

**BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
FINAL**

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MAY 21, 2014, 7:30 P.M.

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CHENERY COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair Libenson; Members Allison, Brusch, Dash, Epstein, Fallon, Gammill, Grob, Helgen, Manjikian, McLaughlin, Sarno; Selectman Baghdady; School Committee Chair Slap

Town Administrator Kale

Members Absent: Mennis

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

Chair Libenson began by informing the WC that the DPW Reserve Fund Transfer request may be discussed at some point this evening.

Article 23 – Appropriation of Capital Expenditures

Chair Libenson raised the issue of the \$30K cost of the study for the Grove Street playground. Selectman Baghdady informed the WC that the BOS did discuss the \$30K fee. The money would allow for both a study and a master plan for the Grove Street field. This amount, he said, is an estimate. The entire amount may not need to be used, but that is the amount that the Board is satisfied with.

Member Fallon raised the issue of Grove Street being studied separately from the other playgrounds across town. Selectman Baghdady offered that Grove Street has been the most controversial of the playgrounds, which impacted the Board's decision to study this playground at this time.

Member Epstein asked what would be achieved by spending \$30K on a consultant as opposed to having an open community meeting where the different interest groups could reconcile and hopefully agree on a common plan for the playground. Selectman Baghdady said that this is possible.

Member Allison expressed concern that this is an item that could have come up through the DPW/Recreation Department and/or the Town Administrator. She noted that "design grants" typically run from \$14K - \$18K. She suggested that \$30K could be better spent and benefit more people on sidewalks, for example.

Member Helgen noted that the soccer and baseball fields there have been recently renovated, so the study would not be covering a large amount of space.

Mr. Kale agreed that getting the parties together is a good idea. He added that the study

could take place in phases, and then stopped at any point. It will be beneficial to have professional insight to guide the town through the process of creating a master plan. The RFP, he said, will be written so that the study is constructed in phases (tiers) to minimize the outlay.

Member Epstein asked if an accounting for any monies spent on a consultant could be provided to the WC. Mr. Kale thought this could be done.

The WC discussed issues relating to the \$30K study.

Member Brusch moved: Favorable action on Article 23, as explained.
The motion passed unanimously.

Capital Budget: Pavement Management

Member Manjikian moved: Favorable action on the roads component of the Capital Budget.
The motion passed unanimously.

Article 3 – Minuteman

Selectman Baghdady reviewed some of the major issues facing Belmont with regard to Minuteman. He noted that many communities are now expressing concern about the size of the new facility as well as the number of non-member students attending the school. Several communities are contemplating withdrawing from the district. Core issues include: the size of the new building, the capital/operating costs, the revised agreement, and whether or not non-member towns will ever choose to become member towns.

The Board of Selectmen, he said, voted that TM should “pass over” the Article, providing that Town Counsel issues a statement on Belmont doing so. This is not as strong as a No vote and keeps all options in motion.

Member Fallon expressed concern about the other options for offering vocational education to Belmont students. An alternative model (for Belmont) is definitely necessary. Selectman Baghdady said that it may, in fact, be impractical for Belmont to leave the Minuteman.

Member McLaughlin said that if the school was right-sized and a new agreement was created, it might suggest “staying put.” However, it is now clear that some communities are voting Yes in order to leave.

SC Chair Slap said that Dr. Kingston would like to put an advisory committee together to study alternative ways to offer vocational programs and to assess the costs. Belmont High School does not have the capacity to offer vocational education at this time.

Member Epstein expressed concern about identifying the “right size.” He questioned

whether building a school with a capacity of under 500 students was efficient. The “minimum efficient scale” for a vocational high school might be 800 or more. Fairness then would require all students, not just students from the Minuteman member towns, to contribute appropriately to the capital cost. Non-member towns currently are not obligated to pay towards capital costs. Fundamentally, the funding mechanism needs to be changed. The solutions proposed by Minuteman do not go far enough.

Member Allison said non-member towns will not join a school when the costs to run it go up by 28%. She distributed a handout entitled “Worst Possible Case (WPC) Analysis.”

She reviewed several WPC options:

- the wealthy, low enrollment schools are likely to withdraw
- MSBA could approve the 800-student school
- enrollment from Belmont remains constant
- a new agreement is adopted.

She noted that the process of assessing costs and other relevant data is not straightforward. In the end, the new agreement could be disastrous for Belmont.

Selectman Baghdady noted that the new formula has a “wealth factor” which could hurt Belmont if all the really wealthy communities (e.g., Wayland, Westin, Dover, Lincoln) withdraw.

Member McLaughlin explained the ramifications of the voting process for Belmont, stressing that there are many factors relating to Minuteman that are in motion.

The WC discussed issues relating the Minuteman: the new agreement, the proposed new facility, the possibility that the entire district will collapse, and the ongoing, escalating operating expenses.

Chair Libenson raised the issue of voting yes to the amended agreement as a way to allow for the *possibility* of leaving, since the new agreement offers an opt-out mechanism.

The topic of selling the Minuteman property was then explored.

Chair Libenson then presented the “Decision Tree” which outlines several options concerning what could likely happen, depending on how Belmont votes: yes, no, pass-over. Scenarios surrounding debt responsibility, withdrawal from the district, viable options for providing vocational education, and the size of the new school were explored and the Decision Tree was discussed.

Member Allison raised the point that this is an extremely complex and convoluted issue. She suggested that WC members take some time to truly understand the agreement.

Chair Libenson reminded the WC that it will meet with the Board of Selectmen next week (5/28) at 7:30 in the Selectmen’s Meeting Room to further discuss the position

Belmont should take concerning the vote.

Article 14 – Citizen’s Petition

Chair Libenson informed the WC that amendments to Article 14 are being put together by the Planning Board. The WC will discuss this issue next week. Member Allison offered that the amendments are not substantive in nature.

Article 18 – Salaries of Elected Officials

Member Dash informed the WC that the General Government subcommittee met and discussed this article. He focused on the increases in the Town Treasurer and the Town Clerk positions. The BOS voted to recommend favorable action, offered Selectman Baghdady.

Member Dash moved: Favorable action on Article 18.
The motion passed unanimously.

Reserve Fund Transfer (RFT) for the DPW Snow and Ice

Member Epstein explained the \$200K Reserve Fund Transfer request (to cover the snow and ice removal fund). The request meets the standard criteria for a RFT. The public works sub-committee voted to approve the request of \$200K.

Member Helgen moved: To approve the RFT request in the amount of \$200K.
The motion passed unanimously.

Regarding next week, the WC will need to focus on Minuteman and the Citizen’s Petition (Article 14).

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of 4/30/14 were approved with two abstentions.

The minutes of 5/14/14 will need to be adjusted and approved at a later date.

Updates: Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Planning Board, and Minuteman

Board of Selectmen: Selectman Baghdady reported that there was a three-alarm blaze on Marlboro Street. A three-decker home was almost destroyed and surrounding homes and cars were damaged by the radiating heat. He praised the firefighters for their heroic efforts.

School Committee: SC Chair Slap reported that the SC is in the midst of contract

negotiations. The SC is attempting to answer the RFT questions. The transition of the new superintendent is underway.

Planning Board: Member Allison reported that the PB held a public hearing to discuss Article 14. She said there were many new faces in the audience and the comments were overall supportive of the article. Selectman Baghdady agreed that it was well attended and that there was much support.

Non-Union Pay Classification Study

Member Dash distributed the study and explained the rationale for the study. The results reflect that Belmont is fairly spot-on with regard to pay. However, \$7,000 will need to be paid out to bring several employees up to the average. The BOS, he said, has voted unanimously to support the study.

Mr. Kale reiterated the rationale for the study and said that it achieved the hoped-for goals.

Public Contributions

There were none.

Adjournment

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:21 p.m.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary