

**TOWN OF BELMONT
CAPITAL BUDGET COMMITTEE
MEETING BY AUDIO AND VISUAL REMOTE ACCESS AND BY
Thursday, April 15, 2021
8:00 AM**

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**
DATE: April 29, 2021
TIME: 2:27 PM

Call to Order

A regular meeting of the Capital Budget Committee (CBC) was called to order at 8:02 a.m. by Chair Anne Marie Mahoney.

Members Present by Audio and Video Remote Access: Chair Mahoney, M. Patricia Brusch, Amy Checkoway (SC), Roy Epstein (SB), Jenny Fallon (WC) [until 9:05], Rebecca Vose and Susan Burgess Cox, Liaison to the Planning Board

Also Present: Jon Marshall, Assistant Town Administrator; Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator; Jay Marcotte, Director of DPW

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Fallon moved: That the minutes of April 8, 2021, be approved.

Mrs. Brusch seconded.

Chair Mahoney called the Roll with Members Brusch, Fallon, Epstein, Mahoney and Vose voting in favor and Ms. Checkoway abstaining.

The motion carried 5-0.

Updates on FY Capital Requests

Gas Tanks at the DPW Yard - Chair Mahoney and Mr. Marcotte described the estimates for three different scenarios from Weston and Sampson: Two 6,000 gallon above-ground steel tanks, one 12,000 gallon underground fiberglass split tank and two 6,000 gallon underground fiberglass tanks. The estimates for the underground tanks do not include design and engineering costs that typically run between 8% and 12% of total project costs. The underground fiberglass tanks have 28 to 30 weeks lead time from when the order is placed to delivery. The steel tanks average 12-14 weeks. The cost of the underground tanks is close to \$400,000 more than the above ground tanks. Mr. Epstein observed that when the Select Board looked at the question of above- versus below- ground tanks, it found no advantage to underground tanks. Members agreed that with the capital budget as strapped at it is, the cost differential was very significant. Mr. Marcotte reminded the Committee that the Town is under pressure from DEP to replace the aged tanks on the site.

Wellington HVAC – This is an ongoing issue with the system. Mr. Epstein asked David Blazon, the new Facilities Director, to look at it. Mr. Blazon reports that key portions of the system are inoperative and require major repairs. The geothermal system at the Wellington has not worked properly since 2013 when the pumps were “fried”, probably due to lack of adequate training of the staff operating it. Since then, the back-up system has carried the full load of HVAC service to the building. Mr. Epstein reported that the repair work goes well beyond replacing the geothermal pumps. As distressing as this news was, members expressed concern about whether the Town will have in-house capability to handle the sophisticated systems such as this one and those in the new high school building. Because the Town cannot defer the repair work much longer, Mr. Epstein stated that more research on the problem and its cure will be done between now and the CBC’s next meeting.

Butler & Burbank Boiler Project – More work is to be done to determine if this project qualifies for partial reimbursement under the MSBA Accelerated Repair Program.

Library A/C Work – The condenser for one of the Library’s five (5) zones was replaced last year. The remaining four (4) are the end of their useful lives. Mr. Blazon feels that if another were to go down, he could handle the repair from his operating budget. Ms. Fallon prefers to re-allocate the \$52K requested for this work to another repair project at the library, given that the building has so many pressing needs. The Committee discussed the dilemma of pouring money into a building that needs to be replaced. In the absence of a concrete commitment to go forward with a building project, the Town and its residents still want and need a library. Mr. Epstein cautioned against throwing money at a system before it breaks down. Ms. Fallon countered that it is wiser to spend some funds to keep the building open rather than wait for a complete failure and avoid the huge capital expense of doing the work necessary to keep the library operating then. Members supported Mr. Epstein’s suggestion of developing a triage plan for the library building as well as Ms. Fallon’s proposal to ask Mr. Blazon for a plan “to create a bridge” to keep the building open and operating until a debt exclusion.

The Committee identified information it wants before making its final FY22 capital budget recommendations:

1. ask Peter Struzziero, Library Director, to recommend a substitute project;
2. determine if Burbank and Butler Boilers project will proceed with funds from the MSBA repair program;
3. clarify the amount the Light Department is prepared to contribute toward the DPW tanks; and
4. update estimate for the Library Alarm System.

At its April 28 meeting the Committee will take its final vote on the capital budget.

Members next discussed the best way to appropriate all the funds available in the FY22 capital budget without specifically allocating them at June’s Annual Town Meeting budget session, to allow time to update project cost estimates, which take time.

Residents Questions and Comments

Resident Pargoli commented on the Wellington HVAC system and expressed unhappiness that the cost of repair always comes back to the Town. She also questioned the number of people of using the library on a daily basis previously referenced in the meeting and was of the opinion that the number was exaggerated.

Resident Thayer questioned why the meeting format was switched from a Zoom meeting to a webinar. He feels the latter format makes it difficult for audience members to follow the meeting. Chair Mahoney explained that the webinar is the format used by other town boards and committees, e.g., the Select Board and the School Committee. The switch was made to allow for the CBC members to connect with each other more efficiently. He strenuously objected to the change and the late notice of the switch. Mr. Marshall explained that agenda changes to an open meeting can be made within 48 hours of the meeting and that the change in remote access format is considered a change to the agenda. Mr. Thayer complained that he missed the first 15 minutes of the meeting due to the switch. Mr. Thayer asked questions of Ms. Garvin related to the operating budget and was reminded that this meeting was concerned solely with the capital budget, and that his questions would not be entertained. He also complained that the meeting was not recorded and was told the open meeting law does not require that it be recorded. Mr. Thayer then raised questions about town government transparency, to which every member of the CBC strenuously objected, and Mr. Thayer apologized if committee members misinterpreted what he said as impugning their character.

Resident Lenk stated that the statement made questioning the number of library patrons visiting daily was wrong and cited statistics that show the Belmont's public library is among the top two for patron visits and circulation in Middlesex County. Committee members acknowledged that Mr. Lenk was correct.

Resident Ananian Sarno posed questions about the DPW above and below ground tank estimates and asked for more explanation about the contributions to cover the cost from Enterprise Funds and the Light Department. Chair Mahoney repeated what had been discussed earlier in the meeting and will email her a copy of the written estimates. Ms. Ananian Sarno also complained about the changed remote meeting format.

Next Meeting April 29

The CBC moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:51 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Vose, Secretary