



**Minutes of the  
Town of Belmont  
Warrant Committee Meeting  
Wednesday, December 13, 2023  
7:30pm**

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: January 2, 2024  
TIME: 9:00 AM

To view the recording of the meeting, please click [HERE](#).

**Call to Order:** Mr. Lubien called the meeting to order at 7:30pm. There were 17 voting members present

Member	Present	Member	Present
Geoffrey Lubien, Chair	Yes	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Paul Rickter, Vice-Chair	Yes	Melissa Morley	Yes
Conor McEachern, Secretary	Yes	Lynn Peterson Read	Remote
William Anderson	Yes	Matthew Taylor	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Marie Warner	Yes
Fitzie Cowing	Yes	Jack Weis	Yes
Sue Croy	Yes	Roy Epstein, Ex-officio Designee, Select Board	Yes
Deepak Garg	Yes	Meghan Moriarty, Ex-officio, School Committee	Yes
Anne Helgen	Yes		
<b>Staff</b>			
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Remote	Jennifer Hewitt, Assistant Town Administrator & Finance Director	Yes

## 1. Continued Discussion of FY25 budget, Free Cash Usage, and Override

High Level Concepts / Guiding Principles: Mr. Rickter presented the most recent version of the document and highlighted the changes that were made since the last meeting:

- Balance the level of community services with our dependence on residential property tax revenue.
- Maintain and adhere to the town's Comprehensive Financial Policies.
- Plan sustainable budgets with a multi-year focus.
- Advise Town Meeting on the budget and other matters that affect the financial interests of the town.

There was a discussion of how the document would be used including as a Mission Statement and placing it on the Warrant Committee webpage.

Mr. Rickter then shared AI's version of the Guiding Principles as written in iambic pentameter:

*In equal measure, guard our services' worth,  
Yet mindful of the tax that lands us wealth.*

*To policies financial, let us adhere,  
And with a multi-year lens, our budgets steer.*

*Let open communication ever guide,  
That all may understand the town's financial tide.*

No Override Scenario: Click [HERE](#) to see the slides. Ms. Hewitt provided an updated model of FY25 Revenue Allocation if there is no override which showed that \$133,975,769 will be the projected available revenue. She then reviewed the components of the figure that are already earmarked such as Free Cash, adjustments, appropriations, shared services, funds to allow the town to make cuts in a controlled manner, etc. Taking those into account, \$1,305,317 is left which could then be allocated between the Town and Schools after Shared Services. She then reviewed the base budgets for the Town and Schools.

Ms. Hewitt highlighted that this information is a starting point to begin a conversation. She went on to show the financial situations and impacts in future years. She then outlined her conversation with the Select

Board regarding using the Override Budget Model that provided a large variance with the Schools and how the number was modified to be more realistic.

There were questions and discussion about this scenario, how this scenario would impact budgets and the budget process, and how to proceed.

Future Recommendations for Budgeting and Management of Free Cash: Mr. McEachern explained that his presentation is being given to get the discussion started. He outlined how he compiled the list. He then reviewed the Warrant Committee Budget Development Principles:

Warrant Committee Budget Development Principles:

- Annual budget growth will be limited to the average change in property taxes and state aid over the prior five years, which is currently 3.7%.
- Department budgets will be submitted based on the revenue estimates provided at our revenue guidance meeting (currently Budget Summit I).
- The use of Free Cash and/or General Stabilization for operations should not exceed our expectation of positive budget variances in the upcoming budget, which is currently \$3 million.
- As part of the Budget Summit process a new presentation on position history over the past five years and expected growth for the upcoming two fiscal years should be provided for both the school's and the town's needs.
- Any planned or realized budget surpluses will be directed toward strengthening the town reserve funds and/or one-time capital projects.

Next, he reviewed the Override Amount to Cover Current Service Gap:

Override Amount to Cover Current Service Gap:

- Based on currently available data the Warrant Committee believes an operating override amount in the range of \$6.5million - \$7.5 million should be considered as **the base amount needed to close the gap between recurring revenues and recurring expenses.**

This was followed by the Budget Growth Limit Calculation:

Budget Growth Limit Calculation

Revenues	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	SYR CHG
Operating Property Tax Levy	89,246	92,562	95,854	99,431	102,786	106,318	
		3.7%	3.6%	3.7%	3.4%	3.4%	
State Aid	11,435	11,994	12,254	12,454	12,857	14,608	
		4.9%	2.2%	1.6%	3.2%	13.6%	
Total	100,681	104,556	108,108	111,885	115,643	120,926	
		3.8%	3.4%	3.5%	3.4%	4.6%	3.7%

There were discussions of the above presentation including recommendations, questions, and how these recommendations could help future planning. Creating a Task Force comprised of members of the Select Board, Warrant Committee, and School Committee to work on this was discussed.

There was a discussion of what override amount should be recommended, and how to educate the public about the need for it and the resulting cuts that will have to be made if it does not pass.

## 2. Review of Q1 Financials

Ms. Hewitt explained that it is very early to see any trends, and reminded the group that the switch to Shared Services is reflected in these numbers as well as other reallocations. She said that otherwise things are stable but pointed out some notable changes and explained that some changes were made to minimize the Q2 "bump" in taxes. There was a discussion and questions about the report and the revenues received during the quarter.

**Approve minutes (if any), including all outstanding subcommittee or working group minutes.**

December 6, 2023: Mr. Rickter pointed out that on line 47 Ms. Warner was talking about Arlington, not Watertown. Also Ms. Garvin's name is misspelled. Ms. Hewitt's should be noted that the years should be FY25, not FY15 online 21-23. Finally, Ms. Read was present at the meeting.

*Ms. Croy moved to approve the minutes of the December 6, 2023 Warrant Committee meeting as amended. Mr. McLaughlin seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.*

**Shared Services Subcommittee Meeting of November 1, 2023:**

*Ms. Morley moved to approve the minutes of the Shared Services Subcommittee Meeting of November 1, 2023. Mr. Taylor seconded, and the motion passed by 4-0-1 roll call vote with Mr. McEachern abstaining.*

**Liaison Reports:**

- A. Select Board: Mr. Epstein reported on the activities and discussions of the Board.
- B. Town Administrator: Ms. Garvin reported that the Select Board and Board of Health will be meeting January 8, 2023 to discuss off-leash dogs, and Ms. Hewitt reminded the Committee about the schedule changes she has proposed.
- C. Library Building Committee: Mr. McLaughlin reported on the new schedule for the project.
- D. Rink Building Committee: Mr. Caputo reported on the activities of the Committee and supply chain challenges for the project. He said the building will probably not be done as planned so the 2024/2025 season will be lost.
- E. School Committee: Ms. Moriarty reported on the activities of the Committee and the budget process.

**Public Comment** – there was no public comment.

**Adjournment**

*Mr. McLaughlin moved to adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Ms. Helgen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:30pm.*

**Next Meeting**: December 20, 2023 at 7:00pm (Budget Summit)

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny  
Recording Secretary