

- **Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**
- **FINAL**
- **April 15, 2009, 7:30 p.m.**
- **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

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- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Epstein, Hofmann, Libensen, Lynch, Millane, Paolillo, Smith, Widmer; BOS Chair Leclerc, School Committee Chair Rittenburg

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- Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Accountant Hagg, Town Treasurer Carman

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- Members Absent: Callanan, Heigham, McLaughlin

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- The meeting was called to order at 7:34 pm by Chair Curtis.

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- Chair Curtis began the meeting by turning to the House budget that came out this afternoon.

- ***Discussion of House Budget and Its Revenue Implications for Belmont in FY10*** Chair Curtis explained that the legislature released its numbers and that those numbers are lower than the Governor's. Town Accountant Hagg distributed a report showing the House proposed cherry sheet budget vs. the Governor's proposed cherry sheet vs. the Town's original estimate. The latest figures for FY10 show that revenue projections from the state are down. There is \$1.36M "potential allocation from Stimulus funds" being proposed directly for the schools. There is also another \$527K in IDEA stimulus money which is earmarked for SPED. Member Brusch noted that the "circuit breaker" is not in these figures. Chair Curtis agreed and stated that the WC needs to understand stimulus and IDEA money minus the circuit breaker change for the schools. The circuit breaker is set at 60% (from 75%), which results in a \$170K loss, said school Finance Director Dr. Gerry Missal. Member Widmer noted that the House has not offset the Chapter 70 state allocation with the anticipated stimulus money. Overall the state has projected \$19.5 billion in revenues and the House proposed budget is \$1 billion out of balance. Either more cuts will be made, or taxes will increase, or midpoint cuts will happen next year. Some form of new tax increases will exist by June 30th, said Widmer, but it won't raise \$1 billion in new taxes.

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- Chair Curtis observed that the \$150K in OPEB should go back into the budget. If we apply it to the town side, he said, it gets us close to the number the town has been budgeting to. Chair Curtis noted that there is \$1.45M in reserved free cash which could be used to help with the anticipated mid-year cuts.

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- Chair Curtis asked the WC: Do we change our current FY10 assumptions? Do we apply the 56% split of total revenues and add back in stimulus money that is directed at the schools? Member Allison: If the OPEB contribution goes to the town-side, it

leaves \$150K to be made up in some fashion. We need to discuss where that might come from and what that might mean. The budget is tight enough that the additional cuts will require serious review. We need to go through tiers on the town side. Member Brusch noted that a union decision is expected by next week on salary freezes. If there is no answer, she said, we can assume no freeze. This is another missing piece.

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- SC Chair Rittenburg noted that it is not clear that the stimulus money can be used to restore budget gaps. It may be allocated only for new initiatives. Chair Curtis suggested that the language states that half be used to plug budget holes and half be used for structural improvements. He highlighted the fact that this money will go away in two years. Member Brusch noted that it has been suggested that the money (half) be used for programs, rather than to plug the holes. We will know more in two weeks, she said.

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- SC Chair Rittenburg noted that the SC hopes to apply money toward the initial tier of staff cuts. It won't impact the other tiers, she said, e.g., staff development, supplies, books. Member Widmer cautioned against discussing too many budget restorations. We can expect further local aid cuts in FY11 and a loss of stimulus funding in FY12. This is a long-term issue and we can't expect that these cuts will be restored in the next decade. Think of these as permanent reductions.

Belmont High School (BHS) Students Speak

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- Three BHS students appeared before the WC to express their concern about the severe budget cuts for now and in the future. They expressed their desire to maintain the high level of education known to Belmont, made a suggestion that the rainy day fund be tapped, and would appreciate that an override be put on the ballot for the town to express its support for the schools.

- ***Health Insurance Savings FY10*** Town Accountant Hagg: Changes in health insurance rates (from 6% to 5%) will result in town savings of \$160K (for retiree and active accounts) and school savings of \$230K (for retirees and active accounts). On July 1, the town's PPO contribution is going down to 50% and the HMO is at 80%. School Finance Director Missal asked: Can we budget the PPO at 50% – will it withstand a legal challenge? BOS Chair Leclerc said yes, it is sound, as it is the law.
Discussion of Warrant Articles The WC expressed no opinion on the following Articles: 1, 2, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 29, 23, 25.

Article 19 – Date of Annual Town Election

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- Regarding this article, Member Hofmann explained that the BOS never discussed the issue with the Board of Registrars. Therefore the Board of Registrars has requested that this Article be withdrawn until this issue can be explored.

- Member Brusch noted that Article 19 has been discussed by the WC as to the money impact and that the cost savings may not be negligible.
Article 20 – Composition of Warrant Committee

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- Member Brusch moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

- **Article 6 – *Non-Contributory Pensions***

- Member Widmer moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

- **Article 7 – *Contributory Pensions***

- Member Hofmann moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

- Member Allison expressed concern regarding the level of contribution that would be needed under this Article for FY11 (it is an annual article).

- **Article 8 – *Highway Improvements***

- Member Widmer moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

- **Article 11 – *Authorization of Expenditure from Revolving Funds***

- Member Hofmann moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

- Member Allison advised that those in charge of the revolving funds be prepared to answer inquires about said funds.

- **Article 5 – *Salaries of Elected Officials***

- Member Widmer moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

- Member Brusch noted that the WC may want to defer on this Article as the issue of salaries has not been completely resolved.

- Support for Article 5 was then withdrawn with a motion by Member Brusch. The motion to withdraw was unanimous.

- **Article 22 – *Appropriation for VFW Space Agreements Payment***

- On April 8th, the WC was unanimous in its vote for unfavorable action on this Article.

- Member Widmer said that he is not sure that the BOS is aware that the WC voted unanimously to oppose Article 22. BOS Chair Leclerc said that he should have voted in such a way to express his support of favorable action on Article 22 last week.

- Member Smith moved that the WC reconsider the vote to oppose Article 22. The motion to reconsider passed unanimously. Member Hofmann moved to oppose Article 22. The motion to oppose passed with 12 in favor and 1 opposed to opposing Article 22.**Article 26 – Senior Tax Deferral Income Limit**

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- Member Hofmann moved to support with favorable action. Upon discussion of the related issues, he then withdrew his motion.

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- The WC discussed Article 26, including its implications, its intention, the wording, and the rationale. Member Widmer articulated several questions: What's the history? What's the index formula? How long was it at \$40K? Assistant Town Administrator Conti will arrange to ask the Assessors to come next week to answer these questions.

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- **Article 30 – Zoning By-Law: Shared Institutional Parking Lots**

- The WC chose not to vote on this Article tonight. Chair Curtis will attend the April 21st Planning Board meeting to get more details.**Article 31 & 32 – Historic Accessory Building Preservation (the “Barn By-Law”)**

- Member Smith noted that the attempt underlying these Articles was to preserve 28 historical structures: “The goal is worthy, but there is a cost to neighbors – is that cost greater than the benefit?” He also noted that neighbors had purchased their homes relying on the Town’s single-family zoning. Chair Curtis added that the structures at issue are privately owned. Member Allison stated that this is “spot zoning” – it allows a small number of residents living in areas zoned for single family to be multi-family. She also suggested that the permitting process proposed would place neighbors at a disadvantage, given the support of the Planning Board for this Article and the dynamics of a process where the application party would receive a very substantial economic benefit and thus could sustain a multi-meeting effort.

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- Member Hofmann moved to oppose Articles 31 and 32. The WC was unanimous in opposing.

- **Article 21 – Transfer of Custody of Benton Library**

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- Member Hofmann moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

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- **Article 12 – Communications Tower Bond De-Authorization**

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- Member Hofmann moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

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- **Article 25 – Belmont Hill School Resolution**

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- Chair Curtis stated that this resolution is empty and its intent is to embarrass the Belmont Hill School. BOS Chair Leclerc said that the BOS would like the support of the WC on this Article, which reminds them of their obligation to the community. Member

Hofmann said that all non-profits in town ought to be treated the same. Member Allison suggested that the BOS require the School to pay for the costs of false alarms, etc. Member Bruschi said she is happy to pass a similar resolution for any non-profit that keeps buying up taxable property.

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- The WC will not opine on Article 25.

- **Article 28 – OPEB Enabling Legislation**

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- Member Widmer moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

- **Article 27 – Authorization for Wellington School Construction**

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- Member Lynch moved to support with favorable action. The WC was unanimous in its support.

- **Article 33 – Light Department Easement**

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- Town Administrator Conti said that there is no impact to the town budget. Member Allison said, though, that town members may not pay as taxpayers, but would pay as rate payers.

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- The WC chose not to opine on Article 33 at this time. *Minutes* The Minutes of 3/25/09, 4/1/09 and 4/08/09 will be reviewed at a later date. Member Hofmann moved that the WC adjourn at 9:45 pm.

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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio

- WC Recording Secretary