

MINUTES
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2007
SPECIAL JOINT SESSION
COMMUNITY ROOM, CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL
7:00PM

A special meeting of the Board was called to order in open session at 7:03 PM in the Community Room of the Chenery Middle School. All members were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present. The Board met in joint session with members of the Warrant Committee, School Committee, and Capital Budget Committee as the "Blueprint Group" (formerly the Structural Group). The purpose of the group is to look at ways to make Town government more efficient and less costly.

The Group heard presentations from subgroups.

Outsourcing (Lynne Doblin): This group was looking at the feasibility of outsourcing food services and landscaping functions. After discussions with town officials it appears that fleet maintenance would be a better area to pursue than landscaping. Public Works Director Peter Castanino said the next step is to try to make comparisons with how other towns handle the vehicle maintenance function and how Belmont compares. Ms. Doblin said the group hopes to have a recommendation by the fall on whether to pursue this.

Elizabeth Gibson reported on the School Committee's discussions on food service. The cost of school lunch was raised on March 1 to cover the cost of health insurance increases for food service workers. Finance Director Gerry Missal has also surveyed other towns about their experiences in this area. The key goal of outsourcing would be to save on the retirement costs of the employees. Diane Stafford said that the schools that do outsource this function also had the highest school lunch prices, though it is possible they may have higher quality food. The schools will continue to look at this.

Waste Management (Robie White): The group was looking at whether a transfer station is worth pursuing. The Town could potentially save \$1 million a year by investing \$1.5 million in a new transfer station, but the impact on residents might offset the benefit of that savings - residents would have to bring items to the transfer station themselves or hire someone to do it for them. The Solid Waste Committee had looked at this and felt that there would not be significant savings once resident costs are factored in. Currently, the Town pays \$2.3 million annually for trash pickup, hauling, dumping, and burning; for pickup and hauling of recyclables, and for yard waste collection, transport, and composting. The cost of operating a transfer station is estimated at between \$800,000 and \$1.2 million per year, mostly for staffing and hauling costs. The group recommends continuing to pursue this, refining the cost figures, determining the political interest and the possible alternative of increasing recycling without going to a transfer station.

Mr. Castanino said the Solid Waste & Recycling Committee continues to look at these issues as well. The landfill is going to be capped next year and the Town needs to make a decision about what that land will be used for.

Pat Bruschi noted that the Town's first override in 1990 was about \$2 million and was billed as specifically for trash collection. There might be some pushback from residents if the Town stops providing that service while retaining that revenue stream.

Asset Management (Ralph Jones): The time is approaching when most of Belmont's sewer pipe will have reached the end of its useful life and will have to be replaced. There is potential to save millions of dollars if this process is anticipated, planned for and managed efficiently with accurate data and cost tracking. If the assets are not maintained, the Town either has to pay more in

replacement costs or accept a lower level of service. A very rough estimate of the total replacement cost of all the Town's pipes, roads, buildings, and Light Department assets would be about \$700 million. The Town is assembling the necessary data that must be collected in order to begin putting together an asset management plan.

Health Insurance: Chairman Solomon noted the Board will be taking the self-insurance issue up on Monday and expects to make a decision on the matter then. Selectman Brownsberger discussed a proposed piece of legislation that would allow the town to join the state Group Insurance Commission (GIC). For Belmont, the potential savings could be 20-30%. Mr. Brownsberger feels the bill has a good chance of passage which could allow for the Town to join the GIC by July 1, 2009. The overall premium increase this year for the GIC is 3.7%, which is quite a bit less than Belmont's. The legislation would require the Town to adopt coalition bargaining. There was discussion about the pros and cons of doing this compared to the possible benefits of joining the GIC.

Regionalization (Mark Paolillo): A meeting was held two weeks ago with 9 other communities. The towns are generally supportive of the formation of a Metro Northwest Consortium to pursue collective purchasing opportunities, possible regional transportation services and sharing of services. Another meeting will take place in April with DPW directors and school superintendents to continue the discussions. Joint collective purchasing RFPs would need to be developed. Mr. Younger said the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission is already putting together an RFP for joint purchase of office supplies.

School/Town Consolidation: (Pat Bruschi) The group has been focusing on IT as the most promising area for consolidation. A proposal is being discussed to consolidate IT functions into one centralized department. This would not save money but it would allow more efficient and effective delivery of services. The plan would require two new positions including one that is deemed to be necessary under the current structure as well. There would be one unified IT budget. It would also involve a unified office space which could be in the Homer building or in the Water building. The group recommends that the proposal be presented in more detail to the Selectmen and the School Committee for discussion of next steps and timelines. It is probably unrealistic to expect implementation to be possible before FY09 because of the integral aspect of the budgetary changes to the success of the structure.

Mark Clark said that this integration is happening on a de facto basis anyway, it is just a question of finding a formal way of structuring it.

Energy/Resources Savings (Jenny Fallon): The group has moved forward to purchase a new module of the SchoolDude software through the school's budget which will allow monitoring of energy use and informed decisions about energy use. This should be up and running by next fall.

Systems & Process Efficiencies (Tom Younger): Mr. Younger and Selectman Firenze will spend some significant time this summer looking at this in anticipation of the FY09 budget.

Core Activities (Selectman Firenze): This group has a lot of different ideas, it continues to meet and the process of delving into these questions is helpful. Mr. Firenze said one way to look at this is what loss of service would cause people to leave town, versus what loss of service would cause no one to leave town.

The next meeting of the Blueprint Group will be tentatively scheduled for Monday, May 7, at 7:00 PM at the Chenery Middle School Community Room.

The Board adjourned at 9:04 PM.

Thomas G. Younger, Town Administrator