

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE FY08 MEETING MINUTES
FINAL
JUNE 18, 2008, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Jones, McLaughlin, Oates, Paolillo, White, and Widmer

BOS Chair Firenze; School Committee Chair Bowe, Town Accountant Hagg, Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti

Absent: Members Allison, Heigham, Hofmann, and Lynch

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

Chair Curtis began the meeting by turning to the first item on the agenda: reserve fund transfers.

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests for Snow & Ice and BS Department (possibly Legal Services transfer)

Building Services Manager Kevin Looney appeared before the Warrant Committee to outline the issues that necessitated the reserve fund transfer request for \$36,800. Mr. Looney stated that the HVAC system for the Fire Stations and the Homer building has a "bad design" and is therefore using a lot of energy. While the electricity usage issue is being addressed, the electricity costs were much higher than anticipated. Other factors, he continued, are that postage fees have gone up and that, regarding telecommunications, the department is being charged for old 484 numbers and there has been a huge increase in the price of line directory advertising.

BOS Chair Firenze asked Mr. Looney if there is any recourse against the HVAC guy or the architect in charge? Mr. Looney replied that perhaps at the Homer Building, but that regarding the Fire Stations, Belmont received \$80,000 (for a different issue) and promised not to sue them again. Member Oates asked if there are maintenance contracts in place? Looney replied yes, but not for the boiler. Selectman Jones offered that thinking through operating costs hasn't been a part of the town's design work. Recourse for poor work is needed, he added - maybe the town withholds a portion of payment when work is problematic. Looney replied that it often takes 2 years to figure out problems with a building. BOS Chair Firenze stated that the town ought to have appropriate warranty timelines. Chair Curtis agreed and added that he hopes these issues will be addressed with the Senior Center.

Chair Curtis then reviewed the criteria for a reserve fund transfer: an unanticipated expense and/or an emergency expense. The telephone expenses may not fit, he said, as these should have been anticipated (and are not emergency in nature). Member White offered that the same question could be raised about the repair services. Town Accountant Hagg clarified that the requirement is "emergency OR unforeseen" - not both. Member Brusch said that the postage expense was unanticipated, but that the department should do a better job controlling it. Regarding the fire stations, not knowing what a building will cost until a full cycle has passed is a problem, but that the fire stations will help in budgeting for the Senior Center and the Wellington, Brusch added. Member Epstein: Since this money has been spent, the issue is really whether the department gets reimbursed (by the WC).

Chair Curtis: We want the town to know we are running things as efficiently as possible and there are consequences of not approving this reserve fund transfer, in that we may owe someone money. I would prefer departments come in to the WC in advance saying that they need to spend more than what's in their budget. At that point they can change behavior and not incur the

costs. Member Brusch agreed, adding that the DPW puts the WC "on notice" and that the School Department has done a similar thing. It's not right that we get requests for things that have already been done, she added.

Member McLaughlin stated that it is a minimal amount of money overall and that the consequences of not approving far outweigh the consequences of approving.

Member McLaughlin motioned: That the WC approve all of Building Services reserve fund transfer requests totaling \$36,800.

The motion was seconded and the discussion continued. Member Epstein: It seems obligatory to approve the money at this point, and also we need a clearer statement of intent for the future. Chair Curtis: I would like for it to be required that a department come before the WC to request a reserve fund transfer for an amount of money not in their budget before the cost is incurred. BOS Chair Firenze: Mr. Younger could keep the WC informed on what departments are doing and can field these requests before it gets to the WC. Younger can make the decision. Curtis reiterated that in the future, he would like to know in advance before the money is spent. He added that he is fine with Town Administrator Younger vetting the requests.

The motion passed with 10 in favor, 2 opposed.

Legal Services

Town Administrator Younger reported to the WC that this money is needed for two ongoing cases that the town is hoping to resolve in the fall. He stated that legal fees will be tracked better as of July 1st. Younger added that the \$20,000 requested for Legal Services pertain specifically to a personnel matter that has been resolved, to the fact that TM went a third night, and because there is a current law suit against the town.

Member Brusch moved: That the Warrant Committee approve the reserve fund transfer request for \$20,000 for Legal Services. The motion passed unanimously.

Snow and Ice removal

Member Brusch moved: That the WC approve the request for \$270,615 for snow and ice removal. The motion passed unanimously.

Timeline for FY10 Budget Presentation for Town & School

Chair Curtis: In September, the WC will receive from Town Accountant Hagg an outline of the available revenues for a no-override budget as well as recommendations for a level service budget. On Oct. 1st, these numbers will be disseminated to the department heads. On Dec 9th, the school department and the town will present their level service and available funding budgets. On Dec. 19th, budget books will be distributed to the WC and the BOS. In January 2009, the WC hopes to restore the process of public meetings whereby the Town Administrator and the school superintendent present their budgets. Member Brusch explained: Every department head is requested to attend the meeting, the WC Chair moderates, and that TM members as well as the general public are encouraged to attend and ask questions. Member Epstein: Since people feel that the budget isn't done well; it's important to have a public forum for them to contribute to the process. Member McLaughlin: The level service concept is fuzzy and can be manipulated; the WC ought to define level services. Chair Curtis agreed; the WC will define. Member Widmer clarified that on Dec. 9th, 4 budgets will be presented - 2 from each side (available revenue and level service). He added that the WC ought to discuss override options - we will know the gap and we ought to know what to go to voters with.

BOS Chair Firenze said that he too is struggling with the level service concept. He said that the zero-based/activity-based budget formation is the way we ought to be doing budgets. We should not assume that what we did last year, we'll do again this year.

Minutes of 5/28/2008 Meeting

The minutes of the meeting were approved with no corrections. There was one abstention.

Summer Projects

Chair Curtis reviewed the summer project assignments that were delineated at the last WC meeting. Curtis: We haven't yet earned the right to ask for an override - and overrides have to be earned. These summer projects address this. We will demonstrate that we are doing all that we can to get our house in order to control spending. These are working groups, not subcommittees.

Chair Curtis then reviewed the "working groups," adding various members to the present configurations. (Chair Curtis later sent out a revised version of the "working groups" list, incorporating these additions.)

Chair Curtis concluded the meeting by informing the WC that Jenny Fallon from the Planning Board wondered if a WC member could attend some of the PB meetings to keep the WC in the loop and also to get WC feedback/input sooner rather than just before TM.

Member McLaughlin moved that the WC adjourn at 9:30 pm.