

5/17/2021

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BELMONT, MA

SELECT BOARD JOINT MEETING WITH THE WARRANT COMMITTEE EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

MONDAY, MAY 10, 2021

REMOTE MEETING

7:00 PM

DATE: June 3, 2021  
TIME: 9:54 AM

CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chair Adam Dash. Vice Chair Roy Epstein and Select Board member Mark Paolillo were present, along with Town Administrator Patrice Garvin, Assistant Town Administrator Jon Marshall, and Director of DPW Jay Marcotte. The members from the Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee were also present for the joint meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Virtual Meet and Greet with the new Belmont Fire Chief David DeStefano will be held on Friday May 14 at 11 am.
- Loneliness: State of Mind with Lynn Croft will be held on May 13 at 11 am.
- Outdoor Tai Chai with Calvin Chin starts in June and will be held Mondays at 10 am.
- Mystery of Morocco with Ron Rosenstock will be held on May 17 at 10 am.

Call the Beech St. Center at 617-993-2976 to pre-register for the above events.

Discussion and possible vote to increase fees for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) billing

- Chief DeStefano did some more calculations after his last presentation and the new proposal promises to produce \$953,000 of revenue which is \$39k more than the last prediction. Comparing to our 2020 reimbursement, it is a forecasted increase of \$300K.
- Paolillo said that he is willing to approve the new billing rates because it's close to what other communities are getting.
- Dash thanked Chief DeStefano for pulling this together quickly. Recurring revenue ideas are so important. Garvin said these additional funds may allow the Town to reinstate the Systems Manager position at the High School that had to be cut due to rejection of override. She said the schools would like to hire a Diversity Coordinator position as well. She said there will be further discussion about using sharing revenue between schools and Town for the Diversity position.
- Epstein supported the change in rates. He stated that revenue could also increase with an increase in the actual collection rates. The Chief's data show historical collection rates of 93% for Medicaid/Medicare 80% for private insureds. Chief DeStefano replied that the town's consultant Pro EMS Solutions advised him that an 80% collection rate for private insurance is excellent.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Bill Anderson asked to repeat the number for expected incremental revenue difference between the forecast and what was collected in 2020. The Chief said that a conservative estimate would be \$293,000. Chief DeStefano said he is making the comparison based on volume over time. The System

Administrator job salary will be \$106,000 and the Diversity Coordinator job salary would be between \$80 and \$90K with \$20K benefit. Anderson noted that a large part of the structural deficit is based on new hires.

- Dash clarified that we are not talking about adding an employee right now. There is still discussion to be undertaken on this subject.

*Motion was made for immediate adoption of the following rates for emergency medical service rates for Belmont: Basic Life Support (BLS) \$1999, Advanced Life Support (ALS 1) \$2475, Advanced Life Support – level 2 (ALS 2) \$2950 and a per mile rate of \$40. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.*

#### Discussion and possible vote to adopt the Sewer Enterprise Policy

- Jon Marshall reported that he, Jay Marcotte and the acting town accountant reviewed what departments were supporting the enterprise. He said they evaluated what percentage the enterprise is of the total fund. The amount of the indirect charge would be higher than what the enterprise could support, so he said they reduced percentages so the rates would not have to increase. Other communities used similar calculations that were based on the amount of work provided by departments. He said the number will be refined going forward.
- Dash said he also appreciates the quick turnaround on this item.
- Paolillo is comfortable approving this tonight, but he feels that the rates should be signed off by the Select Board, in addition to the other signatories.

*Motion was made to adopt the enterprise fund policy as amended. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.*

#### Discussion and possible vote on FY 22 Water & Sewer Budget

Jay Marcotte from the DPW presented:

- The biggest part of the DPW budget is the budget for water and sewer assessments. Last year, the MWRA was supposed to have rate increases, but during COVID they only had a 1% rate increase. However, this year the MWRA increased the water assessment by 9.7% from last year (\$295,764 budget increase), and the sewer assessment was increased by 3.6%.
- There has been a plan in place since 1995 to replace all unlined water mains. That project is now 82.7% complete. The FY22 plan is to replace 6970 Linear Feet. This year, the fuel tanks are included in the \$150K allotted each for water and sewer. Water rates will remain the same as FY19; sewer rates will remain the same as 2018. Marcotte said the Director of DPW in Arlington told him they have had 15% increases in sewer and water in their town for three years in a row. Belmont is doing the best they can to keep rates static.
- Paolillo said since water increase is based on consumption, conservation could help to reduce rates and Marcotte agreed.

#### PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Judith Ananian Sarno wanted to talk about the DPW yard fuel tanks. Dash said that is not part of the item being voted tonight, however, discussion of those tanks will likely come up at a future meeting.

1. Motion was made to keep water fees at FY19 rates which reflects a 0% increase. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

2. Motion was made to keep sewer fees at FY18 rates which reflects a 0% increase. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

[Begin Joint Session with the Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee.]

#### Discussion with Superintendent and School Committee Chair on FY22 Budget

Jack Weiss called the meeting to order at 7:23 pm with a quorum of Warrant Committee subcommittee members.

- Dash said the Select Board is trying out a new budget discussion format by inviting small groups to participate. The goal is to enable the public to hear the exchange of ideas heading into Segment B of Town Meeting.
- Dash asked about the FY22 school budget. Weiss said the Warrant Subcommittee has participated in discussions with the Finance Subcommittee of the School Committee about the budget, but they have not yet seen a budget. The Finance Subcommittee of the School Committee will receive it tomorrow.

#### School budget for FY22

- Supt. Phelan and Amy Checkoway spoke about the FY22 school budget. Checkoway said that they are in the middle of deliberating on the FY22 budget, but they don't have a final budget tonight. Supt. Phelan has recommended a budget and there has been good community feedback with a forum of 250 people. There is a proposed reduction of \$200M. The budget put forward by Supt. Phelan reflects 75% in position reductions. The remaining reductions are in co-curricular athletics, tech supplies, travel and revolving accounts. Checkoway expects discussion of these positions and tweaking of the numbers. She said it is a difficult process but they should have consensus by tomorrow night.
- Phelan said the framework of the budget is the same as originally proposed in the no override budget from February. Dash asked if there would be a change in FTEs for FY22. Phelan said depending on reductions after tomorrow's meeting, they are planning to reduce 9.6 FTEs of new staff and 6 FTEs of existing staff. Phelan encourages the public to go on the website to look at the details.
- Checkoway said that they have been trying to look at projected enrollment numbers to make decisions about staff positions. They hope to continue to offer students the important extra-curricular activities.
- Dash asked if the budget takes into account any federal aid money. Checkoway answered that they are just focusing on the operating budget and it doesn't include federal aid.
- Paolillo asked which schools are impacted by the position cuts. Phelan said the reductions in the FY21 and FY22 budget included middle school teachers, and SPED team chairs. Existing staff cuts were made in the elementary school, kindergarten, and Grade 1 because enrollments are lower there. He said they were trying to evade layoffs at the high school and middle school because of the high enrollment numbers in those grades. Reductions were redistributed per

school proportional to population enrollment. Revolving funds have been reduced across all categories.

- Laurie Slap said that in the Q3 report for FY21, we used federal funds for all COVID activities and that may impact free cash.
- Dash said the interim final rule from the U.S. Treasury Department just came out and contained the first guidance on use of the new federal funds. Belmont will be getting money through the State. They said more guidance is coming next week. The new interim final rules said that Belmont cannot use the funds to cover tax cuts, or pay down pension obligations or debt service. The interim final rules and other information is on the U.S. Treasury's website. Belmont will be getting the money in two tranches, according to the interim final rule. Dash suggests that the Financial Task Force II could provide guidance on how to handle these new federal funds and the restrictions placed on them.
- Epstein said Treasury Department guidelines cover calculation of a revenue shortfall due to COVID. It would be helpful if the Financial Task Force II analyzed the different possibilities to figure out the most favorable rate for Belmont.
- Tom Caputo, Chair of the Financial Task Force II is happy to have that group take a look at the guidance. He said that there are now some specifics but there is still a fair bit that remains unclear. The Financial Task Force will work with the Town Administrator and Supt. Phelan to see if they can work with the State. Caputo said they have time at their Friday meeting and they will change the agenda to spend time on this guidance and report back to this group as soon as next week.
- Dash said we may be adding a Select Board meeting on May 24, in part to discuss the budget.
- Epstein asked the School Committee if their thinking has changed about what they are going to present tomorrow night? Amy Checkoway said it may be too early to say. Discussion will be tomorrow morning, but she doesn't anticipate any major changes.
- Epstein asked if the term "operating budget" refers to the General Fund only or the General Fund plus revolving funds. His understanding was that the agreed reduction in the no-override school budget referred the General Fund.
- Tony Cologero explained that in the budget presentation from May 4, 2021, there are \$270K of expenses coded to be charged to the general fund. \$270K will instead be charged to the appropriate revolving accounts to reduce the amount charged to the general fund.
- Phelan said that last year the School Department budget was reduced by \$3M. We used federal grants in FY21 to cover some expenses. We reduced hours and positions before COVID, and now we are back to the baseline number.
- Weiss said that the Warrant Education Subcommittee members are supportive of using the federal Rescue Funds for additional COVID related costs that aren't currently in the budget. The revolving and general fund portions of the budget need extra funds. We want to be careful about using the one-time dollars for on-going positions. He said there needs to be discussion about how we can add positions gradually. Checkoway said they all share the desire to use the federal funds responsibly.
- Dash said that it looks like there is going to be a reporting requirement for the federal funds, and the Town will have to make statements of purpose for certain uses of those funds, but the we now have broad preliminary guidance, which is helpful. We know we cannot just save the



funds, or put them toward debt service or pension funds. Caputo said we will be allowed to use the funds over three years, so we have to be careful to not fund recurring costs.

- Ann Helgen asked if those grants are available for FY21? Garvin said if the federal funds come in before June 30th, we would be able to use the money in FY21. Dash said the preliminary guidance says it will be appropriated in two tranches, 50% in May 2021, and the balance 12 months later. Big cities get the money directly, but smaller towns get it from the State. Dash said we might be able to appropriate those funds in the June Town Meeting if we receive the first tranche in May 2021.
- Epstein asked if the presentation tomorrow will be tied into the SPED budget model. Colegero said the updated version could be included in the new FY22 budget. So far, there has been no discussion about looking at the general fund tuition lines for FY22 changes.
- Weiss said it's important to have reserve balances at the school. But the funding approach should not be to spend from the general fund first. Retaining a reasonable reserve balance is important.
- Colegero said the school Q3 report shows a projected deficit for SPED tuition lines in the general fund. Phelan commented that we haven't had a challenge in SPED since we have been using the current model.
- Laurie Slap replied to Ann Helgen that the School Committee is planning to vote on the budget tomorrow night.
- Geoff Lubien said the Warrant Committee would not want to tax the general fund. There will be shortfalls in the District 3 fund. We need to use the reserve fund balance of \$650K to allow flexibility. There is a \$1.5M projected balance in the reserve budget. It is the policy to carry over dollars every year.
- Tony Colegero said his intent is to put the plan from October 27 in the budget and he wants to be able to be flexible for the School Committee.
- Laurie Slap said that the Warrant Committee will respect the School Committee but the Warrant Committee needs to be involved due to the free cash in Town. Paolillo asked if it is possible to estimate the reserve fund amount ahead of time so we can be more proactive? Laurie thinks that's a good idea.
- Weiss said in the 6 or 7 years since Supt. Phelan has been in Belmont, the most negative balance never exceeded the reserves. Phelan said they have to follow State guidance on the use of the circuit breaker fund.
- Dash said this was an excellent discussion. Maybe we can do it with a larger group later. Dash thanked them for coming.

[End Joint Session with the Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee.]

*Warrant Committee was adjourned by a quorum vote.*

#### SELECT BOARD COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORTS

- The Community Path Committee Board met last Wednesday.
- Garvin said that Congresswoman Clark announced that Belmont would be 1 of 10 towns that she will be recommending for a federal earmark of \$3.5M.
- Garvin announced that the Town received 3 out of the 5 grants they applied for in response to suggestions from Representative Rogers.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

- a. April 12, 2021 – Regular Meeting
- b. April 26, 2021 – Regular Meeting
- c. April 29, 2021 – Regular Meeting

*Motion was made to approve the April 12, 2021 minutes as amended and the April 29, 2021 meeting minutes. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.*

*The April 26, 2021 meeting minutes will be tabled for approval until the Wednesday, May 12<sup>th</sup> meeting in order to amend them.*

- There will be a Select Board meeting on Wednesday, May 12<sup>th</sup> about the rink.
- There will be a regular Select Board meeting on Monday, May 17<sup>th</sup>.
- A special Select Board meeting on May 24, 2021 will be added in order to vote Town Meeting Segment B Articles.

*Motion was made to adjourn the Select Board meeting. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.*

Respectfully Submitted,



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PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator