

Approved by
the Select Board on:
1/10/2022

SELECT BOARD MEETING
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2021

Remote Meeting

8:00 AM

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: January 19, 2022
TIME: 2:49 PM

CALL TO ORDER

A 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, Director of Information Technology Dave Petto, Director of Facilities David Blazon, Police Chief James MacIsaac, Director of Public Works Jay Marcotte, Town Clerk Ellen Cushman, Director of Health Department Wesley Chin, Director of Council on Aging Nava Niv-Vogel, and Town Accountant Glen Castro.

Dash said they will not be taking public comments during this meeting.

ACTION BY CONSENT

BUDGET MEETINGS

Information Technology – David Petto

Petto said he wants to add a part-time management assistant to his staff this year. He lost one employee to retirement and another employee left for another job. He said he would like to hire a 16-hour assistant to help pay bills, research computer hardware and place orders. He said his focus in FY23 is on cyber security.

Petto said that he has added security software for cyber security. He said it's hard to monitor manually so he has added automation. The other line increase is for the telephone project that they lost time on due to COVID. His plan is to move to hosted voice telephone service which would be off premises on a subscription basis. He said the Town's fire wall is being attacked by hundreds of attacks every hour and his staff works tirelessly to keep up with this challenge.

Epstein commented that the telephone system frequently requires extensive work. Petto said that is because it's on premise and the ultimate goal is to move onto the cloud. Once they get it in place, he hopes there would be only maintenance costs. Petto said the build out of the network infrastructure is also underway. Epstein asked whether ARPA money can be used for network updates. Patrice said she will put it through the auditor to determine its eligibility.

Paolillo asked what % of budget is spent on cyber security? Petto said right now 25% of his budget is in cyber security. He has meetings with cyber risk management organizations and he is always researching best practices and Belmont is far ahead of other communities. He has a lot of draft policies that he needs to finalize. He said he currently doesn't have the staff to assist if there is an issue with an attack. Also he wants to enhance Artificial Intelligence capabilities to scan e-mails to avert ransomware attacks. The average cost of ransomware mitigation is \$2M.

Facilities – David Blazon

Blazon wants to add a plumbing technician as a regular employee. Hiring outside contractors for plumbing jobs becomes quite expensive. This year they spent \$150K on plumbing contractors. Having a plumber on staff would help reduce the costs. He is also looking to add custodial staff for new High School and Middle School. There are 12 contracts that need to be renewed and they anticipate a 5% increase with the new contracts. They are currently using thermal but it costs money to run pumps so electric utility went up \$4K. The solar panel for the new high school will result in a \$170,00 credit. There was also a 5% increase on contracts for school system heating, ventilating, plumbing, and fire controls.

Dash asked if the budget reflected any of the ADA compliance suggestions made. Blazon said if there are small things that he could help with regarding ADA compliance, he is willing to do that.

Epstein feels that Facilities is under resourced. There were 8.8 FTES in 2018 and in 2023 there were 10.0 FTEs. Blazon said the only additions to the budget has been the Systems Manager and the plumber. Blazon said the Town custodial needs are filled by a hybrid model where some in house and some outside contracting is used. Blazon said he is trying to bring in three more custodial positions for the new Middle School. Blazon said the HVAC person was promoted to Systems Manager position. They have had the HVAC position open for a few months and they found one person who could be trained. He said even with a dedicated HVAC person, they need to contract out for boiler work. He would like to take the burden off contracts, but he can't make that happen now. He said they are still working on the HVAC system at Wellington, but we are not getting the advantage of the geothermal program. He said if he has money left in the budget, then he will get the HVAC system fixed. We're saving on gas but electricity is going up due to the new high school. He's working with the Long Term Capital Budget Committee to try to stretch out capital projects. He wants to complete the projects that have been proposed to date and then prioritize the other projects. One of his goals is to find a bigger space so he can buy supplies in bulk and store them for easy access.

Belmont Police Department – Chief MacIsaac

Chief MacIsaac and Assistant Chief Hurley addressed the Police Department budget needs.

MacIsaac said he added \$25K to the budget to cover mandated critical incident stress management. He said that in-service overtime is also being increased due to police reform requirements. The police reform bill now requires five days of training rather than four days annually so there will be an extra day in overtime. Also, the national guard vacancies have been covered from the overtime budget. Another increase in budget is because of the purchase of three new cruisers this year and the rest of the budget is incremental increases in salary. He said there are four vacancies currently and that means they will be using a good portion of their overtime budget. He said they also need to see what degree inflation will affect expenses. Four conditional offers of employment acceptance were just sent out. Once we get fully staffed, the next step will be to hire a software specialist. He said they have technical staff members who do a lot in this area, but we need a dedicated person for this. Epstein would like to make more use of the software that has already been purchased by the Police and Fire Departments. There was discussion about increasing the parking fines to help with revenue.

Paolillo asked what the Police Department is not doing because of tight resources. MacIsaac said under the six pillars of Police Reform set forth by President Obama, technology and social media was one of the pillars that Belmont Police Department is behind on implementing. But MacIsaac said they have made progress on developing policies and 30 new policies were put in place last year and the officers this year will get e-mails to test on their knowledge. The focus is on trying to build trust in community. We are getting approval of a grant to add a social worker on staff, part time, with no cost to town. This social worker will drive in the police cruiser with officers when they are working. We have a candidate who is interested in the job. The officers are excited about this.

Department of Public Works – Jay Marcotte

Jay Marcotte and Mike Santoro represented the DPW.

Marcotte said they added 10K to FY23 budget overtime budget. Overtime is spread out for the weekend trash pickup. The Tree Warden position has been added with a salary of \$75K. Trees are the number one item for update and maintenance. Patrice Garvin has found money from the State for tree upkeep, but we struggle to keep up to level service. Another increase is in the solid waste contract. There was an increase in cardboard disposal costs – it's now \$100 a ton compared to \$60. That increases almost daily and we try to budget in the most conservative manner possible. However, LED street lighting gave us savings this year. Everything else is level funded with 2% increases. Marcotte said he would send an updated organization chart that includes new positions.

Epstein asked if we could increase cemetery plot fees to maintain sites? Marcotte said we can only use the interest from the Perpetual Care Fund and that is limited. There is not enough money to cover everything they need to do and this year it rained so much it was hard to keep up. Marcotte said he sent highway personnel to help out with the cemetery upkeep this year.

Paolillo asked if the Solid Waste Advisory Committee had launched? Marcotte said they had their first meeting. The contract is for five years. The pricing is fixed for two years and then they will re-evaluate our plan.

Town Clerk – Ellen Cushman

Ellen Cushman said there is an increase of \$65K mostly in the elections budget. In our elections budget, we have costs that are required by law. We are planning for four elections in FY23. Still waiting to hear about whether early voting will be permanent change. The amount of people who wanted to vote by mail increased markedly. The Town just finished re-precincting. She received informal word that it has been accepted. She said they have focused on digitizing information so they can supply answers to residents. In 2020 they also started a vital records online portal for paying fees.

Epstein asked if there is any benefit to consolidating the election polling locations? Cushman said unlike other communities, we do not have a cross town bus to take people there. Election polls are supposed to be accessible. Our decision about election polling would be affected by whether the State required mail in votes for every election.

Health Department – Wesley Chin

Wesley Chin said this year he worked with the Town Administrator and Clerk to get extra help from election workers to set up a call center. Another new addition this year was implementing and

maintaining a COVID dashboard. There is a decrease in the budget due to the transfer of the Youth Commission to the Recreation Department. Wesley said his department has been fortunate to be able to use emergency COVID funding. But going forward, if that funding goes away, then it would be hard to keep up with the work.

Epstein thanked everyone for the efforts on rodent control this year. He said this reflected a joint effort between the Health Department, residents and Town Administration and a model for solving problems cooperatively. Epstein asked about regionalizing animal control. Chin said he wouldn't recommend regionalized animal control because of the volume of calls they receive, however he would be willing to re-evaluate this idea.

Council on Aging – Nava Niv-Vogel

Nava Niv-Vogel and Dana Bickelman represented the COA.

The budget for FY23 pre-supposed an 18% increase. Most of the increase is for a new contractual social worker which is a temporary position paid through ARPA funds for \$60K. The rest is step raises and slight increases on contracts and increase in gas. Nava said their main focus has been responding to senior needs around COVID. The Council on Aging center has been open five days a week as of November 2021 and it was a challenge to manage that in a safe way. In the summer, many programs were held outdoors and we are now conducting hybrid programming. We hope to expand that as we get more equipment. This year, parking permit program was implemented and the COA was involved in the vaccination effort, transporting people to vaccine clinics, providing information, and other outreach efforts for well-being checks. The Age Friendly Action Committee now has a five year strategic plan and most of the Age Friendly projects will be funded by grants. They received a grant from MAPC and they need to apply for new funds in January. When there is a gap in funding, the Friends of COA are often able to help out with covering those gaps.

Tomassina Olson appreciates the support for the public transportation. She said Nava is a genius with grants. She is being so effective with funding.

Accounting – Glen Castro

Glen Castro said the Accounting budget has an uptick in salary because they want to add a purchasing intern to the staff. He said they are requesting the staff accountant be transferred to purchasing intern and they would then hire a new staff accountant. They would need \$7K for the new purchasing position. The purchasing agent would be housed in facilities.

Epstein asked Glen if he is continuing cross training for staff because the staff is low? Glen said he feels that everyone can now do approvals.

Paolillo likes the idea of a purchasing agent. Patrice said this job description is still being developed. She is not sure it will be ready for the FY23 budget. The goal is to get this person to do the bidding process for all departments.

Town Administration – Patrice Garvin

Patrice thanked all the departments for all the hard work they have done to get budgets moving forward. She said the Town Administration office has been reorganized to bring back the Budget

Analyst, leaving room for a new Administrative Assistant. With this change, FTEs were not increased and there were savings realized when the two positions were merged.

The budget exercise for all departments involved level funding expenses and taking a hard look at actual dollars spent. The budgets will be a challenge this year. There will be a lot of free cash needed just to roll over budgets. She is being cautious. They will be going through every line for ARPA fund eligibility. We have to be careful to not show that we have revenue this year. She said she will use a spreadsheet that will show what ARPA money is being used for each department.

Epstein asked if Matt Haskell needs training for his new budget analyst role? Patrice said that Matt has all the experience needed for this position.

Next meeting is Monday night on December 20, 2021.

Motion was made to adjourn. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrice Garvin', is written over a horizontal line.

PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator