

WARRANT COMMITTEE FY07 MEETING MINUTES  
FINAL  
MAY 2, 2007, 7:30 P.M.  
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Meeting was called to order at 7:30 by Chair Jones.

Present: Town Administrator Younger, Town Accountant Hagg, BOS Chair Firenze, School Committee Chair Bowe, Town Treasurer Carmen

Absent: Members Christensen, Hofmann, Tillotson; and Assistant Town Administrator Conti

Minutes Approved for 4-18-07 and 4-23-07

After corrections were made, the minutes of 4-18-07 and 4-23-07 were approved, with no abstentions for 4-18-07, and one abstention for 4-23-07.

#### Reports from Subcommittees

##### Fire Department Report

Member Allison distributed a revised handout and began the summary report. The budget remains basically the same as it has been, she said. The fire hose is challenging to budget for - it is a capital requirement, but it is not an annual line-item. By FY09 we will know the operating costs of the new fire houses, but it needs to be noted that these operating costs won't apply to other new buildings because Fire Department staff are responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of their own buildings. The town provides fire-fighting services 24/7, she continued, but the number of fires has been declining, which leads to excess capacity (over-staffing). Regionalization is one response to this issue. It has been talked about for 5 years, and the Chief is enthusiastic. One possibility is to use the Fire Department staff to provide more services to town, e.g., the provision of Advanced Life Support (ALS) services. There may be other such possibilities and it will require a major data-gathering effort to uncover potential sources for regionalization. To that end, Allison explained, she has obtained a \$3K grant to support the initial phase of data research. A study might look at where we are presently and ask "Where might we be by 2012?"

A discussion then ensued and touched on the topics of 1) ALS versus Basic Life Support (BLS) (ALS has a higher fee than BLS and requires a higher level of staff training - regionalization via ALS may be a way to form a bond with neighboring communities); 2) the challenge of getting the Fire Department interested in preventive measures (such as building fire codes, sprinkler inspections, etc.); 3) finding alternative, productive uses of staff time (given that there are fewer fires, this points to a more aggressive look at regionalization).

Member Allison requested that Town Administrator Younger work with her to draft a description of the research assignment and perhaps post it on Craig's List.

Member Curtis commended member Allison and group and noted that the budget growth is impressive.

##### Police Department Report

Member Paolillo issued a handout and began the report by stating that the key issue and key problem concerns the loss of Police Department personnel. In FY06, staffing began at 47 officers. Eight officers were lost that year, which caused increased overtime hours (due to reduced staffing). This continual turnover, Paolillo noted, has made it hard to get a true sense of department operations. The personnel problem has resulted in an undermanned department. Chief McLaughlin is addressing the retention problem. Paolillo added that this issue drives not only overtime costs higher, but also training and hiring costs are driven higher as well. Service suffers, he added, and regionalization collaboration is being considered.

Member White offered that the police officer retention issue is exacerbated further by a lack of clear priorities set forth by the police department. BOS Chair Firenze said that this relates to the concept of zero-based budgeting. The department needs to ask: "What are the activities we want to fund? What are the staffing needs? What do we want the staff focused on?" The issue of supervision, Firenze continued - e.g., numbers of captains, assistants, sergeants, etc. - may need to be evaluated as well. Chair Jones noted that the tacit raid agreement among the larger communities is being broken now. The question of how to keep young officers in Belmont when more exciting and challenging positions are out there needs to be addressed across the board, Jones said. Firenze stated that it is reasonable to expect that after salary and training costs upwards of \$50-60K, officers can be asked to agree to stay with the job for a certain number of years, or reimburse the town if they leave. Member Bruschi wondered whether we could ask the town that raids us to pay the training fees.

Member Paolillo reiterated that this issue impacts the force fully. "It's more than a cost and productivity issue. When the force is never fully manned, it is hard to measure the delivery of its service, or make decisions about the department's organization."

#### General Government Report

Member Heigham passed out a handout and noted that the 5 departments: Accountant, Assessors, Selectmen's, Town Clerk, and Treasurer are operating as they have in previous years. None have increased by more than 5%. "They are static regarding money spent," he said.

There is an issue regarding Human Resources, he continued, in that the HR Director is paid more than the maximum allowable - this after only 3 years in the position.

Town Administrator Younger offered that additional responsibilities have been given to her and that the BOS want her to retain these responsibilities. BOS Chair Firenze concurred that her added responsibilities in union negotiations (with 8-9 unions) account for why she's over the maximum range. Younger added that these duties had previously been outsourced to labor counsel and that is a cost savings now on legal fees for both negotiations and other labor issues.

Regarding IT, Member Heigham declared that it is growing at a high rate. There is nothing to do except attempt to keep increases modest here. The increase in the budget this year was for costs that were shifted from the school.

Member White asked if there were any consolidation opportunities within these 5 departments? Heigham replied that statutory regulations apply and that there is not a lot of overlap among the departments. A brief discussion ensued about the feasibility of consolidation and economies of scale on any possible level concerning the 5 departments.

#### Department of Health Report

Member Hobbs handed out a draft handout and declared: "This is a small department that is doing a huge array of tasks." Were Director Moultrup to retire, it would leave a huge void: she is covering a lot, and has an RN. It will be a problem if the next department head is not a nurse. The department has been unable to fill the 10-hour-per-week RN job. Chair Jones inquired whether a fulltime public health nurse could be hired as next director? Member Bruschi reminded

the WC that Moultrup was hired on as a nurse and then took over as Director. BOS Chair Firenze raised the issue of expanding on regionalization in public health. Chair Jones replied that many of the functions that local health departments are doing, have traditionally been state functions. "Localities are doing what the state couldn't or wouldn't do. We'd have to fight state bureaucracy to regionalize," he said. Brusch said that a lot of regionalization is already being done.

#### Other

Chair Jones stated that Members Curtis and Doblin will present subcommittee reports next week. On May 16, he expects the WC to return to the budget and free cash conversation. BOS Chair Firenze noted that the BOS have not reached consensus on free cash allocation. He is proposing to use \$1.6M, while his colleagues are proposing \$1.9M.

Regarding roads, BOS Chair Firenze mentioned that a stabilization fund vote at Town Meeting would be needed. Town Accountant Hagg explained that a Road Stabilization Fund would not be needed if the intent is to appropriate funds for the roads and they are spent as road projects come forward. Monies put into any Stabilization Fund requires a Town Meeting vote out in order to spend it.

BOS Chair Firenze informed the WC that the Belmont Media Center (BMC)/VFW plan is moving forward. The BMC remains interested in occupying part of the VFW building and will pay the building utilities. If Town Meeting were to give the BOS authorization to lease [to the VFW] this town land for a period of more than 5 years, then the VFW could borrow the money to do repair work on the building. Firenze added: "They would have a secure revenue stream from the BMC." Chair Jones asked if they would cover sewer and water expenses.

Member Heigham motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:20.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio  
Recording Secretary