

MINUTES
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BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MARCH 17, 2003
ALTERNATE SESSION

Call to Order

The Board of Selectmen met in an alternate session on Monday, March 17, 2003 at 7:30 PM in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at the Belmont Town Hall. All members were in attendance.

Questions from Town Residents

There were none.

Action by Appointment

Open Special Town Meeting Warrant

The Board discussed the scheduling of the Special Town Meeting in April.

The Board moved: to call the Special Town Meeting for Wednesday, April 30, 2003 at 7:30 pm in the Belmont High School; further to open the warrant commencing immediately, to be closed at 4 p.m. on Friday, March 28, 2003.

The motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Discussion of Senior Center

Mrs. Miranda, Chairman of the Council on Aging, appeared before the Selectmen to seek the Board's support for taking the next step to move forward on a new Senior Center on the Kendall site to seek design funds for this purpose. She informed the Board of The Friends of the Belmont Council on Aging, which has been incorporated as a non-profit organization to raise funds in support for a new Senior Center.

The president of the Friends organization commented on the group's commitment to raise funds to support this project, but that in order for them to do this successfully, the Town must have committed to the design stage of this project. He indicated this group is comprised of approximately 25 members.

Both Dr. Solomon and Mr. Brownsberger stated their support for this commitment to raise funds and for moving forward on the design stage of this project.

Mrs. Mahoney expressed support for the fundraising effort, but is not certain that the design funds are necessary for the Friends effort to move ahead.

Mr. Brownsberger suggested that given the budget constraints, that the Town scale back the development of the building on the Kendall site to only that of the Senior Center, without a basement and without a second floor space for a branch library and a third floor for potential arts space.

Mrs. Mahoney indicated she is opposed to scaling down the project to only a senior center. She indicated her support for utilizing the site for multiple uses that serves a broader constituency.

Dr. Solomon concurred.

Mr. Brownsberger expressed his concern that a multi-use development might increase the cost of development and thereby reduce the opportunity for success of the project.

He requested the members of the Council on Aging to meet with the members of the Board of Library Trustees over the next two weeks to discuss this issue so that they are prepared to appear before the Board of Selectmen on Monday, March 30 to share ideas they have generated.

Discussion of Disposition of Town-Owned Parcels

The Board turned to a discussion of the potential disposition of three Town-owned parcels, one on Brighton Street, one on B Street, and one on Woodfall Road.

Representative Paulsen appeared before the Board to remind the community that Belmont is a Town in which less than 3% of its housing stock is affordable. She encouraged the Board to think about the Town's responsibilities with respect to affordable housing about it discusses the disposition of these parcels.

A resident expressed concern that the construction of new housing units as affordable housing would increase the cost to the Town from an increase in children in the school system.

A Stoney Brook Road resident expressed concern that disposition of these properties would preclude the Town from utilizing these sites for any other potential future purpose.

Ann Verilli of the Belmont Housing Trust advocated for the use of a number of these sites for the development of affordable housing. She reminded the Board of

the availability of federal HOME funds to support the development of affordable housing.

A resident of Woodfall Road inquired why the parcel was not developed earlier. He contemplated that a significant portion of the parcel is wetlands.

Mr. Winston of the Belmont Land Trust, a private non-profit organization, advocated for the retention of Woodfall Road as open space. He suggested the possibility that abutters and other interested parties might be interested in acquiring the land from the Town for it to be retained as open space.

Roger Colton, of the Fair Housing Committee, asked the Board to recognize the critical need for affordable housing and to make a commitment that if any residential units are developed on the Woodfall Road site, that at least a portion of them be devoted for affordable housing. He noted that the Town doesn't have the funds to acquire land or existing properties to develop affordable housing in the Town. He stated that the Town does own land upon which new housing units could be developed quite easily on Brighton Street and B Street.

A resident of Evergreen Way questioned what type of development is currently allowed under current zoning on the Woodfall Road.

Mr. Kleckner indicated this area is zoning for single-family residences only.

The Board requested Town administration to move on the process of disposing of smaller parcels of land for Town Meeting approval in April to generate additional tax revenue for the land.

The Board moved: that the Town move on the process of disposing of smaller parcels of Town-owned land for Town Meeting consideration.

The motion passed unanimously (3-0).

The Board requested a recommendation be developed by the Office of Community Development of the most cost effective way to evaluate the Woodfall Road parcel for its "buildability".

Mrs. Mahoney inquired how disposition of the B Street parcel might affect future planning for a consolidated public works building. The Board requested a response from the Highway Superintendent on this issue.

The Board requested the Town Administrator and the Office of Community Development make proposals for the future consideration of the three more significant parcels for the Board's discussion in May.

Discussion of FY04 Budget

The Board discussed a memo from the Town Administrator regarding the Board's request that he identify an additional \$200,000 in additional Town budget cuts in order to level fund the capital budget at its FY03 level. He also noted the potential identification of an additional \$100,000 in reductions, but recommended this matter be taken up in executive session because of its potential impact on collective bargaining.

He summarized his proposed additional reduction which included a 10% reduction in most overtime accounts, a reduction of seasonable labor by 50%, reduction in contracted snow removal costs resulting from a consolidated public works function, restricted travel policy for both travel expenses and travel allowances, restoration of funds to paint the pool, and a reduction in the FY03 contingency fund.

Mr. Brownsberger inquired about the viability of reducing the fire suppression overtime.

The Town Administrator stated his belief that this overtime can be sustained by operational changes which may require staff officers to man fire apparatus or certain pieces of equipment to be taken out of service.

The Board requested feedback on the impact of these proposed cuts from the Town department heads for their meeting of March 24.

Mr. Brownsberger stated his belief that the Town should not delay action on the Town budget until May or June because he believes it's important for people to understand where they stand now.

The Town Administrator recommended that this decision not be made tonight, given the significant uncertainty regarding the Governor's budget proposal.

Other

The Town Administrator reviewed a draft letter proposed to be signed by the Board of Selectmen to be sent to the Town of Lexington relative to the Town's position regarding the affordable housing to be developed at the former Metropolitan State Hospital site.

The Board moved: to sign the letter.

The motion passed unanimously (3-0).

Mr. Brownsberger noted the Recreation Commission's entrepreneurial endeavors to generate additional revenues through the use of the Town's facilities. He mentioned the Recreation Commission's decision to sell advertising space on the Town rink.

Mr. Brownsberger recommended the Board request the Recreation Commission to identify ways to generate additional revenues through the enhanced use of the Town's facilities.

The Board requested an opinion from Town Counsel relative to the Recreation Commission's authority to make a policy decision regarding the sale of advertising space in the Town's skating rink.

Mr. Brownsberger updated the Board on the City of Cambridge's recent decision to halt all sewer connections, effectively preventing the development of the Belmont Uplands. He indicated Cambridge might seek to develop a tri-community process to evaluate development in the Alewife area.

Dr. Solomon noted the significant response for additional public comment regarding the quality of cable services in the Town. He indicated his desire to work with Town staff to determine a process to tabulate the results of the comments in a way that can be understood by the Board with respect to its consideration of Comcast's application to renew its cable license.

Action by Appointment (continued)

Discussion of FY04 Budget

The Board moved: to enter executive session for discussion of strategy related to collective bargaining; the board will not return to open session.

The motion passed unanimously (3-0), by roll call vote.

The Board adjourned open session at approximately 10:00 p.m.

Melvin A. Kleckner, Town Administrator
Clerk, Board of Selectmen