

WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

MAY 26, 2004

Handout(s) given out tonight:

1. *Comparative Financial Statements for the 10 Months Ending 4/30/04 and 4/30/03*
2. *May 26, 2004 letter to Board of Selectmen Chair Mahoney from Roger Colton on behalf of the Belmont Housing Trust, Inc.*
3. *Excel Spreadsheet Appendix A Part 1 of 2 on the final financial impact of changing affordability mix – Belmont Uplands*
4. *Excel Spreadsheet Appendix A Part 2 of 2 on the final financial impact of changing affordability mix – Belmont Uplands*
5. *Sick Day Policy article from the Boston Globe*
6. *Cost Cutting Initiatives update May 2004*

Members absent: L. Oates, A. Mahoney, and P. Callanan

Also present: Selectman Will Brownsberger, Town Administrator Mel Kleckner, and Town Accountant Barbara Hagg

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:39 PM.

Acceptance of Minutes

The Committee discussed and the minutes of the April 14, 2004 meeting.

- *Member Hofmann made a motion, Member Heigham seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of the April 14, 2004 meeting.*

The Committee discussed and the minutes of the April 21, 2004 meeting.

- *Member Hofmann made a motion, Member Bruschi seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes of the April 21, 2004 meeting.*

Town Administrator Kleckner gave a brief update on the last mega-meeting as well as the discussions from the Board of Selectmen's meeting from May 24. The Library Trustees were seeking a letter of intent to get on the list for Library Grants from the Board of Library Commissioners, and it did not appear the Town would have to fund anything to get on the list. The Board of Selectmen authorized the appointment of a Site Planning Committee comprised of committee members and some citizen advocates. Town Meeting will eventually have to authorize the next step of the site planning process, maybe as early as next spring.

Vice Chairman White's underlying concern is that we move through the process. There are two schools (with libraries), waiting to be renovated, as well as the main one. Before we go down three different tracks for libraries, we ought to consider if there was a more economic way to go through this process. Does the aggregate make sense instead of thinking of three totally separate issues?

Town Administrator Kleckner spoke on 40B. The O'Neill Group has officially a 40B for the Uplands. The 40B will go directly to the Zoning Board of Appeals. All of this is appealable to a state appeals board. The application has two steps: (1) project eligibility to determine whether the project is feasible, in which the Town has the opportunity to comment on the application (until June 30) before Massachusetts Development, and (2) Mass Development will have to decide whether to approve it. If they do approve it, then it goes to the ZBA. Member Flewelling thinks it unlikely the State would turn this down due to the small amount of affordable housing currently in Belmont. Selectman Brownsberger reported Bob Engler, an affordable housing consultant, mentioned it would create about 15-20 student-aged children.

Member Flewelling asked if the Town has anything to say about the architecture/landscaping of the project. Selectman Brownsberger responded the Town has a lot more control over this process than in others. The negotiation can be more detailed.

Member Heigham added that we are currently a little less than 3% affordable housing in Belmont, and this proposal would double Belmont's allocation.

Member Flewelling asked on the status of the McLean environmental appeal. Town Administrator Kleckner said initially the ruling was favorable to the Town. The DEP did not order a stay and allowed the developer to go forward at their own risk.

Chairman Widmer discussed with the Committee the timing of our last meeting before the summer. The Warrant Committee will meet again on June 30.

Cost Cutting Initiatives & Summer Projects (Handout 6)

Member Bruschi has put together an update on earlier earmarked cost cutting initiatives. The first page is what has been done in recent fiscal years. Page 2 starts the ongoing ones from our list.

Bulk Purchasing

Bulk purchasing and resource sharing would be discussed after GASB 34 has been more fully implemented. Town Accountant Hagg gave an update on the progress of both GASB 34 and bulk purchasing. Chairman Widmer asked if there were opportunities for savings, and is it possible to require bulk purchasing? Town Accountant Hagg said the good news is departments are using Corporate Express and getting lower prices. Member Hofmann agreed this group should still be ongoing after hearing the Committee's discussion.

Resource Sharing

We decided last June that we would put this on hold for FY04 while various departments were off-site. The IT Committee and IT Director would have a lot of input as to how departments would share some resources. It will be put on the Board of Selectmen's

summer agenda. Member Stratford reported there has been some resource sharing between the Town and School, since the Town's IT Director reports to the School's Director of Technology. IT Director Karen Martin is creating a report of the areas that need to be improved within the Town's technology.

Review of the Collective Bargaining Agreements

We have done all of the Town side agreements, and we have still to do the School's agreements. It appears this may have run its course. Member Brusch said we identified that the total costs should be part of the bargaining process, not just salaries. This will be put on hold for now.

Use of Overtime

This does not seem to be a pressing issue much longer.

Energy Savings in Buildings

Member Fitzgerald has been appointed to Dr. Solomon's Energy Savings Committee.

Review of Non-Profit Properties

Member Callanan has been chairing this group. She is working primarily with the Assessors Office. This should be worked on in the fall.

Consolidation of 911 with Other Towns

This has been on the list that Selectman Brownsberger initially raised. With the group currently working on this issue, Arlington and Lexington are also looking into this topic. There has not been much opposition in Belmont from the Police or Joint Public Safety Communications.

Asset Management

This Committee has been meeting and will report in the fall.

Pension Obligation Bonds

In April, Vice Chairman White and Members Hofmann and McCormick agreed to jump on board and look to reduce costs. Town Accountant Hagg said the actuarial study has been completed, but some of the finance assumptions will be changed for FY06. Vice Chairman White will coordinate with Treasurer Freiner to discuss this issue further.

The last page of *Handout 6* includes suggested ideas/projects to possibly begin this summer.

Guidelines for use of Town property by non-profit groups

Members Curtis, Tillotson, Fitzgerald, Brusch, and Town Administrator Kleckner may work together on this topic. This scope is different than asset management. This started as conflicts of interest and how to calculate the actual costs of, for example, a donation of trees. What is the actual cost of the donation including the tree, watering and care for the tree?

Consolidation of buildings

This is about more general maintenance than control of buildings. The original thinking would include someone from Warrant Committee (Member Brusch) and Capital Budget Committee and a small group. The sharing of resources is another aspect for this group to look at. Town Administrator Kleckner will collaborate with the Superintendent of Schools on this project.

Policy on reserves

This conversation was initiated just before the budget process by Town Accountant Hagg and Treasurer Freiner. They are looking for some sort of policy for Free Cash, reserves, and other issues. Selectman Brownsberger has pulled together a financial committee to determine the reserve levels.

Leasing of computers

Member Fitzgerald met with the School's Director of Technology who mentioned the Schools were looking into leasing options. Member Hobbs thinks this could be done with tax-exempt financing since it's a capital lease. Town Accountant Hagg reminded the Committee this needs to go out to bid. Members Tillotson and Fitzgerald will be the Warrant Committee's point people. Member Brusch told Member Stratford to speak with Jack Conti on this topic.

Per pupil cost reports

During this summer, we should get a hold of some local towns to see if we are comparing apples to apples. Member Stratford mentioned a few people in the School Committee are currently working on best practices and benchmarks. Chairman Widmer wants the Warrant Committee to look at this, even if in collaboration with the School Committee. The Education Subcommittee is the correct venue to research this role. Member Hofmann will join with the Warrant Committee's Education Subcommittee.

Ad hoc committee on the budget process

This summer we would review how the budget process went for FY05. It is more of a summer project than a cost cutting initiative.

Use of fees as part of revenues

We need to look at what this really means. Recreation fees still have some issues with self-supporting versus ones for service. What would it look like if we did it a different way? Member Hobbs thinks this could end up affecting the Town/School split if fees and revenues are going to be put into revolving funds. Member Hofmann would like to find out the total revenues the Town collects, including the Schools. Members Brusch, Hobbs, Stratford, Tillotson, and McCormick will work on this issue.

Study potential of moving to Town Manager form of government

Member Heigham will do some background work to the process this summer. This is not a suggestion that we proceed with this, merely a separate summer fact-gathering project. Member Flewelling believes the Town of Belmont would dramatically change if we went to the Town Manager form of government. Member Heigham pointed out there are

operations where the Town Meeting is kept with a Town Manager, with the Board of Selectmen kept as a Board of Directors.

First Look at FY06 Budget

Chairman Widmer wanted share some thoughts about FY06. He thinks it is time to seriously consider an operating override in the FY06 Budget. The critical variable is collective bargaining. We have really squeezed through some difficult areas in the past. In the end, we need to think very seriously about an override, and since we have not looked at the FY06 Budget yet, there is no specific amount in mind. He wondered if it would be advisable to put the override on the ballot for the November election. Regardless of what we do for the FY06 Budget process, we need to decide which direction we are heading as far as the override and when it would go on the ballot.

Member Curtis would prefer and be comforted to know the fire station sales were moving along. Member Heigham added the Historic District Commission has yet to be heard from two of the three fire stations. Member Fitzgerald is concerned that if we put enough attachments onto the fire stations, then we will never sell it. Also, he is not sure that we have too much of a choice but to look for an override going forward.

Member Hobbs said that in November we couldn't tell the voters what will be sacrificed if we do not have the override. Chairman Widmer responded that it is not just assuming doom and reducing costs, he is talking about what it is going to take to get us at a correct level of service.

Selectman Brownsberger said we could address into this some of the capital items. We could even plan to do the Senior Center expenditure under the override. We can have a much better structure process if we know what the voters are willing to do in November rather than engaging in a contingency plan through April. Member Curtis added that we would certainly get maximum turnout since November has a presidential election.

Vice Chairman White is concerned that we will lose site of really how well we can do without the override, if we try for one so early. If we pass the override in November, we will not go through the budget exercise with the same amount of discipline.

Member Brusch is concerned as to what the November override would do to the collective bargaining process. We could look into boosting the capital budget, since our buying power has gone down in the past few years. When we do the override in the spring, we know where we need the money. It is more honest to the voters.

Member Schafer thinks the way we pose it is very important because we don't want to feel that we are rich and regret some impulse spending.

Other

Member Flewelling made a motion, and it was voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Recording Clerk