

Warrant Committee FY07 Meeting Minutes
April 18, 2007, 7:30 p.m.
Chenery Middle School Community Room

Meeting was called to order at 7:30 by Chair Jones.

Present: Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Accountant Hagg; BOS Chair Firenze; School Committee Chair Bowe; Town Treasurer Carmen

Absent: Members Christensen, Callanan, Hobbs, and Widmer

Chair Jones began the meeting by informing the WC that guests were present and prepared to speak at tonight's meeting.

Discussion of Remaining Warrant Articles for Annual Town Meeting

Regarding Article 9 ("Position Classification and Compensation Plan"), Diane Crimmins, HR Director, spoke about the changes in pay and class plan. In 2000, a study was done ranking personnel (copies of Pay and Class Plan have been distributed). This study is good for 10+ years, Crimmins explained. Changes have occurred during the year. Examples include: the Treasurers Office, created DPW Business Manager, Administrative Assistant position was left vacant (that office was reorganized), change in branch librarian position, Community Development position upgraded (Assistant Director position left vacant and department head upgraded), new Assistant Health Director/Sanitarian position established dropping the Sanitarian, GIS administrator is a new position, and Council on Aging position for a volunteer coordinator now funded by town (had been grant funded). Total cost \$16,600, with a net overall savings of \$47,000.

A brief period of Q & A followed.

Member Brusch noted changes with the Community Development Director position as well as the Assistant Director of Board Health position: if these positions become vacant, she asked, would the level change? Crimmins replied that the position is reviewed during a change, and any change in duties is up to management's discretion. Brusch asked: is this well documented? Crimmins replied that comprehensive records are kept year by year. BOS Chair Firenze noted that seven years have passed since actual job classifications were done. "Have we spot-checked the positions regarding grades – is it time to reevaluate?" he wondered. Crimmins replied that it is the same system and the same consultant, which offers stability regarding grades and salary ranges. We look at the market and do town-by-town comparisons, and ask: are our salaries comparable to

those in Lexington, for example? We try to be consistent in following the market. I work with the Town Administrator to stay on market, she said.

Member Hofmann expressed concerned about police turnover. How do we compare to other towns? he asked. Crimmins explained that while Belmont is comparable in pay raises, there is another factor contributing to this turnover. There was a time, she explained, when bigger cities used to not raid (police personnel) from smaller towns. However, Cambridge, Newton, and Boston have changed this "unwritten rule". Newer officers are now lured to the bigger cities for the better opportunities (details, etc.) that are provided there.

Member Hofmann noted that Crimmins' compensation exceeds the maximum listed on the pay scale range. She replied that in some Director positions (e.g. her own, Town Accountant Hagg's), additional duties have been taken on that are well above and beyond what's in the job description, and therefore extra compensation is given. Hofmann asked: Are you still doing the extra duties? Because if a salary is above cap, we need to know why, he said. Chair Jones advised that the Town Administration should be prepared to offer an explanation on this to Town Meeting if the question came up. Member Heigham moved to not make recommendation on this, motion was seconded, and passed.

Regarding Article 12 ("Authorization of Expenditure from Revolving Funds"), two Conservation Commission members were invited up to the WC table by Chair Jones: David Webster and Debby Hartman, Chair of the Rock Meadows subcommittee. Article 12 involves filing fees for consultants and Rock Meadow fees to be used for costs to maintain that property. Chair Jones asked: what happens to a surplus in a revolving fund? Town Accountant Hagg answered that it either rolls over, or comes back to general fund. If the revolving fund is reauthorized by Town Meeting, it rolls over to the next fiscal year.

(A motion on Article 12 occurred later in the meeting – see below.)

Article 13 ("Rock Meadow Maintenance") concerns the appropriation of free cash to get a grant from US Department of Agriculture to help maintain Rock Meadow. David Webster explained: The town has an obligation to maintain Rock Meadow. We need \$30K to leverage \$51K – which amounts to 75% of the total cost of a 10-year contract entitled "Wild Life Habitat Incentive Program". This contract allows Rock Meadow to be kept a meadow. We leverage the grant and fund a 10-year program and thereby write off 75% of the estimated costs. Debby Hartman added: We hire and pay contractors for Rock Meadow, we submit bills, then Belmont gets paid back. But we need the \$30K up front, after which there will be no additional funding requests for the next 10 years. When asked how this type of fund is set up, Town Accountant Hagg replied that it has a "capital project setup": we spend our own money up front, secure the USDA grant separately, and use grant funds from there on out. Member Bruschi noted that this did not flow through Capital Projects.

Member Doblin put forth that she strongly supports this article. It is a small amount of money for a big return on valuable free space, she said. Member Heigham noted the federal funding component and asked: what happens if the funding stops? Hartman replied that it is a 10-year contract – the funding is bounded for 10 years. Member Bruschi asked a time-related question: Why is a \$30K request required in April? Shouldn't this issue be taken up in June? After all, the money won't become available until July. Town Accountant Hagg concurred that the money isn't available until July 1, but you can bid it out now and have it written in the contract that the work won't start until 7/1. In answer to SC Member Bowe's question about the reimbursement process, Hartman replied that "as soon as the work is done, we can submit the bill."

Member Doblin moved for favorable action on Article 13, the motion was seconded, and passed with one abstention.

Minutes Approved for 4-11-07

After corrections were made, the minutes of 4-11-07 were approved, with four abstentions (from members who had been absent).

Member Oates requested that the final version of these minutes – and future minutes – be automatically sent to WC members. Chair Jones replied that, while the minutes were posted to the web site, he had received another such request, and would support final minutes being sent to WC members.

Discussion of Remaining Warrant Articles (continued)

Chair Jones said that Article 11 would be handled in June.

Regarding Article 14 (“Accidental Death Benefit Increase for Surviving Children”), Chair Jones noted that it was waiting for additional information. Town Accountant Hagg remembered that she had received a follow-up from the Retirement Board. No one is presently impacted, and Workers Compensation offers no duplicate payments. One benefit is coordinated with another, she explained, one is off-setting the other. BOS Chair Firenze noted that some employees do not have Workers Comp (fire and police). Member Hofmann stated that they do receive similar benefits to Workers Comp, and he restated his concern regarding the duplication of said benefits. Hagg explained that this benefit was specifically for surviving family members when the employee is killed in the line of duty – these people are not covered by a higher benefit. Chair Jones put forth that only 52% of retiree benefits are funded at this time, and it is therefore odd to expand the scope of benefits, when we aren't sure we can fund what we need to be funding. Assistant Town Administrator Conti noted that while no one is presently impacted, it is possible, and if this situation were to arise, there may be pressure for this benefit in the form of an emotional appeal from town members. Maybe it should be done because it's the right thing to do generally.

Member Heigham motioned for unfavorable action on Article 14 this year, motion was seconded. 8 voted for the motion, 2 voted against, with 2 abstentions.

The WC will meet in Room 112 of the High School at 7:00 on Monday, prior to Town Meeting, to discuss Article 14 should more information become available.

Regarding Article 18 (“Zoning – Public Building Conversion to Multi-Family Housing”, which allows zoning change of certain properties from 2- to 3-maximum-unit dwelling), Chair Jones said that WC action is on hold until the Planning Board meets and decides, and that the BOS is doing the same. BOS Chair Firenze offered new information: the Purchase & Sales Agreement has not yet been signed for the specific property that had sparked Article 18 (the Harvard Lawn firehouse). This fact will be discussed tomorrow with Town Counsel, and the BOS will meet prior to TM regarding what course to take, he said.

Member Heigham motioned to defer action on Article 18 until after the Planning Board action. Motion passed.

Regarding Article 16 (“Disability Access Commission”), Chair Jones noted that it has been reworded, but that doesn't change its meaning or intent. The WC didn't take a position on it.

Regarding Article 12, though it had been discussed earlier, Assistant Town Administrator Conti noted that no recommendation had been made on the article. A move for favorable action was motioned, seconded, and all were in favor.

Budget Submission at Town Meeting: WC or BOS?

Chair Jones referred to an April 9, 2007 BOS meeting where the BOS had announced its opinion on the subject of “Who has official authority to submit the budget at Town Meeting – is it the WC or the BOS?” BOS Chair Firenze cited Article 19, Section 3 of the General By-Laws of the Town, which specifies that the Warrant Committee merely *reports* on the budget, the BOS is the executor of the budget & sets the financial tone. The WC can support the proposed budget or not.

Chair Jones framed the central issue as: Who has the controlling legal authority from the state? Jones cited Chapter 39, Section 16, Paragraph 2 of Massachusetts General Laws which states that the town's financial committee (WC) shall submit the budget to the town. Jones offered that Town Moderator, Henry Hall, who is an attorney, had concurred with Jones.

Member Heigham observed that the budget in Belmont has been read by the WC chair. The town by-laws do not support this, but the state statute does. Jones quoted from the 1988 *Massachusetts Finance Committee Handbook* (author Stuart DeBard) which

reported that only 19% of all towns allow the selectman to make recommendations on the budget, specifically: "Of this 19%, 41% say that the power is in the by-law; 51% say that it is only a courtesy. Those towns would be better served by ending the courtesy so that the voters would have a single set of recommendations to consider."

Firenze asked: If there are two budgets, whose gets voted on by TM? Jones replied: "The WC budget goes to TM, and the BOS budget goes in as an amendment." Firenze said he felt that the BOS is the elected body and the executive branch in this town. It sets the financial tone of town, he continued, and it is inconsistent to think that BOS recommendations can be ruled out by a body of appointed officials. Jones replied that TM, also an elected body, is the legislative branch of the town and it is they who are deciding ultimately.

Member Hofmann suggested that Chair Jones and BOS Chair Firenze meet with Town Counsel for guidance on this issue and report back to the WC.

Reports from Subcommittees

Member Allison and Chair Jones opted to hold off subcommittee report. A handout was distributed regarding Allison's report.

Member Heigham motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:11pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
Recording Secretary