



Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Meeting Minutes
Monday, November 7, 2022, 10:00 a.m.
Belmont Mill
Tioga Meeting Room

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Claude Patten, Jr., TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Fire Chief Mike Newhall, Assistant Fire Chief Deb Black, Police Captain Steve Akerstrom, Fire Lieutenant Tom Murphy, Cemetery Trustee Sharon Ciampi, and Planning Board Member Kevin Sturgeon. Via Zoom was Finance Director Katherine Davis, Land Use Technician Karen Santoro, and Librarian Eileen Gilbert.

Those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Minutes:

Selectman Claude Patten moved the minutes of the public meeting held on October 17, 2022, as written; seconded by Selectman Jon Pike and the motion passed unanimously.

Selectman Pike moved the minutes of the Budget Review meeting held on October 19, 2022, as written; seconded by Selectman Patten and the motion passed unanimously.

Selectman Patten moved the minutes of the Budget Review meeting held on October 27, 2022, as written; seconded by Selectman Pike and the motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

Years of Service Awards Recognition:

The following employees were recognized for their service to the Town of Belmont:

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Peter Latucky | 5 years (Present) |
| Patrick Riley | 10 years |
| Joel Pickowicz | 15 years |
| Dave Estes | 15 years |
| Steve Akerstrom | 20 years (Present) |
| Colleen Akerman | 5 years (Present) |

TC/TC New Hire Introductions:

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Cynthia DeRoy introduced new Town Clerk/Tax Collector Assistant Jennifer Thomas, who is a resident of Belmont. Another new Assistant Leigh Smith will be introduced at the next meeting.

Sewer New Hire Introduction:

Chris Tibbetts was introduced as the new Sewer Technician working with the DPW.

Land Use Introduction and Promotion:

TA Alicia Jipson introduced Susan Austin, the new part-time Land Use Clerk. Due to the recent retirement of the Land Use Administrative Assistant, Susan will be promoted to that full-time position in December.

Park N Ride Replacement Lights Discussion:

Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden informed the Board the original 6 stadium lights were donated to the Town, but they were too bright. Only two were used with LEDs but 50% of those have burned out and the bulbs can no longer be replaced. It is now dim and there are campers and vehicles with homeless parking in the shadows, but the Police Department tries to take care of things. DPW Director Craig Clairmont estimates those units and bulbs have been there for about 20 years. B&G Supervisor Golden has a quote for \$1,800 to replace the lighting and \$780 to remove the old poles, which are deteriorating.

Selectman Pike motioned to approve the replacement of the lights at the Park N Ride for \$1,800, with an additional \$780 to remove the old light poles; seconded by Chairman Ruth Mooney and the motion passed unanimously.

Belmont Bogie Busters Snowmobile Trail Permission:

A written permission form was submitted by the Bogie Busters for permission to use trails on eight Town-owned parcels. There are options for indefinite, 1 year and 5 years. The State of NH provides the insurance coverage. The Board agreed to a one-year term in case there are changes that need to be made on any Town-owned parcels. Chairman Mooney signed the agreement.

Cemetery Trustees Legal Request:

Cemetery Trustee Sharon Ciampi said she was present at TA Jipson's request, to discuss concerns about cemetery perpetual care funds. She explained legal advice was necessary to figure out three legal issues, including how to handle perpetual funds for someone who opened a perpetual care fund but was not buried at the cemetery when they passed. They anticipated using \$1,800-\$2,000 from this year's budget as a retainer. A report of the accounts with principal and interest was distributed to the Board for review. There is approximately \$104,000 that could potentially be accessed through some form of legal process/court. An attorney should be able to give advice on how to get the funds released for return or utilization. The Cemetery Trustees have received advice from Trustee of the Trust Funds, Dave Caron, as well as the NH Cemetery Association and the Department of Justice on how to proceed. Chairman

Mooney clarified that an attorney is needed to give a legal decision. The Board had concerns about any possible incoming funds and how they would be spent. Chairman Mooney stated if the anticipated amount comes through, they would no longer need to make capital requests. TA Jipson noted that Town Counsel was uncertain if capital funds can be used for legal expenses such as these. The Board would like to request that Trustee of the Trust Funds Dave Caron attend the next meeting to discuss this situation.

Cemetery Trustee Ciampi also requested the Board consider allowing two alternates for one year until they can put it on the ballot to increase their membership to 5 members. Chairman Mooney was unsure of the legality of alternates. Selectman Patten said it would be similar to all other Boards like Planning and Zoning that have alternates. Trustee Ciampi said she has the RSA to refer to as well. The Board agreed the Cemetery Trustees may advertise and interview for alternates.

Other New Business:

Homeowner's Assistance Fund:

TA Jipson informed the Board that TC/TC DeRoy has been able to obtain funding for past due taxes, and water and sewer bills to bring accounts current. One payment was \$57,558 bringing that account current and no longer facing deeding.

Old Business:

Code Enforcement Update:

Code Enforcement Officer Mark Ekberg reported ongoing issues with the property at 15 Johnson Street, which has been sent to the courts. The building has been boarded up and it should be difficult to enter without cutting holes in the side of the building. CEO Ekberg keeps a close eye on the property. There is a court hearing November 10th, and a writ of ownership will be discussed. CEO Ekberg is trying to work with the management company to relocate debris on the property until the court can settle the matter.

The owner of 130 Depot Street has requested a non-public meeting with the Board of Selectmen today. CEO Ekberg provided the Board with documentation of the notices that have occurred with regards to the status of the property and the currently illegal junkyard. There is a letter from Attorney Driscoll to be sent to the owner, however the Town recently sent a similar letter. Selectman Patten asked how long ago the junkyard license expired. The license was not renewed in June 2021. In November 2021, the Board agreed to give the owner one year from the denial to bring the property into compliance. There were a large number of tires (1,500-2,000) removed at one point but that is about the only progress. There is no longer an option to bring the property into compliance for a junkyard.

CEO Ekberg has no current update on the property at 752 Laconia Road.

There has been a massive cleanup effort at the 292 Durrell Mountain Road property, but it can't be seen from the road. More than 50% has been cleaned up and moved out.

There has also been good progress with cleanup at the 43 Rogers Road property.

Skate Park Update from Shaker Regional School District:

TA Jipson read an email into the record from Superintendent Mike Tursi, addressed to Skate Park Committee members, as Superintendent Tursi could not be here today.

"Hello Amanda and Barbara, By consensus of the School Board at last night's meeting, they do not want to move forward with leasing or selling the property to the town for the construction of the skate park. Their main reasons include holding on to the property in case there is a need for school district purposes in the future as well as a safety concern due to the high volume of traffic during drop-off and dismissal at the middle school. I know this is not good news to you. Please know that I and the Board continue to support the project as it was initially proposed to the Belmont Board of Selectmen. Thank you, Michael J. Tursi, Superintendent of Schools, Shaker Regional School District."

Chairman Mooney said this is now back in the committee's hands.

Budget Item Adjustments:

TA Jipson reported \$100,000 has been removed from the Water budget because it had been moved into the Capital Outlay and was duplicated in both places. That reduces the Water budget to \$255,141.92.

A change was made to Capital Outlay for the ambulance. This is a warrant article for a total of \$575,000 to come out of the ambulance fund of which \$50,000 will be used in 2023 for the deposit.

SAFER Grant Discussion:

Chairman Mooney stated there has been lots of discussion and innuendos about this grant. She has spent a lot of time doing research and listening to everyone. She will read a letter into the record to help prevent any misunderstandings. The subject will then be open for public discussion.

"I Ruth Mooney under considerable thought and consideration into the SAFER Grant that the Town of Belmont has been awarded feel that due to the hiring of 2 Firefighter/Paramedics in 2022 at the request of the Fire Chief has been made and that the appropriate steps in increases staffing levels have been accommodated. In 2021 when our Fire Chief came to us asking for additional staff we agreed to the increase, as we were told it was needed and that it would put the department in a better place. We were not made aware at any time from 2021 until now that the department was in dire need of 6 more additional staff. Belmont as most towns in the State and across the country are facing hard economic times and I feel that increasing our staffing levels this much at one time is not what is right for Belmont.

When the grant is over keeping this many new employees will have a hard hit to the budget and the taxpayers of Belmont. To put it into perspective hiring 6 additional members to the Fire Department for just wages and benefits alone would have a \$500,000 increase yearly to the Town's budget, not taking into consideration the other related costs for each employee. This would approximately add 45 cents per thousand to the tax rate. With that said I make a motion to instruct our Town Administrator to submit a request to FEMA requesting that our initial grant award be reduced to reflect the hiring of 2 Firefighter/Paramedics and not 6." We are under no obligation to accept 6. It will not affect the Fire, Police or Highway Departments for future grants.

Fire Lieutenant Tom Murphy asked the Board to reconsider. Looking at the amount of calls they have; they are in need of more personnel. There are back-to-back calls, and he has responded to medical calls via pickup truck while waiting for an ambulance. The second ambulance can't transport a patient without 2 employees. He has been on the department for 31 years. Life is different than it was 20 years ago. There is not much opportunity for call members due to people's schedules. Other departments in the area with similar call volume have least 4 people on shift 24/7.

Chairman Mooney was concerned about the requirement for 6 new employees to be firefighter paramedics, and "poaching" employees from other area departments. She has heard there are not enough applicants to fill all the open first responder positions. There are also additional costs associated with new employees in addition to the salary and benefits. Chairman Mooney said the first question she hears about the additional firefighters is "Will we need a new Fire Station addition?"

Resident Jason Griffin from off Plummer Hill Road asked what assessment, knowledge and research was used for the Board to determine the need for 2 firefighters versus 6; and he asked if the FEMA grant is modified to 2 instead of 6, is the Board committing to adding 2 additional firefighters to this budget. Chairman Mooney responded no. Selectman Pike said the Board is not questioning the need, but 6 new employees do not work because of the cost.

Fire Chief Mike Newhall stated there will not be a need for an addition to the Fire Station. He also asked that it be reflected in the record that no one was invited by him to attend this meeting other than Assistant Chief Deb Black. He explained that with 4 people on shift, they can always handle two medical calls, and if there is a fire they can meet minimum standards of two people inside and two people outside.

Chairman Mooney stated if the number was changed to 4, taxpayers would be hit with paying for 4 firefighters at the end of the three-year grant. Chief Newhall reminded the Board that firefighters hired through the grant will be aware that their positions may not continue to be funded at the end of the grant. Many places who get this grant do not keep those people on staff and it is not unusual. Chairman Mooney said it is also not unusual to not accept all of the grant positions. There was discussion about the firefighting program through the college and drawing students into the Belmont Fire Department.

Mr. Griffin asked about the increase in call volume over the last 10 years. Chairman Mooney acknowledged it is a huge increase. Mr. Griffin stated it is an increase of over 600 calls. He questioned the number of firefighters who may retire in the next three years.

Sharon Ciampi asked about how the funding would work and if the funds can be held. They cannot because it is a continuous reimbursement. She said she would like to know that a medical professional is available within 10 minutes to provide assistance. If someone else can foot the bill for three years, we should let them. Firefighters hired can be notified that the positions are grant-funded and may not be continued at the end of the grant term. With increased population and more houses being built there may be a need for 6 firefighters in three years.

Resident Alan MacRae said he has lived here for 39 years and has served on the Budget Committee and the Board of Selectmen. He has a 40-year history with public safety and Belmont is fortunate to have two leaders who are recognized by their peers as top notch. The Fire Department has gotten the short end of things in the past and worked mostly on their own to build the new Fire Department. Belmont is growing and there are lots of new people. He would like all 6 firefighters to be hired to bring us up to NFPA standards and have a positive impact on the rates everyone pays for fire insurance. The department is running multiple back-to-back calls on a regular basis and is relying on mutual aid services for assistance with medical calls. He does not want a tax increase but is willing to pay what it takes to have good service from the Fire Department now, or down the road. We need to support the department and move forward with accepting the 6 positions. If the department is ultimately unable to support the 6 positions after the grant term, those people knew ahead of time it was a grant position. If that happens it is unfortunate, but 6 people could potentially move to surrounding communities because it doesn't seem like the shortage of public safety people is going to disappear in 6 years. He encouraged the Board to accept the grant for 6 new firefighters.

Chairman Mooney stated the Board and the Budget Committee have always supported the Fire Department. A year ago, she recommended the Fire Department order their next ambulance because she had concerns about the lead time.

There was discussion about how other communities proceeded with reducing the number of firefighters initially offered with the SAFER grant. Greg Bavis, the consultant for the SAFER grant clarified some of the information presented.

The Chairman closed public comment.

Selectman Patten seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Mooney stated she is in favor of accepting the grant for hiring 2 Firefighter/Paramedics, under the conditions that the positions are grant-funded and when the grant funding runs out in 2026 the Town of Belmont does not make any commitment to retain the employees. She also requested the record reflect that "After review of the application, it is

stated that the Board of Selectmen are in favor of hiring 6 employees and agree to retain the 6 employees at the conclusion of the grant. This is in fact a large misrepresentation and nowhere in any prior meeting was this discussed, and/or voted on. We as a Board agreed to let the Fire Chief move forward with applying for a grant but at no time made any commitments on how many to retain after. There are in fact many statements made in the grant that I find untrue."

Chairman Mooney motioned to direct the Town Administrator to create a formal grant policy which all departments must follow moving forward, and no grant will be submitted without the signature of the Town Administrator; seconded by Selectman Pike and the motion passed unanimously. Chairman Mooney emphasized that this policy will be implemented Town-wide.

Lieutenant Tom Murphy asked for clarification about the grant reduction. He asked if the request for reduction is not granted by the federal government, will the entire grant be thrown out by the Board. Chairman Mooney confirmed this would be the case.

Chief Newhall asked the Board to reconsider their position.

Five-year Firefighter/AEMT Pete Latucky said he listens to calls come in after hours and having additional help would reduce the burden on current staff because everyone is tired, especially after working a 48-hour shift. It is often necessary for them to call in Gilmanton or Laconia for assistance.

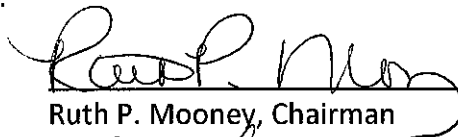
Other Old Business: None

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting date will be November 21, 2022, at 10:00am.

Non-Public:

Chairman Mooney moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II (c) at 11:15 am. Selectman Patten seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously. Roll call was taken and those present and voting were Jon Pike, Ruth Mooney and Claude Patten, Jr. Also present were TA Alicia Jipson and Captain Steven Akerstrom. Then a Nonpublic session with Fire Chief Mike Newhall. The Board returned to public session at 12:25 pm.

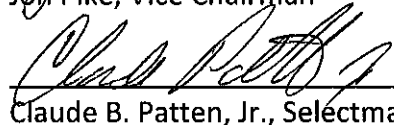
The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 pm.



Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman



Jon Pike, Vice Chairman



Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman