

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

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Becker, Bruschi, Callanan, Dash, Hofmann, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, Millane, Paolillo; BOS Chair Leclerc; School Committee Chair Rittenburg

Assistant Administrator Conti and Town Accountant Hagg

Members Absent: Allison, Epstein, McLaughlin and Smith

The meeting was called to order at 7:38 pm by Chair Curtis.

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

Subcommittee Reports on Program Categories

Culture and Recreation

Subcommittee Chair Lynch began by reviewing the Health Department's sections, which include Public Safety, Inspection, Social Services, and Disease Prevention. The Council on Aging (COA) covers transportation, social services, nutrition, health and wellness, volunteerism, and enrichment. The Library is broken down into Adult, Young Adult, Children's Room, Circulation, and Technology. Recreation's programs include: school year, summer, special needs, and community relations.

Member Manjikian briefly reviewed the COA's functions. Transportation mostly includes the BelderBus and vans. Social Services is the bulk of what they do. Seniors can receive assessments by a social worker to receive different services (language, crisis intervention, etc.) Member Lynch added that the proposed shared position of social worker in the Health Department and COA will improve services and reduce costs. Member Manjikian reviewed the health and wellness offerings, including yoga and aerobics, and noted that computer help technology advising are available. Member Lynch added that the subcommittee has asked for data on the fees for services offered.

Regarding the Library, Member Lynch noted that there was a miscalculation of an appropriation and that the Library received a waiver from the state for \$20K. This issue will be made clear for the upcoming TM. He added that there will be a new round of submissions to the state regarding a new Library. Member Becker noted that the state will offer a 50% reimbursement, but that the papers need to be submitted by May 1st.

Member Becker reviewed in more detail the various Health Department sections. Disease Prevention covers education on anti-smoking, dental, infection control, and

obesity. Public Safety covers animal control, chicken(s) inspection, hazardous waste, and food inspection issues. Social Services will dovetail with the COA. The Health Department is working with surrounding communities to regionalize services.

Recreation, said Member Millane, offers school-year lessons, school programs, summer sports camps, pre-teen camps, and a special needs sports program. They've done more with community relations by offering after-school programs on early release days, a food pantry benefit, a summer blast-off, and by working with the COA, DARE, etc. Recreation covers their department with the revenue made from fees, but we need to know what it costs to run the Underwood Pool and the Rink, as the DPW funds the maintenance on the Pool and Rink.

Education

Subcommittee Chair Bruschi noted five categories that could be applied to the Education budget under the Programmatic rubric, which include:

- Academic Program - (subgroups elementary, middle and HS)
- Extracurricular – (after-school programs, athletics, theater, etc.)
- Special Education – preschool program and out of district placements, etc.
- Non-academic system-wide programs – (transportation, central office/legal, nurses and building operations)
- Technology, staff, curriculum development and substitutes, food service (fee for service)

She said that grouping academic programs by school level would be a big change for this budget.

Chair Curtis asked about METCO and Member Bruschi replied that it is not considered a separate program. The children are considered Belmont students. Member Hofmann said that the town should know what is spent on METCO, as it is a cost to the town.

Member Paolillo provided an update on the feasibility study that is being proposed by the Administration of the Minuteman Career and Technical High School. Minuteman is proposing that it conduct a feasibility study to consider options for making improvements to Minuteman High School. This feasibility study would be funded by a debt issuance by the Minuteman District, and Belmont's share of the debt service cost would be approximately \$32 K. Minuteman cannot move forward with debt issuance for the feasibility study without unanimous approval of its 16 member communities. Once the Minuteman School Committee votes on the debt issuance, Belmont will have 60 days to call a Town Meeting to express disapproval. If we don't express disapproval, it will be considered approved by Belmont.

Member Bruschi noted that Minuteman used to serve over 1,000 students from the member communities and now the number is much lower. They are using "tuition paying students" who are paying 1/3 of what member communities are paying. She

added that Minuteman has created a task force to look at the district agreement and to see how it might be changed. The agreement cannot be amended unless all 16 member communities agree to the amendment.

Member Callanan distributed a handout detailing the programs offered at Minuteman. (See attachment.)

Member Callanan noted that the WC will want to look more closely at the fact that their budget is going up, while enrollment is declining. The WC agreed and Member Libenson added that this budget and programming ought to be compared to other vocational tech. programs across the state, as Minuteman is the most expensive vocational tech. school in the state.

Structural Change Discussion

Chair Curtis returned to the structural change handout that the WC had begun to assess last week. Member Libenson reviewed the document and again framed the question by asking “could this be done”?

Override Timing Discussion

Chair Curtis noted that there are some dates out there for an override, although there is no official position as of yet from the BOS. For a May 24th override, the BOS would need to make that decision by April 14th; for a June 7th vote, the BOS would need to decide by May 3rd. Assistant Town Administrator Conti informed the WC that 35 days prior to the date of the election, the BOS would need to submit to the Town Clerk the text of the ballot question, with the amount and the purpose of the override.

The WC then discussed whether the override election should be held before or after TM. (This does not refer to the April 26th TM). If TM were held prior to the vote, two budgets would be presented: one with an override amount, and the other with an available revenue budget. TM members, and then voters, would know exactly what would be eliminated if the override fails. Member Bruschi noted that having TM first (as was done in 2002) allows for TM to educate the voters, as much voter education happens on TM floor. Important questions get answered.

Chair Curtis said he supports the idea of holding TM prior to a June 7th or 14th vote day. The override campaign can begin as soon as the BOS makes its decision official in early May.

Chair Curtis took a “straw poll” of WC members to see if they supported the idea of having TM vote two budgets prior to an election. The WC was unanimously in favor of this, with the two ex-officio voters choosing not to vote.

Chair Leclerc requested a joint BOS, SC, and WC meeting on April 14th – he would like the WC’s advice on an override amount.

The WC discussed what an available-fund budget would look like. How would the cuts get determined? Member Paolillo noted that the Department Heads need to weigh in on program cuts. Town Accountant Hagg added that Town Administrator Younger needs to be a part of that conversation as well.

Chair Curtis said that, at next week's meeting, the WC will come up with a framework for addressing the available revenue. Subcommittee chairs will need to "ball park" what the major programs cost. At this point, he said, the subcommittee reports will need to be focused around the available-revenue budget.

Other

Member Bruschi noted that the WC will need to allow time to opine on Warrant Articles that will be discussed at the April 26th TM.

Members Becker and Callanan both noted that accomplishing a "structural change" will be important for the override decision.

Member Hofmann moved to adjourn at 9:59 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary