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MINUTES  
TOWN OF BELMONT  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
JOINT MEETING WITH WARRANT COMMITTEE  
Chenery Middle School (CMS)  
Wednesday, February 3, 2016  
7:30 PM

APPROVED  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
DATE: 4-11-2016

**CALL TO ORDER**

A joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, with the Warrant Committee, was called to order in open session at 7:31 p.m. by Chair Sami Baghdady in the CMS Community Room. Selectmen Mark Paolillo and Jim Williams were present. Town Administrator David Kale was also present; Assistant Town Administrator Phyllis Marshal was not.

The Warrant Committee (WC) addressed two items of business concerning the letter for Town Meeting Members that WC Chair Libenson constructed and the gathering of WC questions concerning the CPA projects.

***Proposed Amendment to the Minuteman Regional Agreement: Warrant Committee Recommendation to the Special Town Meeting – STM (2/8/16)***

WC Chair Libenson invited Mr. Jack Weis to the WC table and then opened the floor for discussion. WC Member McLaughlin raised the question of the impending debt for the Minuteman building proposal (\$145M). Which agreement would you like to be operating under, he asked, when facing the debt? He spoke to the reasons why the new agreement will be better as the new building proposal and debt looms. He underscored that flexibility and the hope for non-member towns to pay capital expenses are the key strengths for the new agreement.

Selectman Paolillo stated his reasons for supporting the new agreement. He stated that DESE will likely support the new agreement. The debt can still be voted down at the May Town Meeting and, if it does, Belmont will be better off under the new agreement. He agreed with WC Member McLaughlin's points concerning the flexibility and the non-member towns paying toward capital expenses. Finally, under the revised agreement, non-member towns may join the district. He spoke to the disadvantages of Belmont leaving the district.

WC Member Fallon stated the importance of Belmont feeling confident with its Minuteman relationship. This revised agreement, she said, supports a strengthened relationship with Minuteman. Under the new agreement, Belmont can possibly reconstitute the district.

SC Rep Slap noted that certain facilities of a vocational tech school cannot be built into the new Belmont high school. WC Member Dash noted that the option that provides the best ability to improve the function of Minuteman is to approve the revised agreement. It amounts to the least, worst option. WC Member Gammill stated that he is in favor of the agreement, as it not only lays a more positive path forward, but also supports a vocational tech school of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

APPROVED

MEMBER BOARD OF SELECTMEN

WC Chair Libenson agreed that the revised agreement is better than the previous agreement. However, the proposed new school complicates the revised agreement. He spoke to other complicating factors, e.g., the large number of non-member town students who are subsidized by member towns, the fact that it is unclear if DESE will support having non-member towns pay toward capital, the size of the proposed new school, and the fact that the new school will probably not happen unless the revised agreement is approved.

WC Chair Libenson agreed that the new agreement is better, but he asked – is it good enough? It does not seem likely (under the new agreement) that new schools will join the district. If the new agreement does not pass, it is unlikely a district-wide vote will pass. There are risks to this revised agreement, especially in light of the 628-student new school. This new school does not fit the size of the member towns.

WC Member McLaughlin stated that Belmont will be in a worse position if the existing building is forced to be renovated without MSBA support. Mr. Weis stated that another new agreement is not probable. If this does not pass, there will be a lot of frustration across the district. The building will need costly repairs, which Belmont will be the hook for along with other member towns.

Chair Baghdady stated that WC Chair Libenson's analysis is excellent. He agreed that this agreement is better, but it is being put forth because of the proposed new building – which is an oversized school with significant debt. He said he would like to separate the two issues – the new facility debt and the revised agreement. It might be easier to vote the debt first, then address the agreement. The revised agreement was written with the proposed building in mind.

Selectman Williams spoke to the enrollment numbers. He stated that the fiscal difference (for Belmont) between 628 and 500 students is not significant. He acknowledged that the governance of Minuteman is currently dysfunctional. He noted that Town Counsel has weighed in on the Minuteman issue. He agreed that the worst-case scenario is the old agreement with a building in need of renovation. He then raised the issue of Minuteman's OPEB debt (\$11M), and stated that this issue will need to be dealt with.

Selectman Paolillo added that this new revised agreement was put together with member town selectmen, not with Minuteman's administration. He stated that it is unlikely that yet another agreement will be drafted. He agreed that non-member towns are not likely to join the district, but they are likely to pay toward capital. He said he believes the new building should fail, as it is not right-sized. He spoke to the district-wide vote scenario.

WC Member Sarno said he is skeptical concerning whether we could achieve fully the potential benefits of the revised agreement, but has looked at the worst-case scenarios (no non-member town contributions toward capital costs) under both the existing and new agreements, and found that, at least with respect to capital costs, the difference is likely to be only \$63,000 annually. Concerning operating costs, he asked about the extent to which reduced enrollment from non-member towns might be offset by lower costs. Mr. Weis responded that there would likely be some cost reductions, but that the district's operating costs are driven more by the number of technical and vocational programs offered than the number of students enrolled in them.

WC Member Epstein agreed that the new agreement is the "least bad alternative". Non-member towns are unlikely to join the district under any alternative to the new agreement. The most important goal is to have a fair capital charge, which is impossible under the old agreement. If the debt vote gets defeated, the next step is probably repair of the existing building, which is the worst case scenario.

The Board of Selectmen and the WC then acknowledged the extreme complexity of this issue as it relates to the upcoming STM.

WC Member McVay said that there is a lot of risk with the revised agreement and she is aligned with WC Chair Libenson's presentation.

These issues were further discussed.

Board of Selectmen vote:

*Chair Baghdady moved:* Favorable action on Article 2 regarding a new Minuteman agreement.

The motion passed 2-1.

WC vote:

*Member McLaughlin moved:* Favorable action on Article 2.

The motion passed 11-3.

The Board of Selectmen adjourned their meeting at 9:08 p.m. The WC continued to meet.

## VII. NEXT MEETINGS

Monday, February 22, 2016 at 5:30 p.m. [To be held at CMS, prior to the STM.]



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Mr. David Kale, Town Administrator

