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DATE: May 9, 2023
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**Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee Meeting
Wednesday, March 22, 2023
7:30pm**



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

Call to Order: Mr. Lubien called the meeting to order at 7:31pm.

Members	Present	Members	Present
Geoffrey Lubien, Chair	Yes	Conor McEachern	Yes
Paul Rickter, Vice-Chair	Yes	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Elizabeth Dionne, Secretary	Yes	Lynn Peterson Read	Yes
William Anderson	Yes	Laurie Slap	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Matthew Taylor	Yes
Christine Doyle	Remote	Marie Warner	Yes
Anne Helgen	Remote	Jack Weis	Yes
Staff		Mark Paolillo, Ex-officio Designee - Select Board	Yes
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Yes	Michael Crowley, Ex-officio, School Committee	Remote
Jennifer Hewitt, Assistant Town Administrator & Finance Manager	Yes	Others Present	
		Gail Mann, Library Trustee	Yes
		Peter Struzziero, Library Director	

Discussion of Assistant Library Director Position

Mr. McLaughlin reviewed the situation and issue, saying that the problem is really an optics one. He explained that the FY23 report shows the Library having 26.9 FTEs, and the current budget request includes 26.85 FTEs. He then reviewed the Library's budget request amount as compared to FY23. He explained that the Library would lose their accreditation with the proposed budget and explained what this would do to services.

Mr. McLaughlin then explained the need for an Assistant Director, and the volume of services that the Library provides, and the challenges the organization will face during the construction of the new building. He also reviewed the achievements and efficiencies of the Library and other actions they have taken that he believes justify the filing of this position. He asked that the Town find a way to reinstate this position and offered some suggestions on how this might be done.

There was a discussion of the issue, timing of the request, the staffing issues elsewhere in the Town, etc.

Ms. Garvin spoke about the challenge she faces working on the budget and explained the positions that had been eliminated since the failed override. She reviewed the FY24 Recommended Library Budget and expected future budget needs of the Library.

Ms. Mann said this sounds more like a budget cut than a position cut and suggested that if the Library had proposed a budget that looked more like previous budgets, this conversation would not be happening. She went on to clarify this comment, and explained the work that was done to decide where to spend personnel dollars. She then explained the challenges that would be faced without an Assistant Director.

Ms. Garvin explained the things that were considered when making the budget recommendation.

Ms. Helgen reminded the group about the conversations that were had with the School Department about positions that might need to be cut if an override for FY25 fails.

Mr. Crowley asked if the Library has control of their approved budget and could they hire an Assistant Director within their resources. Ms. Garvin said no because the Town would be responsible for the benefits.

There was a discussion of the issue, what would happen in following years, the impact of future overrides, and other related issues.

Mr. Anderson asked how the services provided have been affected by the lack of an Assistant Director.

Mr. Struzziero shared his views on the issue, funding, the fiscal management of the Library. He also offered to absorb the benefits portion of the position, and to wait until January 1, 2024 to fill the position.

Mr. Struzziero said he has never had an Assistant Director so it's not possible to connect it with lost services, but rather it's about things that the Library was not able to do without the role. He expressed concern about the increase in the work load because of the new building.

Mr. Anderson pointed out that every department in Town is in a difficult position with staffing and the Committee needs to be evenhanded. There was a discussion of the issue of Town employees working 2-3 jobs.

Ms. Dionne expressed discomfort that the Warrant Committee is talking specifically about a position, which was discussed.

The issue of lost and missing positions, and the impact of this staffing issue on services was discussed.

Discussion of Town Q2 Financials

Ms. Hewitt explained that a new report structure is being used and asked for Committee feedback.

She shared information on Revenues to date and added that it's early in the year to gauge how the Town is doing, although she highlighted some areas of interest on the Revenue side. There were some clarifying questions asked which Ms. Hewitt answered.

On the Expense side, she showed how they currently compare to how Town Meeting appropriates the budget, and highlighted some key items. She noted that Public Safety contracts have not been implemented and they are working to finalize retroactive payments. They anticipate transfers from the Police and Fire reserves because of the contracts.

Ms. Garvin reported that the enrollment in the Regional School System is down so they anticipate a turnback of about \$200,000 although transportation may need some adjustment. There was a discussion of transportation costs.

There was a discussion of administrative expenses and whether they are being budgeted correctly. There was also a discussion of encumbrances and contributory retirement.

Subcommittee Reports

- A. Human Services: Mr. McLaughlin reviewed the departments that they have already met with.
- B. Education: Mr. Weiss said they have met and outlined some of their activities.
- C. General Government: Ms. Dionne reported on their activities.
- D. Property Tax Working Group: Ms. Dionne asked if this group should be disbanded and explained why. She also discussed the effort to have an appointed Board of Assessors. There was a discussion of keeping the Property Tax Working Group.
- E. Public Safety: Ms. Read said they expect to meet with both departments next week.
- F. Public Services: Ms. Werner outlined their activities and work they plan to do.
- G. Shared Services: Ms. Doyle outlined their meetings and activities.

Ms. Lubien reminded the Subcommittees that some minutes have not been filed with the Town Clerk.

Discuss Warrant Committee Report

Mr. Lubien made some suggestions about items that could be removed to shorten the report, and outlined the what type of items should be reported on and what should be included. There was a discussion of the size, components, and organization of the report and how to share the information with residents.

Schedule

Mr. Lubien reviewed the probable schedule in preparation of Annual Town Meeting.

Liaisons Reports

- A. Town Administrator: Ms. Garvin reported that the Warrant was closed and there are 20 articles. Segment A has 9 (including the rink) and Segment B has 11.
- B. Select Board: Mr. Paolillo reported on Select Board activities.
- C. School Committee: Mr. Crowley reported that there is a public deliberation about the Superintendent Finalists on March 29th and there will hopefully be a finalist after that meeting. He also announced that this is his last meeting, and he is also leaving the School Committee.
- D. Capital Budget Committee: Ms. Doyle pointed out that some ARPA funds were allocated to Capital which are handled through the Select Board, not Town Meeting. The committee will make a recommendation to the Select Board about the use of these funds.
- E. Structural Change & Implementation Committee: Mr. Rickter reported on their meetings and their current activities and some of the items they hope to look at.

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

February 15, 2023

Motion: Ms. Dionne moved to approve the minutes of the February 15, 2023 Warrant Committee meeting. Mr. Rickter seconded, and the motion passed by roll call.

March 8, 2023

Motion: Mr. McLaughlin moved to approve the minutes of the March 8, 2023 Warrant Committee meeting. Ms. Slap seconded, and the motion passed by roll call vote.

Public Comment – there was no public comment.

Adjournment

Motion: Mr. McLaughlin moved to the adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. The motion was seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:24pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 12, 2023 at 7:30pm

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Secretary