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DATE: July 11, 2022
TIME: 2:53 PM

**Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Warrant Committee Meeting
Wednesday, April 27, 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	Yes
Christine Doyle, Vice Chair	Yes	Robert McLaughlin	Yes
Elizabeth Dionne, Secretary	Yes	Lynn Peterson Read	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Paul Rickter	Absent
Jennifer Fallon	Yes	Ellen Schreiber	Absent
Elizabeth Goss	Yes	Laurie Slap	Yes
Daniel Halston	Yes	Jack Weis	Yes
Anne Helgen	Yes	Adam Dash, Ex-officio Designee - Select Board	Yes
Staff		Jamal Saeh, Ex-officio, School Com. Chair Appointee	Yes
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Yes	Others	
Ted Pendergast, Operations Manager, Joint Public Safety Communications	Yes	Anne Marie Mahoney, Chair, Capital Budget Committee.	Yes
		Meg Moriarty, Chair, School Committee	Yes

1. Review Capital Projects for FY23

Ms. Mahoney explained that for many years she has asked that the Capital Budget be funded at \$3,000,000 and explained that because of many one-time funds they have achieved \$3,300,000. She then reviewed how that happened:

- Select Board Annual Allocation, \$1,500,000
- Cushing Square Parking Lot Sale Proceeds: just over \$1,000,000
- Turn backs: \$493,000
- School Department: \$51,000 in turn backs
- Facilities: Released Burbank & Chenery turn backs of \$177,000

Ms. Mahoney emphasized that except for the Select Board Allocation, all the above funds are available once. She said the requests that have been received are bare bones and that some historical requests are not showing up because there is not enough worker power to accomplish the tasks.

The Capital Budget Recommends funding the following projects:

- Butler Package: \$487,000 for façade and roof work plus \$415,000 to replace windows which will be added to last year's allocation of \$200,000 for windows. Also includes \$300,000 for the PA system.
- Road Rebuild & Patching: \$150,000. Not regular road repair – this is for immediate winter damage.
- Sidewalks: Additional \$100,000
- Tree Planting: \$25,000

Ms. Mahoney said it was the first time in her memory they were able to fund every request that came from the Department Heads.

She reported that because of construction cost escalation and inflation, the CBC has also put together a "Project Bid Reserve" of \$145,000 which gives projects (mostly from Facilities) a cushion to draw from.

Ms. Mahoney then provided details of the department-specific requests.

Ms. Helgen asked if the 2 vehicles for Facilities are replacements or additions to the fleet. Ms. Mahoney said the electric van is new, but the other is a replacement. Ms. Helgen asked how many staff cars Fire has. Ms. Mahoney said she does not have the number but will send it to Mr. Lubien.

Ms. Helgen then said the replacement of trees does not seem to be a capital expense and thought this type of thing was usually included in the budget. She added that a grant had recently been received to replace trees. Ms. Mahoney said they decided to fund this because they were looking for one-time projects that would last a long time. Ms. Helgen asked if this money is in addition to the regular tree budget. Ms. Gavin said they over-spend the Forestry budget every year, and that the DPW often asks for money to plant trees.

Mr. Lubien said that if a homeowner purchases a tree to replace one that comes down in a storm the town will plant it for you. Ms. Garvin added that for a \$500 donation a tree will be planted in someone's honor with a plaque.

Ms. Fallon provided some background information on the Burbank/Wellington Fiber project, funding the Butler fire alarm system, and the Butler Package.

Mr. Weis asked for an explanation of how the \$5.17M was being funded. Ms. Mahoney explained that all of the discretionary requests, plus extra money for trees, roads patching and sidewalks, plus the Project Bid Reserve plus Roads money that is coming from Overrides. How to present this information at Town Meeting was discussed.

2. Vote on LTCBC bylaw and a proposed amendment to the bylaw.

Ms. Doyle provided a review of the Bylaw and each proposed amendment.

- Article 3 Amendment 1, submitted by Jack Weis: Mr. Weis' concern with the Bylaw is that for the 30-year plan, things like routine technology or vehicles are very difficult to project. The solution was to insert the word "*major*" in the last sentence of the amendment. Ms. Doyle explained that the Long-Term Capital Planning Committee voted for the amendment. Mr. Weis said he feels his concern has been addressed by this change.

Motion: Mr. Weis moved to approve the amendment to Article 3. Ms. Slap seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

- Article 3, Amendment 2, submitted by Robert McGaw: Ms. Doyle reviewed the amendment, pointing out the request to add "*The Committee will endeavor to utilize generally accepted financial analysis tools and models in its evaluation and comparison of Capital Projects*" to the article. She explained that the Long-Term Capital Planning Committee voted against the amendment unanimously because they didn't know how they could evaluate what is "*generally accepted tools and models*". Other members of the LTCPC shared their views on the proposed amendment.

Ms. Helgen said she was excited that the Committee is going to take a more analytical view of how purchases are approached.

Motion: Mr. Dash moved unfavorable action on the amendment to Article 3. Ms. Helgen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

- Article 3, Amendment 3, submitted by Roy Epstein: Ms. Doyle said this amendment had been received very late, although she had previously spoken to Mr. Epstein about his concerns. She explained the reasons for the proposed members of the Capital Budget Committee and pointed out that the Select Board has rules about how they manage their responsibilities to different committees. The amendment would align it with the Select Board, but it would differ from the practice of the CPC.

Mr. Dash expressed displeasure that the amendment was not first reviewed by the Select Board. He explained the purpose of the Board's rules for committee responsibilities, and said his understanding was that the new committee would use the established Select Board member rotation. He did not understand Mr. Epstein's reasons for submitting this amendment.

Ms. Mahoney, who is a former Selectperson, said that the Bylaw is permanent, but the rules and processes of committees can change. She also said that sometimes it is good for a representative to be on a committee longer than one year because they develop expertise. She believes the intent of the amendment is to keep the membership process clean and clear.

Mr. Halston said he would like the entire Select Board's input on this amendment. There was a discussion of the time constraints to do this.

Mr. Caputo (a former member of the Select Board) said he supports Mr. Dash's comments and that their process works well. He suggests that the article remain as originally written.

Several members shared their position on the amendment and their reasoning for it.

There was a discussion of timing for voting on this amendment.

Ms. Doyle explained her understanding of Mr. Epstein's objections which have to do with the Select Board representation switching very soon before Town Meeting.

Mr. Dash said he thinks this amendment is a very bad idea and could (and has) lead to abuse of power on the Select Board. He believes the rotation is fairer and brings a diversity of views on the committee.

Mr. Halston asked if Mr. Dash had spoken to Mr. Paolillo about this amendment. Mr. Dash said he had not because the amendment came so late, and Mr. Paolillo is out of town.

Ms. Fallon suggested that adding "vice chair or designee" could resolve the problem, although that cannot be changed at this meeting.

Mr. Lubien said he will talk to Mr. Paolillo to get an email showing his views on the amendment and then look for a way for the committee to feel better about making a decision.

Mr. Caputo asked if the Moderator would accept an amendment on the floor of Town Meeting saying "*the Vice Chair of the Select Board or a member of the committee designated by its Vice Chair*". He feels this would achieve flexibility but also allow power to be diffused. This was discussed and there was general agreement to doing this.

Ms. Doyle said she is concerned that the substance of the Bylaw will be sidetracked at Town Meeting by an ancillary point like this.

Ms. Moriarty said that she had been notified by the Town Clerk that the School Committee must vote on all amendments by 5:00pm on Monday before Town Meeting begins. Mr. Lubien said he will look into this issue.

The Committee will vote on this amendment on Monday before Town Meeting.

3. Discuss and potential vote on articles 9 and 10

Article 10: Mr. Lubien gave an overview of Article 10, explaining that an audit of the retirement system showed that there is a group of employees that have been classified as a Group 2, but should be Group 1 for a variety of reasons. The goal of the Retirement Board is to Grandfather current employees as Group 2, but anyone hired into these positions would be in Group 1. He explained the impact of this change on the budget.

Mr. Pendergast explained the potential impact of the group change to current employees and said that there is no cost to the town because these retirements are included in the actuarial tables and budget plans.

Ms. Doyle said she supports the plan to switch new employees to Group 1 and keep existing employees in Group 2.

Mr. Weis said there is a cost to the Town to not make the change, although he thinks it is not right to change the group of existing employees.

Mr. Dash said the Select Board did discuss this issue and was generally in favor of the article, although they did not vote on it.

Motion: Mr. McLaughlin moved to approve Article 10.

Ms. Doyle disagreed with Mr. Weis' comment that there is a cost because the current schedule shows these employees as Group 2 but agreed that there is a missed future opportunity saving.

Ms. Fallon seconded the motion.

Ms. Dionne said that she supports the proposal but asked that people remember that pensions are a significant and increasing non-discretionary portion of the operating budget. She added that Public Safety retires at age 55 with the largest pensions of anyone in the Belmont employee pool. This will need to be addressed.

The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Article 9 Increase in Retail Liquor Licenses: Mr. Lubien explained that there are currently 2 licenses for full alcohol, wine, and beer and the proposal is to increase the number of licenses to 4 (at \$4,000 each).

Mr. Dash added that there are also currently 4 wine and beer licenses, and these would increase to 6 (at \$2500 each) for a total of 10 retail licenses. He then provided background on the reason for the article and explained the impact of these changes on marijuana licenses. There are no changes to license restrictions.

Ms. Helgen asked if Belmont got other revenue besides the license fees from liquor sales. Ms. Galvin the local receipts of sales tax are impacted.

Motion: Mr. Levin moved to approve Article 9. Ms. Doyle seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

4. Review First Draft of Warrant Committee Annual Report & Executive Summary

Mr. Lubien said that the Executive Summary will have many of the same themes as last year and he will distribute it ASAP. He added that the School Committee was going to vote on May 10 but the Warrant Committee Report is due May 11, and after a discussion with the Superintendent and the Chair of the School Committee they will accelerate their timeline so Warrant will have more time. He then explained the schedule leading up to Town Meeting.

Ms. Slap asked how many additional FTEs the School Committee will be voting to add, and will they flow through. Mr. Lubien said they will flow through to the General Budget. Mr. Saeh said the School Committee had already voted on the 6.2, but it will come back to look at 6.2 vs. 3.2 FTEs. (Sorry – I don't understand what is being discussed here so I'm not sure this paragraph is useful).

Ms. Goss said it's clear that the Town is stretched very thin, and that this needs to be stressed in the report so people know that things will not be happening because there is not enough money or people. Mr. Lubien asked that Chairs send him a list of things that won't happen.

5. Other Business

Updates, if any, from subcommittees, working groups, and/or committee liaisons, including Town Administrator, Select Board, School Committee, Capital Budget Committee, Community Preservation Committee.

- a. **Select Board:** Mr. Dash said they had discussed (among other things) the Warrant Articles, the Concord Avenue Lane switch, the Fire Chief's residency, charge change for the Economic Development Committee, and student parking at high school.
- b. **Town Administrator:** Ms. Garvin reported that they have received estimates for state aid, and that Chapter 70 did go up by \$133,000 and unrestricted is level funded. She also reported that there may be some additional Chapter 90 funds, and that the Fire Department declared one of the vehicles as surplus and the Town of Peru will be purchasing the vehicle. A new Assistant Town Administrator/Finance Director has been hired and will be introduced to the Committee after Town Meeting. Ms. Garvin will be bringing two reserve fund transfer requests (snow & ice and possibly legal costs) to the Warrant Committee.

Mr. Lubien asked how the estimated State Aid money is handled at Town Meeting. Ms. Garvin said they just amend the budget line.

Mr. Weis asked if State Aid is incorporated into the revenue plan is there a corresponding expense. Ms. Garvin explained how the Town handles the variables of State Aid.

Ms. Doyle asked for details on the higher legal costs. Ms. Garvin said one of the biggest unexpected legal expenses is for 91 Birches Circle. Also, the inability to settle lawsuits, open meeting law complaints, open records requests, and complaints about employees have to be reviewed by Town Counsel. Ms. Doyle asked for a breakdown by department, and Ms. Garvin said she could pull that information together because legal invoices are public record.

- c. High School Building Committee Meeting: Mr. McLaughlin notified the Warrant Committee that there would be a meeting the following night of the Building Committee which will be mostly devoted to the solar panels issue.
- d. School Committee: Mr. Saeh said they would vote on the budget next week, and that one contract has been settled, another is going into mediation, and they are still going through the remaining three. They would love to use the increased Chapter 70 funds. He also said that they are working on understanding how the needs of students are or are not being met, especially the 7-8th grade. Additionally, there is work being done to understand math curriculum needs and a working group was created to look at this across the district.

6. Minutes Approval

Ms. Fallon said that line 102 shows \$250,000 in turn backs but the correct number is \$500,000.

Motion: Mr. Weis moved to approve the minutes of the **March 23, 2022** meeting of the Warrant Committee. Mr. McLaughlin seconded, and the motion passed by roll call vote with Mr. Saeh abstaining.

Motion: Ms. Fallon moved to approve the April 14, 2022 meeting of the Human Services Subcommittee. Ms. Read seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

7. Public Comment: There was no public comment.

8. Adjournment

Motion: Mr. McLaughlin moved the adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee. Mr. Levin seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:45pm.

Next Meeting: May 4, 2022 at 5:30pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Secretary