the

circulation area in the existing building was certainly a worthy project but might trigger accessibility compliance throughout the building and certainly would trigger the involvement of the Permanent Building Committee. This, and a later remark by Mr. Clark, triggered a lengthy discussion of the suitability of the current main library building for accessibility reconstruction.

Mr. Clark observed that, in his opinion, the proposed library building project would never rise to the same priority as schools, the Town Yard, or, perhaps, the Police Station. After dealing with those issues, the Town voters would be loathe to authorize the expenditure implied by a new library. Capital expenditures for the existing library should be proposed and evaluated in the light of the fact that, in his view, the Town will have to make do with the existing main library building for many years to come. The Library Director pointed out the importance to Town residents of a library and that full accessibility compliance using the current main building would result in drastic loss of book storage and parking.

Adjournment

(Item 8 on Committee Agenda)

Mrs. Brusch asked that all members of the Committee complete the worksheet that she had distributed earlier in the meeting. After a few moments, she collected the completed worksheets, saying that she would compile the responses and make them available. She also indicated that she would use these as a basis for reporting to the Warrant Committee.

Upon motion duly made, seconded and adopted, the meeting adjourned at about 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark F. Clark