

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

APRIL 1, 2020, 7:30PM

VIRTUAL MEETING ON ZOOM

DATE: April 16, 2020
TIME: 9:18 AM

Present: Chair Slap, Members Alcock, Cragg, Dionne, Doyle, Fallon, Halston, Helgen, Levin, Lubien, McLaughlin, Read, Rickter, Schreiber and Weis.
School Committee Liaison Crowley.
Select Board Chair Caputo. Town Administrator (TA) Garvin and Assistant Town Administrator (ATA) Marshall.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm by Chair Slap. The meeting was conducted on Zoom and open to the public by remote participation only via Zoom or conference call, as per the Governor's suspension of portions of the Open Meeting Law due to the COVID-19 situation. Lubien gave a rundown of the logistics for remote participation.

I-Approve minutes

- March 4, 2020:
Motion (Member Alcock; Lubien seconded): To approve the March 4, 2020 minutes. Motion passed, roll-call vote: Lubien, Slap, Read, Weis, Fallon, Halston, Rickter, Doyle, Dionne, Levin, Schreiber and McLaughlin voted yes; Alcock, Helgen, Caputo and Cragg abstained.

II-Review and discussion of potential impacts from COVID-19 on FY20 and FY21 Town and School budgets

TA Garvin explained that her office had begun preparations for making adjustments to the FY20 and FY21 budgets, due to the shutdown related to COVID-19. She had consulted with Stephen Cirillo from the Collins Center which had prompted a revisiting of FY21 revenue assumptions. Caputo added that a full revisiting of the FY21 budget was necessary prior to Town Meeting, as well as likely moving plans for a November override.

Garvin gave a rundown of revenue line items that were expected to be impacted most significantly:

- Real/personal property taxes and impact on new growth: As of now construction was being allowed to continue, however there was a chance it could get shutdown. Looking at 2008/09 impacts for guidance.
- Local receipts: Likely impact would show up in FY21, people buying fewer new cars.
- Meals tax: Expect a considerable hit in FY21, unclear how many restaurants would still be operational.
- Fees: Nominal hit, looking at a 5% reduction scenario.
- Recreation fees: Concern on whether the pool would be allowed to open, and if so

when.

- Building permits: Community Development Director Clancy was in process of analyzing potential impact – historical data showed it could be a significant drop.
- State aid: Looking at scenarios for reductions in the range of 10%-20%, based on conversations with State legislators.

Related questions/comments from WC members:

- Chair Slap: Will Free Cash be impacted? – Garvin said this is likely, normally revenue estimates are conservative allowing for turn backs to Free Cash.
- Helgen: What about expense side? – For FY20 Garvin expressed a concern about possible overtime expenses for public safety; may come back to Warrant Committee to request a Reserve Fund transfer, other towns have done this already.
- Lubien asked about the potential to furlough employees? – Garvin explained that most employees are union and this would be a complicated process. She was working with Counsel to lay out what the process would be, were the Select Board to go down this route.
- Helgen asked about initiatives on the School side, e.g. freezing expenses.
 - o Crowley said that employees were still being paid, and that remote learning phase two was being rolled out now. Discussions about potential savings with the bus contract were in early stages. No hiring was taking place.
- Cragg suggested the budgeting should be conceived of as a three year process. He also asked about potential for consolidating services with other towns.
- Doyle expressed disappointment in the speed of the process of the School's transition to online learning, suggesting broad furloughs may be appropriate.
- Schreiber: Hard to imagine the FY21 budget will be realistic, given all the uncertainty. How do we adjust to errors in the budget after it is approved?
 - o Garvin said that Fall Town Meeting could be an opportunity to adjust.
 - o Lubien advocated for a conservative budgeting approach in which things could be added back down the road. Fallon replied that reductions should try to avoid layoffs, as it was hard to get people back once they are lost; should make the effort to put forth the best budget possible given the circumstances.
- Halston noted that many companies in the private sector were moving to an approach of salary reductions vs layoffs – Town may want to consider similar approach.

The WC discussed implications for the Warrant Committee Report (WCR):

- Chair Slap reported that Annual Town Meeting had been shifted to mid-June, meaning that the WCR would likely be due at the end of May. Have to put together the best report possible given the constraints – could potentially issue more in-depth analysis later on.
- Weis agreed that it was necessary to reset expectations for the Report.
- Helgen suggested it would be useful to have department heads summarize main impacts of COVID-19 on their department.
- Doyle and Fallon stressed that, while the WCR may be leaner than normal, it was important to be able to speak to Town Meeting Members in an informed way about

possible solutions to budgetary challenges, scenarios for a future override, etc. With respect to subcommittees, Chair Slap added members should try to anticipate questions that may be posed by Town Meeting Members.

The meeting concluded with a request by Chair Slap to Select Board Chair Caputo and TA Garvin, to know how the WC could most effectively participate in the process. Caputo said that creative ideas to solve the budget challenges are needed, as well as assistance in guiding priorities for the community. Garvin invited WC members to participate in upcoming meetings with department heads as part of the process to reassess the FY20/21 budgets.

Chair Slap indicated the WC would attempt to meet on a weekly basis throughout April.

III-Reports from Select Board, Town Administrator, School Committee and liaisons

Caputo reported that the annual local election had been postponed to June 23. Still resolving logistics for Annual Town Meeting, with the hope being that the State would allow for it to be conducted remotely.

Garvin noted that one bid had been received for the Rink RFP.

McLaughlin said that construction was continuing at the High School; supply chain delays were possible.

IV-Adjournment

Motion (Member McLaughlin): To adjourn at 9:04pm. Motion passed.

Submitted by
Christopher S. Henry