

Approved by  
the Select Board on:

8/24/2020

## Minutes

Town of Belmont

Select Board Joint Meeting with Financial Task Force II

Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Tuesday, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

10:30am

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA

DATE: September 3, 2020

TIME: 9:53 AM

### CALL TO ORDER:

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 10:34am by Vice Chair Tom Caputo. Select Board Member Adam Dash was present. The Financial Task Force II (FTF2), which had called itself to order during their prior meeting, was also present.

Caputo, Dash, and Garvin noted that Epstein had said he would likely be unable to attend the meeting.

### ACTION BY CONSENT:

#### Update on Revenue projections regarding new information received

Caputo welcomed Dash and summarized the prior FTF2 discussion, during which they had considered an adjustment to the override placed on ballot last week by the Select Board. The meeting had been called on a short timeframe outside of the normal meeting calendar because the Town of Belmont had received new information from the State on the evening of Thursday, July 30<sup>th</sup>. The information was regarding state aid for FY21 and had an impact on the FTF2 recommendation and Select Board decision on the override. The FTF2 had projected a 25% decrease (about \$3.3 million) in state aid to the Town for FY21, but the state committed to level funding for Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA) and Chapter 70 funding. Caputo noted that there was very little time to process all of the information regarding state aid, and that the FTF2 had to either adjust the override amount on the November ballot or rescind ballot question by the end of the day. Caputo assured his colleagues and the public that the news about an increase in state aid projections was a good one. Ultimately, the FTF2 unanimously recommended that the Select Board rescind the November 2020 ballot question and endorse a specific override amount for the April 2021 ballot.

#### Discussion, possible vote, and recommendation on funding the override from the Financial Task Force II

Dash said that this was the best possible news from the state, though he was confused as to where the State would get the money to cover level-funding for municipalities, as a massive cut had been expected. Dash expressed worry that the cuts would come from elsewhere in the State budget which would need coverage from municipalities. Dash said what the Select Board did with the new information and funding would be important. Dash expressed that he had been guided by the FTF2's work and that his trust in their work led him to high consideration of following their new recommendation. Dash had wanted a November vote, but said that it would be unwise to go forward with that due to the new changes in state aid and the FTF2's new changed recommendation.

Dash said that whenever the override vote was taken, it would be a dramatic vote. He reminded the public that there was no way to restructure the Town out of its deficit, and that restructuring changes usually take a

while to show any savings. Dash also reminded the public that an override is not a bad thing, and that it is just part of the Proposition 2 ½ process.

Caputo said he too had been an advocate of the November vote, but that the FTF2 and Select Board needed more time to process the new information and to decide how the funds would be utilized. Caputo thanked Dash for his trust in the FTF2 and asked the FTF2 if they had comment to add.

- *John Phelan*: Said the school-side was trying to leverage all funding and better position the Town and Schools for FY21 and beyond. Phelan said he felt the need to mark the moment as the School Committee and School Department leverage funding from federal dollars to say that the school-side would do their best and express that the schools may still need to come back with needs to put on the table. Phelan encouraged the Select Board to put the unexpected level-funding of \$3.3 million toward reducing the override in April.
- *Patrice Garvin*: Reminded the public that the FY21 budget was reliant on one-time revenue sources. Free cash of \$3.8 million was projected to cover the reductions projected by the FTF2 for the FY21 budget. Garvin said that it was great news to receive from the State but reminded everyone that it was important to be mindful of how the unanticipated aid could play into FY21 and beyond.
- *Catherine Bowen*: Said she appreciated Phelan marking the moment and added that it meant giving the community a confidence in opening schools and assuring support to students, teachers, and families.
- *Phelan*: Said he would love all the money to be banked and used to reduce the override. He emphasized that opening schools was a very important process that must be done safely.
- *Garvin*: Stated she had no disagreement.
- *Caputo*: Asked for the conversation to be tabled for the time being and said he was encouraged by the work of schools and their usage of the federal money. Caputo agreed that he wanted to bank as much of state aid as possible.
- *Paolillo*: Encouraged a unified approach to figure out the work to be done and to move forward. He said that if everyone came together on the override amount and explained it to the public, there would be a high degree of confidence in voting for the override in Belmont.

Garvin read a statement from Epstein about the amount and timing of the override vote and about structural reforms.

Dash responded to Epstein's statement, saying that the override was necessary and there was no way to structurally reform the Town out of the entire deficit. Dash noted that it was difficult to have a further discussion on his comments without Epstein present.

Caputo agreed that he had comments on Epstein's statement, but would keep them to a time when Epstein was present.

Bowen said that the FTF2 had discussed other revenue that could come in throughout the year. She said the FTF2 was clear about why the vote needed to be moved to April 2021 and that the structural deficit would remain without the override. Bowen warned that the Town could not get out of the hole on the backs of children.

Caputo echoes Bowen's comment on FTF2 discussions and moving the override vote.

Caputo said his conversation with Senator William Brownsberger had given him the impression that the State Legislature did not know how they would provide level-funding, but that they were committed to figuring it out.

[Open public comment]

- *Mike Crowley*: Extremely nervous about delaying the vote to April and have lower voter turnout. Seems like greater risk for loss of the override. We know that we need essential override and the state aid doesn't do much to change the longer funding scenarios. Glad state aid has improved and would like to advocate for reserving as much of that as possible and reduce override request and better FY22. School reopening is fraught with many uncertainties. We have to be open to the notion that if some additional help is needed this year, there needs to be openness on part of select board to consider that and help reopen the schools
- *Robert McGaw*: Chair of Board of Registrars. Acute need to make sure September and November elections can be held safely. No funding for move to vote by mail from state. 4 staff members in town clerk's office who can't use poll time. Most poll workers are older. We need everyone to vote by mail as soon as possible. We will need assistance to support the intensive operation. Hoping that there is some funding to help with Sept. and Nov. elections. There will be a crush of administration and paperwork. We will need temp workers and overtime
  - o *Garvin*: Said she was looking to capture some money for this purpose and had submitted request for funding (\$10,000) to help the office.
  - o *Caputo*: Said the funding should be a priority and was supportive of looking into what needed to be done to provide resources. The Select Board could take up some responsibility in addition to Garvin.
- *Mary Lewis*: Concern about delaying past November. Frustrated about Epstein's comments about looking for savings for structural reforms. School district has squeezed out every last drop of funding. There is no structural reform that is going to change our financial deficit regardless. Concerned about the turnout issue in April. More motivation to vote in November and will give read on largest number of citizens. Should try to have this on the ballot where the most people show up. Hope board will rethink. Echo Bowen's last comment. Would sooner go with asking for \$10M now and come back in a few years than ask for \$9.5M in April and have it fail.
- *Richard Madden*: Endorse Lewis's comments. November ballot is better. We know we have a structural deficit, don't put off the vote
- *Heather Rubeski (TM Member Precinct 7)*: Endorse Mary Lewis's comments. Reminder that we needed this override before COVID-19. It's wonderful to restructure and stretch money, but it also has resulted in us here. This needs to be passed however much and whenever it is. Enormous difference in turnout is something that Select Board and task force need to take into consideration. If this isn't passed in April, that will be part of the reason. It's tempting to put it off and plan better, but the changes will continue and COVID may go on longer than we would like, if we step back, we're scrambling to make a change that may not need to happen. Not just about one new piece of information
  - o *Caputo*: was in favor of November and the challenge facing now is having fundamentally different information from the state. Doesn't feel like we can arrive at a number to give to the voters that we can stand behind. We all want to be able to have a strong argument and explanation for the voters. Structural deficit is very real and we're in a tough position right now.
  - o *Dash*: If we can lower the number that we're presenting in the override, we have a responsibility to the taxpayers to do it. If we don't have a number, we can't put in on the ballot by tomorrow. Dash really wanted a November vote to get the most voters possible. Dash gave great seriousness that there was unanimous consensus from the FTF2 on moving the vote to April, and that their recommendation carries a lot of weight with him.
  - o *Garvin*: COVID is not driving the deficit, but it does make it harder to model and forecast. It is a driving factor because we don't know the implications of COVID. Trying to do the best we can with all the uncertainty.
  - o *Dash*: Dash is not happy with the lateness of the information about increased funding, but understands it.

[Close public comment]

Town Clerk Ellen Cushman corrected the assumption several had made about turnout in April for the FY15 override. Turn out had been high for an April election, at 51%. Cushman said the outcome could be influenced by informing the voters.

*Motion: To rescind vote from July 2th 2020 to place an override on the November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 ballot (2-0, Caputo and Dash)*

Caputo said the intent of the FTF2 was to put an override on the ballot in April, but without exact number, it seemed premature to make a decision at this time.

Dash agreed.

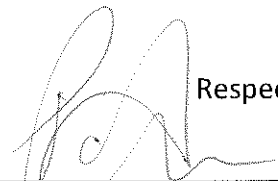
Caputo again said that the news was good, and the state aid would help Belmont meet its needs and possibly reduce the override.

Dash stated he was thankful to state officials for the level funding from the state for FY21.

#### ADJOURNMENT

*Motion: To adjourn the Select Board at 11:33am. (2-0, Caputo and Dash)*

The FTF2 adjourned themselves at 11:33am.



Respectfully Submitted,

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PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator