

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
FINAL  
SEPTEMBER 26, 2007, 7:30 P.M.  
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair-elect Curtis; Members Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Lynch, McLaughlin, Oates, White, and Widmer; Town Administrator Younger, Town Treasurer Carman, Town Accountant Hagg, Assistant Town Administrator Conti; BOS Member Solomon; School Committee Chair Bowe.

Absent: Chair Jones, BOS Chair Firenze, Members Allison, Paolillo, and Hofmann

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 by Acting Chair Brusch.

She began the meeting by stating that the nominating committee would report first. She suggested we have introductions of all sitting at the WC table.

#### Nominating Committee Report

Member White said that he and Member Widmer propose to name Member Curtis as Chair, Member Brusch as Vice Chair, and Secretary will be Member Allison. Nominations were then closed, all were in favor of closing. A motion was made to accept nominating committee's recommendations, all voted in favor.

Chair Curtis noted that the Recreation Committee will not be here tonight, and he hopes to reschedule them soon.

#### Minutes Approved for June 13 and 18, 2007

The minutes of June 13 and June 18, 2007 were accepted as is. All were in favor.

#### Meeting Schedule

Chair Curtis reviewed the WC meeting schedule. He told members to expect to meet every Wednesday after the beginning of year. Curtis then outlined the schedule of upcoming meetings for the WC: October 10, 17; November 14, 28; December 5; and Jan 2, 2008. After that point (January 2, 2008) the WC will meet every week, some Saturdays, too.

Curtis also announced that there will be a "New Member Seminar", which will be Chaired by member Widmer, to be held next Wednesday, Oct 3, at 7:30. All WC members are welcome to attend.

#### Zero-Based Budgeting Presentation

Assistant Town Administrator Conti distributed a handout and began his review of that handout. I undertook this exercise (he began) with BOS Chair Firenze, who is an advocate of the Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) technique. We opted to test it with a small town department - the Council on Aging - and a large department - the DPW's Highway Division. We met once a week with those Department Heads and the results are in the handout. Some numbers are estimates, and some numbers are hard, he explained. We applied a 2-step process, he continued, first looking at each department's programs and analyzing the services that are provided to the community.

The next step was to look at the departments' priorities and assess what you would start with first, if you were rebuilding the department from scratch. The handout reflected that the COA has 9 programs, an administrative column, as well as a total cost column, which, Conti noted, doesn't equal what was budgeted. "We wanted to reflect some hidden costs, such as volunteer contributions, so the big figure of what is budgeted has been deliberately left blank. The goal is to understand the real costs of these services," said Conti. He ended his summary by asking the WC if ZBB appeared to be a helpful tool.

Chair Curtis began the question-and-comment section by asserting that, while ZBB seems useful for understanding various functions that these departments' provide, he had to wonder: "What do we do with this information? How can this help the WC in budgeting?" Curtis added that it's not possible to eliminate a budget priority and expect to save the corresponding amount of money. For example, lopping off the COA's number 9 priority won't save \$20K in rent. We also won't save any money by eliminating the volunteer value column.

Conti responded that this can't be looked at in a strictly mathematical fashion. "There is much more information that resides with the department heads," he said. Member Oates noted that the volunteer value is not really an expense, and that she objects to its inclusion on this document. Member White questioned if the next step is to say what each function should cost? Conti responded that, yes, we can go that direction by showing the positives and negatives of the budget process and by trying to show the costs of services. The volunteer value shows us what the service would cost if we don't have the volunteers. Member Bruschi stated that she agreed with Member Oates' comment regarding volunteers, and that in the case of the schools it would be very difficult to quantify all that the volunteers do.

Member Heigham proposed that the WC take the results of this exercise and see if it is a help. He added that the exercise is not possible to do for every department before budget season. Member McLaughlin added that this appeared to be a great tool for management, but perhaps is "information overload" for the WC. Chair Curtis proposed that it would be helpful to have BOS Chair Firenze offer a concise explanation on the actual value of this exercise and what might change by looking at budgets this way.

#### Miscellaneous

Town Accountant Hagg informed the WC that the Association of Town Finance Committees is holding its annual meeting on November 3, 2007. Member Widmer is a keynote speaker. She invited WC members to consider attending.

Member Oates asked what would be the disposition of the money that remained from the high school front door repair (\$165,000 was allocated, \$8,580 was spent.) Town Accountant Hagg offered that the money can be put back into the reserve fund through Town Meeting.

#### Executive Session

Chair Curtis motioned at 8:25pm to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing Collective Bargaining. Curtis stated that the WC will adjourn the meeting at the conclusion of this discussion. The motion to go into Executive Session was seconded and a roll call vote was taken. All members responded in the affirmative.

The WC came out of Executive Session at 8:53pm (adjourning the main session as well).

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio  
Recording Secretary

