



**Minutes of the
Town of Belmont
Joint Open Meeting of the
Select Board
with the School Committee,
Warrant Committee and
Comprehensive Capital Budget Committee
December 20, 2023
7:00pm**

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: February 2, 2024
TIME: 8:09 AM

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

Call to Mr. Epstein called the meeting of the Select Board to order at 7:03pm.

Order: Ms. Moriarty called the meeting of the School Committee to order 7:04pm.

Mr. Lubien called the meeting of the Warrant Committee to order at 7:05pm.

Ms. Doyle called the meeting of the Comprehensive Capital Budget Committee to order at 7:06pm.

Select Board Members	Present	School Committee Members & Staff	Present
Roy Epstein, Chair	Yes	Meghan Moriarty, Chair	Yes
Elizabeth Dionne, Vice-Chair	Yes	Amy Checkoway, Secretary	Yes
Mark Paolillo, Member	Yes	Jeffrey Liberty	Remote
Warrant Committee Members		Jamal Saeh	Yes
Geoffrey Lubien, Chair	Remote	Jung Yueh	Yes
Paul Rickter, Vice-Chair	Yes	Amy Zuccarello	Yes
Conor McEachern, Secretary	Remote	Jill Geiser, Superintendent of Schools	Yes
William Anderson	Yes	Lucia Sullivan, Asst Superintendent of Schools	Yes
Tom Caputo	Yes	Anthony DiCologero, Schools Director of Finance	Yes
Fitzie Cowing	Yes	Comprehensive Capital Budget Committee (CCBC)	
Sue Croy	Yes	Chris Doyle, Chair	Yes
Deepak Garg	Absent	Claus Becker	Absent
Anne Helgen	Remote	Patricia Brusch	Absent
Robert McLaughlin	Remote	Susan Burgess-Cox	Remote
Melissa Morley	Yes	Jill Geiser, Non-Voting, Superintendent of Schools	Yes
Lynn Peterson Read	Remote	Jennifer Hewitt, Non-Voting – ATM/Finance Director	Yes
Matthew Taylor	Yes	Deepak Gard, Warrant Committee	Absent
Marie Warner	Yes	Lawrence Link	Remote
Jack Weis	Yes	Aaron Pickilingis	Yes
Roy Epstein, Ex-officio Designee, Select Board	Yes	Mark Paolillo, Ex-officio Designee - Select Board	Yes
Meghan Moriarty, Ex-officio, School Committee	Yes	Jung Yueh, Ex-officio Designee - School Committee	Yes
Staff Members			
Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator	Yes	Matt Haskell, Budget Analyst	Yes
Jennifer Hewitt, ATA/Finance Director	Yes		

FY2025 Budget Summit III – No override budget

Town Side No Override Budget Plan: Click [HERE](#) to see the presentation.

Ms. Garvin outlined her experience regarding making budget cuts and the goal to illustrate what the impacts of a non-override scenario would be.

She first outlined the potential use of Free Cash in FY25 including Opioid Settlement funds and money that has been set aside for capital projects.

Ms. Garvin went on to review the FY25-26 available funding if there is no override including details of committed funds and what is left over. The Town would be budgeting to \$32,500,00 and the Schools to

\$64,750,000 in this situation. This would mean a \$800,000 reduction for the Town and \$2,200,00 for the Schools. The budgets being presented at this meeting will reflect these numbers. This budgeting exercise was also done for FY26 although in less detail pending more information.

The Municipal Actions since the last failed override were then presented including FTE Reductions, Efficiencies, and Restructuring of personnel and departments.

Ms. Garvin then explained the planning that has been done to prepare the non-override budget and explained that there is still much work to be done. She then provided details of the reductions being recommended if there is no override including changes to trash pickup and reductions in Police & Fire for FY25 and FY26. She has asked the Police & Fire Chiefs to prepare reports on what these reductions would mean to response time and other services.

For General Government the recommendations include reducing polling locations, fund early voting with State grants, removed DEI funding and reduce staff. Human Resources reductions would include Council on Aging and Health staff reductions and reduced expenses for the Library. In FY26 further Library reductions would be needed.

Ms. Garvin then provided a Summary of Staff Reductions of 6.6 FTEs in FY25 (Human Services, Public Safety, and General Government) and 8.0 FTEs in FY26 (Public Safety) as well as corresponding benefits savings.

School Side No Override Budget Plan: Click [HERE](#) to see the presentation.

Ms. Moriarty emphasized that the School Committee and School Department are not recommending any of the non-override budget scenarios being discussed although the cuts would have to be implemented if there is no override. She cautioned that Belmont would no longer be able to claim that it has an excellent school system if these cuts are made and went on to discuss some of the impacts of the cuts. She expressed her hope that the cuts will not be needed and spoke about her wishes for the Schools and Town.

Dr. Geiser spoke about her concerns about the reductions if there is no override, but also her hope because of the process and collaboration of those in the room. She also pointed out that reducing the dollar amounts actually reduces resources for students.

Mr. DiCologero then reviewed the changes to the FY25 Level Service Rollover due to a reduction in some expenses as well as an increase in Special Education Tuition and Transportation lines. The difference is an increase of \$3,376,000 over the FY24 budget. He then explained why these line items changed and that there is currently an expected deficit for FY24.

Dr. Geiser explained that there are currently 2 scenarios under consideration and that a final one will be presented to the School Committee on January 9, 2024.

She then explained the factors impacting the scenarios (available revenue, level service budget, transportation, etc.). Then, Dr. Geiser provided the details of the two scenarios, the tiered reductions that would be involved, and explained how they differ and the impacts of each type of cut.

Scenario 1:

- Tier 1 includes reductions in Professional Development, and Transportation. She pointed out some of the major issues with these reductions. Tier 1 is the same in both scenarios.
- Tier 2 includes cuts to Extracurricular Programs, and she outlined some of the challenges of these cuts.
- Tier 3 includes \$638,691 reductions in Educational Programs and Classroom Resources, which she detailed.
- Tier 4 is staffing reductions, broken into 3 groups:
 - Staffing Group A: Leadership & Administrative Staff
 - Staffing Group B: Clerical & Support Staff
 - Staffing Group C: \$58,000 of Instructional Staff.

70 **Scenario 2:**

- 71 • Tier 1 includes reductions in Professional Development, and Transportation. Tier 1 is the same in both
- 72 scenarios.
- 73 • Tier 2: In this scenario, there are no cuts to Extracurricular Programs (but there are deeper cuts in Tier
- 74 4).
- 75 • Tier 3 includes \$638,691 reductions in Educational Programs and Classroom Resources, which she
- 76 detailed.
- 77 • Tier 4 is staffing reductions, broken into 3 groups:
- 78 ○ Staffing Group A: Leadership & Administrative Staff
- 79 ○ Staffing Group B: Clerical & Support Staff
- 80 ○ Staffing Group C: \$638,000 for Instructional Staff.

81 Dr. Geiser then provided more details of the serious impacts of these cuts. She emphasized that neither of

82 these scenarios includes a school closure, but it is unclear if that could happen in FY26.

83 Dr. Gieser then explained the approach and considerations that will be used to look at FY26, and explained

84 that it will be necessary to know what will happen in FY25 in order to get more detailed.

85 Ms. Garvin then provided a history of overrides in Belmont for the past 30 years and noted that this would be

86 the highest override requested. She then reviewed the next steps for the Budget Process.

87 Mr. Epstein pointed out that much of the FY24 budget depended on Free Cash and ARPA money that will no

88 longer be available and explained that regular revenue would not even meet FY24 levels if rolled forward into

89 FY25. He went on to explain Excess Free Cash that would be available and explained how the Excess Free

90 Cash would be drawn down in FY25 and FY26. He emphasized that by the end of FY26 the Excess Free Cash

91 would be gone which will create another challenging budget year in FY27. He then spoke about revenue

92 growth versus expense growth.

93 There were questions and discussion about the FY25 Available Funding in a non-override situation and the

94 use of Free Cash as well as a discussion of the enormous impacts these cuts would have on residents.

95 There was also a discussion of the potential override number and how to educate residents about the need for

96 an override.

97 There were further questions and discussion about the non-override budgets presented, the impacts to

98 services that the resulting cuts will cause, and the importance of assuring a successful override and next steps

99 and strategies needed to achieve the override.

100 There was also discussion of how to think differently and creatively about the cuts that would be needed and

101 how the Town and School system would be fundamentally changed by those the cuts required if there is no

102 override.

103 **Public Comment:**

104 Mary Lewis pointed out that the non-override budgets miss the opportunity, moral, educational, and service

105 costs of lost potential. She said there are already deep cuts and expressed her concern about cutting more.

106 She also encouraged more communication at the Special Town Meeting.

107 Angus Abercrombie said that while talking to people about the override he has heard distrust and apathy

108 toward Town and School staff because of past experience, which is attributable to past cuts. He recommended

109 that the override be framed as being hopeful and as a way to rebuild Belmont to stability.

110 **Next Meetings**

- 111 • January 8, 2024 – 7:00 PM – Regular Session
- 112 • January 22, 2024 – 5:30 PM – Pre-Special Town Meeting
- 113 • January 25, 2024 – 7:00 PM – Budget Summit IV

Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting of the Belmont Select Board, and the motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:56pm.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting of the Warrant Committee, and the motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:56pm.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting of the Belmont Comprehensive Capital Budget Committee, and the motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:57pm.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting of the Belmont School Committee, and the motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:57pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Secretary