

**BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
FINAL**

2016 JAN 28 AM 9:07

**JANUARY 13, 2016, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY COMMUNITY ROOM**

Present: Chair Libenson; Members Alcock, Dash, Epstein, Fallon, Gammill, Helgen, Lisanke, McLaughlin, Mennis, Sarno, Schreiber; BOS Chair Baghdady; School Committee Rep. Slap

Town Administrator Kale

Members Absent: McVay, Mennis, Starzec

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Chair Libenson.

Chair Libenson began by turning to the first item on the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of 12/2/15 were approved with three abstentions.

The General Government subcommittee minutes (April 29, 2015) were approved with 3 in favor and 2 abstentions.

Minuteman Update/Special Town Meeting (STM)

Chair Libenson reminded the WC that the STM will be held on Monday, February 8 at 7:00 at the Chenery Middle School. The League of Women Voters will hold its warrant briefing on Thursday, January 28 at 7:00 at the Beech Street Center.

Chair Libenson invited Mr. Jack Weis to the WC table. Mr. Weis provided some background information on the process concerning amending the Minuteman regional agreement. Arlington, he said, began the conversation about amending this agreement several years ago – they wanted weighted voting (as they send a large number of students) and a change in how capital costs would be funded as a condition to considering a new building project. A task force was formed to explore this issue and the first amended agreement was voted on in 2014. This version did not go forward. It was resurrected in the fall of 2015 by a member of the Minuteman School Committee who is also a member of the Boxborough Board of Selectmen. Minuteman urged that the Selectmen of the member towns help craft a revised regional agreement. There is now a revised amended agreement which will need to be voted on.

Mr. Weis highlighted the proposed changes to the regional agreement, which include:

- a four year rolling average for enrollment (which impacts operating costs)
- changing the capital allocation formula, using the same four year average along with a membership fee of 1% and a factor incorporating a community's wealth combined with the percentage of a community's enrollment at Minuteman.

Mr. Weis then discussed the impact of the capital assessment formula on Belmont. Based on Minuteman's most recent estimates for a new building project, it will cost Belmont about \$20,000 more per year, under the new formula.

Concerning non-member towns, they will be assessed a capital fee which will be no less than the *average* fee assigned to the member towns. The state (DESE) will need to approve this.

Another change concerns the voting of the member towns. Towns who send the largest number of students will now have more voting weight. Mr. Weis said it's difficult to say if Belmont will be better or worse off with the shift to weighted voting, because it is not clear how many towns, and which towns, will remain in the district if the revised agreement passes. But he does not believe that change will have a material impact on the weight of Belmont's vote one way or the other.

WC members asked some clarifying questions concerning the debt service responsibility for both member and non-member towns. Mr. Weis provided more detailed information on the new formula.

Member McLaughlin noted that there has been an ongoing concern that the proposed new building is being over built, i.e., it's too large. The new facility is slated for 628 students, which does not feel right sized. Under the old agreement, non-member towns were getting a free ride on capital and a better deal on operating expenses. Belmont is faced with tough decisions, including voting no, which could lead the way to an expensive renovation with no state aid and no contributions from non-member towns.

Member McLaughlin then discussed the new facility debt vote, which must be approved by the Town Meetings of all 16 member towns. If one town votes no, Minuteman can, and has said that it will, hold a special election in the district to approve the debt. Such an election requires a *majority* of voters across the district to approve the debt.

However, he continued, the revised amended agreement gives Belmont some control over its own destiny. The STM in February will address this agreement. If it passes, there will need to be another STM to authorize the new facility debt. He will recommend that TM votes *against* the new facility debt. The project, he said, has been ill-conceived from the beginning. If the debt issue does not pass at the TM level, Minuteman will be forced to go to a district-wide vote.

Member McLaughlin then provided more detail on what could happen if an individual community votes no on the new building debt but the debt is approved by the district. In that situation, the community could petition to leave the district and, if that withdrawal

was denied, they would not be liable for the new debt. If the community were permitted to leave, they can still send students to Minuteman on a “non-member town” basis. Also discussed was that a community who opts to leave the membership will still get to vote on the new building debt.

Member McLaughlin laid out several scenarios that could impact Belmont depending on how the voting goes concerning both the revised amended agreement and the new building debt. The WC discussed issues relating to these scenarios – and the impact to Belmont, e.g., leaving the member district, voting no on the debt, funding a renovation, seeking other technical education options, options for non-member towns, DESE’s role, its enrollment trends, etc.

Mr. Weis explained that non-member students cannot be sent to Minuteman as freshmen if their district offers similar programs. This has started to impact total non-member enrollment.

Chair Libenson requested to know Belmont’s capital costs under the two different scenarios – i.e., if Belmont is in or out of the district. Mr. Weis explained that the enrollment of the building and the total number of member towns will impact this calculation. But, that from a fiscal perspective, being out of the district will likely cost a town less.

Mr. Kale alerted the WC to handouts prepared by Minuteman, which lay out various scenarios concerning the fiscal impact of the seven communities requesting to leave the district.

Chair Libenson indicated that the WC will not vote on this issue tonight. Member McLaughlin will lay out his thinking on the upcoming votes (and the consequences thereof) to hopefully elucidate some of the complexity of this issue. The WC agreed that issues relating to Minuteman need to somehow be simplified.

CPA Update

Chair Libenson will send to the WC the CPA materials (the applications for funding) and the WC template (for analysis of the applications). He asked that the WC provide its feedback/questions by Thursday, January 21. A final set of questions will be formulated at the January 28 meeting. The CPA will present to the WC at the March 2 meeting.

Free Cash Update

BOS Chair Baghdady stated that the free cash amount has not yet been certified by the DOR, but it is in the \$7M dollar range.

Chair Libenson requested to know the exact free cash number as soon as it is certified.

Discuss: Town Meeting Letter Draft

Chair Libenson requested feedback on the draft letter. The WC agreed that a number be provided for Belmont's portion of capital/debt service on Minuteman per year. Member Fallon raised a question about reporting on the stabilization funds. BOS Chair Baghdady suggested that Article 3 (authorizing the Moderator to appoint a BHS building committee) be included in the letter. If the MSBA approves Belmont, this gives us a head-start on going forward.

The draft letter will be voted on at the January 27 meeting.

Updates: Board of Selectmen, School Committee, and Minuteman

Board of Selectmen: BOS Chair Baghdady reported that the BOS heard a presentation by Mr. Glenn Clancy concerning the sewer and stormwater systems and rehabilitation programs. He informed the WC that the town is working to remediate the systems. He encouraged WC members to view the presentation. Also, the Board of Selectmen has signed the Warrant for the February 8, 2016 STM, which includes three articles.

BOS Chair Baghdady provided brief updates on the Uplands (which is underway) and Cushing Village (which is currently on hold). Mr. Starr will present to the Planning Board on February 2.

School Committee: SC Rep Slap reported that the SC recently heard a "space needs" presentation by the Superintendent. The May TM may deal with a vote concerning the need to install modulars at the Chenery. She noted that every inch of space is being utilized across the district. The high school is currently using modulars for classroom space. She encouraged the WC to view the presentation.

Adjournment

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:21 p.m.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary