

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

Town of Belmont
Joint Meeting of the Select Board, School Committee,
Warrant Committee, Long Term Capital Planning Committee and
Capital Budget Committee
Wednesday, February 16, 2022
Remote Meeting
7:00pm

APPROVED BY
THE SELECT BOARD
03/14/2022

CALL TO ORDER

Geoff Lubien called the meeting of the Warrant Committee to order.

Adam Dash called the meeting of the Select Board to order.

Christine Doyle called the meeting of the Long Term Capital Planning Committee to order.

Ann Marie Mahoney called the meeting of the Capital Budget Committee to order.

Amy Checkoway called the meeting of the School Committee to order.

The following committee members were present at the Call to Order:

Warrant Committee Members	Long Term Capital Planning Committee Members
Geoffrey Lubien, Chair	Chris Doyle, Chair
Chris Doyle	Elizabeth Dionne
Elizabeth Dionne	Ann Marie Mahoney
Tom Caputo	Roy Epstein
Jenny Fallon	Mike Crowley
Ann Helgen	Jenny Fallon
Daniel Halston	Select Board Members
Bob McLaughlin	Adam Dash, Chair
Adam Dash	Roy Epstein
Paul Rikter	Mark Paolillo
Jack Weis	Administration
Laurie Slap	Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator
Ellen Schreiber	John Phelan, Superintendent of Schools
Andrew Levin	School Committee Members
Capital Budget Committee	Amy Checkoway, Chair
Anne Marie Mahoney, Chair	Meg Moriarty
Jenny Fallon	Michael Crowley
Patricia Bruschi	Jamal Saeh
Meg Moriarty	Ralph Jones
Roy Epstein	

Chair of the Select Board, Adam Dash, announced that this Joint Meeting with the Select Board, School Committee, Warrant Committee, Long Term Capital Planning Committee and Capital Budget Committee has been convened to review and discuss the FY23 operating budget. Patrice Garvin and Superintendent Phelan will be presenting budget information on the FY23 Town and School budgets.

Dash said there are also a number of Department Heads attending this meeting who can be called on when needed. Comments will be taken when presentations have been completed.

Town Administrator Garvin provided an overview of the FY23 Town proposed budget, which includes:

- Budget Model
- Revenue Estimates
- Free Cash Projection
- Expenditure Estimates
- Expenditure Highlights
- Reserves
- Next Steps
- FY24 Sneak Peak.

Garvin said the Town budget includes revenue and expenditures only. Water and sewer budgets will be presented to the Select Board in mid-March.

Garvin explained that revenues are broken out into recurring and one-time revenues; estimated expenditures are categorized into Town operating, education and fixed costs; and the budget model includes the FY23 estimated and FY24 projected costs.

Garvin said that the budget model was developed by the Collins Center in 2018 and this budget model was used to develop the FY23 budget. She also reported that the FY23 and FY24 budgets were balanced by using \$9.5 – \$10.5 of one-time revenue. The overall FY22 budget needed to be reduced by \$3.4M. This was done by eliminating a police and firefighter position, two labor positions in DPW and the resident engineer in the Office of Community Development. She said they are not planning to restore these positions in FY23. The Town/School budget was 0.6% above the forecasted model due to fixed costs, unknown costs and additional positions. Garvin showed a side-by-side comparison of the budget model vs. the proposed model.

Garvin reported that property tax revenues make up 77.3% of recurring revenue in the proposed FY23 budget and one-time revenue comprised of Free Cash and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds is proposed at the amount of \$9.5M.

She also noted that interpretation of the ARPA fund use has changed multiples times throughout the year due to changing State rules. The most recent ruling is that \$10M of ARPA can be used unrestricted. Garvin is proposing that \$5M of the ARPA funds be used in the FY23 and FY24 budgets.

She showed a slide that showed the increased use of Free Cash since 2018.

FY23 Expenditures (\$148.2M) were displayed in a graph including a detailed comparison of expenditures.

Garvin explained that the main driver of the increase in General Government expenditures is the need for increased cyber security. Reorganization of the Town Administrator office has produced a savings that will be used towards the cyber security line. Also, the Town Clerk's budget was reduced by the cost of one election. If that election needs to be held, then ARPA money will be used for the additional election costs.

Fire, Emergency Management and Police have been level funded. In Public Services a town plumber position is being proposed and in Facilities there has been an increase in electricity due to the new high school.

The Human Services budget includes positions that will be funded by ARPA funding including a new social worker at the Council of Aging and a part time position in the Health Department. These positions will be two-year positions because they are funded with one-time ARPA funding.

The Select Board is expected to take a final vote on the health insurance rate in mid March. The Select Board will discuss joining the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) once the GIC goes out to bid. Garvin showed a slide of health insurance and pension costs since 2018.

The capital budget for FY23 includes \$1.5M to support expenditures supported by the Capital Budget Committee. The majority of the debt service is a result of the Middle and High School building project. Garvin displayed slides showing the past five years balances of Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) and the General Reserve Fund.

Garvin reported that projections for FY24 have shown that expenditures and revenues will balance out.

Superintendent Phelan presented slides for the schools projected FY23 budget.

Superintendent Phelan said the FY23 Schools Budget Book is posted online for all to see. The budgets are separated by programs and include the previous two fiscal years. He said that feedback from the Warrant Committee and School Committee is being incorporated into the Budget Book being compiled now.

The General Fund is being rolled over with an increase of \$2.7M from the FY22 budget. Phelan noted that the increase is within the limits of the Financial Task Force 2 model.

The General Fund does not include the positions added with ESSER and ARPA funds. The schools are still negotiating five union contracts. General fund text materials supplies and equipment items have been reduced due to federal funds being used for those items for the past two years. Special Education costs have also been reduced.

Enrollment has gone down in the aggregate in 2019-21 but looking at potential increases at the high school, special education and ELE levels. Phelan said the budget was reduced from FY21 to FY22 to align with the lower enrollment at the elementary school level.

Phelan is suggesting the addition of 6.2 FTEs in the FY23 budget. A slide was displayed that showed the positions deemed as necessary positions to be included in the FY23 budget. The additional 6.2 FTE positions are separate from positions paid for by the ESSER and ARPA federal funds. Phelan noted that increases in Chapter 70 and Medicaid Reimbursement may be able to support the additional 6.2 positions.

Phelan said he will continue to take feedback from all parties before Town Meeting in June.

Chairman Dash thanked Supt. Phelan and Patrice for their presentations. He opened discussion from committee members.

COMMENTS

Paolillo is concerned about the use of one-time funds and the impact on the FY25 budget. He also noted that the state aid increase seems low at 1.7%. Garvin said that she agrees that the state aid increase is low. But the history of unrestricted general aid does not show a large increase in that area.

Paolillo asked Phelan about the 13 positions that were not rolled over and asked where the savings went. Phelan said they will show the reallocation of funds in the next budget iteration.

Phelan said it will be important to see the numbers at the kindergarten levels to see how many students will be returning. He confirmed the importance of trying to find additional funds to cover some of the 21.4 FTEs that were supported by one-time funding.

Jack Weis from the Warrant Committee asked when the School Department Budget Book will be available. Phelan said Tony DiColegero can send out the Budget Book tomorrow.

Ann Helgen from the Warrant Committee agreed that it is unclear about what is happening to the dollars that would have funded the 13 positions that were not rolled over. She is worried about the two full time behavioral therapists who could be cut. She thinks these positions should be funded on a permanent basis. She commented that these positions could be funded by the savings in the contractual services. She would like to see a cost benefit analysis done before the final budget is presented. Helgen said we need to be more careful about how we add positions in general. We have to pay unemployment when we make cuts. And if we don't cut them, it's a huge increase for the lower enrollment base.

Helgen also asked about the sizeable SPED reserve. She thinks that this could be returned to the Town to pay for utilities for the school. She would like to see innovations in funding that create a stronger financial structure.

Phelan said the out-of-district funding is a subject we need to discuss to see if there is room to support other parts of the budget from that area. In regards to the two SPED behavioral therapists, he said he will look at the contracted services line and see what they can move into salary lines.

Geoff Lubien looks forward to talking about the out-of-district SPED costs in the next couple of weeks. He suggested that for next year, receiving a detailed budget from the Schools earlier would be optimal. He echoed the concerns about the one-time funding. He feels that a lot of returns were due to the impact of COVID and the rate of replenishment will be reduced this year.

Laurie Slap would also like to make sure they keep FY25 in their sights so that undue burden is not placed on taxpayers.

Roy Epstein asked about vocational education enrollment since Belmont left the Minuteman program. Superintendent Phelan said he would give Epstein that information tomorrow.

Epstein asked about the 21.4 FTEs that were charged to the ESSER/ARPA category. He notes that seven positions have not been filled, and if the intent is not to fill the seven positions next year, he wondered why the full 21.4 FTEs are being paid by ARPA. Phelan said that 21.4 FTE number will be reduced by seven FTEs in the revised budget.

Epstein asked if the SPED reserve should be used instead of the ARPA funds to cover some FY23 expenses. \$1M could be taken out of the excess SPED reserve to reduce demand on other funding sources. He would like to reevaluate the roll forward number used in the school budget.

Jack Weis said he prefers getting the big picture overview that Superintendent Phelan presented tonight before digging into the details. He said once we get the detailed budget we can start the process of revisions.

Dash said if anyone from the public is interested, the Warrant and Budget Committees will be diving into the budget further in their upcoming public sessions.

Dash said the ARPA funding Public Forum will be held on March 7th at 7 pm.

Jenny Fallon adjourned the Long Term Capital Planning committee with a roll call vote.

Ann Marie Mahoney adjourned the Capital Budget Committee with a roll call vote.

Amy Checkoway adjourned the School Committee with a roll call vote.

Geoff Lubien adjourned the Warrant Committee with a roll call vote.

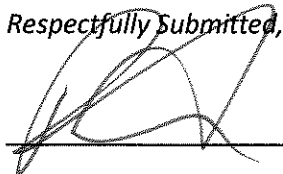
Adam Dash adjourned the Select Board with a roll call vote.

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