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Minutes
Town of Belmont
Board of Selectmen
Selectmen's Meeting Room
Friday, March 2, 2018
8:00am

APPROVED
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
DATE: 10/1/2018

CALL TO ORDER

A budget meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order at 8:00am by Chair Jim Williams. Selectmen Adam Dash was present. Town Administrator Patrice Garvin was present.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS:

[There were none.]

QUESTIONS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS:

[There were none.]

BUDGET MEETING AS FOLLOWS:

Facilities Department, Phyllis Marshall

P. Garvin explained that the Facilities Department budget was in a holding pattern (up ~1%) due to two vacancies. The Town is looking to restructure the department, and P. Garvin presented the old and proposed new organizational charts. The current priority is to hire a Facilities Manager.

A. Dash requested a run-down of the proposed new organizational chart. P. Garvin explained the key proposed changes.

[Vice-Chair Mark Paolillo arrived to the meeting]

A. Dash asked if there would be savings or efficiencies with the restructure; P. Garvin replied there would be efficiencies. A. Dash asked about implementation of a system similar to SommerStat, to log and track requests in real-time. P. Garvin replied that the focus is to get people hired first. P. Marshall explained there is currently a system in place to track facilities requests and that staff are trying to deal with the back-log. A. Dash explained such a system could be more widely applied to other aspects of Town government as well.

J. Williams supported the new organizational chart. He asked why the budget only increased slightly given the new positions. P. Garvin explained the starting salaries would be lower in replacing a long-time employee.

J. Williams asked about the small number of custodians for the High School; P. Marshall confirmed that the night cleaning is contracted out.

P. Marshall recognized the efforts of the current staff to manage the work load given the vacancies in the Department.

Town Clerk, Ellen O'Brien Cushman

E. O'Brien Cushman presented highlights from the Town Clerk's budget. The budget for FY19 would be \$490K, up from \$416K. The biggest reason for the increase was due to holding 4 elections in the upcoming year, versus 2 in the previous year. E. O'Brien Cushman talked about the success of the 'Next Request' system that has been used across all departments in the Town to handle public records requests. She also noted that the number of visits to the Town Clerk's office and emails were both down from the previous year (which was an election year), but were at typical levels for a non-election year.

J. Williams and E. O'Brien Cushman discussed the risks associated with non-compliance of public records requests, and how the 'Next Request' system has aided the public records request process and increased transparency.

E. O'Brien Cushman highlighted a request to re-level Town Clerk employees, due to the fact that they are required to deal with confidential information on an on-going basis; and, so that the salaries would align with other employees in Town having similar responsibilities.

M. Paolillo asked about resources required to coordinate committee interactions. E. O'Brien Cushman highlighted a need for a formal decommissioning process for committee chairs, so that the Town Clerk's office maintains access to all relevant documents. She noted that the Town Clerk's office follows up on a regular basis to try and ensure minutes are up to date; many of the critical committees do a good job, but some others are still behind. Ms. O'Brien Cushman also mentioned that they will be expanding use of a database to track committee appointments, attendance to meetings, etc., which will help to manage committee interactions.

J. Williams requested clarification about the salary increases. The request for increase had been submitted by E. O'Brien Cushman, and the increases would appear in the overall budget, however they were not currently in the department level budget, as they were not yet approved by HR. The salary increases would be small relative to the Town Clerk's budget overall.

Information Technology, Dave Petto

D. Petto stated that the budget was essentially flat from last year, with a ~2.5% increase. The costs increases were largely due to software/network licensing, as well as maintenance contracts for hardware. The department maintained the same FTE as the previous year.

J. Williams asked about the level of resources to address cyber-attacks. D. Petto reported that IT is currently spending 75% of their time on backend securing of servers; also, he plans to increase training and security awareness together with Human Resources.

M. Paolillo asked about IT coordination with other departments. D. Petto said he is consulted when other departments are looking at a new system. He also meets with the School Committee once a month, though they are in charge of their own network.

J. Williams asked if a cost of living adjustment was included in the 2.5% increase; D. Petto confirmed.

J. Williams proposed to meet more often with the IT department to discuss issues of cyber security. The Board and D. Petto agreed with the sentiment.

Town Treasurer, Floyd Carman

Floyd Carman reviewed the responsibilities of the Town Treasurer and Parking Clerk, as well as the budget for these two departments. The total budget increased \$44K from FY18 to ~\$725K; this increase was mostly in the Parking Clerk budget (up ~\$35K), due in large part to the cost of contracts for new parking meters. There were no increases to non-salary components of the budget.

F. Carman outlined what he sees as current and long-term challenge for the Town Treasurer's department: cyber security; maintaining AAA rating; Belmont High School and Public Library Building projects; Police and DPW facilities solution; substation decommission and upgrading of power lines; Cushing Square and Waverly Square revitalization projects.

A. Dash asked whether the 6.4% increase was salary related; F. Carman explained it was from new parking meter installations, but that the parking meters would cover their own cost.

M. Paolillo requested clarification on whether the Town-wide 11% increase in health care costs were reflected in each department's budget; important to understand what is driving the increases across different departments. P. Garvin confirmed this was the case, but that different departments contribute different amounts, depending on their composition.

J. Williams asked about the relationship between the Town Treasurer and the enterprise funds for water/sewer. F. Carman explained the Treasurer is responsible for collections, billing is responsibility of Light Department; he spends 1-2 hours per week on collections for water/sewer or light bills. He works with the business community to set up feasible payment plans where possible. A. Dash noted the high rate of collection from his experience on the Warrant Committee. F. Carman stressed that rate of collections is high for property taxes as well; an allowance is built into the budget for expected levels of non-payment.

Assessors, Dan Dargon and Robert Reardon

R. Reardon explained that the major update for the Assessors was that the State changed from a 3 to a 5 year certification cycle. Money was also added to update pictures of properties. Everything else remains the same.

M. Paolillo asked why the cycle was moved to 5 years. R. Reardon explained that communities are doing a better job on average, so less direct supervision is required.

M. Paolillo asked how many abatement claims are received per year. D. Dargon stated there were 140 last year. R. Reardon stated that this is a low level compared to other communities; this is due to more front-end work of inspections and getting an accurate assessment up-front.

J. Williams asked about the impact of public records requests and what resources have been required to deal with them. R. Reardon explained they do not get a lot of requests as the information is publicly available online and the assessment is a transparent process.

J. Williams asked R. Reardon to explain how the tax levy cap works and whether Belmont is currently taxing at the cap. R. Reardon explained that the hard cap legislated by the State is 2.5% of the total

assessed value, and that Belmont is currently at about half this rate; this is because, locally, Belmont has limited year-over-year increases in the levy to 2.5% plus new growth.

J. Williams raised that some residents were confused about why there is not separate residential/commercial tax rates. R. Reardon explained that a split rate would not add any additional revenue for the Town.

Community Development, Glenn Clancy

G. Clancy reported a modest increase to the Community Development budget. Percentage-wise the largest increases were to small dollar-value items, e.g. office supplies, postage. There was a salary increase for a Building Inspector position that was re-classified.

M. Paolillo asked about a reduction in a line item for professional/technical services, expressing that he often felt Community Development should be given additional resources, and that inspection personnel are stretched thin. G. Clancy explained that the previous year's budget was increased in anticipation of enforcing new sign by-laws, however these additional funds were not fully spent. There was still additional capacity built into the budget compared with two years ago.

M. Paolillo inquired about new storm water regulations and whether additional resources would be needed; G. Clancy explained that funding to address this issue would come from the capital budget in the Sewer Enterprise Fund.

The Board discussed with G. Clancy regarding upcoming consultations on traffic issues related to the new High School building project. A public forum would be held on March 8, 2018 with the Traffic Advisory Committee.

Belmont Emergency Management Association, Leo Saidnawey

L. Saidnawey stated the budget is flat for the upcoming year.

J. Williams asked L. Saidnawey to describe broadly how Emergency Management works. L. Saidnawey explained that the focus is on coordination and training. In an emergency, the Association will open shelters, but usually no one comes; they do not announce shelter locations in advance due to public safety concerns. L. Saidnawey relayed the experience of a recent blackout event and how Emergency Management responded.

L. Saidnawey highlighted the usefulness of conferencing software for coordinating activities in the event of an emergency.


[The agenda items were addressed at this point]

M. Paolillo raised the issue of the need to address broader long-term financial planning for Belmont. J. Williams advocated the Board take certain actions to help alleviate upcoming budget shortfalls. A. Dash suggested to wait for results from the Collins Center report/forecast before taking action; J. Williams

disagreed, and re-iterated that the Board could take action in this budget cycle. P. Garvin suggested that the Board needs to provide direction regarding the level of services provided to the community going forward.

The Board discussed agenda items for upcoming budget meetings.

Motion: To adjourn. (Vote passed 3-0)

 Respectfully Submitted,

Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator