

- **MINUTES**
- **TOWN OF BELMONT**
- **BOARD OF SELECTMEN**
- **SELECTMEN'S MEETING ROOM**
- **Thursday, September 4, 2008**
 - **7:00 PM**

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- **CALL TO ORDER**
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- A special meeting of the Board was called to order in open session at 7:05 PM by Chairman Firenze. All selectmen were present. The Board met in joint session with the School Committee (SC); present were members John Bowe, Laurie Graham, Elizabeth Gibson, Ann Rittenburg, and Leslie Walker. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present.
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- **PROCESS OF FILLING SCHOOL COMMITTEE VACANCY**
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- SC Chair John Bowe explained that SC member Diane Stafford resigned in June. Under state law, if a member resigns mid-term, the SC and Selectmen must meet and vote jointly to select a replacement to serve until the next annual Town election – in this case April 2009. At that time candidates will run to be elected to serve the final year of Stafford's term.
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- In soliciting candidates for the position, it was requested that letters of intent be submitted by August 15. Five responses were received. After interviewing the candidates this evening, a public vote will be taken. With 8 votes to be cast, 5 votes will be needed for selection. If no single candidate receives 5 votes, a run-off vote will be held between the top 2 candidates.
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- Chair Bowe said that Greg Poulos is withdrawing his candidacy, leaving four candidates for the position,
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- **GOALS IN SELECTING NEW MEMBER**
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- Members spoke briefly about their goals in selecting a new member. Chair Bowe pointed out that the new member will need to participate in the selection of a new school superintendent. He would like to find someone who will do a good job working on the budget and help to improve relations between the schools and the community at large.
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- Chair Firenze hopes that the person chosen will help to bring balance and perspective to the SC. For example, someone who does not currently have children in the schools.
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- Ann Rittenburg said that all 5 individuals who responded are qualified and would be good candidates. Chair Firenze agreed and said he hopes the candidates who are not chosen this evening would consider running for election to the SC in April.

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- **CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS**

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- The following candidates were interviewed:

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- Roger Tobin, 20 Livermore Road: Mr. Tobin is a professor of physics at Tufts University. His son graduated from Belmont High School a year ago. He has a background in K-8 science curriculum. Mr. Tobin said he has no specific agenda to push in seeking the position.

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- Becky Vose, 48 Clark Street: Ms. Vose is an attorney and formerly served as Assistant Town Administrator. She has one child who is a senior at Belmont High School and two that have graduated. She is familiar with how Town boards and committees interact and cited the choice of superintendent, an operating override, and the Wellington School as critical issues for the coming year.

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- Kevin Cunningham, 20 Chandler Street: Mr. Cunningham is a professional trainer, educator and consultant. He has three children in the Belmont public schools. He is interested in focusing on process efficiency and believes it is important to view the school budget in the context of the Town as a whole. If the schools can demonstrate efficiency it will help the cause of passing an override.

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- Glenn Mohr, 281 Washington Street: Mr. Mohr is an innovation consultant and a former teacher and curriculum developer. His goal is to preserve the quality of the schools as defined by the community, noting that many have moved to Belmont for its schools. The choice of the superintendent will be critical as the culture of a school system comes from its leadership.

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- Selectmen Firenze and Jones both commented to the effect that all of these candidates are very qualified.

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- Ann Rittenburg asked if the candidates have specific ideas on how the schools can communicate better. Ms. Vose said it is important for SC members to be personally visible at community events. She suggested mailings in advance announcing issues the SC will be tackling. Mr. Tobin said he would remind the community that educating children has benefits for everyone, not just families with children. Mr. Cunningham said his strategy would be to engage all segments of the Town in dialogue so that no one is motivated to undermine a consensus. Mr. Mohr said he would talk to residents about their personal experience with schools and explain what is required to maintain them.

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- Chair Firenze noted that the SC has the freedom to move their budget allocations around as needed. This has generated a credibility issue which in turn creates friction with the Selectmen during the budget process. For example, when discussing estimates of

the number of teachers retiring, the schools react defensively when the Selectmen and Warrant Committee try to dig into how these numbers are arrived at. He asked candidates what is the best way to address this?

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- Mr. Cunningham said it's a little like a marriage where each person is thinking differently about a question. Both sides need to examine their mutual assumptions about the budget process and try to see where the other side is coming from. Ms. Vose said the introduction of a new superintendent is a great opportunity to look at how the budget is developed. Mr. Mohr said it is important to look at how things are perceived and determine the cause of any inaccuracies in the budget. Mr. Tobin said that a certain amount of conflict is inherent because the SC has to advocate for the schools, but the SC must be a credible advocate.
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- Selectman Jones asked Mr. Mohr about ideas for lowering school costs. Mr. Mohr said he has thought a lot about alternative service delivery but with a focus on quality rather than cost. Use of technology can save travel and staff costs.
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- Selectman Jones asked about the idea of computer-based individual distance learning at the high school level. Mr. Cunningham said the push for this seems to be focused on saving money without delivering improvements in quality. Ms. Vose said it could work for certain kinds of students. Mr. Tobin said his experience with online teacher training suggests it is more labor intensive. Human interaction is how we learn best. Mr. Mohr agreed.
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- Selectman Leclerc asked how to combat misapprehension about how well the schools have met financial challenges. Mr. Cunningham said it's critical to reach out to those who are disgruntled. Ms. Vose agreed that the SC should take advantage of opportunities to do so but you can never convince everybody. Mr. Mohr pointed out that sometimes "creative" solutions are short term measures that don't solve long-term problems. Mr. Tobin pointed out that there are few creative ways to solve the problem of costs outpacing revenues. Mr. Cunningham added that sometimes a short-term solution is necessary if not doing it means children's education will suffer.

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• **VOTE**

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• Members voted as follows:

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- John Bowe – Becky Vose
- Laurie Graham – Becky Vose
- Elizabeth Gibson – Becky Vose
- Ann Rittenburg – Roger Tobin
- Leslie Walker – Becky Vose
- Ralph Jones – Becky Vose
- Dan Leclerc – Becky Vose
- Angelo Firenze – Becky Vose

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- Having received a majority of votes, Becky Vose will be appointed to the School Committee to fill Diane Stafford's position until the April 2009 Town election.
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- The Selectmen noted Vose's service on the Zoning Board of Appeals and regretted that time constraints will probably force her to leave that Board.
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- The Board moved: To sign a Memorandum of Agreement with the City of Cambridge developed by the Board of Health.
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- Motion carried unanimously (3-0).
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- The Board moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 pm.
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• Thomas G. Younger, Town
Administrator