

Select Board and Board of Health Joint Meeting and

Select Board Public Forum

March 7, 2022

Remote Meeting

7:00 PM

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA

DATE: March 17, 2022  
TIME: 9:05 AM

APPROVED BY  
THE SELECT BOARD  
03/14/2022

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 and Acting Assistant Town Administrator Glenn Clancy, and Director of Health Department Wes Chin.

Open Joint Meeting with Board of Health

The Board of Health was called to order by Chair, Donna David. Member-at-large Adrienne Allen, and member Julie LeMay were present.

Discussion and possible vote on the COVID-19 Public Health Mandate of the Belmont Board of Health and the Belmont Select Board (Revised), dated September 20, 2021:

a. Discussion and possible vote on lifting the Town's mask mandate

The Board of Health announced that they had voted 3-0 to lift mask mandates in schools and Town with the qualification that unvaccinated individuals, including children five years and under, will continue to wear masks. The change would go into effect on March 8 at 12:01 AM.

A draft of the revised document was displayed on the screen with changes to language highlighted in yellow. Donna David clarified that the new rules are recommendations, not mandates and are not subject to any penalties.

The Select Board and Board of Health discussed the inclusion of an automatic reimposition of the mandate if COVID cases rise to a dangerously high level again.

Epstein said that the nature of disease changes frequently and he would prefer not to include an automatic reimposition clause.

Paolillo agreed that he does not support putting in place an automatic reinstatement if COVID levels were to increase to a dangerous level again. The Select Board members agreed to remove the automatic mandate reinstatement. They agreed that if the COVID levels become more acute, then a special meeting would be held to change the rules.

Donna David agreed that automatic reinstatement of the mask mandate could be removed from the document. She said that the Board of Health is following the waste charts which provide an early indication of disease levels so there would be time to meet before COVID levels become dangerous.

Jamal Saeh, School Committee member, said that this statement should be a recommendation for the general unvaccinated public, not just children under five years old.

The Board of Health and Select Board agreed to keep the statement rescinding the mask mandate as simple as possible.

They decided to retain the draft version submitted by the Health Department, with a revision that removes the automatic reimposition statement.

*The Board of Health made a motion to rescind the indoor mask mandate as of 12:01 on March 8, 2022 with the strong recommendation that unvaccinated individuals continue to wear a mask in indoor public spaces. Vote 3-0.*

*The Select Board made a motion to rescind the indoor mask mandate as of 12:01 on March 8, 2022 with the strong recommendation that unvaccinated individuals continue to wear a mask in indoor public spaces. Vote 3-0.*

**b. Discussion and possible vote on allowing in person meetings for Town boards, commissions and committees**

The state's Open Meeting Law exception expires July 15, 2022. Discussion centered around the possibility of holding hybrid meetings before the July 15, 2022 date. The Select Board held a few hybrid meetings, but the equipment to hold both in-person and remote meetings at the same time is not in place yet. Jeff Hansell said that Belmont Media does not yet have the capability to hold hybrid meetings. He would like to see remote meetings continue until the exception is lifted on July 15, 2022. He will work with Town Administration to determine a long-term plan for which rooms in Town Hall and outside of Town Hall would be used for hybrid meetings.

Remote capability has increased the participation rate, but the Select Board agreed that the implementation of hybrid meetings is important.

Donna David agreed that Belmont should follow the Governor's exception to the Open Meeting Law until July 15, 2022. The decision was made by both Boards for all Belmont committees to continue to conduct meetings remotely.

*The Board of Health adjourned with a vote of 3-0.*

**Close Joint Meeting with Board of Health**

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**Public Forum – American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Distribution Funding Plan**

Dash convened the public forum on the ARPA distribution funding. He announced that Town Administrator Patrice Garvin will present the proposed ARPA budget and then public comment will be solicited.

NOTE: Before Patrice Garvin started her presentation on ARPA funding, she announced that the Belmont Recreation Department won the 2022 Mass. Recreation and Park Association's Regional Community Impact of the Year award for the Northeast Region. She said this is given to an outstanding service to the community. She congratulated Brandon Fiske, the acting Recreation Director.

#### Presentation on proposed ARPA funding (Patrice Garvin):

Garvin displayed slides which showed the history of the ARPA. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding was signed into law on March 2021. Municipalities with less than 50K people receive funds through the US treasury, administered by the state. Belmont received \$7.8M in funds from the Coronavirus Local Stability Funds and the schools received \$1M in Elementary Relief Funds (ESSER III). Funds do not need to be approved by Town Meeting. Revenue loss replacement includes a formula that allows communities to use up to \$10M without restriction.

ARPA fund appropriations were divided into \$2.7M from direct allocations and \$5M from county allocations. To date, the Town has received \$1.3M from the direct allocation and \$2.5M from the county allocation. The second half of the \$7.8M should be received in Summer 2022.

The extra \$1.1M funding from the state ARPA surplus was used to fund the immediate COVID needs of affordable housing, library building upgrades, business relief and rink design.

Garvin displayed the original ARPA budget from last summer. Then she showed an updated proposed budget. She announced that \$277K has already been appropriated at previous Select Board meetings for facilities, public health and senior outreach costs. There is \$7.4M remaining after expenditures.

The updated budget proposes the use of \$5M for the Town operating budget, an \$1M ESSER match for the schools and \$1M to support the Middle School and High School Building construction. The funds must be spent by FY24.

Dash said the Select Board has the responsibility of appropriating the ARPA funds, but The Select Board members thought it was important to convene a public forum to discuss the subject before making final decisions about allocations.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Robert McGaw, pct. 1, asked how the Town can convince taxpayers they can stay on target with the High School/Middle School and the new library if they cannot deliver on it's promises for zero net energy? He maintained that the installation of photovoltaic (PV) solar panels must remain a number one priority for the High School/Middle School project.

Brian Iler asked if there was any way to make sure the \$1M ARPA funds for the High School/Middle School construction is used for PV solar panels by adding a contingency to the appropriation?

Claus Becker said that he would like to make sure the zero net energy promises are fulfilled before another \$1M is allocated to the High School/Middle School project.

Marie Warner, pct. 6, asked about funds that have not yet been fully allocated and she asked about other infrastructure money that may be available to the Town. Garvin said the unallocated funds are show in orange on the chart. Garvin said there are potential sources of infrastructure money and she is working on those sources with the state legislators.

Cabell Eames said she is nervous that the zero net energy goals for the High School/Middle School project will not be accomplished. The PV solar panels were promised; renewable energy implementation will be cheaper now than later.

Richard Madden asked if there has been any discussion about using the ARPA funds for a one-time payment for our first responders. Garvin said that other towns are deliberating about this. She reported that Belmont has discussed the possibility of using the funds to pay first time responder payments.

Lisa Todreas agreed with the other residents about the importance of the installation of the PV solar panels in the new High School/Middle School.

Lisa Pargoli said she is disappointed that they gave the \$1M extra to the High School/Middle School building project.

Bill Anderson, pct. 2, said he has a difficulty grasping the use of the \$5M in ARPA funds to plug the budget. He doesn't think we are budgeting efficiently. When one time money runs out, the burden may fall on the taxpayers. He expressed the desire to see the High School/Middle School building project stay within budget.

Robert Gommer affirmed the importance of including the PV solar panels in the High School/Middle School budget. He thinks the PV solar panels will reduce operating costs in the future and the quicker we install them, the sooner we can realize those savings.

Ronald Geiger, pct. 2, also stressed the importance of the PV solar panels. If we don't support the solar panels, then people will become skeptical of the Town government.

Robert McGaw said we have already voted down the override and we need to focus on building trust in the Town. If the High School/Middle School Building Committee fails to complete their promised goals, it will affect the overrides of the future that will be embracing energy needs. The solar panels should have been built into the design from the beginning, but if the case is made for using the \$1M for this project, it is important that the \$1M be tied to the PV solar panels.

Brian Kopperl, Energy Committee member, believes that every new school should be required to include PV panels because of long term savings. He thinks that the increased participation in remote meetings during the pandemic has helped to keep committees honest. He suggested that if the \$1M is appropriated to the High School construction, that the appropriation include a condition that any funds not used be returned to the ARPA fund to allocate to other uses.

Carolyn Bishop said in reference to net zero energy goals, it's important to spend now and save in the future. We need to get the PV panels for the geothermic system installed before the \$1M additional money is appropriated.

Margaret Callanan said that she doesn't think any additional money should be given to the High School Building Committee. She thinks it sets a bad precedent for the future. She thinks we should look at ways to increase revenue first.

Alison Lenk, pct. 8, questioned the legitimacy of ARPA funding being used for library upgrades and rink design when it has to be related to COVID needs? Garvin answered that the funds for rink and library came from the extra surplus earmarked from state ARPA funds. The rationale for the funding is that aging buildings need better air quality during the pandemic.

Judith Feinleib affirmed that the state funding was in addition to the \$7.8M ARPA funding.

Bill Anderson said if the \$5M wasn't available then we would have had to reduce the rate of increase in the budget. He thinks we should be using the \$5M for capital projects to reduce the rate of acceleration in the budget because it would benefit the Town for 20 to 30 years rather than two years.

Mary Lewis, pct. 1, said she would ordinarily agree that one-time funds should not be used for recurring expenses, but she said the use of the funding is for real expenses and not increasing means you are cutting. Health care, and salaries increase every year. Until we find other ways to address the structural deficit it makes sense to use the money for the operating budget.

Everett Tatelbaum supports the PV solar panels using ARPA money. Energy inflation is on the rise and he thinks solar panels are suited for ARPA funds.

Susan Lapierre affirmed the importance of recognizing essential workers and first responders with a portion of the ARPA funds.

Marina Atlas commented that no one has talked about the health benefits of solar panels for the students.

Steven Tomczyk, pct. 1, affirmed the importance of the solar panels.

Darryl King, pct. 6, said that the PV solar panels are one of the few things that will pay for itself. It's going to create revenue by saving costs. He said the roof is ready for the panels so we need to appropriate the money now.

Lisa Pargoli, pct. 4, what other funding has been given to the Building Committee other than the \$1M in discussion? Patrice Garvin said that the High School/ Middle School construction was funded through MSBA reimbursement, loans, and some money from the Kendall fund.

Brian Kopperl asked if the Select Board has the ability to attach qualifications for the \$1M funding appropriation to make sure zero net energy comes first.

Judith Feinleib noted that all these questions represent a lack of trust in Town government. She suggests finding out from Town counsel whether the Select Board can attach qualifications to the \$1M appropriation to make sure the money is used as intended.

Steve Rosales, pct. 8, said ARPA funds are one-time funds. His preference is to use one-time funds for capital needs. He understands the need for operational costs, but to use all the funding for operational costs, is a mistake.

Ronald Geiger said he thought the solar panels were included in the budget. If we don't use the ARPA funds for that, does that mean the solar panels don't get installed? Garvin said there was never a question that solar panels are going onto the roof. The Building Committee is just trying find a way to meet budget.

#### COMMENTS BY SELECT BOARD

Paolillo said he has always supported the PV panels. If the Select Board decides that \$1M of ARPA funds will be appropriated to the High School/Middle School project that they should look into adding a contingency to that appropriation to make sure money is used for the intended goals. He said he recognizes that using one-time funds is not optimal, but there is a need to sustain the operating budget.

Epstein said he supports the solar panels, but added that the ARPA money is not the only option for paying for solar panels. There are other financing possibilities. If the ARPA money was not used for operating costs, there would be drastic cuts in services for the next two years. PV panels are important but they are not the only factor that goes into planning use of ARPA.

Dash said he is also supportive of the PV panels on the new High School/Middle School building. ARPA is a potential source for that project, but it is not the only source.

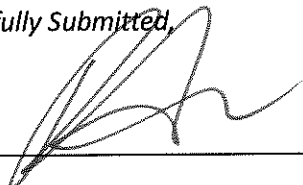
*Motion was made to adjourn and approved by a vote of 3-0.*

*Submitted by*

*Virginia Quinn*

*Recording Secretary*

*Respectfully Submitted,*

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

*PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator*