

- MINUTES
- TOWN OF BELMONT
- BOARD OF SELECTMEN
- SPECIAL SESSION
- CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM
- Wednesday, October 1, 2008
- 7:30 PM
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- CALL TO ORDER
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- A special meeting of the Board was called to order in open session at 7:32 pm by Chairman Firenze in the Chenery Middle School Community Room. All Board members were present. The Board met in joint session with the Warrant Committee (WC) and the School Committee (SC). Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present.
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- Warrant Committee Chair Phil Curtis began the meeting by noting that it was SC Chair John Bowe who first suggested the joint meeting idea. The three bodies here tonight share the common goal of presenting a budget in April. Before delving into the budget, Curtis continued, Town Administrator Younger is going to discuss comments made by citizens who attended the June 23rd post-roads-override public forum meeting.
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- *Discussion of Resident Concerns as Expressed at Public Forum*
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- Town Administrator Younger: About 50 citizens and various town officials were present at this forum, including department heads. For most points raised, there was no follow-up discussion. A number of individuals said that they want the town run like a business. They also want transparency for both the town and school, and they feel a lack of trust in how money is spent.
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- Chair Firenze said there is a lack of confidence in the way the town is run. Residents draw conclusions (sometimes incorrectly) from little bits of information. They are quick to jump to the conclusion that the town is mismanaged. There was discussion of ways in which the Town's decision making bodies can communicate better with residents. It was clarified that Belmont's budget process is more transparent than many other Towns and certainly more than the state or federal government.
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- *FY10 Budget*
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- *a) How Are the Schools and Town Planning to Meet the Non-Override Budget?*
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- SC Chair John Bowe said The SC is faced with making very tough decisions. For example, what is more important, class size or after school athletic programs? – or should we degrade all services across the board or lop off entire programs (like athletics and music, for example). The \$2M shortfall could result in 30 teachers being cut. School Finance Director Gerry Missal added that 3 budgets are being worked on: the

superintendent's recommended budget, the bottom line level service budget, and then the available revenue budget. Relevant information has a time dimension, he added – we know things later in the Spring that we don't now (e.g. winter costs, staff turn over, out of district tuition, etc.)

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- Selectman Leclerc requested that the school make its proposed cuts known early, so parents are aware of what could be lost – before June. Dr. Missal replied that they are starting the process by looking at what is required by the state and what is optional. SC Member Ann Rittenburg added that in addition to learning the specific mandates, the SC has begun a conversation with residents in how to best make reductions to meet the available revenue. We want to get the information out early so they will know what's at stake and can have some input into the process, she said.

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- Town Administrator Younger has met with department heads and has requested that they prepare three budgets which are due early November. The first budget is “level services,” the second is an “available funds” budget, and the third is a “5% reduction” budget (5% below available funds, which will address shortfalls). Younger said he is concerned about the impact of Ballot Question 1, which, if it passes, will cause more reductions. The Governor is looking at cuts and, should local aid get reduced, Younger continued, the FY10 budget will be impacted. WC Member Peg Callanan noted that the members of the SC are committed to meeting more often with the WC Education Subcommittee. Ms. Rittenburg asked if the WC Education Subcommittee would attend SC meetings when finances (budget) are expected to be reviewed. It would make the process more transparent, she said. WC member Pat Bruschi said she is open to that suggestion.

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- ***b) Discussion of Possible Override Scenarios***
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- Chair Curtis: One override scenario would be to compare the “level service” budget to the actual available revenue, and that's the override number: i.e., \$4M. We could also do a “tiered” or “segmented” override – with some funds for the town or money that only goes to schools.

- WC member Walter McLaughlin said that the smaller the override number, the greater the likelihood it would get passed. Mr. Curtis noted that, by addressing consolidation, we may generate additional override support. WC member Bill Hofmann suggested we look to see how Needham successfully managed the consolidation process.

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- ***Other***
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- The actuary report will be presented at a future BOS meeting.
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- The Board agreed that it will not accept any offer of less than \$2.5 million for the Woodfall Road property. Chair Firenze will attend the auction.
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- Selectman Jones announced his retirement from the Warrant Committee effective immediately.

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- The Board adjourned at 9:36 PM.
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• Thomas G. Younger, Town
Administrator