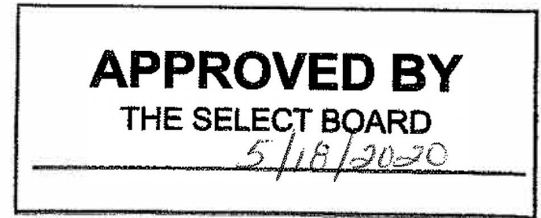


Minutes
Town of Belmont
Select Board
Select Board Meeting Room
Monday, April 27, 2020
7:00pm



CALL TO ORDER:

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Roy Epstein. Vice Chair Tom Caputo and Select Board member Adam Dash were present. Town Administrator Patrice Garvin was present. The meeting was to be partly in joint with the School Committee, which called itself to order.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Belmont High School's Quiz Team is moving on to the quarter finals of the High School quiz show on WGBH – broadcast Saturday May 2 at 6pm on WGBH2, with replays to follow.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS:

[There were none]

ACTION BY CONSENT:

COVID-19 update and discussion, including Belmont Manor

First, Epstein read a statement he had prepared concerning the situation at Belmont Manor.

Following this, Epstein introduced discussion of a temporary emergency regulation, developed in collaboration with the Board of Health. The regulation would require use of face-coverings by both customers and workers at essential businesses. Dash read the proposed regulation in full ([see final version here](#)).

Dash proposed a change to the effect that individuals 'shall' wear face coverings (as opposed to 'should'). He further advocated that a penalty should be specified, otherwise the directive would be difficult to enforce.

Caputo was supportive of the regulation but also wondered about the enforcement scheme, specifically who would enforce the regulation and whether or not adequate resources were available to do so.

Epstein proposed that the Board should adopt the regulation as written, in order to get something in place; he would continue to work with the Board of Health to specify penalties and enforcement, and look to update the regulation in two weeks at the next Board meeting.

Motion: To adopt Temporary Emergency Order #1, with the proposed change to Paragraph 1 that the sentence "...all members of the public entering businesses should..." have the word 'should' replaced with 'shall'. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

Other COVID-related updates:

- Wes Chin (Director, Belmont Health Department) reported the Town had signed up to participate in the State-run contact tracing program. This would allow the Health Department to tap into additional nursing resources to follow-up on positive COVID-19 cases in an effort to limit potential spread. Chin cautioned the public not to provide any personal identifying information and to follow up with the Health Department directly if there is any concern about the legitimacy of a call purporting to be from the contact tracing program.
 - o Caputo asked Chin whether there would be some local effort to provide testing to the community. Chin said they had not received any guidance with respect to this from the Massachusetts Department of Health; if a vaccine were to be developed, the Health Department would likely plan to hold a Town-wide clinic.

School Committee candidate search announcement

Epstein announced the School Committee was seeking to fill a recently vacated position. The end of the term for this position was April 2021. The position would be filled using a process similar to that for committee appointments, and both the Select Board and School Committee would vet and ultimately vote on the appointment.

Andrea Prestwich (Acting Chair, School Committee) welcomed applications from all types of backgrounds and stressed the need to fill the position as soon as possible, as the Committee had much work to do. Tara Donner (School Committee) agreed, but also noted there should be sufficient time allowed to get the word out about the vacancy.

Dash suggested a timeline and interview schedule be established. John Phelan (Superintendent, Belmont Public Schools) volunteered to advertise the position in his regular newsletter.

Joint Meeting with the School Committee to discuss the FY21 Budget

Epstein began by summarizing work to-date on the Town side towards re-doing the FY21 budget in light of anticipated impacts from COVID-19. The largest impact on revenues was to State Aid funds, for which the current projections assumed two scenarios – a 20% and 25% reduction. Adjustments to projections for other revenue line items (new growth, motor vehicle excise, restaurant excise) had also been made on a case-by-case basis. The resulting two scenarios amounted to an additional revenue deficit of \$4.6m-\$5m relative to the previously presented balanced budget from February.

Epstein then highlighted proposed expenditure reductions to address the shortfall, including: salary adjustments on Town side; reduced OPEB contribution to the minimum allowed under the policy (expected this would be made up in later years); transfer of road reconstruction funds to the operating budget; reductions in overtime allocations; sewer pension contributions would be transferred from the operating budget back to the Sewer Enterprise Fund; Capital Budget Committee had approved a reduced capital budget, thereby turning back funds to the operating budget; reductions in Sunday hours for the Library; Health Insurance savings.

Epstein recognized that such cuts would be painful and result in a reduction of services for the community; at this time, however, no reductions to staff were being proposed. The expenditure reductions totalled \$3.9m, meaning that there was still a gap remaining in order to present a balanced budget.

Next, John Phelan (Superintendent, Belmont Public Schools) reviewed work of the School finance team (in collaboration with the Education Subcommittee of the Warrant Committee) in revisiting the School's FY21 budget. He noted there were several scheduled upcoming meetings on April 30 and May 7, and stressed that he had been awaiting clarity on the shortfall amount, prior to putting forth a list of proposed reductions.

Phelan called attention to the \$1.7m in Circuit Breaker funds that had already been committed to the previous version of the FY21 budget. There was concern that Circuit Breaker funding from the State would be impacted down the road, which is precisely what these reserve funds were meant to address.

Phelan requested clarification on whether the School was being asked to make up the entire remaining projected shortfall – i.e. what is the final requested number of School-side reductions? He expressed concern that the ask of the School be equitable in relation to impacts on other Town departments, noting that some of the proposed reductions discussed above actually impacted both Town and Schools.

Garvin answered that she felt the Town had done its due diligence in coming up with savings and requested to see scenarios from the School Department reflecting the ranges from the two scenarios (remaining shortfall of ~\$530k and \$1.1m).

Phelan said the finance team would take up discussion of potential reductions at the next several meetings, using the model of maintaining staff headcount and focusing on non-salary expenditures. There was broad agreement between the School Committee and Select Board to work jointly in prioritizing potential cuts in a fair and equitable manner once the range of possible reductions had been identified. Once the numbers had been vetted, another joint meeting would be called, ideally within a months' time.

Health Insurance rates FY21

Epstein explained that the February version of the FY21 budget had included an assumption of a 4% increase in costs for health insurance, one of the larger budget items. Since that time, health insurance consultant Susan Shillue (President, Cook & Company Insurance Services) had conducted updated projections, showing only a 1% expected increase to costs resulting from recently implemented plan design changes; the caveat / unknown factor being how COVID-19 would impact claims.

Epstein was proposing to lower the budgeted amount of increase from 4% to 3% which would introduce \$218k in savings for the FY21 budget (as noted above), while still being conservative relative to the projections. If costs were to realize as projected (in the 1-2% range) then funds could be added to rebuild the Health Insurance Trust Fund.

No formal vote was required, however the other Board members were supportive of carrying the 3% number in the budget.

May 1 Property Tax due date

The Select Board had received many email inquiries about whether the property tax payment deadline would be postponed to June 1, as had been done in some other municipalities. Epstein's view, in alignment with the recommendation of the Town Treasurer, was to leave the deadline at May 1. His rationale was: the Town has urgent cash flow needs; postponing to June 1 would send a bad signal to the bond market in advance of the second round of borrowing for the High School; postponing the deadline does not excuse the payment, and there would still be another payment looming in August. The Town

Treasurer had expressed willingness to work out a payment plan with homeowners on a case-by-case basis if they required relief. The Board was in agreement not to move the May 1 deadline.

Discussion on the Belmont Farmers' Market, possible vote

Hal Shubin (Chair, Farmers' Market Committee) joined the meeting. At the previous Select Board meeting Shubin had presented several options for opening and operating the Farmers' Market in a safe manner. Since then, he had worked with Town Administrator Garvin and Assistant Town Administrator Marshall, in collaboration with the Health Department, to refine the plan. Shubin presented the final plan, which included an expanded footprint, pre-ordering of food, social distancing markers, PPE for vendors, sanitizing stations, one-way traffic flow and limited occupancy. Shubin was requesting approval of the memo with rules 1-6 as outlined therein, which would allow him to move forward with planning in order to open the Market on schedule.

Garvin noted that under the new temporary emergency regulation, an amendment to the memo should be made specifying that patrons be required to wear face coverings. To address this, Dash proposed the following motion:

Motion: To approve the new configuration of the Farmers' Market along with rules 1-6 as outlined in the provided memo, and to allow the Town Administrator or designee to revise the operating rules as dictated by circumstances. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

McLean Project shuttle plan presentation

Jack Dawley (CEO, Northland Residential) joined the meeting and gave a presentation updating on the McLean Zone 3 development proposal, specifically with regards to projected traffic impacts. Under the Traffic Monitoring and Mitigation Agreement (TMMA) for the site, the current proposed development did not comply with the traffic limits for the maximum number of morning peak trips. Dawley outlined potential options for remedying this situation, which boiled down to either amending the TMMA (would require Town Meeting approval) or revising the development plan. The first option was not being pursued.

For the latter option, decreasing the number of AM trips to be in compliance with the TMMA limit would require decreasing the number of multi-family rental units, or, increasing the number of age-restricted units. Updated traffic count projections were presented for these various scenarios. The updated numbers also included adjustments to the number of trips based on US Census Bureau data showing that a certain proportion of residents would use public transit instead of driving, a so-called 'transit use adjustment'.

Epstein requested the work product for deriving these figures, expressing confusion over how the numbers hit the limits exactly. Further details about the shuttle were also requested; Dawley expressed his commitment to providing a shuttle service with the development, but was still in preliminary stages of resolving the details for what that would look like (though he noted the transit-use adjustment included the assumption of a shuttle service).

[Open public comment.]

- Sue Bass (Town Meeting Member, P3): Important for Town Meeting to have more detail on the shuttle service and how it is incorporated in the transit-use adjustment.

[Close public comment.]

Dawley would follow-up with the materials as discussed.

Community Development Rotary Plan, discussion

Glenn Clancy (Director, Community Development) presented plans for an altered traffic pattern in Belmont Center. Clancy and Garvin had discussed using this period of lower-than-usual traffic volumes to implement a two week experiment, which would allow for data collection and subsequent analysis to determine if the change should be implemented permanently.

The proposal consisted of: Phase 1) – Forcing south bound traffic exiting the Center to make a right turn to either Common Street or Royal Road. Cars desiring to head east on Concord Ave. would have to loop around Memorial Island and make a left back onto Common St. This restriction would eliminate the double left turn conflict at the bridge intersection, and help with the queuing back on Leonard St. in peak times. This was envisioned as a twenty four hour restriction.

Phase 2) – Implement a left turn restriction for northbound cars on Leonard St. turning onto Concord Ave. Cars would instead be forced to continue down Leonard to the intersection at Pleasant St. and make a left turn there, looping back around. This restriction was envisioned for peak afternoon times to help prevent the west-bound back up on Concord Ave.

At this juncture, Clancy was looking for support from the Board to advance discussions with Police and DPW to figure out more specifics on how to actually implement the proposal. He would then come back to the Board with a more detailed plan, requesting approval to roll-out the experiment. Dash and Caputo expressed some concerns about Phase 2 of the plan, but agreed these could be taken up in detail when the final plan was presented.

Motion: To authorize Community Development Director Glenn Clancy to work with other Town Departments to develop a plan for an approximately two-week experiment changing traffic patterns in Belmont Center along the lines presented in Phase 1. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

Annual Town Meeting Warrant discussion

Garvin reported the Warrant was close to being finalized – still waiting on the Community Preservation Committee's (CPC) final list of projects.

Elizabeth Dionne (Chair, Community Preservation Committee) clarified that, of the proposed CPA projects this year, only the Town Hall chimney project had been deemed urgent enough to be taken up at Town Meeting in June. However, the CPC was also awaiting a formal application from the Housing Trust with respect to an Emergency Rental Assistance Program, which potentially could be added to the Warrant as well.

The Town was still awaiting word on whether or not it would be possible to hold a remote Town Meeting in June.

New Hire Advisory Committee recommendations

The Board discussed a memo from the New Hire Advisory Committee (NHAC), which had undertaken a process to review a list of vacant positions with respect to the hiring freeze (approved by the Select Board at its' April 13 meeting) for the remainder of FY20. This list included positions in the Police Department, DPW, Community Development and Facilities, as well as positions in the Library and Assessor's office (with the understanding that the latter positions were outside the Select Board's jurisdiction).

The memo recommended freezing of all the positions under consideration, with exception of the following: 1) Assistant Police Chief – It was felt that this was a critical position for the functioning of the department for various reasons. 2) DPW full-time mechanic – The department was now down to only two mechanics, responsible for maintenance of the entire fleet of Town vehicles. The concern was that any maintenance backlog would force additional overtime and/or outsourcing, hence the position was projected to actually save money in the long run.

Additionally, within the Police Department a process was already underway to fill a vacant Captain's position. Under Civil Service requirements the hiring was scheduled to take place in mid-June based on an already scheduled Assessment Center planned for May. The NHAC had asked Chief MacIsaac if completing the hire could wait until after July 1; the Chief had agreed with this approach, noting however, that delaying the appointment any longer would likely cause a problem with Civil Service.

The NHAC had not made any recommendations on future timing for filling the remaining frozen positions, deferring to individual departments while emphasizing the budgetary challenges for FY21, and even more so for FY22 and beyond.

Some points of discussion:

- The 'delta' impact to the FY20 budget was estimated in the range of \$15k-\$20k for proceeding with the two recommended hires.
- Kathy Keohane (Board of Library Trustees) expressed support and appreciation for the work of the NHAC. She noted the Library had coordinated on the proposed frozen positions for the Library and encouraged other departments to take a similar approach.
- Garvin reiterated her view that filling the positions could wait until after the end of the fiscal year, which was the original purpose of the hiring freeze.
- Dash expressed reservations over moving ahead with the Assistant Police Chief hire. While acknowledging the importance of the position, he preferred to be consistent in taking a belt-tightening approach across the board, and noted that if an internal candidate was chosen this would result in having to backfill their position. He was concerned about making a hire that would need to be reversed soon after due to the challenges presented by future budgets.

Ultimately Caputo introduced the following Motion:

Motion: To accept the recommendations of the New Hire Advisory Committee.

- *Dash seconded the motion.*
- *Epstein stressed that the measures for FY20 addressed short-term considerations only, and there would be significant challenges to face for the FY22 budget, including those associated with renegotiating all union contracts next year.*

- *(Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)*

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:

Garvin reviewed the Town Administrator's Report:

- The Community Path project is currently still in the design phase, and the Town recently met with the MBTA to obtain clarification on the Alexander Avenue Underpass and other elements of Phase 1a/b. The CPPC would be meeting next Monday; a previously planned public input session for June is indefinitely delayed.
- A Hazard Mitigation listening session was held on April 22 as part of the Town's efforts to become certified under the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program. A project list was generated and potential funding sources identified.
- By the end of the week, all committees should be up and running with ability to conduct virtual meetings on Zoom; the Town recently purchased 5 Zoom licenses in order to be able to hold simultaneous meetings.

SELECT BOARD COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORTS:

- Dash: Capital Budget Committee had voted approval of returning \$1.7m in road funds to the operating budget; Recreation Commission discussed opening of the Underwood Pool, would seek to provide a formal recommendation to the Select Board in May.
- Caputo: Upcoming meetings for Warrant Committee, Financial Task Force II and Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee.
- Epstein: Range of issues raised at the Conservation Commission related to increased utilization at Rock Meadow.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion: To adjourn at 11:02pm. (Vote passed 3-0)


Respectfully Submitted,

PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator