

**Town of Belmont
Capital Budget Committee
Beech Street Center, Conference Room, Second Floor
Thursday Evening, March 4, 2010, 7:00 p.m.**

Mrs. Brusch called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. Members of the Committee present were: M. Patricia Brusch, Mark F. Clark, John Conte, Jennifer Fallon, Ralph Jones, Anne Marie Mahoney and Rebecca Vose. Also present were Thomas Younger, Town Administrator; and Barbara Hagg, Town Accountant and staff liaison to the Committee.

The Committee had the following material before it:

1. Agenda prepared by Mark Clark, Secretary, to which was attached draft of minutes of meeting 11/12/09.

Mrs. Brusch noted that it had been brought to her attention that the League of Woman Voters' candidates' night would be held on the evening of March 25, the next date scheduled for a meeting of this Committee. She suggested, however, that this Committee is scheduled to meet at 6:00 p.m. and might be able to conclude scheduled interviews in time to allow people to attend the candidates' night. There was general consensus that Mrs. Brusch's proposal was a plan that this Committee should pursue.

Mrs. Brusch then suggested that before undertaking a general discussion it would be appropriate to act on pending minutes.

Action on Minutes of Previous Meeting
(Item 3 on Committee Agenda)
Meeting of 11/12/09

Mr. Clark pointed out that the issue upon which this Committee had been asked to opine concerning the proposal for an electrical substation had been the purchase of real estate, not the issuance of bonds, nevertheless, the draft minutes accurately reflect the discussion at this Committee's last meeting. Mrs. Brusch observed that the issue is now moot because the Town Meeting had rejected the proposal by the Municipal Light Department, and the entire matter is likely to return to the next town meeting.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the draft minutes of the meeting of November 12, 2009, were approved as presented. Ms. Fallon abstained from the vote as she had been unable to attend the previous meeting.

General Announcements and Discussion (including Schedule Discussion)
(Items 2 & 4 on Committee Agenda)

The Committee undertook a wide-ranging discussion, during which the following points were made. This year there is a puzzling decrease in the total value of capital

requests being made to this Committee. This is not because the Town Administrator has restricted the requests that are incorporated into a budget. This Committee is seeing all of the requests that were made.

Currently, this Committee is working with a total allocation from general tax of \$2.3M. This is based upon a “needs” budget. If the Town Administrator is required to develop an “available funds budget,” he is disinclined to reduce the allocation available to this Committee. He is inclined to try to find reductions elsewhere. This Committee is seeing all of the requests that were made. If it is assumed that debt service (for the High School HVAC units) and the pavement requests are to be funded as requested, this Committee has available \$1,045,793 to fund \$1,527,987 in initial requests.

Capital requests have been received from the Police Department, School Department (including school IT), Public Works (which may assume some responsibility in connection with a library parking lot request), Community Development (pavement management, also a sewer project and the library parking lot, both of which might be shared with Public Works) and Building Services. The Town Administrator suggests that the use of pavement management funds might change because of possible needs in connection with improvements in Belmont Center. The Director of Community Development is scheduled to discuss this with the Selectmen.

The point was made several times that the Town is in a situation where requests for capital funds may be affected by plans for other capital expenditures, particularly large capital projects. Mrs. Mahoney pointed out that some proposals for a new Library would effect questions raised about the White Field House. The effect of temporary modular housing for Wellington students on the condition of the High School parking lot has been raised. The School Department is seeking funds for tennis courts and the Municipal Light Department is considering proposing some of the school’s tennis courts for a new substation. The School Department is seeking funds for a feasibility study regarding its science laboratory at the High School. It is unclear whether that is part of phase one of the comprehensive renovation of the High School building or a temporary measure required before phase one can be implemented.

During the discussion of the inter-related nature of capital projects facing the Town, the point was made that it would be appropriate to discuss in this context a letter that Mr. Clark had recently sent to the Board of Selectmen, the Library Trustees, and the School Committee. Mr. Clark’s letter concerns use by the Town of property on the north side of Concord Avenue and south of the railroad tracks. In particular, the letter suggests that the need for a site for an electrical substation may be an opportunity to acquire the so-called “Pure Coat” site in connection with several Town needs. The Municipal Light Department, however, is looking for an inexpensive site that raises as little controversy as possible. Currently, the temporary committee that is seeking a site for the proposed substation has a limited charge that is consistent with that narrower goal. Mr. Clark suggested that that committee should consider the over-all needs of the community. Mr. Jones raised the question whether the Selectman should broaden the scope of the charge given to that committee.

The chairman of the temporary committee that is seeking a site for the proposed electrical substation has raised the idea of compensating the School Department for the loss of field space associated with the potential siting of the electrical substation on property near the High School by transferring to the School Department the so-called Maxim property (the site of a former private residence on the northern side of Concord Avenue). Mrs. Brusch reminded the Committee that the acquisition of the Maxim property was part of a larger plan for siting a new library building and solving the skating rink dilemma. She pointed out that the Library enjoys major support that could be expected to object to any arrangement that is perceived to disadvantage the Library.

In the course of discussing the north side of Concord Avenue, it was noted that the state school assistance program does not currently require a specific acreage in connection with renovations of a high school. Mr. Younger pointed out that the Town is currently trying to establish clear title to the property on which the high school tennis courts are located, part of which the Municipal Light Department might propose for the electrical substation.

Based upon the discussions so far, the Town Accountant will seek to arrange the following schedule. The Building Services Department, the Community Development Department, and the Public Works Department will be scheduled for the meeting on March 11. The Police Department and the School Department will be scheduled for the meeting on March 25. The order of interviews on each of those days will be in the order given above.

The warrant articles for the Annual Town Meeting closes on March 5 (the day after the current meeting of this Committee). There are several items that may not be resolved by March 5, including particularly the siting of an electrical substation and disposition of the former Benton branch library building. It is likely that these issues will be represented on the warrant by "place-holder" articles. It is also possible that the budget, including a capital budget, will be taken up at an adjourned session of the Annual Town Meeting to be convened in June. In any event, it is too early to know what articles on the warrant this Committee will be expected to opine upon.

This Committee took some time to address the fifth item on its agenda (its annual report to Town Meeting) (see discussion below) and then returned to a more general discussion of capital issues facing the Town.

Mr. Jones inquired that if there were an override would it be appropriate to seek capital funds and to what projects might those capital funds be devoted. The Town Administrator agreed that capital funds should be sought. Mr. Clark suggested that he had in mind two particular uses to which increased funds could be devoted. One is pavement management and the other is actually not within the jurisdiction of this Committee; that is the so-called "orphans" -- the smaller or routine capital expenditures, often capital maintenance, that are frequently neglected. Ms. Fallon pointed out that this Committee has recommended a technology fund to address the issue particularly of

routine computer replacement. Mrs. Brusch noted several “orphan” categories which have confronted this Committee, including chain link fencing, painting and carpeting. If these items and funding for them is part of the current budget, the Board of Selectmen (rather than this Committee) will have an opportunity to influence the expenditure as appropriate.

Both Mr. Clark and Mrs. Brusch mentioned the need to consider roofs again. Ms. Fallon suggested that a particular project could be presented to the voters as a “Capital Outlay Exclusion” encompassing only one year. Mr. Jones suggested that a five-year debt program could be developed. Ms. Fallon pointed out that Winchester has established a restricted fund in connection with an override that can be used only for specified projects.

Mrs. Brusch asked all Committee members to develop questions for department heads who are to be interviewed and email those questions to her so that she can work on them this weekend. Her request prompted a number of questions and observations directed at specific requests for FY2011. Ms. Fallon pointed out that Building Services is again requesting funds for a truck. Ms. Fallon asked the Town Administrator whether the request is appropriate. Questions were also raised whether the chain link fence mentioned by the School Department is a School Department responsibility or a Public Works Department responsibility. Is the tot lot surface requested by the Public Works Department a routine maintenance item or a capital item for this Committee?

Ms. Fallon pointed out that it would be appropriate to know the scope of the Town’s sidewalk snow removal responsibility before addressing the sidewalk plow request by the Public Works Department. She suggested that the Town should have a by-law requiring home owners to remove snow from sidewalks in front of their homes. Mr. Jones pointed out that such proposals in the past have wrestled unsuccessfully with the issue of the responsibility of those homeowners who are physically unable to shovel snow. Mr. Younger opined that it would be unlikely that such a by-law proposal could be developed in time for the Annual Town Meeting. The Town Accountant inquired how much flexibility she might exercise regarding the scheduling of interviews for this Committee. In response, Mrs. Brusch indicated that she is very reluctant to consider any schedule other than that discussed by this Committee. In any event, any switching around of interviewees must be within the two dates (March 11 and 25) previously discussed.

The Committee’s Report to the Annual Town Meeting

(Item 5 on the Committee’s Agenda)

During the previous discussion, the Committee turned to the content of its report to the 2010 Annual Town Meeting. Mr. Clark indicated that he had begun to edit the report, that he intended to include background material from previous reports but that he is suggesting new material concerning pavement management and the planning activity currently undertaken by the Planning Board. He pointed out that the effort to accommodate improvement of Belmont Center might provide appropriate material. Ms.

Fallon described the Planning Board effort and offered to circulate certain of the materials developed by the Planning Board to members of this Committee via email. There was a general consensus that the Committee would consider favorably a report as outlined.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark F. Clark