



# Office of Board of Selectmen

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**Selectmen's Budget Review Workshop Minutes**  
**Wednesday, October 16, 2023, 10:00 am**  
**Belmont Mill**  
**Corner Meeting House Room**

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Travis O'Hara, Selectman Claude Patten, Jr., Selectman Sharon Ciampi, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Police Captain Steven Akerstrom, DPW Director Craig Clairmont and Code Enforcement Officer Mark Ekberg.

Via Zoom were Town Planner Karen Santoro and Library Director Eileen Gilbert

The Chairman opened the meeting at 9:56 am.

**Police Department:**

Police Chief Lewandoski gave an overview of the department's activity. He has been down two positions for quite a bit of the year and the detectives are busy. They added another detective and each one of them is working a sexual assault case. The prosecutor currently has 400 cases and he will be retiring in March. The Captain and the Lieutenant are pulling shifts and the Chief is also taking calls, which is unheard of, but they don't have the manpower and don't want to burn out their current officers. These problems are not inherent to Belmont; they are happening across the country. It takes about 8 months to get an uncertified officer on the road and they are paid by the Town during those 8 months. He has six employees who could retire. The entire Detectives division could retire and there would be no one else to follow up on those cases.

Selectman Pike asked about the service contract increase, which doubled in two years. Chief Lewandoski stated that includes the new taser contract, and all of the contracts increased.

Selectman O'Hara asked about the benefit of a municipality having its own dispatch center. Chief Lewandoski explained the dispatch area opens and controls the lobby and has personal contact with citizens and direct contact with agents on the street, who they help protect and gather information for. We wouldn't get that with a main center. We can maintain and control what we have. There wouldn't be much benefit in Belknap County because other municipalities such as Laconia and Gilford would not use a main dispatch center and nothing would be gained. Captain Steven Akerstrom noted the quality of dispatching is better with our own center. When there are more officers on the road and limited dispatchers there is a safety concern. Doing our own dispatch means we have less radio traffic. There are also a lot of

administrative calls and people stopping in the lobby and our dispatchers are the first point of contact. Even if a main dispatch center was used, we would still need someone in dispatch to do all of the other jobs that they do. If Belmont went 24/7 for dispatch coverage, 5 or 6 staff would be needed.

Selectman Sonny Patten asked why the salaries are not all uniform. It was noted some employees have more experience and come in at a different pay scale than someone with less experience. There was discussion about the breakdown of the salaries and detail pay and holiday pay. There is an offset for detail pay that is not seen in the PD budget because it goes into revenues. Chairman Mooney asked about the officers who did not fulfill their contracts. TA Jipson said that is still in Legal's hands. Selectman O'Hara suggested that police training should be like college and individuals should be able to pay and attend on their own, rather than requiring them to be sponsored by a municipality. There was some conversation about how unions operate. TA Jipson noted insurance rates are not yet final. Selectman Pike reviewed the repairs budget and Chief Lewandoski suggested an increase to \$15,000 due to the increase in parts and labor.

TA Jipson recommended holding off on approving this budget because of medical changes and possible wage modifications.

#### **Building Inspection & Code Enforcement:**

CEO Mark Ekberg provided the Board with a sample printed schedule for his inspections. There was discussion about the salary for a Code Enforcement Officer who is not yet certified, the increased number of inspections and building permits issued, and whether 20 hours is sufficient for the Building Clerk position. Selectman Patten asked about the increase for protective gear and CEO Ekberg explained it would be a one-time increase to purchase appropriate durable raingear and footwear. He does not currently wear steel toe boots. There is a helmet in the CEO vehicle. There was discussion about the building fee schedule and offsets for costs and when they were last updated, which was possibly 2019. TA Jipson explained those fees go into revenues and do not show as part of the CEO budget. There was a significant drop in fees this year because there were 2 or 3 large commercial projects last year. The Board asked CEO Ekberg to do some research on proposed increases to the building permit fees because they have not been updated recently.

Selectman Patten asked about the plan for certifications and any current certifications held. CEO Ekberg will be taking a course in December to try to earn one certification for B1 Residential. The Board agreed to budget for a wage increase, which will be given only after certifications have been obtained. CEO Ekberg suggested a possible move to a salaried position to help cover the hours he works that are not paid. There was discussion about how to cover necessary inspections when CEO Ekberg is out of the office for planned training or vacations. The Legal line is high because of the active court cases.

The Board agreed to hold off on voting because of the possibility of adding funds to subcontract for someone to inspect when CEO Ekberg is out of the office.

### **Solid Waste:**

TA Jipson reviewed the numbers with Casella this morning, but the actual numbers will not be received until mid-December. There is some grant money but that shows on the revenue side. DPW Director Craig Clairmont said he heard the cost for the Household Hazardous Waste will increase significantly but he does not have a final number yet. LRPC charges a flat fee and each town is calculated differently. The proposal is a 10% increase.

*Selectman Mooney moved to approve the Solid Waste budget as presented, with the knowledge that the Household Hazardous Waste amount may increase; seconded by Selectman Pike. The motion passed unopposed (5-0).*

TA Jipson pointed out that we have seen a savings this year with the new automated system and limited carts for disposal. It is a bigger number, but a savings in the long run. DPW reports there is less litter on the roads with the carts in use, and there has been a decrease in people from other towns bringing their trash to Belmont for disposal.

### **Property Taxation:**

There were not a lot of increases to the budget. The service contracts have increased for our Vision and AxisGIS software, which are our behind-the-scenes assessing software systems. The appraisal line was increased because building permits have increased and will require more pickups. There is also an increase in wages.

There was discussion about the revaluation process and what will be happening in 2024. That will be a field review, with drive-bys to check on the condition of properties and structures. A complete revaluation with a "measure and list" where assessors go into homes has an estimated cost of \$300,000-\$500,000 and is recommended every 10 years. We did a sales update in 2022 because of the increases in sales and to get the tax rate down. The goal is always to bring our values up to 100%, but we are still not there yet. The full measure and list should be in 2029 and we should put away \$75,000 per year towards the cost. Our contract with KRT ends in 2024. We have been with them for a long time and they are familiar with Belmont and the idiosyncrasies of some of our properties such as Mallard's Landing and the campgrounds. We have a good working relationship with them. Making a change would mean someone new learning everything from scratch. Selectman O'Hara commented that a different company may not have a different result. The assessors have to do what the state tells them to do. Anyone can argue their assessment to the state and let them make a determination.

*Chairman Mooney moved to approve the Property Assessment budget of \$134,208.75 as presented; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. The motion passed unopposed (5-0).*


### **Long Term Debt & Interest:**

The Long Term Debt budget includes the Pleasant Valley project, and will be the last year for this payment. The Hoadley Road culvert has payments until 2026 and the Police Station until 2040. We are not in a bad position debt-wise.

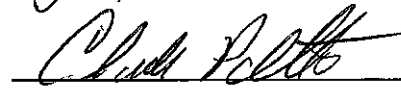
Chairman Mooney moved to approve the Long-Term Debt & Interest budget of \$307,265.00 as presented; seconded by Selectman Pike. The motion passed unopposed (5-0).

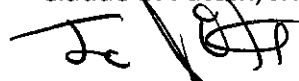
**Adjournment:**

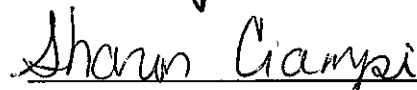
Selectman O'Hara moved to adjourn at 11:42 am; seconded by Selectman Pike. The motion passed unopposed (5-0).

  
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Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman

  
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Jon Pike, Vice Chairman

  
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Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman

  
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Travis O'Hara, Selectman

  
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Sharon Ciampi, Selectman