

**MINUTES
TOWN OF BELMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SELECTMEN'S MEETING ROOM
Monday, February 7, 2011
7:00 PM**

CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Board was called to order in open session at 7:00 pm by Chair Jones in the Selectmen's Meeting Room. Selectmen Firenze and Paolillo were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger was present.

QUESTIONS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS

Mr. Lee Adams raised a concern about the snow conditions near his driveway. Mr. Younger informed him that the crosswalks near his driveway would be cleared soon.

Presentation Emergency Management Agency

Mr. Leo Saidnewey, Belmont's Emergency Management Director, and other representatives from FEMA, MEMA, and the National Weather Service appeared before the Board to present an award from the Emergency Management Agency for Belmont's emergency response and citizens' preparedness in the event of a disaster. He noted the type of weather disasters Belmont has experienced over the past years. The "Storm Ready" program was explained and Belmont's compliance with this program was reviewed.

Certificates were presented to Mr. Saidnewey and his assistant Mr. Davidson to honor them for excellence in "Storm Ready" weather preparedness. A "Storm Ready" sign for Belmont was unveiled, as well.

ACTION BY APPOINTMENT

Report on the Envision Belmont Event

Mr. Tim Bowman, Chair of Envision Belmont, appeared before the Board to present a report on the Envision Belmont Event "Making Tough Choices," which occurred on October 24, 2010. Mr. Bowman noted that 75 residents attended to discuss town-wide priorities with available resources. Common threads include: care for quality of life and concern to maintain that quality of life. Many ideas suggested are already being pursued, which leads to the thought that communication needs to be enhanced. He suggested that the Board of Selectman share the Envision Belmont Event report with appropriate department heads and committee chairs. He also suggested that a report card or status update be available to residents and that this event become an annual "Making Tough

Choices” forum in the fall – prior to the budget season. Mr. Bowman offered Envision Belmont’s help in moving forward with the recommendations put forth in this report.

Selectman Paoillo thanked the group and said he would like to continue being the Board’s liaison to the Envision Belmont Group. Chair Jones noted that town-wide meetings will be held (and some of the issues raised in this report will be discussed) with the Chairs of the Warrant Committee, School Committee, and Board of Selectman. He thanked Mr. Bowman for the efforts put forth by Envision Belmont. Selectman Firenze agreed that communication with residents is an area that the Board needs help with.

The Brendan Grant Foundation – Brendan’s Home Run 5K

The Board moved: To approve the request to run the annual road race on Sunday, June 19, 2011.

The motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Representative Brownsberger – Legislative Update

Representative Brownsberger appeared before the Board to provide legislative updates on the following topics:

- **Local Aid Outlook:** Belmont might get more aid than it did last year, but we won’t know for a while longer. He reviewed what Belmont has received in state aid over the past few years. He said the state budget is more uncertain than a local budget and therefore it remains difficult to predict what amount in state aid funding will be available. He reviewed aspects of the Governor’s budget assumptions (Medicaid, the stabilization fund, etc.). He noted other areas of the state budget that could impact local aid (health care costs, etc.). He said there will be no new taxes at the state level, thus losing a safety valve at the state level. He said Belmont should not change its assumptions about local aid. The local aid number should be known by March, or April, at the latest.
- **Legislation:** Representative Brownsberger briefly noted that there were seven bills that impacted Belmont.
- **Public Employee Benefits:** Pension funding assumptions have not panned out, therefore there is a risk that pensions (in the future) will be funded by money that would have gone to local aid. He discussed the “fairness” factor with regard to benefits. Private employees do not enjoy the same benefits as public employees, e.g., most will not receive 80% of their salary in retirement and most will not receive OPEB benefits. He said he is hopeful that municipal managers will be able to change health plans without going through the arduous process of collective bargaining.
- **SPED:** Controlling SPED costs is on the radar screen, as is reducing the amount of paper work that is required of SPED teachers.
- **Virtual Education:** Representative Brownberger said we need to open ourselves to new ways of educating kids. Virtual charter schools, who would

partner with districts, is a possibility. He noted the kinds of children who would be benefited by this.

Selectman Paolillo noted the work Representative Brownsberger has done on the topic of regionalization. Selectman Firenze concurred that SPED costs are growing with little oversight into how that money is spent. He noted that SPED transportation costs, in particular, are extraordinary.

QUESTIONS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS (continued)

The meeting was shifted to the auditorium to accommodate the large number of parents in attendance.

Chair Jones thanked the Dramatics Club for ending their meeting early, thus freeing up the auditorium.

Ms. Heidi Seiger, 2 Thomas Street, read a statement from her child. She read an excerpt from the poet Robert Frost about the importance of arts. She used a “watershed” example to highlight the state that Belmont finds itself in. She noted ways in which this budget will impact the town of Belmont. She reviewed her work experience as a business manager in the field of education.

She said “short-shrifting” SPED kids may mean that Belmont will pay more later. Chair Jones said that he, too, would like to know why art and music got cut.

Ms. Aygul B. Dutton, Payson Road, said she studied the school budget and was horrified by the list of cuts. She read a statement which summarized the areas where the school budget was forced to be increased. She read about her daughter’s wonderful experience in the art program. She spoke about the loss of foreign language for grades five and six.

Ms. Heidi Steinert, 123 Gilbert Road, thanked the Board for their hard work. She read a statement about the budget process. She said there are people planning to move out of Belmont. It is difficult to wait until June to know what is going on with the budget. The School Department simply does not have enough money to run the schools. She said it’s difficult that the children can’t be here to express how this impacts them. She said she wants something to happen now.

Chair Jones said that he understands the anxiety of parents. He said he wishes that the budget process this year had been more traditional, e.g. with a level services budget coming first.

Mr. Fred Bamber, Stone Road, said that there are items which were cut already this year and that there have been many more cuts in previous years that have never been restored.

Ms. Chris Doyle, Cedar Road, said she is grateful that the SC put forth the budget early. She asked for leadership around a “dignified discussion” for teacher benefits. She said the override question deserves serious consideration as part of the democratic process.

Mr. Mark Kisin mentioned that the in the SC's "mission critical budget" the libraries aren't even in there and yet, he asked, who would say that a library in a school is the gold standard? Without an override, will the town be able to pull sufficient funding together to get to a level services budget or to restore other major cuts?

Selectman Paolillo said that both Prop. 2½ and pension obligations make level service budgeting difficult. He said he believes in and campaigned on the notion of frequent operating overrides. He said the Board will need to understand the operating budgets of both school and town-side budgets. It's unlikely we can afford more than level services.

Mr. Mark Kisin said that Belmont spends less than the state average on its per pupil cost. How much more efficient can we be?

Selectman Firenze said that the average taxpayer in Belmont is paying a lot more than the state average. Our citizens are diverse and there are people who can't afford these taxes. Teacher salaries in Belmont have grown a lot in the past 10 years. Mr. Kisin replied that he has studied that issue and that it is not actually true.

Ms. Lynne Polcari, Hastings Road, said she has seen this process unfold for many years. There is always a gap, year after year. Belmont has chipped away year after year. There has been a steady erosion in the schools. Parents, teachers, staff have risen to the challenge effectively. How long can this be sustained? The gap will exist no matter what local aid is. She requested that the Board take a leadership role and explain that while this is difficult fiscally, that this Board values education as does this community. The gap cannot be bridged anymore. It doesn't matter what it is that is cut – even if art and music could be restored, something else will have to go. She spoke to the importance of Curriculum Directors (which have been cut). These cuts are chipping at the foundation underneath education. Let the voters decide and the Board needs to take a leadership role in this process.

Two students, sophomores at BHS, spoke about peers who are moving out of town because of the cuts. They spoke about all of the high school cuts and the impact of those cuts. They requested the option to vote for an override.

Another parent from Lester Road, spoke to the need for an override every few years just to keep level services.

Chair Jones said the town stayed within 2.5% – the schools did not. Mr. Kisin replied that the town has more control over its budget. Chair Jones said that he will hold a town-wide meeting to discuss the budget. He said he would like to work with the entire community to support the school budget. He said his job is more than just to put this on the ballot and watch it get defeated, which he has been advised that it will.

Selectman Paolillo said that Prop. 2½ does need the infusion of overrides to move forward.

Representative Brownsberger said that he got into politics as a concerned parent dealing with cuts in education many years ago. Regarding an April override, there is a lot of information that is unknown in April. If an override goes on the ballot too early, people may vote it down because there are so many unknowns, thus reducing the probability of success. It may be prudent to strongly consider waiting.

The meeting moved back to the Selectman's meeting room and went back into session at 9:45 p.m.

Town Administrator's Report

Mr. Younger reported on the following items:

- 2 Ms. Penelope Moore (a resident from 64 Royal Road) commended the DPW (specifically Mr. Gil) for excellent snow clearing on her street.
- 3 Minuteman's assessment is now up to \$880K (\$30K more than originally budgeted for).
- 3 The Health Insurance trust fund is at \$5.2M.
- 3 Emergency Parking Ban – He is devising a plan, should it be needed. Watertown has had a town-wide ban since February 2. Belmont's plan could be implemented within 48 hours. School areas do not have appropriate parking and the ban would impact teachers. Chair Jones suggested contacting the Superintendent and getting it implemented as soon as possible.

ACTION BY CONSENT

Approval of BOS Meeting Minutes 1/24/11

The Board moved: To approve the minutes of 1/24/11.
The motion passed unanimously (3-0).

ACTION BY APPOINTMENT (continued)

Executive Session (Negotiation with Non-Union Personnel)

The Board moved: To enter into executive session at 9:51 p.m. to discuss negotiation with non-union personnel. The Board will not return to open session.
The motion passed unanimously (3-0).

The Board moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:xx pm.

Thomas G. Younger, Town Administrator