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**TOWN OF BELMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Beech Street Center
Monday, November 16, 2015
7:00 PM**

**APPROVED
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
DATE: 02-22-16**

CALL TO ORDER

A (public forum) meeting of the Board was called to order in open session at 7:07 p.m. by Chair Sami Baghdady at the Beech Street Center. Selectman Jim Williams and Selectman Mark Paolillo were present. Town Administrator David Kale was present; Assistant Town Administrator Phyllis Marshall was not in attendance.

Chair Baghdady began by pausing for a moment of silence for the victims of the Paris terrorist event. He expressed concern and sympathy for all impacted by this act.

Chair Baghdady then turned to the only agenda item (the Waverley Commuter Rail discussion). He said he hopes that the options will be laid out clearly and that residents will make their wishes known. He then introduced Senator Brownsberger.

Senator Brownsberger said that it is important that people in town have input and have an opportunity to put their ideas forward. He thanked the Selectmen for hosting the forum and the MBTA for engaging Belmont in this discussion.

Chair Baghdady then reviewed the format for the evening.

ACTION BY APPOINTMENT

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Mass DOT) presentation to provide updated information about the Waverly Commuter Rail Station and options to bring the facility into required compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations

The following appeared before the Board:

- Erik Stoothoff, Chief Engineer, MBTA
- John Doherty, Project Manager, MBTA
- Paul Hadley, Director of Commuter Rail Projects-North, MBTA
- Fayssal J. Hussein, PE (Consultant)
- Senator Brownsberger
- Representative Rogers

Mr. Stoothoff began by noting that this evening's presentation is similar to the one provided to the Board last month.

Mr. Doherty began by reviewing the existing conditions at the Waverley Square station. The recent repairs at Waverley triggered the requirement that the station be brought into ADA compliance. There are about 117 users per day at this station. To upgrade the Waverley station so that it complies with the ADA, he said, would cost about \$30M for high platforms (adjacent to the track). Mini-high platforms (small sections of the platform would be accessible for handicap access) would run about \$15-16M, but it is not a preferable option. He then explained where the elevators and stairs might be placed, in relation to the platform, in these scenarios.

Mr. Stoothoff provided clarifying remarks on the ramping alternatives and emergency regress options.

Mr. Doherty then discussed the Belmont Center Station. Improvements will need to happen at that station in the near future. He noted that ridership needs to improve overall throughout Belmont. He briefly discussed the Feasibility Assessments.

Regarding options, he noted that the Waverley and Belmont Center stations could be closed and combined into one station at or slightly to the east of the current Belmont Center station. However, this is not an option that is currently "on the table". It impacts many residents in Belmont and the curvature of the tracks makes it unworkable, as well.

Regarding the South Pleasant Street alternative, Mr. Doherty explained where the station would be located and what it might look like, including its elevators and the platform. The MBTA needs to identify funding sources.

Selectmen Comments

Selectman Paolillo asked how those making the recent repairs did not know that fixing the Waverley station would trigger the ADA compliance. Mr. Stoothoff explained that repaving the platform constituted reconstructing the platform. Selectman Paolillo followed up by asking: How could this not have been known? Mr. Stoothoff replied that the MBTA was not aware that repaving would trigger the compliance.

Selectman Williams reminded the audience that all sessions with the MBTA have been open and in public. He then referenced a letter he wrote and published online which outlined three options. The MBTA did not reply to the letter and Selectman Williams asked for more information on one of the options. Mr. Stoothoff provided some additional information. "Time variances" refer to how much time is allowed in which to comply with the ADA compliance.

Audience Comments and Questions

Mr. Sterling Crockett, a resident from Precinct 5, read a statement concerning the MBTA's actions. The statement was critical of the MBTA, stating that they acted in bad faith or in negligence.

Mr. Vincent Stanton stated that he has never seen a nine-car passenger train on the railroad line under discussion (some of the earlier MBTA comments had suggested that being able to deal

with 9-car trains was one of their considerations). He then offered comments on how all of this relates to – and could be coordinated with – a potential community bike path running through Belmont. He said he is very interested in working with the MBTA on the ramping system and in obtaining federal dollars.

Mr. Don Mercier asked about the amount of ramp required (800 feet long) as well as the location of the ramps. Mr. Stoothoff offered some additional information on growth of the ridership necessitating the length of ramp. Mr. Mercier expressed several additional concerns.

Ms. Judith Ananian Sarno, TMM Pct. 3, said she is adamantly opposed to closing the Waverley Station. She then asked about the \$30M quote to upgrade the Waverley station. She expressed concern about the insertion of bridges (in the Pleasant Street alternative) that would increase traffic in the currently quiet neighborhoods. Mr. Stoothoff said that the \$30M was to make Waverley accessible only. He explained the one bridge rendering included within the Pleasant Street option. He then provided additional information on the proposal.

Ms. Erin Lubien, Unity Ave., noted that there must be other options. She explained potential other options for accessibility and for parking.

Ms. Annis Sengupta, an urban planner from 35 Marion Road, explained several reasons why the South Pleasant Street option was not desirable. She said other options exist and there are many people in town that would be willing to contribute to the process. She discussed the access points that the two existing stations offer.

Mr. David Webster, TMM Pct. 4, stated that he rides the Waverley Station daily and that these stations are a community asset and is pedestrian-friendly public transportation options. He spoke unfavorably of the Pleasant Street option. He noted that Belmont's streets are already congested and that Waverley is the "most dense" part of Belmont. The Waverley station should be made accessible – closing it down makes it completely inaccessible.

Ms. Rachel Grygorcewicz, a Waltham resident, said she is vehemently against closing the Waverley station. This would close a much needed life-line in to Boston.

Mr. Chris Morris, Barnard Road, asked several questions about the combined station option. Chair Baghdady provided some information based on Mr. Morris's questions. Belmont, he said, is not ready to sell land to the MBTA. Mr. Stoothoff said that the idea is being fleshed out and that the MBTA is opening up the public conversation.

Mr. David Lehoux, of Watertown, said his wife is handicapped and uses the Waverley station. A Pleasant Street station would be a further walk for his wife. The bus option would be eliminated on Pleasant Street. He expressed that the walkability factor is key.

Ms. Janet MacDonald stressed that disability access is a civil right.

Ms. Anne Mahon, TMM Pct. 4, said that Waverley is surrounded by low income housing. She said Waverley needs to be kept open so that the most vulnerable people in town can continue to

have access to the train.

Mr. Steven Gage said he is familiar with the train line. He supported more commuting possibilities in the area. Both stations should remain open.

Mr. Kevin Cunningham, TMM Pct. 4, quoted a Patch article from June 2010 which illustrated that the Pleasant Street alternative was already under discussion at least five years ago – it is not a new option created to address the current problem. Separately, he noted that the current proposals failed to address how bus service etc. might play a role in any of the scenarios.

Ms. Martha Cohen, spoke to the cost of making Waverley accessible being the same cost as building a new station. She said the noise pollution (at the new station) would be unimaginable.

Mr. Steve Covert, Hull Street, spoke to better accessibility in keeping the two stations open. As an experienced engineer, he added some input regarding the engineering.

Ms. Nancy Kougeas, Somerset Street, supported keeping the existing two stations that people can actually walk to. Replacing this setup with one station that no one can walk to, she said, makes no sense.

Mr. Roy Epstein, Warrant Committee member, discussed disability action issues at the Waverley station. He explained how a wheelchair-bound person gets into Boston: they call The Ride. The Ride makes Waverley accessibility irrelevant. He suggested that a much more effective investment of the money being discussed would be to fund The Ride at enhanced levels.

Mr. John [??] of Waltham spoke to the need for better and more efficient cross connections to Waltham and Watertown.

Ms. Sue Bass, TMM Pct. 3, asked for the convening of a charrette, as had been suggested at the earlier BOS meeting. She said that no one can walk to the proposed Pleasant Street station and that the money should be spent in other ways, e.g., adapting Waverley Square for less than \$30M.

Ms. Melissa MacIntire, of the Winnbrook area, said she moved to Belmont for the public transportation options. Young people buy houses to get into the city.

Mr. Jim Savas, of Pct. 7, noted that major roads are being narrowed and that traffic has become intense. He asserted that the stations need to be kept open.

Mr. John Rizzo spoke to the credibility of the MBTA and he encouraged the MBTA to do its homework.

Mr. Jimmy [??], of Watertown, said he is handicapped and needs access to the train. Watertown residents use Waverley station. Closing Waverley would impact both the 73 and 74 busses. He supported keeping both stations open.

Ms. Marilyn P. Devaney, the Governor's Council Representative, spoke to the impact on neighboring communities and said she does not support the closing of Waverley. She encouraged the Selectmen to write a letter to support keeping both stations open.

Mr. Mark D'Andrea, Waverley Street, expressed that the one-station option will disrupt the commerce. He said both stations need to be kept open.

Chair Baghdady read from an MBTA letter sent to the Architectural Access Board on October 26, 2015 concerning the funding of the South Pleasant option. Chair Baghdady requested assurance from the MBTA that relocating the station to South Pleasant Street was not a foregone conclusion. MBTA staff assured Chair Baghdady that all options are being considered. Chair Baghdady suggested that the charrette be set up to discuss reducing the cost (to fix Waverley) from \$30M. He said that he hopes the MBTA has heard the concerns expressed tonight and that keeping Waverley open and accessible be further explored.

NEXT MEETINGS

- Friday, December 11, 2015 at 8:00 a.m. (Working Session)
- Monday, December 14 at 8:00 a.m. Selectmen's Meeting Room
- Monday, December 14 at 7:00 p.m. Selectmen's Meeting Room
- Monday, December 21 at 7:00 p.m. Selectmen's Meeting Room (POBs)

The Board moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:54 p.m.



Mr. David Kale, Town Administrator