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BELMONT, MA**

DATE: June 8, 2022
TIME: 3:20 PM

**Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee Meeting
Wednesday, May 18, 2022
7:30pm**



To view the recording of the meeting, please click [HERE](#).

Call to Order: Mr. Lubien called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

| Member | Present | Member | Present |
|------------------------------------|---------|---|---------|
| Geoffrey Lubien, Chair | Yes | Andrew Levin | Absent |
| Christine Doyle, Vice Chair | Yes | Robert McLaughlin | Yes |
| Elizabeth Dionne, Secretary | Yes | Lynn Peterson Read | Yes |
| Tom Caputo | Yes | Paul Rickter | Yes |
| Jennifer Fallon | Yes | Ellen Schreiber | Yes |
| Elizabeth Goss | Yes | Laurie Slap | Yes |
| Daniel Halston | Yes | Jack Weis | Yes |
| Anne Helgen | Yes | Mark Paolillo, Ex-officio Designee - Select Board | Yes |
| Staff | | Jamal Saeh, Ex-officio, School Com. Chair Appointee | Yes |
| Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator | Yes | | |
| Jay Marcotte, DPW Director | Yes | | |

There was a discussion of scheduling conflicts with the Select Board in regard to voting on ARPA funds. Mr. Paolillo said the Select Board meeting with ARPA discussions will be on May 23rd, to avoid the conflict.

Review Q3 financials: Town and Schools

Town Revenues (Ms. Garvin):

- Revenue for Q3 is at 59.2% collections.
- Property Tax is on target at about 75%.
- Total Fees will mostly show up in Q4 because of timing, especially Excise.
- Local Receipts estimates were made at pre-Covid levels, and some impacts are still being seen (like room rental, parking, etc.).
- Ambulance Receipts are on target.
- Other Covid-related impacts on revenue collection were shared.

Ms. Garvin addressed the issue of a flyer that was distributed that said the town has been underestimating local receipts by \$2.4 million for several years. She shared a spreadsheet that disproved this claim, and explained what was illustrated. Ms. Fallon added information about the use of Free Cash.

Mr. Weis pointed out that any underestimates are only about ½ of a percent of the budget, which shows that the budgeting is actually extremely accurate.

Town Expenses (Ms. Garvin)::

- Ms. Garvin said the expenses are right on target.
- Salary lines not expended to 75% are due to vacancies and turnover.
- Because of the high overtime line in the Fire Department, the plan is to take any surplus salary on the Town side and apply it to Fire Overtime.
- Other lines that have not expended to 75% is due to timing,
- Overages are due to encumbrances, which will be settled at the end of Q4.
- DPW has expended 87.7%, mostly due to trees because that budget is underfunded.

- Recreation has expended 55% but they are going into the summer spending season.
- Board of Health received \$24,000 from the State, so that savings will flow to Free Cash.
- Other departments are right on target.
- Free Cash will be rolled over between \$8-9 million.
- Surplus Revenue is too close to call.
- Turn backs are currently unknown but are being projected between \$2-4 million.

Schools (Mr. Weis):

- \$850,000 projected positive variance at the end of the year (up from \$710,000 projected in Q2). Ms. Helgen pointed out that the final amount will be a turnback to the town.
- Of the \$850,000, about \$700,000 is teacher salaries which is essentially the same as the Q2 projection.
- Because turnover savings (where retiring or resigning teachers are replaced by new teachers at lower salaries is a common occurrence) the Schools budgeting is taking this into account next year and has included \$500,000 of turnover savings in the FY23 budget
- The remaining variance is in Fringe Benefits (lower usage of health insurance, etc.).
- Mr. Weis outlined some expenses that were Covid-related (tents, etc.).
- Substitute Expenses were down because there were fewer of them utilized than were anticipated.

Ms. Slap asked Ms. Garvin if the \$850,000 described by Mr. Weis was included in her Free Cash estimate. Ms. Garvin said it is not included.

Mr. Saeh said there are obviously unknowns (expenses, contracts, etc.) that can impact the positive variance.

Mr. Paolillo noted that Special Education is trending to a deficit and asked if there is any indication of where that might end up. Mr. Weis explained issues influencing this budget.

Mr. Paolillo then asked if there is anything that could affect the Town and Schools turnback numbers. Mr. Weis said the union contracts on the Schools side could have a big impact. Ms. Garvin said that on the Town side it's overtime at the Fire Department. There was a discussion of this.

Mr. Weis outlined some of the Revolving Fund variances.

Ms. Schreiber asked why the school is not being rented. Mr. Weis said his understanding was that they were waiting to "settle" into the new school. Also, after-school fees have not been increased at other schools. Ms. Garvin said that on the Town side they are just starting to see increases in rental activities.

Mr. Weis explained that most of the grants are for Special Education.

Review, discuss, and vote on Town Meeting Segment B Articles

Mr. Lubien advised that it would not be possible to vote on all segments at this meeting because numbers are still changing. In particular is the fuel tank project which will be voted on by the Select Board on Monday. There was a discussion of the issue.

Ms. Fallon reminded the group that the \$500,000 allocated by the Capital Budget Committee for this project is still there.

Mr. Paolillo outlined the four options that are being considered for the fuel tanks.

Mr. Lubien reviewed other variations that will need to be worked out.

Article 13: Mr. Caputo asked if the petitioner had expressed a willingness to withdraw the article. Ms. Garvin said no, but there may be new language submitted.

Article 14, Community Preservation: The Committee has already voted on these, although there may be minor changes on the floor. Ms. Dionne reviewed the possible changes.

Mr. McLaughlin said the Town of Belmont does not control all the land that will be used for the path (the Belmont Community Forum owns much of it).

Motion: Mr. McLaughlin moved reconsideration on Article 14, Section B for \$200,000.

Mr. Paolillo pointed out that this is funding request is for Phase 2, and the issue with the land is the 1a and 1b part of the path. He said the land needed from Belmont Citizen's Forum is a temporary taking for construction, and they have provided a letter of intent to donate the land to the Town. There was a discussion of this issue.

Mr. McLaughlin withdrew his motion for reconsideration.

Article 16, Salaries of Elected Officials: Ms. Helgen asked why the Assessors get paid when other Boards do not. Ms. Garvin said elected Assessors are generally paid by other Towns. Ms. Dionne added that the Retirement Board is also paid, and that the Assessors drive the financial engine of the Town and this may be why they are paid.

Motion: Ms. Fallon moved affirmative action. Mr. McLaughlin seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Article 16, Enterprise Funds:

Motion: Ms. Helgen moved approval. Mr. McLaughlin seconded.

Mr. Weis asked for an idea of what the Retained Earnings are. Mr. Marcotte said Water Retained Earnings are \$2.8 million range, and Sewer came in at about \$2.8 million. He explained that impacts on Sewer, including the Trapelo Road project which he detailed. There was a discussion of these issues.

The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Article 17: Ms. Garvin provided an overview of the existing Revolving Funds on the Town side. Mr. Weis said it would be helpful to show the balance as well as the expenditure. Ms. Garvin said the information was in her February Budget Message, and she will run another report June 1st.

Motion: Ms. Helgen moved approval. Mr. Rickter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Article 18:

Motion: Ms. Helgen moved approval. Ms. Fallon seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Article 21: Ms. Dionne said the rating agencies were impressed that Belmont has a plan for this.

Motion: Ms. Fallon moved approval. Ms. Helgen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Other Business

Administrative matters: Mr. Lubien outlined the meeting schedule leading up to Town Meeting. He also said he would be talking with the Moderator about a process/policy for the budgeting process.

There was a discussion of the expiration of the remote meeting allowance. Mr. Lubien said things are being worked out on how to handle hybrid meetings. Mr. Paolillo said this will be taken up by the Select Board. Ms. Garvin said there likely will be a two-pronged approach: the Board/Committee would be physically present but participants will be remote. Once this is established and worked out then there would be a discussion of having the members of the Board/Committee remote. There was discussion of the remote participation issue.

Approval of Minutes

May 4, 2022: Ms. Doyle suggested that the minutes need to include that the public is asked for comment.

Motion: *Mr. McLaughlin moved to approve the minutes of the May 4, 2022 meeting. Ms. Fallon seconded, and the motion passed with Mr. Saeh, Ms. Slap, Mr. Paolillo, and Mr. Rickter abstaining.*

May 11, 2022:

Motion: *Ms. Helgen moved to approve the minutes of May 11, 2022 as amended.*

Ms. Dionne asked that the sentence “*Ms. Dionne noted that Town Meeting members may not read the entire report, but they read different sections of it, depending on their areas of interest or concern. The report also serves as an important historic record of budget issues.*”

Ms. Fallon seconded, and the motion passed with Mr. Rickter abstaining.

Updates:

Select Board: Mr. Paolillo gave a brief update of the Select Board plans, and announced that the Select Board will have a booth at Town Day for the first time. There was a discussion of a dunk tank next year.

Middle/High School Building Committee: Mr. McLaughlin reported that the high school project is 79% done and the middle school project is about 1/3 done. He said there is a chance that receiving the ARPA funds will affect the reimbursement.

General Government Sub-Committee:

Motion: *Ms. Fallon moved to approve the minutes of the April 14, 2022 General Government Sub-Committee meeting. Mr. McLaughlin seconded, and the motion passed with Ms. Schreiber abstaining.*

Public Safety Sub-Committee:

Motion: *Ms. Read moved to approve the minutes of the April 11, 2022 Public Safety Sub-Committee meeting. Ms. Doyle seconded, and the motion passed with Ms. Helgen abstaining.*

Public Comment

Bill Anderson said Town Day is an opportunity to support local musicians, including high school students.

Adjournment

Motion: *Mr. McLaughlin moved the adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Mr. Rickter seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:09pm.*

Next Meetings:

- Wednesday, May 25 at 7:30pm
- Meetings scheduled at 5:30pm for each of the four Town meetings nights.
- June 22 at 7:30pm (no meeting on the 15th).

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny

Recording Secretary