

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE FY08 MEETING MINUTES
FINAL
MAY 14, 2008, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Hofmann, Lynch, McLaughlin, Paolillo, White, and Widmer; BOS Chair Firenze

Town Accountant Hagg, Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Treasurer Carman

Absent: Members Jones, Oates; School Committee Chair Bowe

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began the meeting by turning the floor over to the CPA Committee for its presentation. Several CPA Committee members were present.

Presentation from the Committee Researching the Community Preservation Act (CPA)

Member Paolillo, a CPA Committee member, began by informing the WC that the CPA Committee was formed to determine the feasibility of the town adopting the CPA, which has been in effect in the state since 2001. The committee is gathering input from the community to assess the financial impact as well as the potential benefits to the town. It will report back on its findings in the early fall, at which time the BOS will decide whether or not to move forward. At this time, Paolillo continued, the committee would like the WC's input as it continues to gather data. The matching funds from the state had been 100% - until this year, that is.

Adam Dash, CPA Committee Chair: Basically a tax-surcharge initiative is put on the ballot - and the money so collected is earmarked for open space, historic preservation, and affordable housing. Money raised by a town's tax dollars had been matched 100% by the state. But, as more and more municipalities have signed on, together with the real estate market decline, the state is matching at 60% this year. Regarding the percentage adoption, some towns pass at 3%, some have less of a surcharge. Towns must decide if they want to adopt and at what level of surcharge. In Belmont, the money could be used for the brick barn at Rock Meadow, the Uplands, to restore the Underwood Pool (it qualifies, as it is historic), or to acquire new land or to preserve something else historic. There is a 5-year commitment once adopting the CPA. The money can be built up for a particular project and can be pooled with other towns for something like a bike path. Mr. Dash reiterated that the committee is still in its deliberation/fact-finding phase. The people in the town will choose in the long run, he said, via a ballot initiative. The CPA committee will receive the public's input at a meeting in June.

Questions and Discussion:

Member Allison: If the voters adopt this, they then have no assurance as to how this money is divided. Mr. Dash replied that a new committee is formed whose function will be to field requests and to decide which projects receive funds. Member McLaughlin: It is a fight in this town to raise taxes and the CPA won't help with the three overrides that Belmont is currently facing. Belmont doesn't have a lot of open space; it is completely developed. Our priorities are for good services in a well-rounded town and a good school system. Furthermore, the state's contribution will continue to go down. Mr. Dash replied that there is pending legislation to not let the state's matching funds to go below a 75% match rate. Member Widmer added that, absent any legislation, the state's match is likely to go down based on the forecasted deficit predictions.

BOS Chair Firenze asked: If this had been previously adopted 5 years ago with a 3% surcharge, how would this money have been used? Member Paolillo: \$1.5M could have been raised for the Underwood Pool and the state would have contributed \$1.5M to the Pool, totaling \$3M for the project. But, he added, the match piece for the future is unknown. Member Bruschi: Would the town be earning interest on the combined surcharge and state's matching funding? Yes. Bruschi then asked: Who decides if what the town wants to do with the funding is allowable? The committee first reviews, and it then goes to TM. Member Epstein: If the town had a priority that falls under these guidelines, it makes sense to get it subsidized, but if the town's high priority items don't qualify, we'd be taking tax dollars away from higher priority projects to fund less priority activities - there is the potential to be counter-productive.

Next steps: The CPA committee will submit its draft report to the BOS soon and will possibly make a TM presentation in the Fall.

Schedule for the Balance of the Warrant Committee Meetings in Fiscal Year (June 2008)

Chair Curtis: The WC is scheduled to meet on May 28 as well as sometime in June (tentatively the 18th) to tie up all reserve fund matters. Town Accountant Hagg: The snow removal budget was about \$280-85K overspent, building services have submitted an "alert" due to the energy costs for fire stations, and maybe \$50K will be requested for the Homer Building HVAC work. Member Bruschi: I am not sure the Homer request qualifies under the definition of a reserve fund transfer as it's not an emergency. Assistant Town Administrator Conti: It's for unanticipated landscape work. Mr. Looney will present a factual presentation on the May 28th.

Ideas for Summer Discussion and Process Issues

Chair Curtis: Also on the 28th, the WC should discuss ideas for areas to explore over the summer. Member Bruschi and Chair Curtis have highlighted the Minuteman budget, a school and town consolidation committee, and looking at comparable town budgets. Member Bruschi: When I see what other towns (with comparable budgets) spend on their roads, I want to see what they aren't they spending their money on. Member Widmer: We need a game plan for the fall regarding the overall budget process. We need to start running after Labor Day with override and non-override budget scenarios. Member Hofmann: We should also look at the form of our town government. There were too many open seats at TM and uncontested races this year. BOS Chair Firenze noted that a committee has been formed to look at this issue. Member McLaughlin: We should look at the issue of energy costs and time-of-day pricing of electricity. Changes here will force people to be more economical. Member Callanan: I would like to see a follow-up to the work done on the blueprint committee. The BOS was going to identify core services. BOS Chair Firenze: Identifying core services depends on who is doing the looking - seniors? parents? Different groups have very different priorities. Firenze suggested that the minutes of last blueprint meeting be sent to all WC members. He added that the WC needs to look at the overall process for generating the budget, including revisiting the zero-based budgeting exercise as well as working more closely with the SC in developing the school budget. This needs to happen much earlier in the process. Furthermore, the BOS has decided not to fund the shared IT vacancy until the issues of consolidation can be addressed.

Member Allison: In assessing the WC's objectives for the coming year, I would add that we need to develop and elucidate the budget, identify the subsequent budget objectives, and figure out what supports those objectives. We also need models of what constitutes good budget processes and then get them adopted. And finally, we need to define two lists "the irritants" and "the big ticket items". Chair Curtis agreed that "irritants" assume great importance during override conversations and he added (in response to Chair Firenze's comment about the town's inability to make structural changes) that the health insurance changes were successful structural changes.

Member White asked, "What is the role of the WC subcommittee? Are we simply adding numbers or do we have a more meaningful purpose?" He added that he would not like to spend another year discussing "how to split the pie and what to do with free cash."

Minutes of Meetings, 4/23/2008 (Lisa), 4/28/2008 & 4/30/2008 (Barbara)

The minutes of the above meetings were postponed until May 28th.

Other

Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:31 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary