

APPROVED BY
THE SELECT BOARD
December 6, 2021

Select Board Joint with School Committee

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

Remote Meeting

8:00 PM

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: December 10, 2021
TIME: 11:12 AM

CALL TO ORDER

A joint meeting of the Select Board was called to order by Chair Adam Dash. Vice Chair Roy Epstein and Select Board member Mark Paolillo were present, along with Town Administrator Patrice Garvin.

Chair Amy Checkoway called the School Committee to order. Meg Moriarty, Mike Crowley, Catherine Bowen and Jamal Saeh were present.

ACTION BY CONSENT

There are nine applicants for the vacancy created by Andrea Prestwich's resignation. There were 12 applicants, but three withdrew their names.

- Diana Cepada (not present)
- Ralph Jones
- Frances Leighton
- Jeffrey Liberty
- Marko Labudovic (not present)
- Alessandro Miglio
- Glenn Robertelli
- Jung Yueh
- Amy Zuccarello

The three candidates who withdrew are: Jerome West, Aisha Fox-Telfort and Phillip Fremont-Smith

Dash announced that public comment will not be taken during the interview process. The interview process was changed since the vote at the November 9th joint meeting and Amy Checkoway, Chair of the School Committee, will present that process again in order to re-vote it.

Adam Dash reported that he filed a conflict of interest disclosure with the Town Clerk because one of the candidates, Ralph Jones, was the chair of his campaign committee. He feels he can fill his duties objectively despite this situation.

Meg Moriarty also filed a conflict of interest disclosure because Ralph Jones was the treasurer of her campaign committee. The campaign has since been dissolved. She feels that she can still serve objectively despite this previous relationship.

Mark Paolillo disclosed that Ralph Jones had worked on a prior Select Board election campaign of his but not on his most recent campaign.

Amy Checkoway reported on recent changes to the process:

- Each applicant will present a brief introduction of up to three minutes.
- Meg Moriarty has agreed to be the timekeeper.
- The School Committee and Select Board will vote for five candidates each without deliberation.
- After the initial vote, each member should e-mail their top five choices to Matt Haskell's Town e-mail address (Mhaskell@belmont-ma.gov). Matt Haskell was determined to be a neutral recipient
- If there is a tie, a tie breaker vote will be conducted with just the two candidates.
- If there continues to be a tie, then both candidates would be allowed to proceed to the next round.
- Matt Haskell will be given approximately five minutes to tally the votes. He will report the votes verbally and then the five top candidates will answer five interview questions.
- Response time will be limited to two minutes per question.
- After each finalist has answered all five questions, we will ask each finalist to produce a one-minute closing statement.
- Matt Haskell will tally votes during each round of voting and he will read out each vote verbally.
- The plan is to have voting members all take turns asking questions so everyone participates. First, the school committee Members will share asking Questions 1-3 in alphabetical order and then Questions 4 and 5 in reverse alphabetical order.
- Meg said her plan is to start the timer and give a 15 second warning, but allow a few seconds as a grace period.

Motion was made to adopt the process as described by Amy Checkoway. Motion was approved unanimously by the Select Board and School Committee members.

Amy thanked the applicants for their interest in serving. She said the challenges to serving on the School Committee are demanding but it affords an opportunity to affect the students of Belmont.

Opening statements will be organized in alphabetical order.

Adam noted that Diana Cepeda is not present so Ralph Jones will be the first candidate to speak.

Interview of School Committee Candidates

Ralph Jones said that he grew up in a family of public school teachers. He applied because he wanted to help and he has time to help now that he is retired. He said he has relevant experience having served on the School Committee for nine years, and has a total of 25 years experience in elected and appointed positions in Belmont Town government. As a previous member of the School Committee he has experience in collective bargaining and has worked in the development of legal frameworks for municipal labor relations. He said he will not run for reelection in April.

Frances Leighton said she has lived in Belmont only one year, but her sister has lived here for more than a decade. She has 20 years experience in project and program management in large-scale processes and problem solving and her experience in fostering strong relationships within organizations and she thinks these are skills can be transferred to the School Committee role. Her husband has three children who attend Belmont Schools.

Jeffrey Liberty said he has 30 years experience working with complex educational organizations and he has national expertise in a number of the areas that the School Committee oversees. He has coached, and has good insight into the Town of Belmont as a result of his volunteer activities over the years. He has two children in the Belmont Public Schools.

Alessandro Miglio has two children in the Belmont Schools. He said this is his first foray into public service but he feels that his skills as a manager have given him the background to deal with the unique challenges in education today.

Glenn Robertelli has two children in Belmont Schools. He is a corporate health care entrepreneur and he feels his expertise could be transferred to the School Committee. He has experience in budgeting and financial reporting as well as using data in planning. He has been formally trained in negotiations and he has experience with large multinational organizations. He has a flexible schedule that will allow him to dedicate time to the School Committee. He also coaches baseball in Belmont.

Jung Yueh has two children in Belmont. He works at a software startup in survey analytics located in Belmont. He feels that the position at the School Committee was a calling for him and believes it matches his experience. He was treasurer of the PTO at his children's school and enjoyed that role. He is also a soccer coach in Belmont. He spent the last two weeks watching videos of Town committee meetings to get a background on Town government and he realizes how hard people work in the Town of Belmont

Amy Zuccarello graduated from Belmont Public Schools and has two children in the public school system. She feels her background and skills set complements the other committee members. She is a lawyer with 20-years experience in finance and is expert at analyzing information to produce successful outcomes. She said she has the creativity to work with organizations where resources are limited and has experience in negotiation. She has worked with the Girl Scouts and is prepared to support the school children of Belmont.

Dash checked again to see if Marko Labudovic and Diana Cepada were present, but they were still not present at the meeting.

Dash said we are not going to deliberate at this stage of the voting. Matt Haskell has sent an e-mail to each voting member and each member should reply to his e-mail with their top five votes. After approximately five minutes, we will come back to the meeting and read and rank the next round of candidates to be interviewed.

[Dash announced that a five minute recess will be taken while votes are tallied.]

[The meeting resumed at 8:49 pm.]

Matt Haskell verbally stated the roll call of votes (alphabetical order by committee member last name):

Adam Dash	Jones	Liberty	Robertelli	Yueh	Zuccarello
Epstein	Jones	Leighton	Liberty	Robertelli	Zuccarello
Paolillo	Jones	Liberty	Robertelli	Yueh	Zuccarello
Checkoway	Jones	Leighton	Liberty	Yueh	Zuccarello
Moriarty	Jones	Liberty	Robertelli	Yueh	Zuccarello
Bowen	Jones	Leighton	Liberty	Miglio	Zuccarello

Crowley	Leighton	Liberty	Robertelli	Yueh	Zuccarello
Saeh	Jones	Leighton	Liberty	Yueh	Zuccarello

Vote totals (in alphabetical order by last name of candidates):

Jones	7
Leighton	5
Liberty	8
Miglio	1
Robertelli	5
Yueh	6
Zuccarello	8

Ralph Jones, Jeff Liberty, Jung Yueh and Amy Zuccarello advanced to the final round.

Frances Leighton and Glenn Robertelli tied so another vote will be conducted for one of those candidates and the winner will move on to next round. If there is another tie, both candidates will be included in the interview round. Dash asked members to e-mail Matt Haskell to vote for the two candidates who tied.

Votes for tie breaker (in alphabetical order by committee members):

Dash	Robertelli
Epstein	Leighton
Paolillo	Robertelli
Checkoway	Leighton
Moriarty	Robertelli
Bowen	Leighton
Crowley	Robertelli
Saeh	Leighton

Since there was a split vote of 4 and 4, both tied candidates will move ahead so there will be six candidates in the interview round.

Question 1 – Please explain the unique traits and skills that you would bring to the current School Committee?

- Ralph Jones said in relation to this role, he has two important characteristics: time (he is retired); and his experience as a diligent researcher and he seeks advice from the best people.
- Frances Leighton said she has 20 years experience in project and program management and she is task oriented. She is a good communicator and will respond to requests in a timely fashion.
- Jeff Liberty replied that his ten years experience as a teacher has taught him how to support diverse learning. His background as a school principal provided him many different experiences that he could bring to the School Committee. He has worked with colleagues to manage

successful education changes. He has strong communication skills and has earned the trust of parents in Belmont.

- Glenn Robertelli said he enjoys working with people and embraces differences of opinion. He is expert at background planning and his experience with financial control and auditing will be valuable.
- Jung Yueh said he has been trained in financial and benefit analysis for labor negotiations in long term projections. He likes to think that he is good at finding consensus. He speaks Mandarin Chinese and he could communicate well with the growing Asian community in Belmont.
- Amy Zuccarello said she is different than the typical applicant. She is not an educator or teacher. She has experience as a business advisor and is expert at listening to concerns and taking the time to understand differences in constituencies.

Question 2 – Please share your perspective on the top three priorities facing the School Committee over the next five months.

- Ralph Jones 1) negotiating collective bargaining contracts; effective bargaining requires introspection and knowledge, and the results of bargaining affects the budget. 2) establishing rapport with others during the budget process. 3) Diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Frances Leighton 1) maintaining normalcy in the schools; students need to get back to a normal routine. 2) development of the budget will require creative options and the focus on a five-year strategic plan. 3) Focus on equity and inclusion; everyone should feel safe and respected.
- Jeff Liberty 1) restore a sense of public confidence in the schools which requires a focus on transparent communication about goals and policies. 2) successfully negotiating a contract with educators that is fair to retain good people. 3) establish a budget for the 2022-23 school year that includes use of federal and local funds and rational communication regarding funding policies.
- Glenn Robertelli 1) continue to ensure normalcy for students. 2) continue to be vigilant in hosting in-person learning. 2) focus on budget, oversight and planning. 3) communication and community engagement; consolidation of information sent out from the schools.
- Jung Yueh 1) union negotiations; consensus so that both students and staff are satisfied. 2) making sure that we have good teachers and staffing; enrollment is a little lower so maybe we could be a little more flexible during this period. 3) Continue to ensure a safe environment for teachers, staff and students.
- Amy Zuccarello 1) budget handling and oversight; Town budget has been reliant on one-time funds to fill gaps, but those should only be temporary options. 2) Negotiations with the Belmont Education Association to attract talented teachers; need a fair contract. 3) community engagement; the School Committee has made strides in this area and this focus should continue.

Question 3 – The School Committee is expected to collaborate with and hold district leadership accountable at the same time. How would you manage this dual role to achieve the best outcome for students?

- Amy Zuccarello said we need to be united to provide the best education. Once we understand we are working towards the same goals, the School Committee and district leadership can lead by example with mutual respect.

- Jung Yueh said with clear goals we can provide support and feedback from parents and community so we can get a better understanding of what is important to everyone. He feels his experience in survey research could help reach proscribed goals. He feels it is also important to observe what other communities are doing.
- Glenn Robertelli said forming good relationships is the first step to collaboration. Utilizing annual performance plans and metric tracking can help with this. He said the School Committee should set formal goals. He also thinks district leadership performance should be evaluated by the parents themselves. Having community input about Town leadership is essential.
- Jeff Liberty said accountability is not an end goal. The School Committee needs to seek out feedback from diverse sets of constituents. And district leadership needs to be able to express their goals. He notes that last year, Supt. Phelan set three goals, but the challenge was that assessment was never made about whether these goals were achieved. The community should collaborate with the Belmont Public Schools and the Committee needs to hold district leadership accountable for their goals.
- Frances Leighton said the best way to hold anyone accountable is with clear expectations and open and honest discussions. Being heard is often more important than any decisions that are made.
- Ralph Jones doesn't think there is a serious conflict between collaboration currently. He feels the School Committee has clear goals. But the role of the Superintendent of Schools should be to serve as CEO and advisor to the School Committee and he said some lines have been crossed there. He said the best way to measure performance is by setting clear goals with frequent feedback.

Question 4 – As one of six School Committee members what would your approach be to getting up to speed on your role and becoming part of a group?

- Amy Zuccarello has been involved in many School Committee meetings and is aware of the important issues facing Belmont. She is capable of sifting through relevant materials quickly and is not afraid to ask questions.
- Jung Yueh said he would follow the School Committee lead and try to learn from them about important priorities. He would be willing to read important materials to shorten the learning curve.
- Glenn Robertelli said his objective would be to meet one on one with School Committee members and stakeholders. He would try to establish a working relationship with each committee member and find out what they consider key issues.
- Jeff Liberty said he has been in communication with School Committee members and has attended most School Committee meetings. He is familiar with the subcommittee structure of the School Committee. He would meet with families and Belmont Public School educators and leadership to get feedback to help him navigate the issues.
- Frances Leighton said it's important to listen and totally immerse yourself in order to make informed decisions. She would first get a list of key people to speak with and resources to consult. There are many documents available that would help her learn the aspect of her role.
- Ralph Jones said there is training available for School Committee members provided by Mass. Association of School Committees. It includes all aspects of the role. You need to understand the full sets of laws under which you operate before you can participate as a member. He

would be willing to take any assignments offered by the Chair. He would support and defend whatever decision is made on the budget for next fiscal year.

Question 5 – How will you fit this demanding role into your other commitments? Do you envision serving on the School Committee past April 2022?

- Ralph Jones replied that he is retired so he has time to spend on the role and will not serve on the committee after April 2022.
- Frances Leighton said she is good at prioritizing. She works from home a lot now and that allows more flexibility. She has a supportive family. She feels it's a great opportunity to do a test run since it's a temporary position.
- Jeff Liberty said often travels for work and coaches baseball. But he has a flexible work schedule. He can call in when he is traveling. He is open to running for re-election in April. Continuity can be important to establish trust so he would hope to be elected in Spring.
- Glenn Robertelli said that he has full control of his work schedule. He works from home to balance his various commitments. He plans to run for re-election. He thinks it would be most beneficial for the person elected to serve after April 2022.
- Jung Yueh said he works downtown in Belmont and has a short commute time and has flexibility. He has no other community volunteering for next six months. He has not made plans for beyond April 2022, it's a serious decision but he is not sure at this time if he will run for re-election.
- Amy Zuccarello said she thinks the role requires that members make time to do the work. She feels confident that she has the time to do the work at this time in her career. She is a self-employed partner at her firm so she can juggle work hours. She doesn't travel very much. She would like to serve past April 2022 as long as it's in the Town's best interest.

Dash said this concludes the interview session part of the program. We will now vote for one person. If there is a tie at first place, there will be tie breaker. If no one candidate receives at least five votes, then we will drop the candidate with the lowest vote count and continue voting.

DELIBERATIONS BY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mike Crowley said he deeply appreciates all the candidates. He has thought a good deal about what we need in the School Committee. Our school system has been through a challenging past year. There are so many people who believe that our school system failed last year. As a result, we have many disaffected families. The district has experienced a decline in enrollment. There are more kids today who need special needs and mental health support. We heard about students who have considered self harm. We need a special kind of person on the School Committee. As he looks at all the candidates he is impressed by Jeff Liberty's experience with educational systems. Jeff was a hard critic the past year but he is thoughtful and experienced. He thinks we need Jeff Liberty.

Mark Paolillo agrees with the Mike Crowley's assessment of Jeff Liberty and he was impressed with many of the other candidates. But when he looked at the skills that were considered important by our joint committees – understanding issues, communication skills, negotiation experiences, experience working as a team, strategic planning, availability and flexibility -- he thinks that Ralph Jones would be the best candidate. We need someone to hit the ground running. For the next six months Ralph Jones

can support budget and collective bargaining and then in Spring he hopes that many of the candidates tonight will run in the election.

Catherine Bowen said that Michael Crowley said it so well. Jeff Liberty would be an excellent person to serve with. She hopes the candidates who is not chosen would consider other ways to participate in the community. Belmont is undergoing a very critical period and we need good people to work towards making Belmont the best community possible.

Amy Checkoway said Mr. Jones' experiences on other committees is extremely impressive. She appreciates him coming forward at a time when we can use his help. She appreciated Amy Zuccarello's response to the questions, her candor and legal background, and her role as a parent. Mr. Liberty has played different roles as a district leader in Boston Public Schools, as well as a principal and head master working on innovative learning. He has worked with Superintendents and educators closely. At a time when we need to push forward district leadership and connect with our families, she leans towards Jeff Liberty. He has applied for the role of School Committee member before and has stayed engaged. His experience would contribute to our successful collaboration with stakeholders.

Epstein said every candidate has the potential to be an outstanding School Committee member. The collective bargaining agreement is critically important this year and bargaining only happens every three years and will end in the Springtime. Having direct experience with the process is a critical need now. For that reason, he would like to see Ralph Jones in the role for the next six months.

Meg Moriarty said she doesn't have one clear person who she would vote for. She also hopes that the candidates continue to run in April. But she feels that right now the most important issue is dealing with budget and bargaining negotiations. And because of that, Ralph Jones would come to the top of the list. She knows Jeff has been very invested, and she will echo what Epstein said, running for office is a part time job. The School Committee in April will probably be a contested race and there is no time for a learning curve in the next five months.

Jamal Saeh said that he is also on the fence. His top three choices are: Ralph Jones, Amy Zuccarello and Jeff Liberty. Amy Zuccarello is a very strong candidate. Her commitment to the community and her experience is evident. Jeff Liberty has the commitment and vision to the Town. He would love to have all three, but he has decided that time commitment is important. He is aware that running for office is an all consuming effort from December to April. We are meeting remotely but the most pressing negotiations are in-person and that takes time. The most pressing issue is union bargaining negotiations. He is leaning towards Ralph because he has the time and the technical experience to come to the negotiating table next week and be a bridge to all the other Town governments he has served for a long time.

Amy Checkoway said another consideration for future decision is continuity on the School Committee. She hopes Meg and Jamal will remain on the Select Board so they can eventually become leaders on the Committee. Our district will be changing in the next three to five years because we are reconfiguring the school district. We need to make sure there is a strong organizational structure to support the challenges. She also appreciates the urgency of negotiating and budget.

Adam Dash said being a parent is important. He went into tonight looking for someone who would run in April, but the point Epstein brought up about running and serving while having a full-time job is a

good one. The School Committee is experiencing much criticism lately. We need someone who can be tough and rise above that criticism. The six candidates are all very good. Epstein put it perfectly about Ralph Jones having the capability to do what we need to do right now. It would be good to have the diversity that Jung Yuen brings to the committee. He said Amy Zuccarello would be a good negotiator and Jeff Liberty has significant knowledge of the education field. Frances Leighton's strategic planning background would be good long term. Robertelli being a parent and being a trained negotiator would also be good long term.

Mike Crowley said he would work with whomever we choose. He feels we need to give more thought about what is the most pressing issue of the moment. He focuses on budget, but we can't get through on just that and he feels we also can't get through with skills in just union negotiations. The pandemic has changed the union and School Committee relationships. We may be negotiating next year; it's important all the time. He is mostly concerned because we have significant data showing that we have large numbers of kids who are under distress. We need someone who can step in and attack the crisis we have right now in mental health. Jeff Liberty has the most experience to deal with these kinds of problems to help us work through this crisis.

Amy assumed each person has the bandwidth to run and serve at the same time. That should not be the driving consideration in making our choice.

Catherine Bowen has respect for Mr. Jones, but she feels that Jeff Liberty is a better candidate for our needs going forward.

Dash said everyone will e-mail Matt Haskell about which candidate they will back. The largest majority vote-getter will win, such that at least five votes are needed to prevail. If there is a tie at first place, a run-off will be held. If no candidate get sfive votes, we will drop the lowest vote getter, and we will repeat the process and continue to vote again until someone gets five votes.

Final voting session:

Matt Haskell reported the final votes:

Dash, Epstein, Paolillo, Moriarty and Saeh voted for Ralph Jones.

Checkoway, Bowen and Crowley voted for Jeff Liberty.

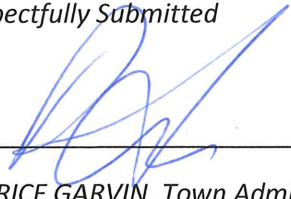
Ralph Jones was chosen by a vote of 5-3.

Dash congratulated Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones encouraged all the finalists to run in April. Dash thanked the School Committee and the candidates and encouraged the final candidates to run for the term that starts in 2022.

Amy Checkoway said she hoped the process has been a good experience for all the candidates. She said Ralph Jones will add great value to the School Committee.

Motion was made to adjourn. Motion was approved unanimously by both committees.

Respectfully Submitted



PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator