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Minutes
Town of Belmont

APPROVED
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
DATE: 12/16/19

Select Board

Select Board Meeting Room

Thursday, October 24, 2019

7:30am

CALL TO ORDER:

A budget meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:31am by Chair Tom Caputo. Vice Chair Adam Dash and Select Board member Roy Epstein were present. Town Administrator Patrice Garvin and Budget Director Glen Castro were present.

The meeting was posted as joint with the Warrant Committee, which did not initially have a quorum but was called to order during the meeting. The following Warrant Committee members were present: Chair Laurie Slap, Bob McLaughlin, Lynn Peterson Read, John Alcock, Dan Halston, Geoff Lubien, Jack Weis, and Elizabeth Dionne.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Town Hall and Homer Building Halloween Trick-or-Treat event on October 28, 4-6pm.
- A parade and ceremony to open the new Belmont Veterans Memorial at Clay Pit Pond will be held November 2; parade leaves from the WWI Memorial at 10:15 and the unveiling ceremony and the Clay Pit Pond site will commence at 11am.

COMMENTS FROM TOWN RESIDENTS:

[There were none]

ACTION BY CONSENT:

Budget Meetings:

Garvin gave a brief overview: To attempt to stretch the FY21 budget as far as possible (thereby delaying an override vote until November 2020), Garvin had requested level-funded budgets excepting salary steps and other contractual obligations. She had also requested department heads defer capital outlays to FY22.

Fire Department: David Frizzell (Fire Chief) and Wayne Haley (Assistant Fire Chief) were present. Frizzell presented an essentially flat budget, with a total of \$100k in reductions from the previous year which included \$96k of deferred capital. Certain fixed costs in the budget, usually inflated at 3-5% per year, were kept flat for this year. The department was currently in the process of turnout gear replacement and Frizzell had implemented a short-term work around to delay some of these costs; he warned that previous cuts to turnout gear had ultimately resulted in a larger capital expense down the road.

Frizzell highlighted the biggest challenges for the department: 1) employee retention; 2) struggling to hire through the Civil Service system, not enough qualified candidates; 3) OSHA requirements – working with Department of Labor, ahead of the curve on many items but not all.

Caputo asked about benchmarking the department to other communities; Frizzell said it's a resource intensive task to ensure comparing apples-to-apples, e.g. other departments include administrative incidents in their totals. With respect to percentage allocation of total municipal budget to the Fire Department, Belmont was roughly in line with other communities.

Epstein asked if Frizzell was formally recommending the Fire Department move away from Civil Service; Frizzell confirmed.

Belmont Emergency Management Agency: Hayley had taken over from the long-time work of the previous Director in February. He presented a flat budget with no increases from the previous year. The Agency had recently been working to pursue grants for emergency preparedness, as well as identify candidates to fill mandated spots on the Local Emergency Committee.

Police Department: Rich McLaughlin (Police Chief) and Jamie MacIsaac (Assistant Police Chief) were present. McLaughlin presented a flat budget aside from contracts; the budget included deferral of three cruisers as part of the capital outlay. McLaughlin stressed the need to get back on schedule with cruiser replacement following FY21.

Two major issues discussed were traffic enforcement in Town and the continued difficulty in filling crossing guard positions.

[Open questions to Warrant Committee.]

- *Halston:* What is the impact to the department of not having adequate crossing guards?
 - o McLaughlin explained that uniformed officers are assigned to fill the empty spots, often after they have just come off shift. MacIsaac said this had become a source of frustration and a morale issue in the department.

Community Development: Glenn Clancy (Director, Community Development) was present. Slight increases to salary expense due to anticipated union negotiations and step increases. On the operating side, request for small increases to fund: 1) clothing allowance for Assistant Director Yogurtian, who was spending an increasing amount of time in the field; 2) funding of wiring inspector, a position shared with Watertown, who controlled the negotiations.

Challenges included: 1) traffic issues in Town; 2) catching up with the pavement management program – two additional roads added this year on top of work in the Hittinger-Trowbridge neighborhood related to the High School; 3) difficulty filling Building Inspector vacancy position.

With respect to 3) Clancy elaborated that the position in Belmont included enforcement duties on top of other usual building inspector duties – this was not the case in other communities, and the compensation level was not reflective of this additional work. The Board discussed with Clancy the potential to restructure the position and he agreed to look into it further.

[Open to Warrant Committee]

- *Weis:* Asked if the Building Inspector position could be shared with another community; Clancy had considered this approach previously, but determined it would not make sense given the community-specific aspect of the job and the overall workload.

Town Clerk: Ellen O'Brien Cushman (Town Clerk) was present and outlined the three major programs of the department: 1) Town Meeting coordination (Moderator salary plus expenses); 2) elections; 3) record keeping. The biggest driver of the budget was elections – this was a busy year with September State primaries, Town election and presidential election upcoming in November 2020. She highlighted the cost/effort involved in moving towards more early voting in elections.

[Open to Warrant Committee]

- *Alcock:* Asked about ballot machine replacement. Cushman explained this was a capital budget item approved last year; she was moving ahead with the purchase, would test out new machines in April prior to the Fall election roll-out.

Accounting: Chitra Subramanian (Town Accountant) was present. A flat budget was presented, including the same FTE level as the previous year, a slight increase to cover qualifications for the Assistant Town Administrator offset by reduced costs in other areas.

Subramanian provided some highlights from the department: Free Cash was certified a month earlier than last year; on track for OPEB, next OPEB study scheduled for June; some unexpected additional work this past year related to the High School borrowing; the Assistant Town Accountant has been working closely with the Owners Project Manager from the Building Committee on a process to file MSBA reimbursements – important to do so in a timely fashion; progress made towards going paperless for purchase orders, plan to work with IT on a pilot program.

There was discussion around the due date for closing the books on the previous fiscal year – Subramanian thought mid-September was a feasible date (allow for start of school); Garvin preferred end of August to facilitate early certification of Free Cash.

Information Technology (IT): Dave Petto (Director, IT) was present. A level funded budget aside from contractual increases for security services. There was ostensibly an increase that was due to IT taking over the telephone system line item from the facilities department.

Garvin explained that IT was one of the few exceptions to the deferred capital outlay as certain equipment was necessary to maintain the security and operation of the Town's network. She and Petto were still in discussions over the amount requested and how it would be funded.

Petto highlighted maintenance of a secure network as the primary challenge for the department - attacks on the network had increased; it was impossible to prevent attacks entirely, rather the goal was to minimize disruption. This effort also entailed maintenance and testing of the Town's robust backup system.

[Warrant Committee adjourned at 9:08am due to lack of quorum.]

Recreation: Jon Marshall (Assistant Town Administrator / Recreation Director) was present. The budget had decreased 2% from last year; small increase from salary obligations, consistently lower than estimated on utilities.

Garvin and Marshall reviewed efforts toward establishing a Recreation Enterprise Fund. The Fund would be established for FY21 but operate with a subsidy from the General Fund, which would likely be required

the first few years before it became self-sustaining. There were particular challenges this year (and for the next several years) due to space constraints imposed by construction at the High School.

Another initiative underway was to look at after-school program offerings, in collaboration with the School Department; preliminary discussions under way with the Council on Aging, private schools etc. to identify potential space options.

Finally, Marshall noted he was looking to covert an office manager position to an Assistant Recreation Director to help the Department grow.

[Caputo left the meeting; Dash took over as acting Chair.]

Facilities: Steve Dorrance (Director, Facilities) was present. The budget had increased ~1% from last year. Dorrance was concerned with upcoming contract renewals (e.g. on-call electrical, elevator servicing, etc.) and had put in conservative estimates for these items. Utilities were a significant cost driver - Dorrance had negotiated a favorable rate for natural gas therms; water costs were reduced via shifting to Water Enterprise Fund. Deferred capital outlay included items needed for regular maintenance, e.g. snow blowers.

In terms of challenges for the department, Dorrance stressed he was working under the current fiscal constraints to reduce costs. However, there was still a large volume of needs to be addressed and putting off the work would lead to more expensive deferred maintenance down the road. He identified potential for savings via bringing HVAC services in house at some point down the road if the budget allowed.

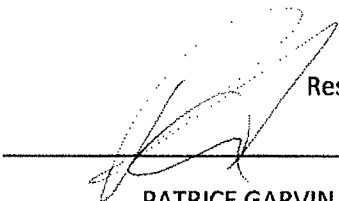
Epstein asked about cleaning of the new DPW building which was scheduled to open in December – there was no line item for this work. Dorrance said the cost would have to be absorbed some other way, possibly through overtime allocation; would need to coordinate a suitable cleaning schedule.

ADJOURNMENT:

The next budget meeting would be held on October 31 to review the remaining departments.

Motion: To adjourn. (Vote passed 2-0)

Respectfully Submitted,



PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator