

MINUTES
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MONDAY, MAY 7, 2007
SPECIAL JOINT SESSION
COMMUNITY ROOM, CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL
7:00PM

A special meeting of the Board was called to order in open session at 7:07 PM in the Community Room of the Chenery Middle School. All members were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present. The Board met in joint session with members of the Warrant Committee, School Committee, and Capital Budget Committee as the "Blueprint Group" (formerly the Structural Group). The purpose of the group is to look at ways to make Town government more efficient and less costly.

The Group heard presentations from subgroups.

Outsourcing (Peter Castanino): The subgroup has been focusing on vehicle maintenance. Mr. Castanino has assembled a list of all the town's vehicles and other equipment that would require this type of maintenance. He has also isolated the budget cost of vehicle maintenance and spoke with other towns about how they handle this function - most towns still do it internally. There are a number of issues that need to be considered, including the need for emergency maintenance off-hours (i.e., for Light Department vehicles responding to power outages during a snowstorm.) The subgroup will continue to study this with the goal of having a recommendation by the fall. Mr. Castanino noted that the employees who handle vehicle maintenance also provide other functions, so if maintenance is outsourced then either someone else needs to be hired to do those other tasks, or you retain the personnel and the labor savings are diminished, or those things don't get done.

There was general discussion about the likelihood and pace of significant structural change. This discussion led to the area of Core Activities. Chairman Firenze said this subgroup had looked at a survey from 1996 asking what services people would be willing to pay more money to maintain. Schools, library, trash collection were all high on the list; the rink and pool were not.

Selectman Leclerc and Selectman Solomon both commented on the need for the leaders of the Town to tell the voters what they believe needs to be done, make the case for it and let the voters decide.

New Sources of Revenue (Jim Heigham): The state limits what the Town is allowed to raise from its two main income sources - property taxes and fees. The Town cannot control what it receives for local aid from the state. Belmont can pursue other efforts to raise revenue, but they will always be minute compared to these components.

Energy/Resources Savings (Jenny Fallon): The subgroup has succeeded in getting the policy statement on resource conservation passed by both the Town and the schools and has written an implementation plan to be worked on by the facilities managers. The subgroup is now doing the data gathering that will inform the decisions of how best to proceed. Some procedures have been drafted which are now being circulated for review and comment. It still remains to develop an energy and water management plan and make it publicly available. The subgroup also wants to expand curriculum offerings in this area in the schools and do more outreach to the general public, and hopes to move forward with these areas in the fall.

Regionalization (Tom Younger): Under the auspices of the Metropolitan Area Planning Group (MAPC), Belmont is working on combined office supplies purchasing among 10 communities and an advertisement for bids is going out this month. If this generates savings it will encourage efforts in other budget areas. There has been talk about shared kennel services, for example. If overrides around the state continue to fail, there will be even more interest.

The Town probably cannot save a huge amount on office supplies, but at least it's progress that can be demonstrated.

School/Town Consolidation (Scott Stratford): On building maintenance, the focus is on integrating the software to track maintenance needs -to make sure town and schools are using the same program. In the area of IT, the subgroup has obtained from Belmont's IT personnel a proposed design for a model structure for a combined IT department.

Health Insurance: Chairman Firenze updated the group on the process of union negotiations regarding health insurance. Anne Mahon asked if Belmont could offer its employees an opt-out payment incentive if they choose to opt-out of taking health insurance from the Town, as Cambridge does. Chairman Firenze said this is an idea that is being looked at, but because Belmont's plan is more generous than most public or private plans there are probably few employees that would opt-out and go on their spouse's plan.

There was agreement that the Blueprint Group should make an interim report to the June Town Meeting outlining the progress that has been made. Chairman Firenze would like a one or two paragraph synopsis from each subgroup's chair on the status of its activities. Mr. Younger and Mr. Conti will talk with the Moderator about how to allow feedback and discussion from Town Meeting Members on this topic - whether as part of the budget discussion or as a separate article.

The next meeting of the Blueprint Group will be tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, September 19 at 7:00 PM at the Chenery Middle School.

The Board adjourned at 8:54 PM.

Thomas G. Younger
Town Administrator