

MINUTES
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MONDAY, MARCH 26, 2007
REGULAR SESSION
SELECTMEN'S MEETING ROOM, TOWN HALL
7:00PM

I. CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Board was called to order in open session at 7:00 PM in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at Town Hall. All members were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present.

III. QUESTIONS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS

There were no questions.

III. ACTION BY APPOINTMENT

Chairman Solomon noted that this is Selectman Brownsberger's last regular Board meeting after 9 years of service and expressed gratitude for his service. Selectman Firenze said he has enjoyed serving with Selectman Brownsberger. Selectman Brownsberger thanked his colleagues and said he has been proud and pleased to serve with them.

Yellow Cab of Belmont Rate Adjustment Hearing

Louis and Rick Truscello of Belmont Taxi and an attorney from Yellow Cab Company appeared before the Board. This is the first rate increase request since 2001. The request is to increase the rate per mile to \$3.20 and the waiting time from \$22 to \$24 per hour. This is consistent with neighboring communities.

Selectman Firenze asked if there is a senior discount. Louis Truscello said this was tried in the 1990s and for a number of reasons it didn't work out. However, the Council on Aging helps seniors share rides.

The Board moved: To approve the rate adjustment request.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

Waverley Trail Update

Jim Levitt & Adam Tocci from the Waverley Trail Advisory Committee appeared before the Board. Mr. Levitt explained that the Committee has a dedication ceremony planned for April 27, which is also Arbor Day, at 11:30 AM. It will include a tree planting ceremony. Mr. Tocci said the committee will be selling bricks to the public for \$75 in which a message can be imprinted that will be implanted near the main kiosk in Waverley Square. There is space for 200 bricks.

The project has been completely funded by private donations and did not cost the Town any money.

VFW Location discussion

Chairman Solomon said that the VFW building needs substantial renovation and repair. The VFW cannot afford to make these repairs. Chairman Solomon said regardless of the outcome, the Town intends that the VFW will have a place to meet in Belmont.

Selectman Firenze said the lease agreement on the land states that the building will revert to the Town if the VFW no longer occupies it. The Belmont Media Center is interested in renting the upper floor but cannot fund the repairs, which are projected to cost as much as \$120,000-\$150,000. It does not appear that the Town can afford to underwrite the repairs.

On behalf of the VFW, David Frizzell, Sr. read a letter from the Town's Veterans Service Officer, John Maguranis, asking the Town to remember the sacrifices of our veterans and do whatever it takes to keep the VFW in its current location. Mr. Frizzell said the veterans perform many services for the Town and it is time for the Town to do something for its veterans.

Selectman Brownsberger said if the VFW owns the building, the Town cannot spend money to fix it. If the Town owns it, everything has to be done by the book and up to code which could add time and expense to the project.

It was clarified that the Media Center cannot purchase the building unless the Town takes possession of it and then has to dispose of it through the RFP process. There was discussion of whether the terms of the lease could be changed to somehow allow such a transfer. This would require legal consultation.

The Board agreed that it would like to do whatever it can to help the veterans and proposed to put together a working group including Selectman Firenze, Town Counsel and Mr. Younger to find a solution.

The Board moved: To declare the month of May as "Veterans' Month" and to authorize the VFW to conduct their annual poppy fundraising drive.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

IV. ACTION BY CONSENT

Approval of New Common Victualler's License - Savino's Grill
Close Annual Town Meeting Warrant

The Board moved: To approve the license and close the Town Meeting Warrant.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

Savino's Grill will open on April 16.

Goden Street/Alexander Avenue Parking

Mr. Conti reviewed the process of studying the Goden/Myrtle/Oak parking issue and why the recommendation was made for one-side only parking. The Fire Department is concerned that it would be unable to get an emergency vehicle down the road when cars are parked on both sides.

Community Development Director Glenn Clancy said that the formula proposed by the Pavement Management Committee study suggests that Goden Street should be restricted on one side because of the level of traffic, but the other two roads see less volume and would not be restricted. However, the complication of the athletic event traffic might argue for exceptions to the formula.

Chairman Solomon said that many residents are opposed to this change and would like to see the current restrictions enforced. Traffic Sgt. Jamie MacIsaac noted that it is hard to have the same enforcement effect with occasional visitors from out of town that one can have with residents.

Selectman Firenze said the key seems to be the difficulties during 5-15 events a year. There was discussion of taking temporary measures on game days to implement restrictions, though it may cost money to have DPW or the police do this.

The Board moved: To direct the Town Administrator and the parking group to adopt a temporary approach to prohibit parking on the downhill (end) of Goden, Oak, and Myrtle Streets during athletic events and implement it in the most cost-effective and efficient way to address the problem.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

Mr. Younger suggested that the parking prohibition be added to the school athletics web page with directions to the field. School Committee member Scott Stratford said the school encourages use of the school parking lot for games, but will double check on this.

The Board heard from Alexander Avenue residents opposed to the recommendation to remove the two-hour parking restriction. A resident pointed out that the train station was closed at one time and that accounts for the difference in signage between Alexander Avenue and Channing Road. Mr. Stratford shared some photos of Alexander Avenue with cars parked in various locations.

The Board moved: To provisionally implement a 2-hour restriction on Channing Road, notice the residents and hold a public hearing, and to make no change on Alexander Avenue.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

Pleasant Street Update

Mr. Clancy explained that as part of the project, the Light Department (BMLD) agreed to fund work to put their primary wiring underground. It was discovered during the work that Verizon had three conduits on the north side of Pleasant Street covered by a concrete cap. Next to this is an MWRA water main. This means there is no room on that half of the street for other utilities to go. This meant the drainage system had to be moved to the other side, in the location where it had been planned to put the BMLD wiring. As a result, the primary line will have to be kept above ground. BMLD proposes to reduce the amount of primary line on Pleasant Street by transferring some load to conduit on Cross Street. Mr. Clancy is asking the Board to authorize the change to not bury the primary line on Pleasant Street.

The Board moved: To authorize a design change to the Pleasant Street project to not bury the primary BMLD wire on Pleasant Street between Leonard Street and Route 2.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

V. ACTION BY WRITING

Award FY2007 Pavement Management Project

Mr. Clancy said the award is to Newport Construction, an experienced firm with a very competitive price that came in below the Town's estimate. They hope to begin work in April on Washington and Cross Streets.

The Board moved: To approve the contract award for \$1.4 million.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

Approval of Contract for Engineering Services - Community Development

Mr. Clancy explained that this is the contract for the work that Faye, Spofford, Thorndike is going to do using flow meters to measure stormwater flows for GIS work and to help inform solutions for the Winn Brook area.

The Board moved: To approve the contract.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

Resolution in Support of Restoring the 40% Cut in FY08 Commonwealth Sewer Rate Relief Fund

This is a request from the MWRA.

The Board moved: To pass and send the resolution.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

Budget Issues

Chairman Solomon said the goal is for the Board to agree on a recommendation on how to spend the Town's available free cash for FY08. Belmont is facing a budget deficit of some \$2.8 million. He noted that the operating budget already contains \$800,000 from free cash, leaving \$4.4 million to be allocated. The Warrant Committee has expressed concern about spending portions of the free cash that may not recur annually on expenses that do recur annually, which would increase the budget gap in the following year.

It was clarified that twin \$400,000 reductions by Town and schools, if implemented, could bring the deficit down to \$2 million.

Selectman Firenze proposed applying \$1.2 million from free cash to the operating, \$600,000 for small capital items that are now in the operating budget, \$2 million for roads, and \$400,000 for the post-employment liability (OPEB) fund. This would leave about \$300,000 in free cash. He noted Belmont can expect to receive several million from the sale of land on Woodfall Road in FY08 and an overlay adjustment of a few hundred thousand. This would still leave a gap of \$1.6 million that needs to be closed.

Selectman Brownsberger said he would like to come as close as possible to fully funding the town and school requests, understanding that an operating override or major changes would be required in FY09 in any case. He proposed using \$2.5 million of additional free cash for the operating budget.

There was discussion that there may be an additional \$200,000 or so in revenues above what was originally estimated which could cut the gap to \$2.6 million.

Chairman Solomon said he is comfortable with an additional \$2 million from free cash for town and school operating budgets. Mr. Younger said this is a level he
Ann Mahon asked if Town Meeting Members feel the budget is too low and reject it at Town meeting, what happens? It was clarified that Town Meeting is sovereign and can make any changes it likes to the budget.

Gretchen McClain noted the importance of maintaining the schools and the demonstrated willingness of parents to support an operating override to do so.

The Board did not take a vote on this issue. Mr. Younger will provide the Board with a list of cuts he would have to make under Selectman Firenze's proposal and the Board can discuss the issue again on Wednesday in a continuance of this meeting at 7:00 PM.

Self-Insurance Decision

Chairman Solomon noted the Warrant Committee has recommended making the change to a self-insured health care plan subject to the following conditions: The Town will establish a health care trust fund, establish an advisory committee, have the Insurance Advisory Committee meet quarterly on health insurance, have all the cost estimates in hand, and contract with the carrier to be the final arbiter of coverage.

It was clarified that this change can be implemented for FY08.

The Board moved: To direct the Town Administrator to come before the Board with a specific package based on the Warrant Committee's principles that the Board can take action on.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0).

Legislative Update: Representative Brownsberger

There is a hearing on Monday for the OPEB bill. There is also a hearing coming up on the library bond bill. Mr. Brownsberger will testify in favor of the library bond bill although he does not support moving forward with the library project at this time.

There was a court decision that DEP should be regulating any development in "landlocked tidelands" which would include much of the Alewife area. It is unclear whether this might impact the Uplands.

Town Administrator's Report

Mr. Younger reported on the following items:

" The town-owned parcel of land on Sherman Street sold at auction for \$5,000. It will be split by the two abutting neighbors.

" The Town has received a \$10,000 grant from the state Department of Housing and Community Development for consulting services on the Chapter 40R process at Our Lady of Mercy Parish.

" The Chapter 90 bond bill for FY08 increases Belmont's funding by just under \$80,000 or about 24%. Mr. Younger has investigated the situation with the curb cuts that were complained about by a resident - those were grandfathered in under the current rules.

VI. OTHER

The Board agreed to formally request a report from the Planning Board on the citizens' petition.

The Board recessed until Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at 7 PM at the Chenery Middle School.

The Board reconvened at 7:00 PM on March 28, 2007 in the Community Room of the Chenery Middle School.

Budget Discussion

The Board returned to the question of how to make use of the free cash reserves.

Mr. Younger presented new numbers. He has been able to find about \$400,000 in non-recurring or "small capital" expenses which could be covered with free cash under Selectman Firenze's proposal. He has also cut delta and grounds summer help, sidewalk money, and various small items for a total of \$200,000 in budget cuts.

There was discussion of whether the budget gap could in fact be just about closed if Selectman Firenze's proposal were changed from \$1.2 million for the operating budget and \$600,000 for small capital items, to \$1.6 million and \$400,000, and if the schools could find \$330,000 in cuts by eliminating the guidance director position and restricting full-day kindergarten to one school as a pilot program, plus \$100,000 in additional revenue estimates. There was uncertainty over whether the actual deficit is \$2.8 million or \$3 million. Also, the School Committee has not discussed the cuts that Mr. Younger and Dr. Holland have talked about.

The Warrant Committee convened and joined the Selectmen's budget discussion, which turned to information presented by Phil Curtis. He presented a proposal assuming that there will be a \$1 million savings in health insurance costs in FY08. Combined with \$420,000 in school reductions (full-day kindergarten, guidance director, and IT position) and a \$240,000 cut on the Town side, this would reduce the deficit to approximately \$1 million that would need to be funded from free cash.

There was discussion about whether the \$1 million in savings would be feasible in FY08 and whether it is appropriate to craft a budget based on that assumption. It was suggested that discussing particular amounts of savings that might result from collective bargaining should be done in executive session so as not to compromise the Town's ability to bargain.

The Warrant Committee took a straw vote on Mr. Curtis' proposal to spend \$1.8 million total from free cash for the operating budget contingent on the validation of the assumption of the \$1 million in savings from all the health insurance changes. The vote was 10 in favor, none opposed, and 5 abstentions.

The Board moved: To enter into executive session to discuss collective bargaining and subsequently to return to open session.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0). The Board entered executive session at 8:28 PM.

(During executive session, no substantive motions were made.)

The Board returned to open session at 9:11 PM.

Warrant Committee Chair Ralph Jones asked about the buildings and facilities budget, given the new fire stations being active, the possible assumption by the Town of the VFW hall, and the new Senior Center being built. He said the current budget does not seem capable of handling all these new buildings. Selectman Firenze clarified that the Town is trying to help work out an agreement between the VFW and the Belmont Media Center to avoid having to assume the building.

The Warrant Committee discussed and approved its minutes from the previous meeting.

The Warrant Committee agreed to meet next Wednesday, April 4 at 7:30 PM.

Chairman Solomon noted this is his last meeting as a member of the Warrant Committee and thanked all the members for the privilege of serving with them.

The Board moved: To enter executive session to discuss litigation and not to return to open session.

Motion carried unanimously (3-0). The Board entered executive session at 9:48 PM.

(During executive session, one substantive motion was made and passed unanimously. The Board adjourned at 10:00 PM.)

Thomas G. Younger, Town Administrator