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BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**FEBRUARY 14, 7:30 P.M.****CHENERY COMMUNITY ROOM**

Present: Chair Epstein; Members Alcock, Crowley, Dionne, Doyle, Fallon, Helgen, Libenson, Lisanke, Lubien, McLaughlin, Schreiber, Slap, Weis, Selectman Dash and School Committee Member Tom Caputo (filling in for School Committee Chair Fiore)

Town Administrator Garvin

Member Schreiber arrived at 7:42 pm. Member Doyle arrived at 8:10 pm.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by Chair Epstein.

Chair Epstein began by reviewing the evening's agenda.

I. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of 1/24/18 were approved with 1 abstention.

II. Initial discussion of projects recommended by Community Preservation Committee

Chair Epstein discussed introducing a new criterion for the WC review of CPA projects – intertemporal planning. This would be in addition to the existing criteria of implications for ongoing operating costs and distributional/equity effects. There is no real mechanism in Belmont to take a multi-year view and projects are funded as long as there is funding, but there is no discussion about taking a longer-term view with respect to available funds. One example of a candidate for intertemporal planning is the community path, which would take more funds than the CPA makes available in any single year.

Chair Epstein recapped that Belmont's 2010 vote to adopt the CPA authorized a 1.5% surcharge on resident's property taxes. At the time of the CPA adoption campaign the state matching funds were expected to result in a match rate of up to 100%. But since 2009, the funding source for the match has been relatively fixed while the number of towns adopting the CPA has kept increasing, so match rate keeps going down. For fiscal year 2017, the state match for Belmont was only 17.2%. The match could fall in the future if more towns sign on.

Chair Epstein discussed how CPA funds are used. The Act requires towns to set aside 10% of the dollars raised for open space, 10% for historical preservation, and 10% for community housing. Open space is now interpreted to include certain recreational uses. Belmont has used CPA for playgrounds and the pool, but not for the hockey rink because it has a roof.

The CPA passed in Belmont in 2010 by a vote of 51% to 49%. The CPA includes a provision that permits towns to amend the amount of the surcharge. It also permits a town to rescind approval at any time 5 years after adoption.

Currently, the surcharge is yielding \$1.1 million. The match brings amount raised for FY17 to \$1.3 million. The proposed projects total \$1.5 million

Selectman Dash said that information on the CPA can be found on the CPC website. The deadline for submission of projects is August, after which requestors make proposals and give presentations. The CPC reviews the information for each project and vets the budgets. Playgrounds are required to bring in some public fundraising to pay for a portion of the project budget. Selectman Dash responded to questions about vetting project budgets and reserving a portion of CPA funds for future years; he is interested in having the CPC develop a formal set of rules for how it would approach reserving funds. Member Weis asked about the role of the WC in reviewing projects and Chairman Epstein indicated that it is appropriate to ask questions as needed to help TM make informed decisions.

Chairman Epstein walked through each of the CPA projects under consideration and indicated that he wants to send WC questions to the CPC by Feb. 19th. He also gave his views on each of the projects.

- Veterans Memorial for Clay Pit Pond. The proposal is to rehabilitate an existing memorial. Total cost is \$380,000; sponsors want \$103,000 from CPA. There would not be much cost for ongoing maintenance. Noteworthy for high private source contributions. Reasonably limited scale. (Projects of about \$100,000 or less in his view raise fewer concerns.) Negatives—there are 5 veterans memorials in Belmont. What happens if private funding goal is not achieved? Member Schreiber indicated that private fundraising already has raised \$230,000.
- Payson Park Design Plan. The project cost is \$5,000. (The project was accidentally left off the list being reviewed by the WC.)
- Town Field Open Space. Project cost is \$180,000. Neutral impact on town maintenance budget. Represents the renovation of a major recreation asset. What happens to project if private funding goal of \$20,000 is not achieved? If private funding isn't raised, may have to scale back project per Selectmen Dash. Member Schreiber posed a question about the CPC policy on private fund raising. Selectman Dash said that there is no formal policy, but private fundraising is assumed if a private group requests the funding.
- McLean Barn. Historic preservation project totaling \$200,000, which also is the request. It is a stabilization project. Chairman Epstein said that the project has no pros in favor of it. The barn has been abandoned for decades. To make it into a useful space would be extremely expensive, and the barn is inaccessible in terms of location and parking. It appears that \$15,000 has already been spent out of the

CPA Administrative Fund. The town can allocate up to 5% for administrative expenses, but this does not appear to be an administrative expense. (Town Administrator Garvin offered to follow-up.) Graffiti removal is part of the project expense but isn't needed for stabilization. A 2005 consultant report studied potential use of the barn as a garage space and concluded that the building was too dilapidated to support the weight of vehicles. The size of the structure is 2,800 square feet, 5,600 square feet if the 2nd story is included, but the building is basically an empty shell. Renovation at an assumed cost of \$300 per square foot x 5,600 square feet would cost \$1.7 million and would require ongoing upkeep. Chairman Epstein pointed out that the town agreed to a conservation restriction on the deed, but why not renegotiate the restriction? The barn is apparently on a list of national historic registry properties, but it is unclear what requirements that carries. Currently the building is being used by homeless people, creating a liability for the town. Selectman Dash said that the town should stabilize the building and then figure out what to do with it.

- Fund a Set-aside for the Housing Trust. The project is in the community housing bucket for a proposed \$250,000. There is no ascertainable effect on the operating budget. A pro in favor of the project is that once a project is identified, the availability of funds could help the town leverage state money. The con is that the project requires setting aside funds for no specific purpose. Member Fallon said that Town Treasurer Carman is developing some rules about how Housing Trust would have to approach the Treasurer's Office when it comes time for funding to be ready to be spent. Member Weis queried whether "distribution" was an appropriate rubric to use when evaluating housing projects, particularly in comparison to other public projects, since housing is inherently a private good.
- Grove Street Path. This is an intergenerational walking path/open space project with a total cost of \$817,000, of which \$780,000 is sought from the CPA. The project would pay for construction of the path, not renovation of the playground at Grove Street. The pro in favor of the project is that this is a marginal addition of a recreational opportunity. It comes with a significant landscaping component. It also includes new batting cages for the baseball field but this could be done independently. Chair Epstein was concerned that the project was duplicative of the intergenerational walking path at the Clay Pit Pond. Also, there is a very nice and accessible walking path around Fresh Pond. This would be the 3rd intergenerational walking path in very close proximity. For roughly \$800,000, the path is 3,000 feet long or 6/10 of a mile. Equal to 10 years of our sidewalk budget. Other potential uses for this money—this is a large fraction of the upfront cost to Belmont of the Community Path. Hopefully the high school debt exclusion will be approved, but could these funds go to restoring the baseball or other high school field, which might be a better bang for the buck. Selectman Dash pointed out in response to a member question that Belmont can't use CPA funds for sidewalks.

III. Review of Q2 financials and distribution of FY19 budget notebooks

In response to a question from Member Libenson, Chair Epstein and Town Administrator Garvin committed to providing hardcopies at the meeting of materials circulated to the members by email. She indicated that expenditures are well on target vs. revenue. Motor vehicles excise taxes collections are 18% higher than a year ago but this may be a timing issue because the bulk of the excise taxes are collected in Q3. With respect to building permits, Belmont hasn't received the final for Cushing Village, which isn't reflected in the totals. The Town Administrator is not sure if the Uplands (now Royal Belmont) project is fully permitted.

On the expenditures side, the Facilities Department experienced an increase in salary dollars because of buyouts of vacation for retirees. Chairman Epstein asked why Minuteman spending is up, and Member Crowley promised to look into the reasons. Per Chairman Epstein, the broad picture is that with the exception of the prepayment of property taxes, the town is fairly consistent with past spending and revenue patterns.

IV. Updates from BOS, Town Administrator, and liaisons

School Committee: School Committee Member Caputo said that on the school side of the budget, Belmont is trending toward a \$207,000 deficit (amount of spending projected over the total budgeted). There are a couple of drivers for this spending, including higher than expected Special Education costs and higher expenses for use of substitutes. On the latter, Caputo said that there is a question involving a change of policy as well as in the contract involving high school substitutes. Member Weis said that it is important to keep in mind that the variance in spending associated with substitutes is extremely small in comparison with total salary expenses. Caputo said that with the departure of Amy Spangler, the Wellington Elementary School principal, some salary expenses are being reallocated. He also said that the school Director of Finance, Tony DiCologero and the School Committee's Special Education Group are taking a look at all 107 out-of-district students to see whether they will cost as much as originally projected. Member Helgen pointed out that this will not lead to an actual deficit as the schools can tap the Circuit Breaker funds, and Caputo agreed. Chairman Epstein expressed a concern about revolving account funds—for example, the food service balance appeared to grow compared to the beginning of the fiscal year. He prefers not to see excessive balances sitting in revolving funds, and Caputo said the School Committee agrees.

Board of Selectmen: Selectman Dash said that he will be representing the BOS on the WC for the next six weeks. The important news from the BOS is that the trash contract is moving to single stream for recycling, which is mainly driven by changes in the global market (China is refusing U.S. recycling now) and what potential bidders are telling DPW. Recycling will continue to be every two week pick up, but will be an automated pickup of 96-gallon containers the town will distribute to residents. Selectman Dash said that the search continues for a Light Department General Manager. Also, the Light Department audit has been completed. Selectman Dash has brought forward a proposal to reconstitute a Youth Commission within the Health Department, something eliminated in

response to the fiscal tightening that took place in 2008. Town Administrator Garvin said that the budget includes funding for a 19-hour position to staff the commission. Member Alcock asked about the status of the renovation work at the Police Department and Chairman Epstein said that interviews are now taking place with candidate design firms.

Town Administrator: Town Administrator Garvin said the budget books were still being prepared. Chairman Epstein said that he would deliver them to each WC member.

VII. Public Contributions

None.

VIII. Adjournment

Member McLaughlin moved to end the meeting at 9:42 pm.