

**Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**FINAL**  
**March 10, 2010, 7:30 p.m.**  
**Chenery Middle School Community Room**

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Becker, Brusch, Callanan, Dash, Epstein, Libenson, Manjikian, McLaughlin, Millane, Paolillo, Smith; BOS Chair Leclerc; School Committee Chair Rittenburg

Town Administrator Younger and Town Accountant Hagg

Members Absent: Hofmann and Lynch  
(Member Lynch arrived at 8:35 pm)

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began by turning to the first item on the agenda.

***State Aid Discussion (5% Reduction)***

Chair Curtis noted that the House will cut state aid by 5% across the board. Town Accountant Hagg created a revised spreadsheet on what this means for Belmont's revenue picture. She reviewed the adjustments to the revenue areas. The bottom line shortfall is now \$3.6M. She noted that Town Administrator Younger requested a "target split" of town and school revenue so as to create an *available revenue* funds budget. (This would be a non-override budget.) Non-discretionary spending includes Debt Service, Retirement, Minuteman, State Assessments, and Overlay – totaling \$14M and leaving \$70M for~discretionary spending. Hagg noted that the present target split of remaining revenues is 56.3% on the school side and 43.4% on the town side. She said that the school percentage reflects the full stimulus money of \$526K. The total available revenue number for schools would be \$39.8M. (Again this included the \$526K for stimulus funds.) The Superintendent's *needs-based* budget (which did not include the stimulus funding) was \$42.2M. The town's available revenue figure for only discretionary spending would be \$30.1M. (The Town's discretionary spending budget for FY11 was \$31.4M, as noted in its *needs-based* budget presented last month by Mr. Younger).

BOS Chair Leclerc said that he supports an override to maintain level services and that it is unfortunate that that number is going up, as it makes the override decision more difficult. He stated that he is speaking for himself, and not his BOS colleagues. Member Brusch said that there is a desire of some state legislators to add some money to the circuit breaker and regional school transportation accounts so as to make these 5% percent local aid cuts slightly less painful.

***Subcommittee Reports on Program Categories***

## **General Government**

Subcommittee Chair Millane reviewed a handout which broke General Government down into categories: Town Clerk, Treasury, Human Resources, Accounting and Finance, Assessors, and Town Administrator. Member Dash reviewed the Town Administrator section and as well as the Human Resources (HR) section. He noted that 80% of HR is mandated. Member Epstein spoke with Treasurer Carman and reviewed that the Treasurer's Office has a small staffing level. He discussed automating the large number of payroll checks, and the thousands of tax bills that are sent out each year. Postage and printing money could definitely be saved with automation as well as with the staff that prepares and sends these mailings out. He added that to automate would require an investment in additional IT software and that there is no budget to do this. IT is usually 3-4% of a town's budget, and in Belmont, it is only 1.8% of the budget. Mr. Younger discussed why all employees do not have direct deposit (this is bargained, he said, as it is considered a "working condition").

Member Allison offered that the "performance indicator" section of the report could be applied to the Assessors' time in the following way. The Assessors' time is distributed among four categories and these categories amount to the programs they pursue. With HR, she continued, one could start with the activity indicators to see what the programs are – for example, recruitment. There is some disconnect between the measurement of activities and the program structure.

Member McLaughlin said that the Town Clerk's office technology is completely antiquated and it ought to be updated (e.g., automated) with an IT program compatible with this century. Member Epstein noted that duplicated efforts existed across town departments which could be consolidated. Chair Curtis said that it is unclear how much time is put into each of these categories. Member Dash replied that HR doesn't break its categories down by time. Member Allison said (with WC agreement) that an assessment of time allocation is something that should be done. Chair Curtis added that program analysis requires that we know the time spent on various activities, as it helps to evaluate the programs.

## **Public Safety**

Subcommittee Chair Paolillo reviewed the Fire Department first. He said they summarized the breakdown of their incoming calls to see how much time is spent on each category. Chair Curtis observed that the Fire Department is staffed for peak need, but that most of the time, peak need is more than what is needed. Paolillo agreed and said that most calls are not fire incidents and that regionalization may help balance out peak staffing with the incidents of fires. Regionalization could also help with funding capital needs. The WC discussed deployment for different calls, e.g., fire, police, and ambulance responding to calls. Chair Curtis said we are paying too many people to sit around because of the peak staffing issue.

Regarding the Police, the WC discussed patrol and budget distinctions. The police calls (18,000 of them) are not yet sorted out by category, but the Chief is working on this.

## **Public Works**

Subcommittee Chair Epstein began by noting that this was a “vast department” with many functions, including: highway and street maintenance, solid waste, snow removal, forestry and planting, cemetery maintenance, maintenance of town fields, vehicle maintenance, etc. Community Development, he said, is also far-reaching with road repair and planning, inspections, issuing permits, etc. He said it would be hard to say how they could do all that they do more efficiently. To cut their budget would mean the elimination of services. In some areas, Epstein said, spending needs to be increased to save money long-term. Supervisory oversight is required on projects, and cannot be eliminated.

Building Services, Epstein continued, is a small department and is responsible for maintenance on the following buildings: police, Town Hall, Homer, two fire stations, the town yard building, and now the new senior center. There is a question of how to consolidate Building Services with the school department’s facility functions. Town Hall is expensive to run, he said, and is an under-utilized facility. One must ask if it should be kept open. Member Allison said it might be worth looking at buildings that are maintained vs. new buildings. Regarding Community Development, she said, look at the time spent on permit issuing, planning for zoning, and engineering planning.

The Education and Culture & Recreation subcommittees will report next week.

Member Millane observed that the prospective part-time budget position could help get departments all on the same page with regard to program budgeting, time allotments, etc. Mr. Younger replied that he is not considering reducing this position, even in the available funds budget.

## ***Structural Change Discussion***

Chair Curtis requested to review the “Structural Change Suggestion” document that Member Libenson created, and to ask for each item: Is this suggestion achievable? Could it be done? Member Libenson reviewed the document and suggestions were annotated with “could be done” or “probably could not be done”. (Member Libenson will send an updated version of the document to WC members.)

## ***Legally Required Town Services (Mr. Heigham’s Memo)***

Chair Curtis reviewed a memo written by former WC member Mr. Jim Heigham (who is an expert in municipal law). The memo outlines those services and equipment that municipalities are legally required by state to provide. Among the highlights:

- Fire and Police: Legislatively bound to have, but no requirements in the details (not required to have ambulance).
- General Government, Accounting, Town Clerk, and Health Department are required (not so BOS).
- Elections are required.
- We are obligated to maintain roads (however, fortunately for Belmont, no standard was given). There is no requirement on Private Ways or sidewalks.
- A Library is not required, but if we choose to offer one, then certain requirements exist.
- Recreation is not required. A town cannot abandon or sell the use of its parkland (e.g. swimming pool?).
- Schools are required. We are required to construct and maintain school buildings.
- A Senior Center is not required, nor is a COA.
- Sewers and clean water are required.

SC Chair Rittenburg observed that the school department has a lot of state regulations it must comply with. Member Becker asked specifically about the town's obligations to the Underwood Pool. Chair Curtis replied that the answer to this question is unclear. If it should fail, he said, Town Council once opined that we could close the pool, although by doing so, we could still get sued by a member of the Underwood family.

### *Other*

Next week, the Education and Culture & Recreation subcommittees will report, and the WC will continue with the structural changes conversation.

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:35 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio  
WC Recording Secretary