

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
February 9, 2021

Present: Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Chair
Ms. Catherine Bowen, Secretary
Ms. Amy Checkoway
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Tara Donner
Ms. Evelyn Gomez
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations
Mr. Michael McAllister, Director of Human Capital

1. Opening Business

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 8:02 a.m.

The Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee – Anne Helgen, Geoff Lubien, Liz Goss, Jack Weis, and Paul Rickter- joined the School Committee Finance Subcommittee meeting.

2. FY22 Override for April 2021 Ballot (Vote)

On a motion offered by Andrea Prestwich and seconded by Mike Crowley, it was VOTED, unanimously on a roll call vote to support the \$6.4 million override placed on the Town ballot by the Select Board.

3. FY22 Budget Reduction Scenario

Superintendent Phelan updated the School Committee and Education Subcommittee of the Warrant Committee with minor changes to the February 5 budget presentation, which will include some updated slides. The original amount of \$2.3 million in school reductions was changed to \$2.07 million after discussion around a 60/40 Town/School split in operating expenses. OPEB expenses are accounted for outside of the Town departments' budgets.

Superintendent Phelan then presented the no override reduction impact on students and asked for feedback from the group. The typical approach is to include what would be lost in the following order: all new positions for the FY22 budget (technology integration specialist, SPED elementary chair, district-wide equity specialist, MS Teachers, HS Teachers, communications positions), existing positions then non-salary items. The reduction process will not be done in a traditional manner (last in, first out) but will be done to prioritize needs (keep newly added positions and reduce current positions).

Exact reductions for programs or categories are not included in the presentation due to the many variables at this time. The goal is to give an overview of how the reduction process will be approached. Over the next couple of weeks, there will be more detail with specific position cuts. A variables page may be included in future presentations and a spreadsheet to clarification, for instance, "fewer specials" means more frees.

The group discussed other variables such as a requested change in Chapter 70 numbers to reflect a shift in Kindergarten staffing FTEs and overall enrollment, and agreed on the need to get specific cuts out to the public as soon as possible to stress the urgency for an override.

Committee members discussed the priority to hold academics harmless; recognize the concerns for CORE instruction gaps. The athletic and co-curricular programs are funded by a combination of fees and revolving funds, predominantly serving 9-12 grades. How many unique students are served by the programs? Generally aiming to eliminate fees, but need to look at how programs are serving all students. No specific reductions in line items or programs have been determined as of yet and the schools will look at all perspectives. Typically, reductions would yield more study halls/free periods, reduced co-curriculars/athletics, reduced technology supports (1:1 program), reductions in transportation.

Comments were offered by community members with support to not cut supplies that enable teachers to teach or athletics for purposes of student physical and mental health.

State funding was discussed, as it is lower than estimated due to enrollment decrease and credits for K program; both are being re-evaluated with DESE. Belmont pays for unemployment, in the absence of federal support in the pandemic; this has not had a negative impact as yet.

4. CMS Solar Panel Discussion

Superintendent Phelan gave the School Committee an update on the Chenery Middle School Solar Panel project. He met with Patrice Garvin, Craig Spinelli (Belmont Light Department), Jay Marcotte (DPW), and Mike Santoro (DPW); there was a delay in reviewing the roof to determine if it can take the weight of the solar panels and to confirm there are no existing leaks. Once DPW hears back from Belmont's roof contractor, the work will move forward. They discussed the pathways of ownership for the solar panels, whether the panels should be owned by the Light Department and the School Committee lease the roof space to them, or to have the Town/Schools own them as with regular capital. Belmont Light Department is overseeing the project and the current plan is to install the solar panels on the lower gym roof. Placing the panels on the main roof, which would be out of sightlines, was the original preference but the investigation found the larger roof to be vulnerable due to identified leaks in the roof. Superintendent Phelan said there are leaks over all the roofs at Chenery and they are looking to repair.

Member Bowen recapped a brief history of the project: the panels were awarded to the Town of Belmont by virtue of a successful residential solarize campaign in 2016; the most successful in the state; an anonymous donor has also donated to the installation; Belmont owns its electric utility so there is additional benefit in having renewable electric energy to residents overall. Supt. Phelan shared the good collaboration and the good news of a utilities cost savings of some \$15,000 annually.

Member Checkoway acknowledged the great interest of the community to see the project realized. Supt. Phelan indicated that he expected to be able to have an update at the next Finance Subcommittee meeting.

Anthony DiCologero alerted the Committee to recent LABBB transportation vendor contract negotiations. Usage is at 60% of the original contract due to the pandemic. He asked for verbal authorization to investigate the process of a contract adjustment request with the other LABBB districts. There is an overall savings in this budgeted line. The School Committee was favorable to his request.

5. Approval of Minutes

School Committee Minutes:

- January 5, 2021
- January 12, 2021
- January 19, 2021

On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED, unanimously on a roll call vote to accept the School Committee minutes.

Finance Subcommittee Minutes:

- January 5, 2021
- January 12, 2021

On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED, (3-0-1) on a roll call vote to accept the Finance Subcommittee minutes.

Finance Subcommittee Minutes:

- January 19, 2021
- February 2, 2021

On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED, unanimously on a roll call vote to accept the Finance Subcommittee minutes.

6. Adjourn

On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Evelyn Gomez, it was VOTED, unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:59.

Respectfully Submitted by:


Catherine Bowen, Secretary