

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes

FINAL

June 8, 2011, 7:30 p.m.

Chenery Community Room

Present: Chair Allison; Members Baghdady, Becker, Bruschi, Dash, Epstein, Grob, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, Millane, Sarno, Smith; School Committee Representative Slap

Members Absent: Callanan, McHugh and BOS Chair Jones

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 pm by Chair Allison.

Chair Allison began by reviewing the evening's agenda items.

Review of Fire Department Overtime

Chair Allison requested that Member Lynch give the review. Member Lynch circulated a graphic presentation of overtime usage prepared by the Fire Department. He said that by June 15, Chief Frizzell will have provided up-to-date data on the overtime numbers. He noted that only a portion of the initial overtime funding request was granted by the WC, and that the WC had asked that the Chief keep the subcommittee updated on the likelihood of returning to the WC for the full amount. (So far, it looks as if fully funding the initial request will not be necessary.)

Review of WC Report

Chair Allison requested that the comments come under three categories, beginning with format (all under the brainstorming rubric).

Regarding format (presentation, style, and length), Member Lynch said this report was a huge improvement, but that it is still a very long report. He wondered if the Executive Summary should be a little longer. Member Sarno noted that he added verbiage to introduce various tables and charts. If the charts were more standardized throughout the report, he suggested, an overview of those charts might obviate some of the introductory remarks. Member Smith said that long term issues could be raised in the early fall (with subcommittees) and then followed up for the Spring TM. Member Manjikian said it makes sense to expand on the Executive Summary section, as those issues (salary, benefits, OPEB, etc.) will remain with us over the years. Member Becker said those issues with a dramatic change could be highlighted as not all TM members are familiar with the issues. Chair Allison reiterated that the "zingers" could be pulled out and noted.

Member Dash said that "user friendliness" with the report would be appreciated. He said it's hard to know what amount of detail is the right amount. He agreed that

tracking the recommendations was a good idea. He added that uniformity of charts might be useful. He said it's hard to tell where one department ends and another one begins. Member Millane said that planning ahead of time regarding the length of the report would be useful and would serve as a helpful guideline. Member Epstein said that the report is very long because the tables are presenting a huge amount of detail. He noted that several budgets are sometimes presented to TM (override, non override, etc.). Chair Allison offered an alternative rationale for the inclusion of the overview tables: namely, to give TM a feel for total spending on a program. She also suggested that the usefulness of this was independent of the override issue. Member Epstein noted that a lot of the report data tables are from the spreadsheets that Town Accountant Hagg maintained. Chair Allison agreed, pointing out that the Town Accountant spreadsheet was large and might not be "user friendly" for some TMMs. Member Epstein said that, if the contents of the report could be distilled into an Executive Summary (10-15 pages long), focusing on highlights, perhaps with an action item, the department write-ups might be eliminated or moved into appendices. School Representative Slap said she enjoyed reading the report and she liked the idea of seeing measurements of the concrete issues.

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- Member Sarno said he was unclear about the WC's overall budgetary focus. He asked: what are we trying to provide to people? Do we want to show the cost effectiveness of programs? Member Lynch spoke about the purpose of activity indicators. Should they be included in the WC report that goes to TM? he asked. Member Libenson wondered if we've asked TM for feedback on the report. He wondered if the report was serving TM's needs. Chair Allison said that perhaps new TM members could be surveyed. Member Dash said it would be interesting to compare the older TM members' perspective with the newer members. The WC discussed how this could happen (e.g., phone calls, TM caucuses, etc.)

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- Member Epstein wondered about the hostility of TM members toward the WC. The WC may want to regain their confidence, he offered. Chair Allison replied that a large and complex budget was recommended by the WC and that TM approved that budget. That is positive, she said. Member Becker noted that in several cases TM voted differently from the WC. Chair Allison noted that those votes occurred on non-budget articles and that the WC treatment of non-budget articles would be an appropriate subject for a separate WC discussion.

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- Chair Allison recapped the two major suggestions for which there seemed to be a consensus: that the executive summary should be expanded to include highlights from the department reviews, and that there was a need to provide more performance data on the effectiveness of the department(s) – its measurements – versus just showing how the department's money is spent.

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- Chair Allison distributed an "Observations and Recommendations" document, compiled from the respective sections of the WC report, for discussion. She briefly reviewed the document and asked the WC to read it over. Member Lynch asked about getting a document like this out to TM in the fall. Member Libenson affirmed that suggestion; and he noted that the WC sometimes looks at the close details and not the

overall town process (weeds vs. trees). Chair Allison said that the WC is supposed to look at the financial details. She then invited general discussion of the point.

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- The WC discussed if the big picture of policy concepts has a financial impact, and if this was in the WC's scope to address. The general consensus was that the broader policy issues should be left with the elected BOS and that the WC will continue to advise on financial matters and financial implications of broader issues. Member Libenson expressed his sense that there was a need for more leadership on broad issues and that the WC could make recommendations that others investigate the broad issues more aggressively. He offered the following as a big issue: the Fire Department and regionalization (there could be big savings here). Member Dash suggested offering the list to the elected officials. Member Epstein said these issues will arise again as the available revenue budget will not match the level service budget next year. Member Lynch said that these (broad) issues need to come before TM as they do matter the most, and suggested this might be the basis for a presentation to Fall TM. He said the WC should encourage action under its charge. Member Sarno said the WC helps to identify the major cost drivers and it may be able to contribute to the management of those cost drivers via addressing the issues structurally. Chair Allison said that the WC will meet in the fall, and that TM will meet in the fall. This could be an opportunity that the WC could take advantage of. The WC could use this meeting to "tee up" financial issues (town wide) and then check back in the Spring. The WC seemed to think this was a good idea and that it could help to ensure that recommendations don't get lost or forgotten from year to year.

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- Chair Allison said she would create a document for next week's meeting summarizing this discussion. The WC would want to discuss this with the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee before launching.

Review of TM Presentation

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- Chair Allison said that the report could go two ways: a high level, short report which hits the high points, or a more detailed report similar to the Minuteman Report presented by Mr. Weiss. Member Lynch said somewhere in the middle is appropriate. He offered that the WC analyzes the fiscal work of the departments, and that the broad overview is good, but he asked if each department needed a short overview? The WC discussed the TM presentation. Member Grob said she liked the "big picture" approach. Member Dash and Smith agreed and added that extra information is out there if it is needed for TM members.

Review of Updated 5-Year Budget Projections

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- Chair Allison began by saying that it's unclear how budget projections will work moving forward with a new town accountant. She said the WC may need to be more self-sufficient in generating the necessary forecast this fall. She then generally reviewed the 5-year Budget Projections, noting that this initial run assumes that state aid remains unchanged and cash compensation increases by 3% across the board. She noted that the

projections also assume we will be able to control health expenditures. The retirement numbers assume relatively stable stock market performance. The Minuteman forecast assumes that enrollment will increase and that cost control will continue. This leaves a two million dollar deficit for FY13. (She also noted that the CPA revenues will need a format, perhaps a separate schedule similar to water and sewer.) These realities will need to be tested this fall. A variety of “what if” scenarios can be tested on this model which may help the WC see (analytically) various paths to a balanced budget.

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- Member Epstein said a summary of this type might be included in the WC report. Member Millane agreed and said this would be good information to have at the Fall TM.

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- ***Announcements/Updates***

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- Chair Allison alerted the WC to the end-of-May balances for the revolving accounts. She requested that the WC review these balances. Member Bruschi said that the Education subcommittee will need to analyze the school revolving accounts this week.

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- Regarding the Fire Department revolving accounts, Member Lynch said the Chief will be in touch with him regarding the actual overtime numbers. The subcommittee will be ready if a request for funds transfer is needed.

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- Next week, Chair Allison said, the plan is to meet at 6:30 p.m. and adjourn around 8:00 p.m.. More details will follow.

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- ***Approval of Minutes***

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- The minutes of April 25, 2011 were approved.

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- Chair Allison said that the minutes of April 27, 2011 will be redistributed and voted on at next week’s meeting (as it was unclear which edition was being voted on).

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- The minutes of May 4, 2011 were approved with two abstentions.

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- ***Wrap-up/Adjournment***

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- Member Becker moved to adjourn at 9:14 pm.

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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary