

Approved by
the Select Board on:

12/20/2021

Select Board Joint Meeting with School Committee

Monday, December 6, 2021

7:00 PM

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: January 12, 2022
TIME: 2:08 PM

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, Acting Assistant Town Administrator Glenn Clancy, and Health Director Wesley Chin.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Town of Belmont and the Belmont Economic Development Committee are launching the first Belmont Business Directory.
- Belmont Gallery of Art and Belmont Art Association will hold the Belmont Holiday Market on Saturday, December 11th from 12-4 pm at Town Parking Lot on Concord Ave. (Snow date: Sunday, December 12th.)
- COVID-19 Moderna Booster Shot Clinic for residents 18 and older will be held at the Beth El Temple on Monday, December 13 from 4 to 7 pm. Register at <https://home/color.com/vaccine/register/Belmont>.
- Special Cardboard Drop Off event will be held at the DPW Yard on December 18th from 8 am to 1 pm. Pre-registration can be done online at the Town website. \$5 fee will be charged.
- Applicants are needed for the Disability Access Commission. You can apply on the volunteer portal on the Town website.

COMMENTS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS

[NONE.]

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

a. December Bulletin

Garvin said she attached the December bulletin with this month's highlights. Link will be posted tomorrow.

b. Collins Center Update

Belmont received two grants: 1) capital planning and 2) finance structure. Glenn Clancy said the Collins Center wanted to interview 22 people from Belmont committees and Town staff. Most interviews have been scheduled, but there are a few outstanding interviews to be arranged.

Paolillo asked that Glenn send the list of interviewees and the scope of work to Select Board members. Clancy said the goal of the project is to take a look at the financial structure of the Town and make suggestions for best practices. Garvin said the Collins Center should produce a report by Spring.

c. Budget Process Update

Garvin said they are working on the budgets and meeting with department heads from each Town department. The Select Board will meet next week to talk to department heads about budgets.

d. Awarded State ARPA Funds – 1.1M Announcement

Thanks to Senator Brownsberger and Representative Rodgers, Belmont received more State money (\$1.1M). The funding will be dedicated to the library, skating rink, economic development and public housing.

Paolillo thanked Patrice Garvin for her role in securing this funding especially the \$250K earmarked for the Rink.

ACTION BY CONSENT

COVID Update

Wesley Chin shared that much of the State is moving in the wrong direction regarding COVID cases. Belmont had 21 cases this week, which is high. He is encouraging people to get vaccinated and wear masks in public. The Belmont Booster Clinic on Monday at the Temple Beth El still has spots open.

Chin said that the Board of Health met today and they are not currently recommending further restrictions. Over 50% of new cases are breakthrough cases. Belmont held four vaccine clinics in the last month and have been able to vaccinate children and adults. He said he has not heard of many hospitalizations with breakthrough cases.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Revenue Loss Calculations FY23

Craig Peacock, the Town auditor joined group. Garvin said the ARPA funds are classified into four categories: 1) COVID-19, 2) premium payments, 3) water sewer infrastructure, and, 4) revenue loss calculation. The State gave us a formula to use to calculate the numbers. The new State guidelines included a new definition of revenue that was different from the federal formula so she asked the auditors to get involved. Craig Peacock's calculation for revenue loss, unfortunately indicated that the Town is not showing revenue loss that ties directly to COVID. That means the unrestricted federal money will have to be used other places.

Craig Peacock introduced himself. He said is a partner with Powers and Sullivan. Over the last six months he has been working with audit firms and the State to clarify the changing requirements and eligible revenues. He summarized the discussion he had with Town administration.

Peacock said the new rules use FY19 revenue at 4.1% increase and compare these numbers to calendar year 2020. Currently, both at the federal and county levels there is a discrepancy about whether the Mass. School Business Authority (MSBA) reimbursement should be included in the calculation. Belmont received a significant amount of MSBA funds in 2020. The hope was that Belmont could get a revenue loss without MSBA. A high debt exclusion also affected the revenue loss calculation. Using the 4.1% allowed for an increase, the Town did not show revenue loss when comparing fiscal FY19 to calendar year 2020. Peacock said he tried an exercise that compared FY18 to calendar year 2020 and even with this comparison, the Town did not have a revenue loss. The next step would be to look at the other tranches or we are also allowed to apply for funds over the next three years using the same formula if there is money left in the ARPA funds. That calculation would compare FY19 to calendar years FY21-23.

Epstein said it seems the MSBA and debt exclusion used to pay for the new Belmont High School is causing a revenue windfall. He asked if the auditors did an exercise to calculate revenue loss factoring out the High School and the MSBA money. Peacock said he did not do that calculation but he thinks there would be a revenue loss without the debt exclusion and the MSBA.

Peacock reported that we are still working off the interim rules and the State said they don't know when the final rule will be issued. He said he has heard that the MSBA funds may be removed from the calculation, but he has not heard that debt exclusion will be removed from the calculation.

Paolillo asked who we would be submitting the calculations too? Peacock said there is no review process from the State. It is up to the localities to determine the meaning of the rules. Is the Town at risk of not receiving the full amount of \$7.8M over the next two years? Peacock said the Town's flexibility is limited without revenue loss. If we can utilize the other tranches before FY24, we may be able to justify our needs, but there is a chance that some of the money would have to be returned.

PUBLIC COMMENTS about ARPA calculations:

Bill Anderson asked 1) if there is any way we can ask for relief based on our debt exclusion; and 2) are their limitations on the of the funds for affordable housing?

Peacock replied that he is not aware that debt exclusion can be removed from the calculation.

Garvin replied that appropriations made by the State are specifically ear marked so we don't have the flexibility to use for rental assistance.

Dash asked that the Select Board be kept apprised of the final rule when it's issued.

Epstein asked if these rules were set by the State or Federal government? Peacock said the funds are federal but the monies are being administered by the State. Many communities are contacting their State representatives about addressing the problem with the feds to try change the rules. He doesn't think debt exclusions will ever be removed, but it never hurts to let your needs be heard.

The Select Board suggested that Patrice Garvin and George Hall approach Senator Brownsberger, Congresswoman Clark and Representative Rodgers about this.

FY23 Revenue Presentation

Patrice Garvin presented an overview on the revenue estimate process that was started in early October.

There main sources of recurring revenues are:

- Property Tax
- Local receipts (motor excise, fees, rental)
- Local State Aid (Chapter 70)
- Available funds (pilot payments, enterprise funds)
- One-time sources (free cash, reserve and stabilization funds)

Garvin said the budget process entails comparing revenue from FY21 actuals and FY22 estimates.

Key points from her presentation:

- The new growth estimate related to property taxes, for FY22 and FY23 is estimated at \$800K.
- In local receipts, we have been conservative because of the impact of the pandemic.
- Ambulance receipts were increased in 2022 due to the new billing schedule with the Fire Chief.
- We were told we would have a reduction in State aid but it ended up being level funded. The actual numbers for State aid is released in January 2022.
- Parking meter revenues decreased during COVID.
- Belmont Light pilot payment was increased in 2021 to help fund the FY21 budget. The Town is paying this back over time (\$150K in FY22, \$350K in FY23).
- Water and sewer administrative costs were increased.
- Capital Endowment fund is a reserve and we receive \$125K every year for operating budget.
- Free cash used in FY21 was \$3.8 M, and in FY22 this increased to \$7.1M. Free Cash amount will change after department requests are determined.
- We need to determine if there any direct COVID related expenses that can utilize the ARPA funds.
- These are only preliminary estimates for revenue for FY23.

Epstein asked about marijuana related revenue? Glenn Clancy replied that Cal Verde has their building permit. Mint has not yet been permitted, they are moving into old gas station and construction has not started. Cal Verde should open in early spring and Mint should open late summer.

Garvin reported that restaurant excise dipped a little this year but it may increase in FY23. Epstein and Paolillo noted that the Capital Endowment Committee may increase their draw to \$150K.

PUBLIC COMMENTS about the FY23 budget:

Geoff Lubien, Warrant Committee member, reconfirmed that the rules coming from the State are restricting revenue loss and will restrict the \$2.7M ARPA fund. If the revenue loss formula is solely related to COVID, there is a chance we won't be able to recover the money. Paolillo and Lubien agreed to discuss this at the next Warrant Committee meeting and to try to lobby this issue.

Vote to accept donation on behalf of the Belmont/Watertown SPORT (Special Programs Organized for Recreation Time) Program from Andy Silberstein in the amount of \$6,000.00

Andy Silberstein is donating the money he received at his bar mitzvah towards this program. The Select Board thanked him for his generosity toward the community.

Motion was made to accept the donation of \$6000.00 from Andy Silberstein to be used only for the Belmont/Watertown SPORT Program. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

[Open Joint Meeting with School Committee.]

Update on Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Chair of the School Committee, Amy Checkoway called the School Committee to order with a quorum (Meg Moriarty, Mike Crowley, Catherine Bowen, Ralph Jones, Supt. Phelan).

Lisa Gibalerio, Ann Wang, Ellie Lesser, and Sophia Suarez-Friedman from the Belmont Wellness Coalition were present. Lisa said the survey was done in 2019 and again in Spring 2021.

2021 Youth Risk Behavior Highlights:

- Students surveyed were in grades 7-12.
- A good response rate and diverse demographics were received.
- Vapor use and alcohol and marijuana use has declined from 2019 to 2021. Use increases with age.
- Looked at students' perceptions about risk (vaping, alcohol and marijuana).
- 31% of high school students reported overwhelming stress. 125 students at the high school said they considered suicide.
- Middle school statistics on suicide plans/thoughts were higher than at the high school. Gender breakdown showed that females in general, and females who identify as gender expansive seem more vulnerable. Students of color showed a higher rate in the considered suicide question.
- Ellie Lesser, student representative, reported that among the top five stressors at the high school and the middle school, school demands were at the top of the list.
- Lisa said they work very closely with the School and School Committee about the results of the survey.

COMMENTS from Committee members about Youth Risk Behavior Survey:

Paolillo commented that alcohol and marijuana use is still pretty significant even though it went down from 2019.

Supt. Phelan said three social workers have been added this year to work directly with students and teachers. He said that Team Chairs were added using federal money to help support SPED students. He said they are planning to hire two more social workers and hallway monitors at the middle and high school. They scaled up METCO aid support and hired a director and the schools are focusing on supporting students who need marginalized support. Schools are using one-time federal money this year and we are open to supporting Town-wide long term plans for the schools.

Paolillo asked if the school provides access to mental health services in addition to the social workers? Phelan said the mental health professionals guide students to McLean or other hospitals. He said a suicide protocol exists in conjunction with the Police Department.

Amy Checkoway said School Committee members were concerned with this report. Schools have to focus on what students need to foster learning. She would like to see the whole community get involved. Parents need to be informed on how to help their children with mental health issues.

Ralph Jones said we need to think about the causes of all this and we need to look at a community-wide effort to support this. The importance of peer leaders could be very important here.

Dash said that reactivating the Youth Commission could also help.

Mike Crowley said maybe a task force could be created to cultivate the community-wide response.

Epstein asked how stressors were ranked in the questionnaire? He noted that the biggest stressor was school demands. Were these open-ended responses or were they multiple choice?

Ann Wang from the Wellness Coalition said the questionnaire was multiple choice and responses were limited. There were nine response options, but no open-ended questions.

What is the role of the School and School Committee in establishing the level of school demands?

Phelan said they have been working on this issue since 2015. They looked at social and academic pressure and partnered with other groups to speak at the school. He said they had homework free weekends. The expectations at Belmont High add stress. We need the resources to connect families and students to the support they need.

Dash thanked the School Committee and Wellness Coalition for attending the meeting. He asked that they continue to apprise the Select Board about issues related to mental health in the schools.

Lisa Gibalerio said she would like to start a working group to approach this in a holistic way.

Amy Checkoway made motion to adjourn the School Committee. Motion was approved by a quorum.

[Close Joint Meeting with School Committee.]

Discussion and possible vote to amend Community Path Project Committee Charge

Russ Leino, Chair of the Community Path Committee, is present to discuss the charge.

Russ said they have been discussing the need to update the charge. The current charge is focused on Phase I A&B and the committee has largely completed most of the items. With the submission of 25% design, the committee discussed that we need to keep the motion going and we need to get started on Phase II while continuing the work on Phase I. Leino said a subcommittee was designated to put together a proposal which was shared with Town Administration. He said the goal was to make it a single committee so that work is consistent and coordinated. It may make sense to form working groups. The changes involve adding two resident seats and focusing on the remaining tasks.

Dash said adding a subcommittee sounds like a good idea. Epstein said that it is clear to him that Phase II is more complicated than Phase I. He thinks that the most important thing is to make sure the resident members are experienced in certain technical competencies that may arise in Phase II.

Motion was made to revise the charge for the Community Path Project Committee as discussed and shown. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Discussion and possible vote on Diversity Task Force Charge timeline extension

Roger Fussa from the Diversity Task Force joined the meeting. Roger said the task force needs more time to produce the final report. He would like to ask for an extension until end of February 2022. Fussa said there will be draft report completed first and then the task force needs to put together a task force timeline. Epstein said in lieu of an interim report, he would like to request a copy of the draft report before the end of February. Dash commented that the decision about a draft report should be left up to the committee. Dash and Paolillo agreed that they just need to see the final report. The task force will be debating the report in public meeting.

Motion was made to approve the extension of the deadline for the delivery of the Diversity Task Force report until the end of February 2022. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Discussion and possible vote to approve the Preliminary Rink Design Committee Charge

Pat Brusch, Chair of the Belmont Permanent Building Committee joined the group. Paolillo said the Rink Design Committee has been meeting since the end of September. During that time, they have been looking at financial options for a new rink. We talked about fund raising and renting ice time to produce funds and have arrived at a number of ways to raise funds outside of a potential debt exclusion. But it was determined that we need some taxpayer support. The decision was to form a Rink Design Committee comprised of four members of the Rink Financing Committee and three members of the Permanent Building Committee. The Town Administration identified \$125K of earmarked money from the State that we can use for the work we do on that committee.

Pat Brusch, said that Town Counsel approved the new plan. She said they learned that you can hire an architect and project manager and handoff to the building committee without starting all over. The Select Board's role would be signing contracts and authorizing bill payments. The committee would be responsible for the interview process.

Epstein said it makes sense to create this committee. He wonders if it is necessary to restrict the remaining three members to the Permanent Building Committee. Pat Brusch said that all three of the members have shown interest in being on the new committee. This will be a temporary committee that will end in four to five months. At that point the current committee will be dissolved and we will create a Rink Building Committee. The Rink Building Committee update could be added to the agenda for December 20th. ARPA money will be used for the schematic design. The committee would recommend a project manager and an architect to the Select Board for the 30% design for Town's ice skating rink so work can be handed off to the building committee as approved by Town Meeting and Town Moderator. Pat Brusch said that the Permanent Building Committee can create and submit the RFQ. Pat will get some names for the committee members and inform the Select Board of the choices.

*Motion was made to approve the Preliminary Rink Design Committee with objectives as amended.
Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.*

Discussion and possible vote for committee appointment: Housing Trust

Rachel Heller, Chair of the Housing Trust reported that there are two vacancies open on the Housing Trust. She said they have two excellent applicants: Benjamin Meshoulam who has experience in public and regulatory matters in environment and affordable housing, and Michael Marotta who is an architect who works in affordable housing. The addition of these members will help with compliance needs. Verna Napoli will consider reapplying in the summer.

Motion was made to approve the appointment of Benjamin Meshoulam to the Housing Trust with an expiration date of June 30, 2024. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Motion was made to approve the appointment of Michael Marotta to the Housing Trust with an expiration date of June 30, 2024. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Select Board Committee Liaison Reports

The Structural Impact Group continues to make progress. Chair plans to submit a report for the December 20th Select Board meeting to report on top level ideas. A final report will be available in the first quarter of 2022.

Traffic Working Group – Middle School and High School will hold another public forum on December 13th and 14th to discuss parking restrictions. Once the final found of public input is received, the final report will be voted on December 20th.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

a. November 10, 2021 – Joint with School Committee (tabled from 11/29)

Motion was made to approve the joint meeting minutes from November 10, 2021 as amended. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

b. November 29, 2021 – Joint with Board of Assessors

Motion made to approve the joint meeting minutes from November 29, 2021 as amended. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Motion was made to enter Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares; all unions.

The Select Board made a motion to not return to public session after Executive Session.

Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Respectfully Submitted,



PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator