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DATE: April 1, 2022
TIME: 9:12 AM

Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee Meeting
Wednesday, February 23, 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	Yes
Christine Doyle, Vice Chair	Yes	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Elizabeth Dionne, Secretary	Yes	Lynn Peterson Read	Yes
Tom Caputo	No	Paul Rickter	Yes
Jennifer Fallon	Yes	Ellen Schreiber	Yes
Elizabeth Goss	No	Laurie Slap	Yes
Daniel Halston	Yes	Jack Weis	Yes
Anne Helgen	Yes	Roy Epstein, sitting in for Mr. Dash Ex-officio Designee - Select Board	Yes
Staff		Meg Moriarty, sitting in for Mr. Saeh Ex-officio, School Com. Chair Appointee	
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Yes		
Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business & Operations. Belmont Public Schools.	Yes		

1. Review Q2 Financials--Town & Schools

Town Budget: Ms. Garvin reviewed revenues for Q2, saying they are on target for collections, and provided details of the types of revenue. She explained that receipts are usually large in Q3 so the number will go up next quarter.

She explained that she does not expect to have revenue surplus to move to Free Cash and explained why it happened last year and will not happen this year.

Mr. Epstein asked why the Realized Revenues are under 50% through December. Ms. Garvin said a lot of it is timing and residual impact from the pandemic. Mr. Epstein suggested that if there is such a large deviation in the future that there be some explanation provided.

Mr. Epstein asked why Building Permit Revenue is so strong. Ms. Garvin said permits have been strong for two years, mostly due to pandemic remodeling.

Mr. Epstein asked if the Cemetery Fees are high enough to take care of cemetery maintenance. Ms. Garvin said this could be discussed with the Cemetery Commission.

Ms. Garvin then reviewed the Q2 expenditures, saying most of it is in line with the budget. She highlighted some outlying items and what was impacting those expenses. Overall, the Town is 50.9% expended which is on target.

Ms. Doyle asked if the Police and Fire overtime data is being compiled to document the issues with civil service hiring. Ms. Garvin said she had asked both Chiefs to do this.

Ms. Doyle asked if there was a reserve maintained to pay for vacation/sick time. Ms. Garvin said there is not, and they discussed vacation/sick time accrual and expenses.

Ms. Doyle asked if there was communication to the Facilities and Library regarding their utility costs. Ms. Garvin said she has not done this.

Ms. Dionne said the town has to deal with the Civil Service issue, because it limits hiring opportunities and workforce diversity, and that a clear and compelling explanation needs to be prepared before Town Meeting will vote to eliminate it.

Mr. Epstein also commented on the issues of Civil Service hiring. Regarding the electricity costs, he said that Belmont Light's rates have not gone up, but the new high school as designed in consuming 2-3 times as much electricity as the old one. He was not aware of why the Library electricity costs have gone up.

Mr. McLaughlin asked about \$12,500 that the library has not yet spent. Ms. Garvin said she would have to look into it, but she thinks it might be for maintenance.

Ms. Schreiber asked if there was anything that Ms. Garvin was seeing that might affect the Warrant Committee Reserve. Ms. Garvin said snow and ice, and unanticipated facilities costs (such as something significant breaking).

Mr. Weis asked if the \$640,000 available in the school budget is an actual savings from Minuteman. Mr. DiCologero explained that he would have to check to see if the 2nd invoice from Minuteman has been processed, and also explained that there are busing expenses that would be charged to this line.

School Budget: Mr. Weis gave an overview of the Q2 Financial for the School Department, explaining that they expect a positive variance of \$710,000 for the fiscal year. He said that about 90% is related to salaries at all levels and highlighted some of the largest items impacting this number. He also reviewed the Revolving Accounts.

Ms. Helgen said she would like to see detail on the non-recurring expenditures.

Ms. Helgen also said that Turnover Savings look significantly higher than last year and asked if this should instead be used for staffing increases for F23 instead of being rolled over.

Ms. Helgen pointed out that the SPED Reserve is high and expected to get higher and said this should be looked at more critically.

Mr. Epstein said he believes the Turnover Savings is probably higher than \$700,000, and but some was consumed by incremental hiring earlier in the fiscal year. Mr. Weis said he believes this is accurate. Mr. DiCologero also agreed. The Turnover Savings calculation was discussed.

Ms. Doyle asked if money was set aside in preparation for the results of union negotiations. Ms. Garvin confirmed that there is.

Ms. Doyle reiterated that she would like the Town to have a survey of why students left the school system and whether they will be returning. She believes this would be very helpful for planning. Ms. Moriarty asked what would make a good study, and Ms. Doyle outlined some features of the studies done in other towns. This idea was discussed and funding implications of lower enrollment.

Ms. Slap said the Q2 results are helpful to inform the FY23 budget and asked that these be shown.

Ms. Schreiber asked if there is information about how many students went to Medford and what the cost impacts are versus Minuteman. Mr. DiCologero said he does not have the tuition information immediately available but said Medford is less expensive than Minuteman. There are 3 students at Medford and one at Minuteman.

Ms. Dionne expressed dismay at the disrespectful way that the Superintendent responded to Ms. Helgen's questions at last week's meeting. She said the Warrant Committee is supposed to ask difficult questions and was not impressed with the answers they received last week from the School Department. She feels this was disrespectful to the entire Warrant Committee. She was also dismayed by the evasive answers regarding Minuteman.

Ms. Helgen asked to see the dollar amount for 13 approved positions (including benefits), and how many have actually been hired. Mr. DiCologero said he will get that information, and they discussed this question.

Mr. Weis said it would be helpful to see how Q2 Actuals by budget categories compare to next year's budget. He said that the Q2 variance as shown without the budget categories highlights the Turnover Savings. If the Variance Report was done the other way, these salary lines would be spread across different lines and be more difficult to see. There was a discussion of this issue.

81 **2. Reports (if any) from Select Board, Town Administrator, School Committee and Liaisons.**

82 CPC: Ms. Dionne reported that CPC presentations will be on March 16th. Mr. Weis asked if the CPC was
83 now willing to prioritize projects, rather than leaving it to Town Meeting as before. Ms. Dionne said she had
84 reviewed the CPA Plan and it does state that the CPC committee will prioritize if necessary and they are
85 moving in the direction of doing this.

86 High School: Mr. McLaughlin reported that a recommendation that Ms. Garvin had made will address the
87 budget shortage. There will be a public meeting on March 7th to discuss this. Ms. Schreiber said the work
88 on West of Harris Field will not be done and described some other items that may not be done.

89 **3. Minutes Approval:** There were no minutes to approve.

90 **4. Other business:** Mr. Lubien suggested that there be agenda time dedicated to open budgeting
91 discussions at every meeting. He suggested one topic might be the large increase in the school budget
92 over the last 3 years.

93 Ms. Helgen supported Mr. Lubien's suggestion and outlined some potential topics.

94 Ms. Dionne said she would like to see the Committee go back to a more skeptical, questioning approach.

95 Ms. Fallon said that the Financial Task Force work and the model that is used to start the budget has been
96 a good development over the last several years. She suggested that having residents understand that
97 model more would be good for the process.

98 Ms. Doyle suggested that there be a consistent format for recommendations in each area. She also said
99 she is concerned about the budget as presented because it increases the structural deficit, especially since
100 the override did not pass. There was a discussion of the deficit and level versus reduced services funding.

101 Mr. Epstein said it was difficult to discuss the School Department budget and the joint meeting last week
102 because it had not been distributed before the meeting, and it is difficult to understand because there was
103 no summary section. He made some suggestions and observations regarding the School Department
104 budget. He suggested there be another joint meeting now that the Select Board and Warrant Committee
105 members have access to the budget.

106 Mr. Lubien said another meeting was a good idea, but the Education Subcommittee is responsible to dig
107 deeply into the budget and address the issues raised by Mr. Epstein.

108 Ms. Moriarty said each year the School Department turns back a lot of money and asked if there was any
109 difference between turning back cash versus tighter budgeting up front. Mr. Lubien responded that it's a
110 balance between budgeting versus what taxpayers can afford, but that if there is a lot of turn back money it
111 means the budget is not being managed tightly enough.

112 Ms. Doyle said in order to avoid increasing in the structural deficit, there needs to be a top-down direction
113 on needed cuts. Ms. Garvin outlined some reductions that the Town had and said any further cuts would
114 result in layoffs. She discussed the issue with reducing services when residents know that there is free
115 cash available.

116 Ms. Slap said any big changes to the budget must happen soon.

117 **5. Public Comment:** Bill Anderson discussed his view of free cash and turning back money. He asked the
118 school Committee to look carefully at why the budget is increasing by \$10 million when enrollment is down
119 9%. He also said that passing overrides is avoiding the problem of expenses being too high. Finally, he
120 said he felt the Superintendent's behavior during meetings is inappropriate, and Mr. Lubien said he should
121 discuss this issue with the School Committee.

122 **6. Adjournment: Motion:** Mr. McLaughlin moved to adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee.
123 *The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:28pm.*

124 **Next Meeting:** March 16, 2022 at 7:30pm

125 Respectfully submitted by,

126 Susan Peghiny
127 Recording Secretary
128