

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes

FINAL

March 3, 2010, 7:30 p.m.

Chenery Middle School Community Room

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

Town Administrator Younger and Town Accountant Hagg

Members Absent: Hofmann

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

Chair Curtis began by noting that the WC will continue with the structural change conversation, followed by “Other”, minutes, then subcommittee breakout sessions.

Further Discussion of Ideas for Structural Change

Chair Curtis read a list of additional suggestions submitted at last week’s WC meeting. Member Libenson noted that he has received a draft from Public Safety placing their suggestions for structural change within the matrix discussed last week (i.e., “financial impact high/medium/low”, “approvals required”, etc.) He asked that the other subcommittee chairs send him their lists of suggestions, locating the ideas within the matrix. Chair Curtis noted that the completed matrix will get posted on the town’s website.

Regarding the budget analysis, Chair Curtis said that the WC is trying this month to understand the budget programmatically. Once the programmatic analysis is complete, an “available revenue budget” will be created, and the programmatic analysis will be used to make principled recommendations on where the scarce resources should be allocated. The political decisions that will need to be made will not be easy to make or popular, but it is necessary to explain the budget to people by looking at what programs we are spending money on.

Member Allison raised two points for subcommittee consideration on program budgeting. First, she noted that concerns had been raised about the level of effort required to create a full program budget, including the budget categories, activity indication, and performance evaluations. She observed that if the only thing we were able to do this year was to provide the departmental budgets in terms of programs – where the program descriptions truly capture the department’s activities – it would be a major contribution to the budget discussion. A robust and sensible set of budget categories are a much more useful basis for discussion than expense lines. Secondly, she said, by engaging in the program analysis this year, we will have laid the foundation for

next year's WC to move further into the development of activity indicators and performance evaluation.

- BOS Chair Leclerc informed the WC that the department heads are being asked to create an available funds budget. He agreed with the WC that the programmatic analysis will be helpful in making cuts, but he is concerned about accomplishing this analysis in a month's time.

- Chair Curtis informed the WC that next week the structural change conversation will move along (with analysis of the matrix document Member Libenson is creating) and that the subcommittee chairs will report on the programs in the departments under which operating budgets are being reported. Member Libenson requested that, by the end of night on Sunday, the subcommittee chairs send him the matrix entries for their departments.

- *Other*

- Chair Curtis read a section from the Mass. Taxpayer Foundation Bulletin written by former WC Member Mr. Mike Widmer. The article said that regarding the FY11 budget, the news is good. By most accounts it will be funded at 2010 levels. However, the serious cuts are postponed until FY12. In order to fund the FY11 budget the state is using \$2.1 billion in one-time funds. While this allows for fewer cuts in FY11, it opens up a huge budget hole in for FY12 at which point there will be no reserves and no hope for economic recovery to help. The outlook for 2012 is grim.

- Mr. Younger noted that, regarding the vocational school's feasibility study, the date to vote is set for March 23rd. This vote refers to each Minuteman member community voting to fund the feasibility study. The MSBA requires funding approval of the feasibility study. The MSBA is funding a share of the total construction costs of the project and the rest of the financial burden is shouldered by the member communities. Member Brusch noted that legally only 2/3s of the communities have to support this for it to go forward. BOS Chair Leclerc offered that the Minuteman subcommittee is unanimously opposed to this study and the ensuing construction project. The BOS will recommend not supporting as well. He continued to say that he has not communicated Belmont's position to the other communities. Member Brusch noted that the MSBA requires a statement of interest which has to be "letter perfect". The BOS have never been asked to vote on a Minuteman statement of interest. Furthermore, she said, the MSBA requires that the exact number of students is known before they'll approve and member communities already pay 100% of capital costs. Member McLaughlin suggested that Belmont meet with Minuteman to state clearly its intention to neither support the study or the project.

- Mr. Younger informed the WC that he has met with Watertown's Town Manager and provided him with Belmont's capital budget requests to see whether any asset sharing would be possible. He will meet with Arlington too. If items can't be shared, he said, at least money could be saved by "mutual bidding". Member Brusch suggested that

studying the long term list would be great as well. Belmont will need to purchase expensive capital items, maybe not this year or next, but definitely down the road.

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- Member Callanan asked SC Chair Rittenburg about what was ratified at the SC meeting on 3/2/10. SC Chair Rittenburg said that the SC voted (a unanimous SC vote in favor and the BOS Chair against) on an agreement for Unit A for a one-year extension on its current contract and to have a zero COLA increase, but to increase the top step salaries by \$900 followed by \$200 for all teachers at the end of the contract. BOS Chair Leclerc explained that the Board supported extending the contract and maintaining the step increases, but not supporting additional enhancements. Therefore, as this contract had enhancements, he voted against it. Member Bruschi asked what the cost of living was for this past year, as she believed it did not increase. Chair Curtis noted that at a \$70K salary, \$900 amounts to a 1.2% increase. Member Epstein noted that, since the cost-of-living index used in calculating major federal benefits such as Social Security had shown a 2% decrease, this amounted to an effective 3% increase, in addition to scheduled step increases. He further noted that Social Security recipients had not received a cost-of-living increase this year.

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- Member Allison asked: "How much does this add to the school budget's bottom-line?" SC Chair Rittenburg said she didn't believe it added anything, as it has been factored in. Member Bruschi asked where it was included, then noted that it must have been within the "contract increases" line item.

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- Member Callanan then asked about the consolidation efforts. BOS Chair Leclerc said that Selectman Jones will meet with Superintendent Entwistle on the issue of HR consolidation, and that Jones has suggested that a committee be created to offer a swift recommendation on consolidation options. SC Chair Rittenburg said that the school department has been in support of Labor consolidation and that the Superintendent has, thus far, held back on hiring an HR Director, but that position will need to be filled. Chair Curtis noted that the WC is endorsing consolidation of Labor, HR, and Buildings and Grounds.

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- Before the WC broke into subcommittee meetings, Member Bruschi suggested that the Unit A enhancement ratified by the SC this week might impact the deliberations of the Retirement Board (RB), and that a WC member should be at their meeting. Town Accountant Hagg noted that the RB is meeting March 24th at 8:15 a.m. Member Allison agreed to attend the meeting as a representative of the WC.

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- Mr. Younger notified the WC that he is meeting with the town unions throughout March and that it is likely that extensions will be negotiated.

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- The WC discussed pension funding, the actuarial study, and the fact that the health costs for post employment are growing fast.

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- ***Minutes***

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- The minutes of 2/3/10, 2/11/10, 2/17/10 and 2/24/10 were approved with minor adjustments to the minutes of 2/3/10. There was a request to add the town and school PowerPoint presentations to the minutes of 2/11/10. There was one abstention to the minutes of 2/11 and there were four abstentions to the 2/17 minutes.

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- ***Subcommittee Breakout Sessions***

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- Chair Curtis notified the television audience that the WC would now break into subcommittees at 8:50 pm.

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- Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:40 pm.

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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary

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