

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE FY08 MEETING MINUTES
FINAL
JULY 23, 2008, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Jones, McLaughlin, Oates, Paolillo, and Widmer

Town Accountant Hagg, Town Administrator Younger, Town Treasurer Carman, School Committee Chair Bowe

Absent: Members Heigham, Hofmann, Lynch; BOS Chair Firenze

The meeting was called to order at 7:33 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began the meeting by noting the topics that would be discussed this evening: the reserve fund transfer request from Public Works, and the fuel cost increases and their impact on the FY09 budget. Chair Curtis welcomed Eric Smith to the Warrant Committee. Mr. Smith was recently appointed, but not sworn in yet. He spoke briefly about his background.

Reserve Fund Transfer for Multi-Use Synthetic Field

Peter Castanino approached the WC table and spoke about the issues concerning the multi-use synthetic field, which was installed in 2002. The last repair was two years ago and cost \$32,000. During heavy rains, the rubber pads float and do not flatten out, which creates humps, rendering the field unplayable. The field now needs to be flattened out and re-sewn together and the field needs to be ready by mid-August. Castanino continued: There are two estimates (\$5,600 and \$6,900) and the reserve fund transfer request is to fix the field at \$5,600 - for mid-August.

The WC discussed the issue of a law suit (which was dropped in March 2008), whether this request fits the criteria for a reserve fund transfer, the maintenance of comparable fields and regular upkeep costs. It was then asked - who should be responsible (fiscally) for maintaining the field? Member Allison voiced concern about the precedent that would be set by granting this transfer request. Member Brusch offered that this request did meet the reserve fund transfer requirement as it is unanticipated. To which Allison replied: How many times should this have happened in the past before it is still unanticipated? Chair Curtis wondered if the maintenance budget should be raised. Member Callanan asked if the School or Recreation Department budgets should have funds allocated from their maintenance budgets to cover this.

The Warrant Committee moved approval of the \$5,600 reserve fund transfer request. The motion passed with 9 in favor and 2 opposed.

Increased Fuel Costs and Impact on FY09 Budget

Chair Curtis: The amount of money budgeted for fuel is dramatically less than what fuel is likely to cost in FY09. The school budget is \$392K short and the town budget is \$177K short. Town Administrator Younger explained that the town secures its bid for fuel costs annually through a collaborative bid with surrounding communities and that the spike in energy costs that occurred in March is likely to hit other cities and towns hard as well. Dr. Missal, Director of Finance and Administration for the school department, added that the collaborative contract helped keep Belmont's fuel prices below the market prices for many previous years.

Chair Curtis: Given that there is not money in the budget right now to address these short-falls, if nothing changes, the town and schools are left to deal with these unanticipated increases. The WC needs to know what Belmont has agreed to contractually - in other words, can we save money via conservation efforts, or are we contractually committed to spending a certain amount? Town Accountant Hagg offered to get a copy of the agreement and circulate it to WC members.

Town Administrator Younger addressed some of the conservation areas that the town is exploring, for example: 4-day work weeks, closing Town Hall down in the evenings, adjusting library hours, and closing the Benton library branch. Chair Curtis acknowledged that conservation and saving is critical, but that the current shortfall may still require the infusion of more money. Member Allison: To frame the issue quantitatively, this shortfall amounts to about 1% of the school budget - since the school has surplus money, it will need to go through that surplus, and then find savings elsewhere. Member McLaughlin: Policy issues need to be addressed as well, for example, how many police cars are needed, how many DPW trucks? Member Widmer: If we add this shortfall into the (Spring 2009) override budget and if the override fails, we will have a worse problem. We need to live without dipping into free cash or reserves. Chair Curtis agreed. "I want to let town departments know that we're dealing with this problem without seeking an infusion of free cash." Town Accountant Hagg: A \$200K shortfall on the town side will result in cutting bodies.

The WC discussed other areas where cuts or adjustments could possibly be made, including the cost for heating the indoor pool, regionalization of the indoor pool, funding the hockey rink, paying for gas for employees to commute to Belmont, consolidation of school meeting times, funding the outdoor pool, and the fact that some buildings may be overheated. Dr. Missal explained in great detail why the high school is extremely inefficiently heated.

Chair Curtis: It is the strong sense of the WC that we will not at this stage recommend to TM to use free cash to cover this shortfall. In other words, we are stuck with our budgets. The WC, however, would like to be of assistance in thinking through this problem.

Dr. Missal stated that he would like to meet with the education subcommittee to make a plan of action to cover the \$392K - "I would like to create a safety net if the funds can't be identified to cover this," he added.

Member McLaughlin moved that the WC adjourn at 8:58 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary