

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE FY08 MEETING MINUTES
FINAL
APRIL 16, 2008, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Jones, Lynch, McLaughlin, Oates, Paolillo, White, and Widmer; School Committee Chair Bowe

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

Absent: Members Allison and Hofmann

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began the meeting by highlighting the order of the evening's agenda.

Planning Board - Zoning Articles and Discussion of Comprehensive Zoning Plan

Zoning Articles

Article 22 - Zoning By-Law: Clarifying Amendment - Ms. Jenny Fallon explained that this Article clarifies the language pertaining to setbacks of an accessory building from a primary structure by at least 5 feet.

Article 23 - Zoning By-Law: Banks by Special Permit - Ms. Fallon stated that this Article represents a change to the zoning by-law by requiring a special permit for new banks to be established in Belmont. Concern has been raised over the number of banks in commercial centers (14 banks in Belmont), and the special permit process allows for a public hearing before any new bank is opened. Fallon added that the purpose was not to prohibit banks, but rather to balance the needs of the business centers. The goal is to increase the vitality of the business center and to promote a better mix of businesses.

Many WC members expressed concern in the following ways: that this Article was prejudicial against banks and would in fact inhibit the ability of banks coming into Belmont; that it's not the WC's role (in recommending this Article) to attempt to control the market economy, which should be free and open; and that the WC may require more information on the financial impact of this Article.

Member Heigham moved that the Warrant Committee take no position on this article. This motion was defeated (5 in favor, 8 opposed).

After further discussion, Member Widmer motioned that the Warrant Committee oppose Article 23. The motion passed with 11 in favor, 1 opposed, and one abstention.

Article 24 - Zoning By-Law: Window Signs and Displays - Ms. Fallon: While there is a by-law that says window signs can't cover more than 20% of a window (50% percent for temporary signs), this Article proposes to change the by-law to incorporate the space within three feet of the window. The purpose is to make storefronts more attractive to pedestrians, which can't happen unless people can see into the stores. In other words, businesses are better supported if signs do not cover the windows.

Member Hiegham moved that the Warrant Committee take no position on Article 24. The motion passed - all members voted in favor.

Article 20 - Cushing Square Road Discontinuance - Article 20 was brought forward by the BOS and would allow for the first step in a process to allow consideration of projects in the Cushing Square Overlay district. This article seeks to allow the BOS to change the use of the parking lot property and the end of Horne Road. Member Widmer: The reality is that these properties will then be sold to the developer; it's disingenuous not to connect this Article with the current proposal relating to these properties. Mr. Szklut: If we allow for the possibility of closing Horne Road (via the selling of a section of it), we will never get to evaluate the proposal that is presently out there (Mr. Starr's). Member Brusch added that this proposal seems different in scale from what she voted for at Town Meeting a while back. Widmer: While the BOS needs authority to move this process forward, it would behoove town leaders to work through some of these issues first, and bring before TM in October. I would recommend that the BOS delay until we can get consensus in presenting to TM.

Town Administrator Younger: While this article gives the BOS the option to sell the parking lot and to discontinue Horne Road, it doesn't mean it's going to occur under the cover of darkness. It simply allows the BOS to move forward in a timely manner. Ms. Fallon added: The Planning Board has an interest in seeing the Cushing Overlay project come to fruition to benefit the town and these properties are an essential piece to that. It is less likely that the developer will look at the project in same way if these properties are not available. Widmer: That is precisely why we should NOT move forward at this time. If this article is defeated - "and I predict it will be" - it sends a message to developers that we don't want to develop Cushing Square. I'd rather we send a positive, unified message. Member Brusch agreed: I am not prepared to support this as it is now. We need to work out the kinks in advance of TM.

Member Heigham moved that the Warrant Committee recommend that the BOS withdraw Article 20. The motion passed with 12 in favor and 1 abstention.

Member Brusch noted that the WC should vote on the article itself, in case the BOS opts to pursue Article 20.

Brusch moved that the Warrant Committee take unfavorable action on Article 20. The motion passed with 12 in favor and 1 abstention.

Don Becker, a Horne Road resident, added that most Horne Road residents are in favor of an appropriately scaled development to expand the tax base, etc. The residents desire collaboration with a project, but that the present design is not one the residents can live with.

Comprehensive Zoning Plan

Chair Curtis: The BOS would like to spend \$50K for a Comprehensive Zoning Plan. While most WC members don't disagree with the concept, the question remains about finding the money. Mr. Szklut added that the cost for this plan is estimated at \$125K. (\$50K for FY09 and \$75K in the following year.)

Ms. Fallon: There hasn't been a plan for Belmont since the 1960s. A Comprehensive Plan would address such issues as the town's economic viability, the capital projects for consideration, the infrastructure of the town, development proposals, affordable housing, Cushing Square, Waverley Square, etc. All of these areas should be considered together, in concert, not piecemeal. Belmont needs to look at services as a whole, examine its priorities, discuss the sharing of resources, etc. The product of the Plan will include a compilation of goals, maps, implementation steps to achieve these goals, responsibilities delineated, and the consensus of priorities as a community revealed.

The first year of this Plan, continued Fallon, focuses around the gathering of data, which is a public process involving meetings with various committees in town. The second part of this process involves taking this data and creating policy statements and writing a Plan. The required money is for hiring professional consulting services. \$125K is a reasonable figure for a Plan of this type (divided over 2 years). Mr. Szklut added that it is important to get a sense of what guides the thinking of Belmont - to get a sense of the entire town.

Member Bruschi: The \$50K that was unearched to fund the first year of this Plan is truly one time money (\$37K left over from various capital budget projects and \$13K left over from the professional services consulting zoning account). I don't see \$75K being available for next year. What happens if we fund only the \$50K? Szklut replied that the product at end of the \$50K will be a worthwhile, more specific one than the town has seen in many years. Member Paolillo asked about the specific economic benefits to a Plan such as this one. Szklut replied that it is hard to put into dollars and cents, that planning processes don't translate easily into economic benefits, but that with a more focused, more deliberate, form based zoning, the development community gets a clear map of what the town is looking for, of what is most important to people. One question the Plan will grapple with is how to increase revenue and still maintain the small-town feel of Belmont.

Member Epstein: This Plan seems impossibly broad; it is unworkable to look to make an impact 25 years out. How is it possible that this will this get distilled into something specific - a more targeted focus with recognizable goals? I would argue that the \$50K not be spent on this activity.

Chair Curtis concluded the topic by stating that the WC does not need to decide anything tonight. The \$50K will be discussed next week, when Article 4 is addressed.

Pipeline Easement Article 27 - Glenn Clancy

Mr. Clancy: The purpose of this article is to secure for the Water Department easement for legal right of access to repair water mains on the McLean property. While the Water Department had assumed that easement was embedded in the original document, Town Counsel said no, it is not. This article makes sure easements are in place for the Water Department to do their business on the McLean property.

The Warrant Committee motioned to support Article 27. The motion passed with all voting in favor.

Assessors - Article 21, Amendments to Quarterly Tax Billing Legislation

Dick Simmons and Charlie Laverty appeared before the Warrant Committee to discuss Article 21. Mr. Simmons: This article addresses technical changes. It's basically the same as it was with the addition of some "cleaned up language." The changes concern clarifying when and how deadlines will be established and it makes the language more consistent with other cities and towns.

Member Heigham moved to recommend approval for Article 21. The motion passed with all members voting in favor.

Other

Articles 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11 will be addressed next week (4/23/08).

Assistant Town Administrator Conti will circulate a revised Position Classification and Compensation Plan for next week.

Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:35 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary