

4/12/2021

SELECT BOARD JOINT MEETING WITH WARRANT COMMITTEE, FINANCIAL TASK FORCE II AND SCHOOL
COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2021

REMOTE MEETING

7:00 PM

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: April 21, 2021
TIME: 9:18 AM

Update on the recent COVID-19 federal relief package and other financial model projections.

Laurie Slap, Chair of Warrant Committee, called the Warrant Committee to order. Andrea Prestwich called the School Committee to order. Roy Epstein called the Select Board to order. Tom Caputo called the Financial Task Force II to order.

The goal of tonight's joint meeting is to review the American Rescue Plan Act passed on March 11, 2021.

[Tom Caputo, Supt. Phelan and Patrice Garvin will be doing slide presentations.]

Update of Federal COVID grant and Massachusetts state aid, presentation by Tom Caputo:

- The new federal relief package covers a period of three years until December 31, 2024. The US Treasury is providing guidance. Belmont's funds come through the State.
- The fund includes \$7.6M in a COVID stability fund for town and schools and \$1M for secondary and elementary school emergency relief.
- The Finance Secretariat said that these funds should not be used for override.
- There are four major funding points of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021:
 - 1) To respond to pandemic and its negative impacts
 - 2) For premium pay to eligible workers during the pandemic
 - 3) For the provision of government services lost during the pandemic
 - 4) To make necessary investments in water, sewer and broadband.
- The school funding is broken down by 80% for general support and 20% for learning loss.
- The town went through an exercise during budget analyses to determine loss of revenue due to COVID. The town estimates lost revenue to be \$700K to \$1M for operating budget. These expenses were not included in our FY22 budget.
- Belmont could potentially use the sewer, water and Broadband infrastructure funds. But sewer and water are enterprise funds so the revenue and costs have to balance each year. The funds could be used to benefit rate increases in the future but can't help operating budget.
- Slide showed the breakdown of FY22 revenue lost to COVID.

Elementary and secondary emergency relief fund III (ESSER III), presentation by Supt. Phelan

- There is \$1M for the schools in the relief fund.
- Since August the schools have been compiling a "COVID parking lot" outside the FY22 budget. Supt. Phelan said he anticipates conducting academic recovery during the summer and

throughout the school year of 2021-22. They also have a mandate for elementary students who can't attend for medical reasons, to continue remote participation. A survey of elementary and middle school parents was completed and 13% of parents want their children to stay remote.

- The schools will also need to expand cleaning activities. We used the federal government's \$4M in COVID funds this year to purchase COVID related sanitizing products and fans, to pay for employees who were put on leave due to hybrid model and to supply free lunches for everyone regardless of income.
- Once info from DESE is received we will have meeting at end of April for parents. Later on in the school year, we will be identifying level of testing required for virus and we may need more medical support for at least the first half of next year.
- We are thankful for the federal dollars this year and the \$1.5M for next school year will be used appropriately. The funds we received this year from the government, allowed us to operate on a hybrid model.

COVID expenses already funded through COVID grants, presentation by Patrice Garvin

- Last March, the schools and town separated out expenses in case we received aid so we could reimburse. We used the money from CARES act on PPE, cleaning, social distancing barriers, teleworking (laptops), Zoom licenses/software. We paid for overtime for quarantined employees, PPE for first responders, and vaccination clinics with FEMA money.
- There was a lot more need than the CARES Act funded. We hope with the rescue plan we can look and see if we can have vaccine clinics and testing for residents for virus. We could use relief funds for re-opening library, senior center and hold elections and we need to start to plan for opening buildings in a safe manner. Air quality in buildings will need to be enhanced as well. New Facilities director will do these evaluations. Cleaning and PPE will always be needed. We are also anticipating remote meetings to continue. Higher participation enhances transparency of town.
- Chapter 70 and unrestricted general aid are the largest funds we receive from the State. We have heard that Chapter 70 may include increases. If Chapter 70 is increased, then it will go up about \$200K. In FY22, the state budgets are anticipated to increase by \$219,927 over FY21 budget.

Summary by Tom Caputo:

- We can use this relief fund to cover COVID related expenses and revenue loss. If additional funding is available after that, then we can use on capital investment and sewer and water. We have every intention to maximize that funding.
- We are predicting that only a modest amount of federal funding can be used to offset budget expenses.

Laurie Slap opened up the meeting for Q & A. She said that there will be a total of one hour for questions. Questions will be read in the order received via Zoom.

Note: Advocacy statements will be skipped. And repetitive ones will be deleted. And questions will be directed to the appropriate person. No questions will be allowed in chat, only in open meeting.

Questions from public:

Nora Peale asked about After School programs. Part of the funding is earmarked for after school including Belmont's independent programs. How do you plan to support these programs?

- Supt Phelan replied that Belmont Schools has not charged the after school programs for space this year and they provided PPE free of charge. Now that we are going back in person, we will allow them to use space and don't plan on charging until the beginning of the 2021 school year. We have been working with after school groups and will continue to support them accordingly.

Mary Lewis asked if there is an estimated amount for repairing the electrical at the library to provide air purifiers there?

- Ann Marie Mahoney answered that it would be \$200,090 to bring library up to code.

Nicole Dorn asked if the impact of \$11M of free cash reserves on the budget could be discussed?

- Tom Caputo said the recommendation was to leverage \$11.2M in free cash to reduce override need. In addition to the \$2M that are historically used, we are allocating \$2.7M in FY22, \$4.4 M in FY23 and \$4.4M in FY24.

Jim Sullivan asked where he could find the list of COVID parking lot items?

- Supt. Phelan answered that the list is under the school website under "budget." There is a presentation on federal grants that has that list within them.

Michael McNamara asked if we could use the federal relief funds for household rental aid?

- Tom Caputo said this is probably an eligible expense and not currently in the operating budget, but he is waiting for more guidance.

Bill Anderson asked why we did not choose to disclose the statement from Senator Brownsberger stating that regulations categories may be loosening?

- Laurie Slap said this is preliminary and she did not see statements from Brownsberger. Caputo said that could have occurred in the past, but we don't know if it will be happening with this funding.

Mary Lewis asked if the 1B category that provides aid to businesses and households, could be used to help families pay bills?

- Caputo said the town will explore this. It may require town meeting endorsement.

Bill Anderson asked when the treasury guidance was coming?

- Patrice Garvin said no date has been offered yet. Bill said he thinks May 11 is the date.

Michael McNamara asked if these are one time or recurring funds? Laurie Slap replied that these are one-time funds.

Laurie Slap thanked everyone and said that she hoped to see people at upcoming events.

Laurie Slap adjourned the Warrant Committee by unanimous vote.

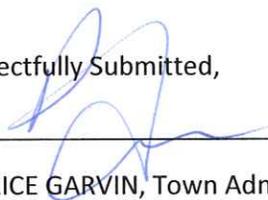
Andrea Prestwich adjourned the School Committee by unanimous vote.

Roy Epstein adjourned the Select Board by unanimous vote.

Tom Caputo adjourned the Financial Task Force II by unanimous vote.

Town election is April 6, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted,



PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator