

Minutes

Town of Belmont

Select Board

Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Monday, May 18, 2020

7:00pm

Approved by
the Select Board on:

June 8, 2020

CALL TO ORDER:

A regular 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.

A portion of the meeting was joint with the School Committee and Warrant Committee. Chair Andrea Prestwich called the School Committee to order at 7:00pm; Chair Laurie Slap called the Warrant Committee to order at 7:01pm.

Chair Epstein was introducing a new policy on public comment, following protocol used for Warrant briefings: any public questions or comments specific to agenda items would be limited to two minutes in the absence of prior arrangement with the Chair.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Indian cooking class with Meenakshi Garodia to be held virtually on Tuesday May 26 at 1:15pm – contact the Beech Street Center for Zoom meeting details.
- A virtual Mother's Day Tea, also hosted by the Beech Street Center, planned for Friday May 29 at 1:15pm.
- Coffee and Conversations with the Belmont Police Department, Friday May 22 at 10:00am. Lieutenant Kristen Daley will give an update.
- Belmont Police Chief James MacIsaac announced the selection of Mark Hurley as the Assistant Police Chief for the Belmont Police Department.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

- *April 27, regular session:*

Motion: To approve the April 27, 2020 regular session minutes. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS:

[There were none.]

ACTION BY CONSENT:

Underwood Pool, Discussion and Possible Vote on Recreation Commission's Recommendation

A memo from the Recreation Commission had laid out considerations around opening the pool this summer – specifically, requirements to at least breaking even financially while still maintaining health and safety of staff/users. Such considerations included: operating at reduced capacity; \$14 per person charge for use of a 1 hour 45 minute time slot; need to remain open for at least nine weeks; providing all required PPE, use of porta potties on-site; 4-6 week lead time to open the pool. The Recreation Commission had explicitly acknowledged the financial risk of opening the pool, especially given the Town's difficult financial circumstances, and recommended opening the pool if it could at least financially break even.

Caputo asked about whether a decision could be delayed to allow for additional guidance from Governor Baker. Marcotte and Marshall indicated that, based on the lead time required to open the pool and the amount of time necessary for the pool to remain open to turn a profit, a decision could not wait.

Epstein thought it would be unwise to open the pool this year given the risks involved and the potential for additional financial strain on an already challenging budget. Dash pointed out the severe restrictions that would be required for operating the pool safely this year. Caputo highlighted the high degree of uncertainty around the decision, which made it challenging to vote in favor of the pool opening.

Motion: That the Town of Belmont not open the Underwood Pool this summer. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

Joint Meeting of the Select Board, School Committee and Warrant Committee to discuss the FY21 budget

Epstein gave an overview of recent developments on the budget: Due to COVID-19, Town and Schools had been working intensely to update the FY21 budget as presented in February to account for updated revenue assumptions. These assumptions had settled on a projected 25% decrease in State Aid revenue, along with estimated reductions to other revenue line items such as local receipts, motor vehicle excise, meals excise, etc. The resulting budget deficit gap was ~\$5m. At the previous Select Board meeting Garvin had outlined \$3.9m in proposed expense reductions, mostly from the Town side but also from some shared line items with the Schools. Since that meeting, Town and School leaders had collaborated to find an additional \$850k in reductions on the School side. This left a ~\$300k gap, that could now be considered closed due to the reduced expense from not opening the Underwood Pool.

Epstein stressed that this had been a difficult process with lots of shared sacrifice; however, he felt the budget was the best that could be achieved under the circumstances, and that it was suitable to present to Town Meeting.

John Phelan (Superintendent, Belmont Public Schools) echoed the sentiment that the budget reflected the most appropriate combination of reductions to Town and School services, given the difficult circumstances. He was appreciative of the collaborative process that had been undertaken to find savings. Finally, he brought attention to the wider financial challenges faced by both Town and Schools for FY22 and beyond, stressing the need to move forward with the FY21 budget to subsequently begin with longer term planning.

[Epstein opened up discussion for members of the School Committee and Warrant Committee.]

- *Andrea Prestwich (Chair, School Committee)*: While it may be the best budget possible under the circumstances, it is still miserable from the School's perspective. Concerns about impacts to the quality of education from increased class sizes, as well as unknown needs that may arise due to COVID-19. Per pupil expenditure levels already reflect a bare bones School budget in Belmont in normal times.
- *Laurie Slap (Chair, Warrant Committee)*: These are difficult circumstances and the cuts are painful. Need to move forward with the proposal given where we are in the year, and move forward with planning for FY22.
- *Christine Doyle (Warrant Committee)*: Hope that Belmont is undertaking a robust submission for CARES act reimbursements. Need clearer understanding of how Town departments are impacted by COVID-19 and their related plans to provide services is a new way.
- *Michael Crowley (School Committee and Liaison to Warrant Committee)*: Even under normal circumstances not enough teachers/staff – concerned about reversing recent progress on reducing class size ratios. Consider the assumption of 25% reduction to State Aid revenue to be far too conservative based on understanding of what is going on with the Legislature; would prefer to make a less conservative assumption that gives some added flexibility in the budget to address unknowns for school in the fall.
- *Anne Helgen (Warrant Committee)*: Point out that the School Department budget is still increasing year-over-year, even with the proposed reductions; also, during this emergency period the budget still shows additions to reserve funds. Agree that we should revisit in the fall to see what can be added back in if the budget ends up being too conservative – confidence that the Schools will be treated well.
- *Tara Donner (School Committee)*: School Department is unique in the sense that it would be challenging to add funds back in the fall that would help address the upcoming school year, if the budget turns out to be too conservative – staffing levels will already have been determined. Impact from reduced FTEs in the School is more immediate vs delayed fixing of roads; advocate for keeping the FTEs and looking elsewhere for reductions.
- *Jack Weis (Warrant Committee)*: Echo Helgen on semantics of cutting vs not increasing school budget – the budget is still increasing in absolute terms year-over-year. Over the last several years Town departments have seen relatively smaller increases to the budget, culminating in only a ~\$117k increase for FY21.
- *Elizabeth Dionne (Warrant Committee)*: Important to articulate the real needs on the Town side of the budget and what reductions to services will mean for residents.

[Open the discussion for public comment.]

- *Kathy Keohane*: Appreciate the collaboration involved in achieving the balanced budget. As a representative of the Board of Library Trustees, the Library will be reducing hours, materials and heat in order to help with the budget gap. Please consider the Library for any incremental funds that may result if the budget ends up being too conservative – historically, library utilization goes up in times of recession.
- *Paul Roberts*: Disappointing to hear Town vs Schools rhetoric. Town needs a fix for the structural deficit / lack of funding in the system and Belmont leaders need to stand up and advocate full funding of services.

- *Julie Crockett:* Not prudent to put off the additional FTEs for addressing enrolment. If anything, more staffing resources will be needed next year to face COVID-related challenges.
- *Tara Donner:* Want to clarify, even though the School budget in increasing year-over-year, still amounts to reduction in services because enrolment continues to grow.
- *Amy Checkoway:* Support the need to plan aggressively for FY22 and give the community a chance to weigh-in on proposal for delivering fully-funded services.

[Close public comment.]

Epstein concluded by reiterating that the budget process had attempted to balance different needs of the community, as reflected in the preceding discussion. He hoped his colleagues on the School Committee and Warrant Committee would ultimately vote to support the budget.

[School Committee adjourned at 8:34pm; Warrant Committee adjourned at 8:35pm.]

Memorial Day proclamation

State Representative Dave Rogers was present and read the proclamation.

Motion: That the Select Board and Town of Belmont support the proclamation on Memorial Day, as read by State Representative Dave Rogers. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

Vote to approve Memorial Day morning observations

In lieu of the traditional Memorial Day parade, an event had been organized for a small group, led by Veterans' Services Officer Bob Upton, to visit the various monuments in Town and conduct short ceremonies at each. Proper social distancing and face-coverings would be employed. The event would be streamed live on the Belmont Media Center.

Motion: To authorize the Memorial Day morning observations at each of the nine Veterans' Memorials in Belmont, under the plan as submitted by Veterans' Services Officer Bob Upton, with the proviso to limit the number of participants to eight maximum.

- *Caputo amended the motion to say "...participants to approximately eight maximum".*
- *(Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)*

COVID-19 Update and Discussion

Epstein had proposed an amendment to Temporary Emergency Regulation #2, which sought to clarify that violations of the face-covering mandate were *not* applicable to members of the same household who, for example, were out walking in the street or other areas where it was possible to maintain social distancing. Dash requested additional clarifying language to specify the situations where the amendment itself would not apply, specifically those laid out in Governor Baker's order. The amendment was revised in real-time over Zoom.

Motion: To approve the amendment to Temporary Emergency Regulation #2 as shown on screen. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

Wes Chin (Director, Belmont Health Department) gave a brief update on new guidance from Governor Baker with respect to the phased reopening plan.

McLean Demographer discussion

Jerome McKibben (McKibben Demographic) presented results from a study commissioned by the Town to evaluate the demographic impact from the proposed Zone 3 McLean development. The report looked at data from the Royal Belmont and projected numbers for the Cushing Square development, in addition to looking at two possible options for McLean (one being the original proposal of 40 age-restricted units with 110 apartments, second being 93 age-restricted units with 50 apartments). Focus of the report was largely to project the impact to the school-aged population.

Based on these data, Garvin and Community Development Director Clancy had worked through projections of the financial impact to Belmont, taking into account the additional property tax and other revenues, as well as expected costs from providing services such as police/fire and education. At this stage, projections were showing positive net revenue to the Town for both McLean options, though smaller net revenues for option one, with education costs driving the differences.

Epstein would work with Planning Board Chair Pinkerton to devise a request for some follow-up sensitivity analysis to be conducted by McKibben.

Incinerator Demolition Bid Contract Approval

The bid had come in favorably under the estimated amount for this component of the project (\$680k). Bruce Haskell (Langdon Environmental) would serve in a capacity as project manager to oversee the demolition and removal of the incinerator building – this would effectively prepare the site to be ready for the capping process. Dash had reviewed the documents thoroughly and Haskell had provided sufficient answers to Dash's outstanding questions about the contract.

Motion: To accept and execute the contract for the demolition of the incinerator building at 1130 Concord Avenue with JR Vinagro corporation for \$274,600. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

Marijuana submissions

This item had been taken up at the previous Select Board meeting. Dash had requested some follow-up questions of MINT, as no representative had been present. Dash was now comfortable moving forward to the next stage, given the answers provided by MINT.

Garvin was requesting a formal vote to move forward with the Community Host Agreement negotiations.

Motion: To enter into negotiations of a Community Host Agreement with MINT, 768 Pleasant St., and Cal Verde, 1010 Pleasant St.; negotiations to be handled by Town Administrator Patrice Garvin, Community Development Director Glenn Clancy and Select Board Member Adam Dash. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Roy Epstein, Tom Caputo, Adam Dash)

Town Meeting Warrant

Epstein provided an update on the prospects for holding a remote Town Meeting: The State Legislature had passed a bill to allow towns to conduct remote Town Meetings, however the bill was stalled in the House. Two contingency options were being pursued: 1) Epstein had signed off on ~\$5k in legal fees to

proceed with filing a court action, jointly with Winchester and Lexington. Expected to file the action this week, but unclear how fast the case would be processed. 2) As a backup to 1), the Town could proceed with holding the Town Meeting remotely and vote on a home-rule petition, whereby the outcome of the Town Meeting would be validated subsequently by the Legislature. There was no plan to hold a physical Town Meeting outdoors, as some other towns had done, e.g. in a football field.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:

Garvin reviewed the Town Administrator's Report:

- A proposal for a Chapter 40B housing development on Beatrice Circle had come in last week. Meeting with the developer on Wednesday to get more details regarding the proposal.

SELECT BOARD COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORTS:

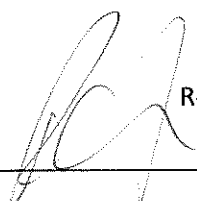
Dash: Recreation Commission had taken up analysis of opening the pool, as per previous discussion.

Caputo: Warrant Committee working on the Warrant Committee Report for Town Meeting – would be a condensed version this year, highlight key issues. The Middle and High School Building Committee held the topping-off ceremony this past Friday with a small group, streamed on Belmont Media Center. The Committee was close to finalizing the Guaranteed Maximum Price; currently the project was ~\$1.4m over budget, well within the available contingency.

Epstein: Meeting with engineering firm Nitsch for the Community Path Project Committee. To finalize construction plans for the tunnel at Alexander Avenue borings were required; Nitsch was waiting on approval from the MBTA. Still hoping to reach 25% design by early July, and hold a public meeting to get input on the design.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion: To adjourn at 10:23pm. (Vote passed 3-0)

 Respectfully Submitted,

PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator