

- **Belmont Board of Selectmen**
  - **Meeting Minutes**
    - **March 4, 2009, 7:30 p.m.**
      - **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

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- *[Note: This was a joint meeting of the Warrant Committee and the Board of Selectmen.]*
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- Present: All BOS members, Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Accountant Hagg, members of the Warrant Committee(WC).
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- The BOS meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm by Chair Firenze.
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- WC Chair Curtis began the meeting by turning to the Minuteman discussion.
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- ***Minuteman Representative and General Discussion of Minuteman Budget***
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- Dr. Bouquillon, Superintendent of Minuteman, and Joe Scali, Belmont Representative to the Minuteman School Committee, appeared before the Warrant Committee to discuss the school and the budget. Dr. Bouquillon reviewed some basic data concerning the Minuteman. The budget, which is \$17.4M, is up 2.9%. He reviewed an assessment sheet and provided a budget booklet. Belmont's total assessment is \$810,314 for 33 students, which is \$24,000 per student. SC Chair Bowe asked why the Minuteman average cost per student is \$25K, and \$17K is the average cost per student across the state – why is it so high? Dr. Bouquillon replied that post graduate students are not accounted for.
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- Dr. Bouquillon proceeded to review a series of “Belmont Questions”. The following is a brief summary of the highlights revealed from the answers provided by Dr. Bouquillon. With regard to cost reducing initiatives, he stated that two administrative positions have been eliminated and that each program and position is being examined. The Admissions Coordinator position is an important one as she recruits students at the middle schools. Public Information Support involves Minuteman's efforts in the areas of communication and advertising to raise awareness. E & D budget appropriation occurs as part of the budget closedown in July and the money will be used to reduce the assessments to towns. Regarding food services outsourcing, Minuteman has hired a food service program after firing the existing vendor. There are revolving accounts including \$111,502 from rental income. The average vocational class size is 13.43. It is on the lower end, he said, but is not the lowest.
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- Member Epstein noted that the Minuteman staffing appears to be appropriate for 1,000 or more students, when there are currently about 675 students. When and how will this be addressed, he asked? Dr. Bouquillon said it will take 3-5 years to address or

“right size”. Chair Curtis asked, why 3-5 years? Bouquillon said that Minuteman actually hopes to add students in lieu of reducing staff. Regarding the 15.5 FTE for maintenance, he said that the building is running all day, seven days a week with cleaning happening at night. Member Bruschi noted that Belmont high school has a custodial staff of 4 FTE and is also running around the clock.

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- Chair Curtis: Minuteman is more expensive in cost per student compared to other vocational technical schools. Can you identify the factors that account for this difference? Dr. Bouquillon replied: too many staff and not enough kids is the short answer and the fact that previous administrations have ignored these concerns. BOS Chair Firenze wondered if the Minuteman has too many programs? Member Hofmann noted that, given the current fiscal crises, the budget increase of 3% and the 3-5 years for “right sizing” is incomprehensible. We shouldn’t have to pay for this, Hofmann continued – fund what you’ve got now and acknowledge that this school is not run efficiently. Bouquillon replied that there will be ramifications to the education of students if that process is rushed. Member Widmer countered that the education of Belmont public students is adversely impacted by Minuteman’s budget. Widmer continued: We are sacrificing the quality of our education and urge you to accelerate the right sizing process. Member Allison added that Minuteman is not adapting to the new fiscal reality under which it must operate. Many nonprofits are adjusting on a faster schedule than you plan to do. Your unwillingness to do so impacts us everyday.

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- ***Discussion of Town and School Available Funds Budgets, with detail as to specific impact***

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- ***Town:***

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- Chair Curtis turned to Town Administrator Younger to provide the budget that is drawn to the best guess of available funding. Mr. Younger began with a general overview: \$29,533,849 is the level services budget, which is \$1.9M more than the available funds budget number. Mr. Younger then reviewed the elimination/reduction highlights in various departments, e.g. police, fire, public works. Younger said that he was looking into combining polling places for multiple precincts at one location to save money, as well as examining building utilization for both efficiency and savings on utilities. Town Hall operations could be moved to the Homer Building to save money. \$160K has been reduced from the Library budget while still meeting certification. Younger said the Library staff is looking to coordinate weekend hours with other communities (Arlington, Watertown). For Recreation, he said that in general program costs need to be matched by program revenue.

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- Member Paolillo asked about the process for making reductions. Mr. Younger explained that the process began with the hiring freeze last October. Reductions were made, he said, and I saw how the departments functioned with those reductions. Chair Curtis asked about non-union salary raises, and Younger replied that no cost-of-living raises for non-union employees were granted, but that midpoint increases have been included. BOS Chair Firenze and BOS Member Jones urged Mr. Younger to revisit the

midpoint increases. Mr. Younger said that there are ongoing meetings with the unions regarding a wage freeze. Chair Curtis suggested that management should not get midpoint increases if it is asking unions for a salary freeze.

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• ***School:***

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• SC Chair Bowe: The school has had to cut back an additional \$600K from its budget, resulting in another tier of cut backs including \$200K from professional development (what remains is just enough to keep licensing requirements) along with dozens of small cuts (including professional development). \$300K was eliminated from all athletics and activities at the high school and middle school. Everything is now fee-based and not funded by taxpayers. Fees will range from \$350K to \$1,000K for a student for athletics. Two more staff positions will be cut, making up the remaining \$100K.

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•	\$200K	professional development (and a long list of smaller items)
•	\$300K	athletics/activities
•	+ <u>\$100K</u>	two more staff positions
•	\$600K	total additional cuts (\$2.9M in cuts were presented

previously)

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• Chair Curtis noted his preference for a written document that outlines the additional \$600K in cuts. Member Allison asked if all salary increases for non-union employees were being preserved? SC Chair Bowe said, at this time, yes, but noted that non-union includes those making about \$10.50 per hour. Member Paolillo said that there needs to be a non-union wage freeze as the \$105K saved could offset the \$600K in cuts outlined above. Member Widmer said that if there was a town- and school-wide salary freeze, the number that would be saved needs to be determined. It could be 40% of the gap (\$2M). Member Allison noted that the town's pension contribution is another number that needs to be identified. BOS Chair Firenze agreed that this needs to be examined as we are only required to pay a 50% pension contribution and we are presently contributing 80%.

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• ***Joint Meeting with Board of Selectmen to Discuss FY10 Budget Timing***

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• Chair Curtis: The WC (in a recent vote) was unanimous in its agreement to present the budget to Town Meeting (TM) in June. The BOS, however, voted to present a budget to TM in April. [The WC has the authority to present the budget.] The stimulus money is a moving piece which may not be known in April. Member Widmer: the global and state fiscal picture is getting worse by the minute. Tax revenue is in free fall and drops will continue through June. Belmont will get lower local aid in FY10 and there is a total uncertainty around the stimulus money. The budget should be presented in June, Widmer continued, and it is unconscionable to put a budget together in April. Member Allison inquired as to how the Selectmen arrived at the April decision? Member Leclerc replied that the BOS felt that they needed "a conversation" about the budget with TM members and chose to present "a contingency budget" at that time. Member McLaughlin

suggested that a *budget hearing* could take place in April, but that the budget could be *presented* in June. BOS Chair Firenze noted that if the budget is presented under Article 1 – there is no discussion of the budget. Member Widmer said (as Moderator) that he can figure out a way to have a discussion in April on the TM floor relative to the budget issues. The more we show how painful it is to budget to the available funds, the better chance we'll have for an override.

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- Chair Firenze adjourned the BOS at 10:00 pm.

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Respectfully submitted,

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• Thomas G. Younger, Town  
Administrator

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