

Approved by  
the Select Board on:  
04-13-2020

**Minutes  
Town of Belmont**

**Select Board**

**Virtual meeting on Zoom**

**Monday, April 6, 2020**

**7:00pm**

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: May 5, 2020  
TIME: 9:36 AM

**CALL TO ORDER:**

A regular meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Tom Caputo. Vice Chair Adam Dash and Select Board member Roy Epstein were present. Town Administrator Patrice Garvin was present. The meeting was conducted on Zoom and open to the public by remote participation only via Zoom or conference call, as per the Governor's suspension of portions of the Open Meeting Law due to the COVID-19 situation. Caputo reviewed instructions for how to access the meeting remotely.

**COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

- Annual Town Election, previously scheduled to take place tomorrow (April 7), rescheduled to June 23, 2020.
- Belmont Helps is a grassroots organization formed to connect Belmont residents who need help during this time, or who would like to volunteer to help others.

**QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS:**

[There were none.]

**ACTION BY CONSENT:**

**COVID-19 update and discussion**

Caputo invited updates from Wes Chin (Director, Belmont Health Department), as well as the Police and Fire Chiefs:

- Chin reported that as of today there were 41 confirmed positive cases, and one COVID-related death. He stressed that the Health Department believed the number of actual cases in the community was higher than reported due to the lack of available testing. The CDC had come out with new guidance to wear face-coverings in public due to the risk for asymptomatic spread; he also reiterated the need to maintain social distancing in all situations.

The Health Department was actively engaged in contact tracing from confirmed positive cases. David Neylon (Public Health Nurse, Belmont Health Department) explained the

process; Chin appealed to the community for retired nurses or doctors who could volunteer their time to assist with contact tracing as the caseload continued to increase.

- Caputo asked Chin whether he felt the Health Department was adequately staffed to confront the current challenges. Chin replied the Department had been feeling pressed for time over the last week; there were many emails/calls coming in for which staff did not have time to reply. Recently the Health Department had been awarded an additional \$10k in emergency funding (\$20k total to date), and was hoping to use these funds to bring on additional nursing help.
- David Frizzell (Belmont Fire Chief) reported that the last few weeks the Fire Department had been in preparation mode, as calls were actually down. This involved many conference calls, updating staff on constantly evolving guidance/best practices, and implementing new safety procedures on calls / around the stations. While the number of calls were down recently, each call was taking longer because of procedures instituted to reduce the risk of exposure. The Department was communicating closely with long-term care facilities in Belmont in anticipation of increased case-load.
  - Caputo asked whether the Chief foresaw any issues around increased overtime, or need for additional staffing. Frizzell said the situation was changing day-by-day, however, he expected that overtime may become an issue as things progress and current staff may be required to take sick leave at a higher-than-normal rate. Another concern was the availability of ambulance services – currently making preparations to activate the back-up ambulance.
- Jamie MacIsaac (Belmont Police Chief) reported that the Police Department had also been busy making preparations and putting policies in place, and was on standby to go into emergency shift coverage. MacIsaac had been participating in daily meetings and the Department was experiencing a high volume of emails each day. There had been two domestic violence arrests recently. Officers were making rounds to public spaces such as Rock Meadow in order to promote social distancing and compliance with dog-leashing.

[Open public comment; there was none; close public comment.]

### **Proclamation in honor of the 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide**

Jirair Hovsepien joined the meeting. He thanked the Select Board for making the proclamation which he noted was particularly important at this time, due to the fact that the annual gathering at the State House to honor the anniversary had been postponed. Hovsepien shared a brief history of the Armenian genocide.

Caputo read aloud the proclamation honoring the 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

### **Discussion of the financial impact of COVID-19 in FY20 and FY21; possible votes to be taken**

Caputo first provided some context, saying that it was necessary to understand potential impacts for FY20, which would conclude on June 30. While the expectation was that State aid revenue would likely come in as planned for FY20, there were concerns about incurring additional

unexpected costs, e.g. from overtime. Further, it may be prudent to take immediate action in FY20 to alleviate even more severe impacts on the FY21 budget. The FY21 budget would need to be revisited in-depth. Caputo had directed Garvin to explore all options for addressing these budgetary challenges.

Garvin elaborated on some of the points:

- With respect to FY21, the budget that had been in preparation previously was based on the assumption of using significant one-time funds to balance the budget, in anticipation of seeking an operating override in November 2020 – such assumptions were no longer appropriate. The current priority was to try and get a handle on projected revenues for FY21, including running scenarios for 10%, 15%, and 20% reductions to State aid (these scenarios alone would see a \$1.4m-\$2.6m decline in revenue), as well as examining certain line items on a case-by-case basis, using the 2008 recession as guidance.
- In terms of FY20, in order to ensure there are no cash flow problems and due to concerns about unexpected costs, Garvin was suggesting to implement both a hiring and spending freeze until the end of the fiscal year. She presented a vacancy list for positions that would remain unfilled, along with associated projected savings. There had been concerns expressed about certain positions being deemed critical (and therefore exempt from the freeze), for which she had proposed to set up an independent panel to review and advise on the validity.  
The spending freeze would apply to all non-essential overtime and expenses, however, details were still being worked through as to what would be considered as non-essential.
- Warrant Committee had raised the option of furloughs / layoffs as a way to reduce costs. Garvin stressed that the process for enacting such measures was more complicated, and would require more time to enact, compared with the private sector.

[Caputo opened discussion to the Select Board.]

- Dash commented that this was a financial emergency, both for Belmont and other towns and cities across the Commonwealth. He was in favor of implementing the hiring and spending freezes to the end of the fiscal year, as soon as was feasible. With respect to the FY21 budget, the public needs to understand that reductions will likely be needed.
- Caputo was concerned about voting on a hiring freeze without having a clear process in place for determining which positions were critical. He echoed Dash's acknowledgement that reductions to services for FY21 were a real possibility. Caputo had spoken with State Senator Brownsberger about State aid for FY21, and was given the indication that any decision was at least 4-6 weeks off.
- Epstein was in agreement with the proposals for freezes, in general. He commented that an additional measure to boost Free Cash should be to temporarily reduce the OPEB contribution to the minimum allowed. Epstein also advocated for increased communication and collaboration with the School Committee between now and Town Meeting.

[Open public comment.]

- *Kathy Keohane (Chair, Board of Library Trustees)*: Expressed that all Town departments should agree not to make any hiring offers between now and next week, and that it was important to establish a committee to review potential critical positions. During this time, everyone needs to chip in to save money in whatever way possible.

[Close public comment.]

There was agreement on the following next steps: 1) Garvin would work with department heads to classify non-essential spending, with the understanding that no major discretionary spending take place this coming week, and that on-going construction/building projects would be exempt from a potential spending freeze; 2) Under the assumption that no employment offers be made in the upcoming week, Garvin would put together a specific plan for how to assess potential critical positions with respect to the hiring freeze, and the Board committed to take a vote on the hiring freeze at its meeting next Monday; 3) Working with Town Counsel and HR Director Porter, Garvin would put together a process plan and timeline for a potential furlough of employees, so that the Board could be further informed about this option; 4) Caputo would follow up with School Committee Chair Burgess-Cox on a coordination plan between now and Town Meeting.

#### **Discussion and vote to approve an amendment to the Solid Waste Contract; Waste Management**

Jay Marcotte (Director, DPW) joined the meeting. He explained that the original contract with Waste Management, signed in 2018, had built in a reduced flat fee for collection of bulky items, which entailed a per unit charge for items collected over and above this amount (~\$50k). This process involved significant resource costs incurred by DPW to reconcile the overages. The intention was that once actual data was produced on the amount of bulky items collected in a given year, the contract would be updated to reflect a more accurate flat fee; this would also allow for doing away with the additional oversight burden on DPW's side. The updated flat fee for collection of bulky items was \$72,500, with an inflation escalator of 3.5% and an option for the sixth year of the contract.

A further change to the contract was that bedding was no longer included in the list of bulky items; at the previous Select Board meeting, Marcotte had presented plans to initiate a bedding recycling program.

[Open public comment; there was none; close public comment.]

*Motion: To accept and execute amendment one to the contract between the Town of Belmont and Waste Management of MA, Inc., regarding the contract dated July 1, 2018, as presented tonight. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)*

### **Discussion and vote on the postponement of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Becca Pizzi 5k Road Race**

Becca Pizzi (Race Director) joined the meeting. She was proposing a postponed date of June 14, with a backup date of August 30. Garvin thought the June date was likely too soon – she would follow up with Health Department Director Chin to consult on the August 30 date. Epstein suggested to Pizzi to also look into modifying the format of the race to incorporate social distancing measures. The Board would revisit the matter in a week.

### **Discussion and vote on the postponement of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts Order Sons of Italy of America 5k Road Race**

Originally planned for April 19, Kathi Young (Co-chair of the race) explained the group was seeking to reschedule to October 4. Garvin would follow up on this matter as well with Health Director Chin, and with other department heads to determine if the date was suitable.

### **Discussion and possible vote on the possible postponement of the Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony**

Veterans' Services Officer Bob Upton had sent an email to Gavin with possible alternate dates. As with the previous two matters, she would further investigate the feasibility of August 7, 2020 as a possible date, which was also National Purple Heart Day. Update to be provided in a week's time.

### **2020 Census update**

Jon Marshall (Assistant Town Administrator) reviewed the Town's efforts to promote completion of the Census. Residents will have been contacted by mail with instructions on how to fill out the Census online, and further information could be found on the Town's website. For purposes of the Census, April 1 was the date for determining residence.

### **Discussion of ATM Warrant – List of articles**

Dates for Annual Town Meeting had now been pushed out to the middle of June. The hope was that the State legislature would give approval for the Town to hold a remote Town Meeting; the Town Clerk was currently exploring options for how the online voting technology could be integrated into a Zoom meeting. Logistics were still being discussed, however, the intention would be to disseminate as much information as possible prior to the meeting and encourage written questions in advance, in order to streamline any discussion.

Only critical articles for the functioning of the Town would be taken up, including: 1) general reports, a standing article ;2) Town's legal interests, another standing article; 3) Community Preservation Act (CPA) project articles; 4) salaries of elected officials; 5) limits for revolving funds; 6) FY21 budget; 7) OPEB contributions; 8) capital budget; 9) Water/Sewer Enterprise fund transfers; 10) appropriation of State revenue from rideshare levy.

Dash had previously noted that the Housing Trust was going to consider freeing up \$250k in previously authorized CPA funds for emergency rental assistance – this may also need to be addressed at Town Meeting in conjunction with the other CPA projects. A public comment from Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Chair Elizabeth Dionne indicated the CPC would review the matter, as well as provide guidance on which projects it deemed to be critical.

**Possible approval of a new Common Victualler License for: Bakehaus by CLC; 442 Common Street, Belmont**

All the required documentation was in order.

*Motion: To approve the Common Victualler License for Bakehaus by CLC, 442 Common Street, Belmont. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)*

**TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:**

Garvin reviewed the Town Administrator's Report:

- One response to the Rink RFP had been received, from Belmont Youth Hockey. Garvin would be contacting the applicant regarding an adjusted timeline.
- With respect to the McLean Zone 3 project: on April 27 the Board would discuss possible revisions to the Traffic Management and Mitigation Agreement; the report on projected impacts to services by consultant McKibben was expected by May 18.
- Garvin had included a letter from the Police/Fire unions expressing concerns with respect to plans to eliminate civil service.
- An update on the status of boards/committees that were operational to conduct remote meetings via Zoom. The Town had only recently obtained a license to conduct multiple meetings at a given time. The process to train chairs on how to conduct remote meetings was ongoing, and currently still limited to critical business.

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:**

- *March 16, 2020 regular session:*

*Motion: To approve the March 16, 2020 regular session minutes. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)*

- *March 26, 2020 regular session:*

*Motion: To approve the March 26, 2020 regular session minutes. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)*

**SELECT BOARD COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORTS:**

- Dash reported the Capital Budget Committee had conducted its first successful remote meeting last week. There had been discussion on how to proceed with the annual report – given the circumstances it would likely involve a modified process this year.

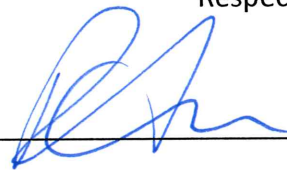
- Epstein was hoping to get up and running with Zoom meetings for various committees.
- Caputo:
  - o Warrant Committee had met the previous Wednesday, initiating the conversation around potential impacts to the FY20 and FY21 budgets. Plan was to meet weekly, when possible, over the next month or so.
  - o Belmont Middle and High School building project is continuing. The Committee planned to meet Wednesday for routine approvals, as well as ongoing discussion of the project status and timelines.
  - o School Committee set to meet tomorrow on financial matters. Phase two of remote engagement was rolling out now.

ADJOURNMENT:

Caputo noted that the next meeting, scheduled for April 13, was normally designated for reorganization following the local election (which had been postponed); he requested an agenda item be added for discussion to this effect.

*Motion: To adjourn at 9:24pm. (Vote passed 3-0; roll-call vote: Tom Caputo, Adam Dash, Roy Epstein)*

Respectfully Submitted,



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PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator