

- **Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**
- **FINAL**
- **May 6, 2009, 7:30 p.m.**
- **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

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- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Callanan, Heigham, Libensen, Lynch, McLaughlin, Millane, Smith, Widmer; BOS Chair Leclerc, SC Chair Rittenburg

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- Town Administrator Younger, Town Accountant Hagg

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- Members Absent: Bruschi, Epstein, Hofmann, and Paolillo

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- The meeting was called to order at 7:40 pm by Chair Curtis.

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- Chair Curtis began the meeting by saying that the Town Budget would be reviewed department by department to see what departments are spending according to their available revenues. We will see what this level of spending means for town services. Regarding sub-committee reports, Chair Curtis will be putting together the WC report for Town Meeting and will need written sub-committee reports emailed to him by the 13th of May.

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- ***FY10 Town Budget***

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- Town Accountant Hagg began the town budget review by stating that cuts were not equal among all departments. In the BOS office, there are reduced hours. Town Administrator Younger pointed out that there exists an accumulation of items that have been cut over the years. Hagg continued: Information Technology is a department that helps keep staffing costs down and, as a result, no cuts were made there. In Human Resources, personnel has stayed the same, but cuts were made to their training budgets. In Finance and Accounting, they have not filled a vacant intern position, but the BOS felt that the intern could be maintained as of July 1st to help with decoding the stimulus regulations. A fixed cost in this department includes the actuarial report which is done every two years. The Assessors Office experienced no cuts as they are needed to revalue the properties for tax revenue. Member Millane asked about health insurance variances. Accountant Hagg replied that they are budgeted by person at one point in time and change every year. Member Allison asked about the reductions in the Treasurer's office – are they from the FY09 budget or last October? Hagg replied that the Treasury Office had given up one full time position and that there was another vacancy due to a death (which must be filled). The Senior Center, Hagg continued, is being bonded at \$3M this year, but the Treasurer has been actively paying down this Senior Center debt over the past few years.

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- Employee benefits are up 6% overall. Regarding property insurance figures, Jeff Conti has been able to increase coverages and maintain the rate increases for next year.

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- The Police Department has seen cuts in staff and equipment. Member McLaughlin said that he met with the Police Chief and talked about layoff vs. limping along with the same cruisers for an extra year or two. We ought to have no new cruisers and retain employees whom we have invested money into training. Member Allison noted that, with a cruiser, there is a set of clear expenses to go with it. If things don't improve, we will need four cruisers down the road. A lot of time and thought has gone into making these decisions, she said, and procedurally making *ad hoc* changes that do not respect this process is not desirable. Member McLaughlin added that he is trying to save the money spent in training the town employee; we are losing intellectual capital. Member Widmer said that the difficulty in adding anything back in is that it is not sustainable. There will be a need for cuts for the next 2-3 years. Town Administrator Younger concurred with Member Widmer on the sustainability issue. He added that the Police Department has applied for grants. If the position is put back in with stimulus grant money, we have to be prepared to lose the stimulus money and pay for three years of this position. Plans are in place, he said, to fill the positions of two individuals who will be shipped off to Iraq with a provisional appointment of a laid-off officer who could fill in for the year.

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- The Police overtime budget will be cut and one traffic crossing guard position will be deleted. Member McLaughlin said that the Police overtime budget is tight – it could run out. Could free cash be used for the overtime budget? Chair Curtis replied that, no, that would not be appropriate. Departments will need to have the discipline to make cuts and live with the consequences. Member Widmer said that there will not be an extra penny available for restorations. Reserves will be very low for FY10, FY11 and FY12. Town Administrator Younger noted that the Police overtime has not been cut much from FY09. Member Heigham asked if the total Police budget had increased from FY09 to 10? Town Accountant Hagg replied that, yes, it had. Member Widmer said that this was an important point to make given the fiscal constraints the town is facing.

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- The Fire Department is down two people by attrition and its budget went up a small amount due to salary increases. Their overtime budget is same as last year. Mr. Younger noted that the Fire Department has applied for stimulus funding but that there is no official word yet.

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- Chair Curtis requested to see on the budget report the difference in the revised FY10 expected budget to the FY09 actual expenditures. Accountant Hagg will provide this information.

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- The Minuteman budget has a 17.8% increase. This is considered nondiscretionary spending. Change can come only from getting together with other communities to demand changes. Member McLaughlin said there needs to be a rebellion to control costs at the same time that everything else is being cut and squeezed. Chair Curtis agreed.

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- Community Development has in its budget the “master plan” cost of \$75K (which hopefully brings it to completion). The Public Works budget covers a large number of divisions. The snow removal budget does now include the plowing of Private Ways. It also allows for “overspending legally” by budgeting as much as last year. There has been a cut in personnel for Fleet Maintenance. The planting of trees was not funded in FY09 but was subsidized by a private gift – this was a one-year gift, and the town will again not be funding tree planting in FY10. The street lighting budget has been maintained. The fuel bid savings is reflected in all departments. The water budget is up to maintain the newly reopened town field. The pool will remain open providing nothing major is required to keep it running. The cemetery maintenance budget was reduced but we still want to treat the grounds respectfully (i.e., in caring for the lawn and replanting and maintaining trees).

- All building costs are lumped into Building Services – and Building Services now covers the new Senior Center. No one is sure what it will cost to keep the Senior Center running. The Health Department is lean and had no cuts in personnel other than Youth Division. Animal Control is also slim. The COA budget is less as a result of one full-time position. Member Allison noted that the rent expense is gone, but that the expense of running the Senior Center has been moved to another budget. She suggested putting building expenses back into individual budgets so that we know what the costs are by department. They should not be lumped together under “Building Services”. This will be considered for FY11.

- The Library budget is reduced but still meets the minimum requirement by law to receive the state grant and be in the Minuteman network. Part-time workers have been cut as have IT equipment funds. The Recreation Department budget is maintained, as they are self-sustaining with fees. The WC discussed the fact that the Public Works department covers some of the Recreation Department costs and that therefore, considered on an “all-in” basis, the Recreation Department is *not* entirely “self-sustaining with fees.” The Capital Budget was reduced by \$350K from FY09 (this will be discussed in more detail next week).

- From the audience, Mr. John Owens noted that the Recreation Department doesn’t want to allocate its costs. He also noted that the town is \$3M in debt – how many vehicles exist in Public Works, he asked? Mr. Younger said that town vehicles have been reduced from 11 to 6 – 2 in Fire, 2 in Police and 2 in Public Works. Ms. Kimberly Becker noted that the WC has made some very good suggestions in dealing with the town, but, she asked, who is going to implement these suggestions? who is accountable? Chair Curtis said that a group is working to streamline the lines of accountability in town government. Town Administrator Younger needs to be given the authority to do more

- Member Allison commented to Mr. Owens that the town is in for three hard years and that middle class subsidies will need to be dealt with. Chair Curtis added that we first need to figure out what services cost and then what we want to subsidize.

- ***Beacon Hill Update***

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- Member Widmer: The new consensus revenue estimate for FY10 is \$18 billion. This is a responsible estimate, he said, and it is \$1.5 billion *less* than the revenue estimate in the House budget that was recently passed. Increasing the sales tax, as the House did, would raise \$625M against the \$1.5 billion problem. There may need to be \$875M in additional cuts, which would impact local aid. The Senate will release its budget late next week based on the \$18 billion revenue estimate. If there is no more revenue on the table, we will see additional local aid cuts for FY10.

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- Chair Curtis noted that the WC will need to deal with less money from local aid cuts on both the school and town side. We will need to decide about free cash use to help with local aid cuts.

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- BOS Chair Leclerc noted that it was probably a good thing that free cash was preserved at \$1.4M to hedge against local aid cuts.

Sub-committee Reports

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- Chair Curtis reminded the WC that reports are due next week. Reports should include the following:

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- 1. Budget Metrics: Please include a new column on the left for “FY09 Expected Expenditures”.

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- 2. Please include the % of town budget for~the particular department~using the \$79,823,097 grand total for your calculation. (Example: Fire Department - \$4,966,320/\$79.823M = 6.2% of total budget).

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- 3. A short narrative describing what the department does for core functions (this can come from the narrative). Also include its core missions, head counts, and what people do.

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- 4. A description of what will *not* be done because of the gap between the level service budget and the final recommended budget.

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- Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:15 pm.

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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary