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**Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee Meeting
Wednesday, June 22, 2022
7:30pm**



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

Call to Order: Mr. Lubien called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

Member	Present	Member	Present
Geoffrey Lubien, Chair	Yes	Andrew Levin	Absent
Christine Doyle, Vice Chair	Yes	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Elizabeth Dionne, Secretary	Yes	Lynn Peterson Read	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Paul Rickter	Yes
Jennifer Fallon	Yes	Ellen Schreiber	Yes
Elizabeth Goss	Yes	Laurie Slap	Yes
Daniel Halston	Absent	Jack Weis	Yes
Anne Helgen	Yes	Mark Paolillo, Ex-officio Designee - Select Board	Yes
Staff		Meg Moriarty, Ex-officio, School Com. Chair	Absent
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Absent	Others	
Jennifer Hewitt, Assistant Town Administrator & Finance Manager	Yes	Kathy Keohane, Vice Chair of Belmont Public Library Board of Trustees.	Yes
		Clair Colburn, Chair of the Library Building Committee	Yes
		Michael Widmer, Town Moderator	Yes

Update on Library Building Project by Kathy Keohane, Vice Chair of Belmont Public Library Board of Trustees.

Ms. Keohane reviewed the history of the project, including the various groups that they have interacted with during the process. They will meet with the Select Board to discuss the path forward and putting the Library on the docket for the November Debt Exclusion vote. She then went on to outline what the next steps would be if the project is approved, and the product documents that are available on the website.

Ms. Colburn said the cost of the new project is currently at \$39.5 million which is slightly lower than the presentation at Town Meeting. She then explained the cost changes that occurred. She also reviewed how costs are being offset through donations, grants, etc.

Ms. Keohane outlined some of the donor recognitions that are available for different levels.

Ms. Fallon (who is also a member of the Library Building Committee) asked what the status is for energy plans for the new library. Ms. Colburn said it will be an all-electric building. Unfortunately, the site does not allow for 100% renewable net-zero, but the building has as many solar panels as possible. She reviewed some other sustainability measures being incorporated into the project. Ms. Colburn said a member of the Belmont Energy Committee has joined the Library Building Committee and is providing good ideas that are being considered.

Ms. Helgen expressed concern about needing an override for the library and the rink, and that the public needs to see that the structural deficit is being worked on at the same time.

Ms. Helgen asked if the donations and grants will go to construction costs, or items/expenses in the building. Ms. Keohane said it will go toward construction costs and the pledges have been structured to come in before any borrowing is done.

Discuss Budget Process and Fora for FY24 budget.

Mr. Widmer explained that his starting point for thinking about the Warrant Committee is the separation of power. He said the Warrant Committee is actually an arm of Town Meeting through the moderator, and explained what he believes its role is in building the budget. He outlined the spectrum of his experience with

the Warrant Committee and its role over the last 30 years, which varies because of the lack of clarity around the that role and the makeup of the Committee at any given time. He sees the Committee as a strategic leader that looks longer term and reviews deeper issues in a collaborative way with other committees. He feels the Warrant Committee can make important contributions to the Town but is sometimes under-utilized.

Mr. Widmer explained that it's important for the Warrant Committee to dig into the potential challenges of the FY25 budget and not just present the FY24 budget without a clear picture of what will happen in FY25. The Warrant Committee has a strategic, analytical, and educational role for these coming years. He made some recommendations for the Warrant Committee to consider (SGIC, pension payments, etc.). In the end, he doesn't think the question is "whose budget is it", rather what is the role of the Warrant Committee as an arm of an independent branch of government, and what is its greatest added value.

Mr. Weis said he thinks Mr. Widmer's view has to be shared with the Select Board, Town Administrator, and School Department and asked how this view of the role can be ensured. Mr. Widmer said because of the challenges ahead there is an openness for input from the Warrant Committee with the other bodies. He discussed why he has this view and doesn't think there will be many obstacles to a more expansive role for the Warrant Committee in concert with the other committees.

Mr. Lubien gave an update on discussions for a Budget Summit, saying that the plan is to work on a framework over the summer with members of the Warrant Committee attending. He outlined some of the topics the summit might address and shared the proposed plan for this as well as potential membership.

Ms. Fallon asked what the Warrant Committee's relationship is to financial task forces. Mr. Widmer said it is not an issue of financial task forces, rather a 2022-2023 effort to ensure that everyone is buying into the same process (and then over time agree on the numbers). He thinks the Warrant Committee should play an important role in this process, especially in the analytical and educational areas. There was some discussion of this issue and how the Warrant Committee and task forces might work together in the future. Mr. Caputo provided details of how financial task forces work, and how they might interact with the Warrant Committee.

Ms. Slap said it's important to think about how the Warrant Committee can educate the community about the library, rink, and expected override that will be coming.

Ms. Helgen said it might be helpful to see how other towns do summits and hopes the process will help educate residents more publicly and earlier. She suggests that there be more focus on revenues and that the process on how the funding is split between the Town and the Schools needs to be more transparent. There also has to be some demonstration that work is being done on the deficit that makes sense to the public.

Ms. Doyle said the Lexington budget has superior explanations and descriptions and should be used as a model for Belmont. She also hopes the Warrant Committee will grapple with the recommendations of the Structural Change Impact Group. She added that the Collins Center Report has good recommendations that are related to this discussion. Mr. Lubien will have this document distributed to Warrant Committee members.

Ms. Schreiber explained that her understanding was that the Warrant Committee advises Town Meeting and talked to department heads, made recommendations, occasionally analyzed a topic, but did not have authority to be involved in decisions. And, as the budget has come to the Warrant Committee later and later, there has not been a lot of opportunity to really review it. She said that during tonight's discussion she continues to hear that the Warrant Committee should educate and pick a handful of projects for analysis. She thinks the Committee has been sidelined and expressed her views on what the Warrant Committee should work on and what role it should take.

Mr. Paolillo said he thinks the budget really is the legislative branch's budget because they are the only ones who can appropriate. Committees work together to analyze the budget and then present it to Town Meeting for approval. He agrees that the process should be collaborative and that a more robust process needs to be created, especially with more communication to the public. Regarding special projects, the Select Board does not have the bandwidth to look at them in-depth, but they are often extremely important to the Town (and referenced the work and decision to self-insure).

Mr. Weis said that he feels Town Meeting doesn't have the detailed expertise to analyze the budget, and believes that their hope is that the Warrant Committee can help them understand what they are approving. He added that part of the value of the Warrant Committee is that it is viewed as the analytical, independent group that reviews the budget, and if it takes a role in advocating for items that independence will be compromised.

There was a discussion of this comment. Mr. Widmer shared that he thought it was imperative for the Warrant Committee to have opinions and advocate because of its expertise and knowledge to inform Town Meeting members.

Ms. Read said she feels people value the independence of the Warrant Committee and its “commenting” role on the budget, which could be exercised more visibly.

Ms. Hewitt explained that her experience is that having staff prepare initial number and then getting feedback from Town committees is very valuable and outlined some of the benefits of this system.

Ms. Helgen asked Mr. Widmer who makes the recommendation of the budget to Town Meeting. Her understanding is that it is the Select Board but wanted his input on this issue. Mr. Widmer said ultimately it is the responsibility of the Warrant Committee, which Mr. Paolillo agreed with. Mr. Widmer went on to explain this position.

Ms. Helgen then asked that someone be the point person for getting SCIG tasks completed and explained why she thinks this is important. Mr. Lubien said his understanding is that an Implementation Committee will be appointed by the Select Board. Mr. Paolillo said he welcomes input on participation in this group and discussed his understanding and questions about the recommendations and issues. There was a discussion between Mr. Paolillo, Ms. Helgen, Mr. Lubien, and Mr. Rickter around this issue and the charge of the Implementation Committee.

Ms. Schreiber said that the Warrant Committee sees themselves as independent, yet in all of her interactions she has seen that others do not share this view. She learned that the Warrant Committee is seen as insiders who, with the Select Board and School Committee, make all the decisions. She also suggested that perhaps some task forces/committees comprised of Warrant Committee members plus members of the public could be created to help leverage the Warrant Committee bandwidth, bring in expertise, and invites the public to be involved.

Mr. McLaughlin pointed out that the Warrant Committee has no staff but are talking about taking a larger role in creating the budget. He added that the budget belonging to the Warrant Committee might be on paper but in reality, he thinks it's the Town Administrator and School Superintendent's budget. Mr. Widmer said that although there is no staff, the Warrant Committee's role should be seen more broadly than it often has. He explained his thinking on this issue and this was discussed.

Ms. Fallon commented on her experience with the Warrant Committee from when she was a member of the School Committee. She said that ensuring that the Schools and Town understand the whole budget, not just their sides, is something the Warrant Committee can facilitate.

Ms. Doyle pointed out that at the state and federal level, the executive branch proposes the budget. She added that the Warrant Committee can provide financial policy guidelines to the administration (i.e., don't present a budget with certain items, etc.). She also pointed out that the Structural Change group weighed all of their recommendations, so other's do not have to determine priorities.

Discuss Any Year-End Business or Comments, including recently concluded Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Lubien pointed out that Dan Halston and Andy Levin will be leaving the Warrant Committee. Jenny Fallon will also be leaving the Committee and shared her thoughts on her time on the Committee. Laurie Slap has agreed to stay on for another year. Mr. Widmer has been interviewing candidates to fill these vacancies.

Other Business

- A. Administrative matters: Mr. Lubien and Ms. Hewitt outlined potential joint meetings that might occur during the summer, especially in relation to the Collins Center report.

Mr. Lubien asked members to reach out to him for chair, vice-chair, or treasurer positions.

Updates, if any, from subcommittees, working groups, and/or committee liaisons, including:

- A. Select Board: Mr. Paolillo reported on the upcoming plans of the Select Board.
- B. Middle & High School Building Committee: Mr. McLaughlin said there should be a vote soon for the bid package for the solar installation.

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

Warrant Committee Minutes:

May 25, 2022: Mr. Weis ask that lines 90 and 91 be changed to “*Mr. Weis said the higher cost of the underground tanks...*”. Then have the next line read ‘*and because of that thinks the underground tanks...*’

Motion: *Ms. Helgen moved to approve the minutes of the May 25, 2022 Warrant Committee meeting as amended. Mr. McLaughlin seconded, and the motion passed by roll call vote with Ms. Slap, Mr. Paolillo, Ms. Dionne, and Ms. Schreiber abstaining.*

June 6, 2022: Mr. Caputo said on line 52 it should say the “*Rink Building Committee*”, rather than the “*Middle/High School Building Committee*”.

Mr. Paolillo pointed out that Mr. Epstein is no longer the Select Board representative and should be corrected.

Motion: *Ms. Helgen moved to approve the minutes of the June 6, 22 Warrant Committee meeting as amended. Mr. McLaughlin seconded, and the motion passed by roll call vote with Ms. Schreiber, Mr. Paolillo, Ms. Doyle, and Ms. Read abstaining.*

June 13, 2022: Ms. Helgen pointed out that line 27 says Mr. Helgen. Mr. Rickter pointed out that his last name is missing. Mr. Paolillo pointed out that Mr. Epstein’s name incorrectly appears where his should appear. Ms. Schreiber asked that the paragraph starting at line 47 read:

Ms. Schreiber reminded the Committee that a previous article about the Middle/High School Building Committee was revised, she thought, because Town Counsel said the proposers could not require a building committee to make a specific decision, so the language was softened to “urge” (or similar), which she thinks was appropriate. She believes this amendment would make it difficult for the building committee to balance all of the requirements of the project and responsibly perform their duties.

There was a discussion of the vote on Line 60 (regarding the Revised Amendment to Article 8). Mr. Lubien will work to correct this.

Ms. Schreiber said to take out the last couple of sentences [from her comments].

Motion: *Mr. McLaughlin moved to approve the minutes of the June 13, 2022 Warrant Committee meeting as amended and edited. Ms. Dionne seconded, and the motion passed by roll call vote with Ms. Slap, and Mr. Paolillo abstaining.*

Sub-Committee Minutes:

Education Subcommittee:

Motion: *Ms. Helgen moved to approve the minutes of the **June 9, 2022** Education Subcommittee meeting. Mr. Rickter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.*

Long Term Financial Planning Subcommittee:

Motion: *Ms. Slap moved to approve the minutes of the **June 3, 2022** Long Term Financial Planning Subcommittee meeting as amended. Mr. Caputo seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.*

Motion: *Ms. Slap moved to approve the minutes of the **March 25, 2022** Long Term Financial Planning Subcommittee meeting as amended. Mr. Caputo seconded, and the motion passed by roll call vote with Mr. Lubien abstaining.*

Public Comment – there was no public comment.

Adjournment

Motion: *Mr. McLaughlin moved to the adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Ms. Helgen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:34pm.*

Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 14 at 7:30pm

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Secretary