

**Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**FINAL**  
**June 16, 2010, 7:30 p.m.**  
**Board of Selectmen's Meeting Room**

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Becker, Bruschi, Callanan, Dash, Epstein, Hofmann, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, Millane, Smith; BOS Chair Jones; School Committee Chair Rittenburg

Town Administrator Younger and Town Accountant Hagg

Members Absent:

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began by stating that this would be the final WC meeting of the year.

***Reserve Fund Transfer Request 1: Department of Public Works***

Chair Curtis said that he received documentation from DPW Director Castanino requesting a reserve fund transfer in the amount of \$90,300 to cover work that arose from significant tree damage during the June 6 micro-burst storm. The WC agreed that this request is an appropriate use of the reserve fund as it is an unanticipated, emergency situation. This is why money is kept in reserve, said Chair Curtis.

*Member Allison moved:* To support the reserve fund transfer of \$90,300 from the WC reserve fund to the Public Works department.  
The motion passed unanimously.

***Moment of Silence: Walter McLaughlin***

The WC recognized a moment of silence for Mr. Walter McLaughlin (Warrant Committee member and outstanding town citizen) who died on Friday.

***Reserve Fund Transfer Request 2: School Department***

Chair Curtis noted that there is a second reserve fund transfer request and he invited School Finance Director Missal to speak on the school's request for additional funding. Dr. Missal explained that, based on the third quarter report, he is nervous about the schools' ability to cover certain areas, specifically, deficits in the following areas:

- \$20K salary deficit (long term substitute(s) pay was higher than expected)
- \$87K out-of-district special education (also exceeded the expectation)
- \$117K transportation account (Special Education busing)

- \$63K regular transportation (user fees increased and people opted out)

Dr. Missal noted that he is not requesting this full amount, but rather the offset which can't be covered: \$67K. If less money is needed (than the \$67K), whatever is not used will go back to free cash.

Dr. Missal reviewed the major budget factors that were taken into consideration and may have contributed to the deficit projections, including reliance on user fees in the budget, unanticipated Wellington modular fees, and special education out-of-district costs which exceeded budgeted amounts.

Education subcommittee Chair Lynch asked: Does this request meet the standard of an unexpected expense? They are budget shortfalls, he said, not unanticipated expenses, and thus do not meet the standards for a reserve fund transfer. Therefore, the Education subcommittee's recommendation is to deny the request. Member Smith noted that the School Department could spend down some of its revolving funds to cover this expense. Dr. Missal replied that the transportation revolving account is being spent down. As for not being unforeseen, the Wellington modular charges that the Wellington Building Committee refused to pick up, were clearly unforeseen. Additional SPED costs (\$177K) were also unforeseen and unexpected. We are covering as much of this as we possibly can, he said.

SC Chair Rittenburg said that, every year, SPED costs are a challenge to budget, as the school department can't possibly predict how many kids will enter the system requiring IEPs. She said that the School Department knew a reserve fund transfer was a possibility and the education subcommittee advised to budget the \$300K and come back to the WC if the amount needed exceeded what was budgeted. This speaks as to why special education should be taken out of the regular school budget, she said.

Member Bruschi noted that the reserve fund is specifically for emergency or unforeseen expenses. Regarding the Wellington, she said, it was always clear that some expenses would not be covered by the building committee, and those expenses could have been anticipated. She further observed that Special Education requests should have been made earlier in the year, at the time the events that could not have been anticipated occurred. Member Millane asked if there are other accounts with balances that can be used to cover this request. Dr. Missal replied that balances have to be used for the specific category they come from. For example, athletic balances are used for athletics. He reviewed several accounts and their balances.

Chair Curtis noted that life is "very tough fiscally and it's going to get tougher". There is a principle at stake, namely that the WC reserve fund does not cover budget shortfalls in the school or town budget. He noted that the categories in which revolving balances had positive balances were still receiving substantial support from general revenue and thus an allocation of additional monies from those revolving funds to cover overages was appropriate. This money does not exist to bail out a particular department. The Public

Works request is the paradigm of what the fund is used for. The School's request does not meet the emergency and unforeseen requirement, he said.

*Member Hofmann moved:* To accept the Education Subcommittee's recommendation to not support this reserve fund transfer request.

The WC discussed Special Education as a budget category with SC Chair Rittenburg, who suggested that SPED should be considered a non-discretionary cost. Member Becker asked: Where is the School Department supposed to get the money for a SPED child who moves into town in March with an expensive out-of-district tuition? Dr. Missal reiterated that the schools are doing everything possible to control SPED costs and that these particular expenses were not anticipated. We had the assurance of the WC a year ago that this was a legitimate request, he said.

The motion (i.e., to *not* support the request) passed, with 13 members voting in favor, one opposed, and one abstained.

## ***Minutes***

The minutes of May 19 and May 25 were approved, with two abstentions on each date.

## ***Warrant Committee Summer Projects***

Chair Curtis asked Member Allison to lead the Summer Projects discussion. She said that she organized the projects into two categories: group projects and "committee of one" projects. Summer projects, she said, should focus on areas that will make a difference. She noted that she eliminated some areas – Core Services, for example – because they had been studied without success. Privatization of the rink was also eliminated, as this rink would not be a commercial success since it has no parking.

Group Projects include:

- Minuteman (Members Callanan, Millane and Becker will work with BOS Chair Jones)
- Programmatic approach to budgeting for the school department (the Education Subcommittee will explore this area)
- Capital Assets, which need to be looked at in a systematic way (budget, spending)
- Structural Reform (with Members Libenson, Dash, Becker, and Hofmann working to prioritize the suggestions)

Small Projects include:

- Streamlining the WC report (Members Allison, Epstein, and Becker)

The "Committee of One" projects include:

- Pension issues (non-actuarial, health care costs, and COA)

Chair Curtis said that he believes this Pension category should trump Capital Assets – he suggested that the WC table Capital Assets. BOS Chair Jones noted that Belmont has a retirement board which acts on its own and sends the town the bill. He said that unfunded pensions are vastly underestimated. Member Epstein said that he would work with BOS Chair Jones on the Pension issues.

Member Brusch requested that the Town's health care consultant answer the question: Is Belmont doing better than it would have had it joined the GIC?

### ***Warrant Committee Self-Assessment***

Chair Curtis noted that the *WC Self Assessments* have been sent out. Member Allison observed that the purpose of the exercise is to learn how well the WC works as a group, and how well its processes work – it is not about individual members. It is incumbent upon us to be the best possible group and to identify ways we can improve, she said.

### ***Other***

Town Administrator Younger noted that the Open Meeting laws may be taking effect on November 1 rather than July 1.

Town Accountant Hagg alerted the WC that there is a letter in the packet regarding a water budget error at Town Meeting. The letter includes the correct figures.

Member Hofmann moved to adjourn at 9:18 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio  
WC Recording Secretary