

Approved by
the Select Board on:

1/10/2022

SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING

MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 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 Community Development Glenn Clancy, Chief of Fire Department David Destefano, Director of BEMA Wayne Haley, Treasurer Floyd Carman, Director of Board of Assessors, Dan Dargon, Director Library, Peter Struzziero, Director of Recreation Department Brandon Fitts, Acting Director of Human Resources, Phillipe Hyppolite.

Dash explained that the focus of this annual meeting is for Select Board review of preliminary FY23 budgets. No public comments will be accepted at this meeting. Public meetings will be held at a later date as the budget process moves forward.

ACTION BY CONSENT

BUDGET MEETINGS

Fire Department – Chief DeStefano

Chief DeStefano said they are currently in the hiring process for six recruits. He said training will start with four recruits in January and they will be coming on payroll then. Once they graduate the Mass. Fire Academy, they will be added to the regular roster. The Fire Department is in negotiation with unions so the salaries in the preliminary budget is level funded until changes are negotiated. He said there is a small decrease in bottom line number. Garvin said they looked at three-year actuals so she feels they budgeted correctly on the expense line. \$30K will buy 12 sets of gear for new firefighters. Line items to do with supply and repairs were increased and there were small increases in EMS and ALS due to increase in supply costs. A new item on the budget is community engagement and education. This is to make sure the department is involved in the community. Garvin said they eliminated a firefighter position in FY22 and that position will not be filled in FY23. Garvin said the budget is basically a rollover budget.

Epstein asked about overtime budget. DeStefano said it was the same as FY22 budget. Once new hires come on, DeStefano said the overtime will be more stable. But the overtime in the FY22 budget was higher than was allocated. The Fire Department has almost expended their overtime halfway through the fiscal year. Discussions with the Select Board and Warrant Committee will be conducted on how to fund the overtime due to all the vacancies this year. DeStefano said in March 2021 they had five Fire Department employees who were out sick or injured and since April have lost four people over an eight month period. Most of the sick and injured employees have returned. Epstein asked how much of ambulance rates will be consumed by increases in ALS? DeStefano thinks they won't be that much of an impact, and the new rate structure will still allow us to make money. Paolillo asked if they could get

some numbers for the ALS increases. DeStefano said he could get this information to them. He reported that he could use another full-time dedicated position in fire prevention with new buildings like the McLean and Middle and High School coming online.

Paolillo noted that even though the Town is getting more complex, the FTEs in the Fire Department budget have remained the same.

Belmont Emergency Management Agency (BEMA), Assistant Fire Chief and Director of BEMA Wayne Haley

Assistant Chief Haley reported that the last year and a half has been challenging. He said he has been working with a rollover budget for the past three years. The biggest issue this year was the building evacuation at Trapelo Rd., hurricanes and snow events, and COVID responsibilities. BEMA is staffed by one part time Director and Administrative Assistant.

Epstein commented that the grant for the bicycle EMS sounds like a good idea. Haley said that every year Belmont is offered an emergency management preparedness grant. This year he put in for the bicycle EMS program. The grant will pay two for bikes, equipment, uniforms and training for ten people, but will not pay the salaries of those people. It's a one-time expense for getting unit deployed, but staffing will have to be paid by details and regular overtime. Select Board members asked about collaborative disaster planning. DeStefano said he and his administrative assistant go to regional MEMA meetings. Haley said he would like to look at a community preparedness plan and hopes to get some grant money to revamp the disaster plan.

Office of Community Development – Glenn Clancy

Clancy said the biggest challenge is getting staffing back to where it should be. He reported that one of the positions in Community Development was eliminated and the assistant director and administrative assistant have been filling in for those responsibilities. Because of the lack of personnel, they had to detain some hearing dates for Zoning Appeals. The Planning Division had two vacancies, but those have been filled. The short-term plan is to move the Zoning Board of Appeals items from the DPW Assistant Director responsibilities and onto the Planning Division.

The second Assistant Inspector position was not filled, and Clancy said his plan is to replace the second position with a code enforcement officer who will support the inspectional services division. Clancy said he is working with the union on the new position. The operating side of the budget is a rollover. He said that Belmont currently shares the plumbing, gas and wire inspector with the Town of Watertown. But Watertown wants to make their part-time inspectors full time positions. This forces Belmont to hire two, 20-hour per week inspectors. Clancy said that they are getting good candidates for these jobs and they will hire by April 1, 2021. The \$95K in the budget for the shared Watertown inspectors will have to be adjusted upward. Watertown was very flexible with their hours and they were next door. He doesn't know how the sharing of resources will work with another town.

Dash asked about the increase in pavement costs. Clancy said the pavement management budget is used for a variety of things. It includes design work and police detail for jobs like the Concord Ave. intersection. Clancy explained that the 5% reduction in his budget is due to new hires coming in at lower rate.

Epstein noted that Community Development does an extraordinary amount of work with limited staff. Clancy said the salary line is down because of the elimination of the resident engineer position and it's also due to new hires in the Planning Division.

Paolillo said we ask Community Development to do so much. The list of accomplishments is so high he wonders how we can continue at the current levels. He thinks as we move forward on the FY23 budget, it would be good to look at adding a position in this department or sharing employees with other towns.

Treasurer – Floyd Carman

Floyd said he views the Treasurer Department as the cash manager of the Town. Currently, the Treasurer Department has 7 ½ FTEs for FY23. The budget increased \$9K from FY21. He reports that the biggest challenge for the department is cyber security. He said they are continually making sure that the internet is safe on a daily basis. Dash noted fluctuations on line items. Carman said this is due to debt payments. As interest increases, debt may go up. He said his staffing rate seems to be adequate, but he underscored the importance of having trained employees who are familiar with Belmont. He feels the key to success is to keep experienced staff in place and it is good we have not had much turnover.

Epstein noted that the tax collection rate of 99.5% is a huge accomplishment. He feels Floyd has worked hard to achieve that result. Cyber security is important. Epstein wondered if there is discussion with other towns about cyber security? Carman said Dave Petto has helped him a lot. He is cautious about anything that raises a red flag. There have been many ransomware events in Mass., and he doesn't want Belmont to be one of those. It was suggested that the Board discuss cyber security at the Thursday budget meeting with Dave Petto. Paolillo agreed we need to make cyber security a priority to surveil for ransomware attacks on a 24/7 basis.

Board of Assessors – Dan Dargon

Dargon reports that they have had a lot of turnover in the Assessor's Office. They lost two people with extensive experience. They are currently trying to replace one last position. The budget is basically a level budget, except for expansion on outreach for pilot payments. Dash noted that there is no change in abatement applications from FY21. Dan said that was an oversight he would change that line on the budget.

Dargon said the 4% salary increase is caused by the new hires -- the Administrative Assessor has moved up and we are still trying to fill one position. Vacancy is posted. It's difficult to find people to fill assessment positions in public positions.

Paolillo asked if we could develop a more comprehensive plan in relation to pilot payments. He feels the plan should be led by the Select Board and Board of Assessors. Dargon agreed that the Select Board and Board of Assessors should have a joint meeting to discuss the issue of pilot payments.

Garvin said that on the revenue side, we usually take \$235K from overlay to use for revenue in the operating budget and she and Dargon have agreed to boost that to \$335K.

Also Garvin reported that they have had conversations about cyber security and she has been working on ways to improve this issue in town.

Library – Peter Struzziero

Kathy Keohane and Corrine McCue Olmstead from the Library Board of Trustees joined Peter to discuss the library budget. Peter Struzziero said they have been very busy during COVID. People are coming back to the building. The budget increases of 6.3% are direct results of COVID: E-books costs are rising, new software is needed due to online chats/Zoom licenses, and the need to enhance their security system to monitor capacity of library goers. Struzziero said the biggest increase in budget is in capital outlay. Computers are usually replaced every five years, but this year the increased use of digital products has caused us to ask for \$40K increase. He would like to replace the library server and expand wifi capabilities. He also included a Children's Librarian 27.3 FTE level increase. With the addition of new schools, student numbers are expected to increase.

Dash asked if it would be better to wait to add staff FTE until after construction of new library. Peter replied that they are going to need more people in the future and he needs to start filling positions now to be prepared. Kathy Keohane said the need for a full-time children's librarian is there. The number of new families with children has increased in Belmont. It is a sustained need during transition. Dash said they might want to put together a long-term plan for the budget. Corrine McCue Olmstead said that many of the activities of the Children's Room can happen outside the building and with electronic resources. Dash and Epstein noted that there are compelling arguments from other departments for adding staff and the Town has to prioritize. Peter said they only have two full time librarians in Children's Room. Other towns have five full-time positions and the library is open 66 hours per week.

Paolillo said he would like to see a summary of the needs from all Town departments in order to assess the most acute need. Garvin reminded everyone that this is still the early stages of budget planning. But the biggest issues she sees are on the revenue side. She said the main question is how much free cash to use to fund the operating budget. Garvin said last year we eliminated many positions in public safety and we are not adding them back in this year. Paolillo said he would like to see which services are suffering the most in the community. We need to know the outcomes of not investing in certain positions. Garvin she has asked Department Heads to look at ARPA funds to see if we can use those funds to cover needs of the FY23 budget instead of free cash.

Peter Struzziero said the budget includes step increases due to unions. Paolillo asked if there was any ability to share personnel with other towns? Struzziero said they do share resources and have part-time people who work in other towns.

A non-successful debt exclusion in the Fall would mean more conversation. Kathy said they are looking for a way to automate some of the activities in library, like self check out.

Recreation – Brandon Fitts

Brandon said that the Recreation Department has never stopped running programs during COVID, and, in fact, has increased programming. The Underwood Pool re-opened, the Rink is operating, and camp has increased activities. As a result, a few budget items have increased: small software increases, brochure printing, cost of electricity, and custodial and rental fee increases. He said they don't pay to rent school facilities now but instead pay for custodial services. They inherited the adult education services from the schools this past Fall and it generated revenue for the department. Fitts has also been talking to the Health Department about taking on the Youth Commission and Commissioner as of July 1, 2022. He would like to utilize the Youth Coordinator to help with adult programs and marketing. His

salary also increased when John Marshall left because Brandon is now doing what he did. He said they have the revenue to support these added positions. Budget included cost shifting and wage increases.

Epstein asked if the adult recreation program fees were high because of lack of space at the high school. Fitts said space is at a premium. Negotiating space has been a challenge. They now have a fee for service schedule. The adult fees will still remain high. They haven't been running adult sports since pandemic. But he anticipates a high level of participation in the coming year.

Paolillo asked if Fitts thinks that we will get good candidates for the Youth Commissioner position. Fitts said making it a full-time, early level position will be attractive to students who graduate from college. He is working with Human Resources to narrow down the job description and salary. We may have to refine the charge for the Youth Commission. Paolillo suggested that the new Youth Commissioner could work with the School Committee and Belmont Wellness Coalition to help address some of the issues brought out in the School Wellness survey. Fitts agreed that we need to increase the level of Middle and High School involvement.

Garvin said they are still looking at the Youth Commissioner position. They would like to make it a full-time position and salary will be developed around the availability of the revenues added from adult education.

Human Resources – Philippe Hyppolite

Philippe reported that the budget has been reduced due to elimination of the Human Resources Administrative Assistant. He said that the decrease is sustainable. Philippe said the main increase in the budget is in technology to increase training and implementation of employee wellness programs.

Epstein asked about school and Town integration in the area of Human Resources. Phillipe said after much discussion, it was determined to be more efficient to keep positions separate.

Paolillo said the Structural Change Impact Group is still discussing the integration of Human Resources services. He asked why Shawna thought we don't need a Human Resources generalist? Patrice said after the retirement of their Human Resources generalist they spread the work out over other employees. That position was paid out through the Trust. Paolillo is worried about the impact on other employees. Could we contract out for benefits administrative work? Hyppolite said the department is handling most of the duties but if they need to contract out it would be on a part time basis only.

Dash noted that a regular Select Board meeting will be held tonight at 7 pm. The other nine department heads will be interviewed on Thursday at 9 am.

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

Respectfully Submitted,



PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator