



## **BUTLER PTA General Meeting April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

Minutes taken by Stephanie Wratten

**Attending:** James McDonald, Carrie Redi, Frank Dill, Paul Aloisio, Kim Blinn, Kate Weinstein, Miriam Lapson, Karen Gutterman, Rose O'Neil, Alexandra Goho, Eric Perkins, Stephanie Wratten, Laura VanderHart, Barbara Bulfoni, Maribel Carvajal

### **Approval of Minutes - Stephanie Wratten**

Stephanie moved to approve the minutes, Frank seconded, all approved.

### **Bylaws – Mauro Lance**

Laura moved to approve the recommendations of the bylaw committee, Barbara seconded, all approved.

### **Nominating Committee – Barbara Bulfoni**

Barbara said that the by-laws ask for a nominating committee of 3 so we need to approve a committee of 2 because 2 people volunteered for the committee.

Laura moved that we have committee of 2, Paul and Carrie seconded, all approved.

Sabrina Tam and Maribel Caraval will be the two on nominating committee.

Laura asked us to post flyers around town for the upcoming electronics recycling.

### **Guest Speaker -- Senator Will Brownsberger**

Senator Brownsberger gave a brief update on the State budget outlook and will talk about school funding, then fielded some questions.

He shared that he got into politics as parent in Belmont concerned about schools. He was a Belmont town selectman, then state senator.

In the state – managing the budget is still an issue. The affordable care act is challenging to pay for. Mass Health – about 1 in 4 people in Massachusetts are on it. 58% of the cost is seniors and disabled, even though many young people are in the program.

State aid expectation for education is modest so it is good news that Belmont passed override.

Other issues on education front -- charter schools in Boston. Mostly parents seem to want charters since they want options. But now a split message since many parents are trying to make it work in district schools.

PARCC testing. He is interested in our feedback even though it is not really a legislative issue. Parent attending shared various feedback – lots of prep, so many test days (even though maybe there is less test time overall), some kids found it stressful, no homework those weeks when some kids could

have done homework, depends on kid time pressure vs. no time pressure, concerns about the cost of doing the computer test, difficulty of kids navigating or typing on the computer, sounds like it varies from teacher to teacher what they told the kids and whether or not they felt pressure

### Questions

*Tell us a bit about ELL and special ed – they are mandated but not state funded.*

He sees special ed as part of education in 21<sup>st</sup> century – not something extra the state is asking for. State does help with extraordinary costs and pays about 75% of the most expensive cases.

One thing perhaps we could do differently – the paperwork associated with special ed. Parents want the feedback/info but is there a way to lighten this up? ELL is maybe a bit different. He doesn't know about those issues as well. Important to educate all children.

*How does the state contribute to the cost of education?*

Typically 60/40 split, but varies depending on wealth of community. Interestingly – Belmont and Watertown come out the same – but differently – individuals vs. commercial tax base. Some towns state essentially pays the whole thing – Lawrence, Holyoke, Brockton. The state at least pays 17.5% of the cost - like in Belmont. But the 17.5% is of the “foundation budget” – many communities spend more than the foundation budget.

*What do you mean by foundation budget?*

The foundation budget is determined by a formula for number of kids, cost of supplies, teachers. It is below what most districts are spending. The concept is part of state aid distribution. ELL and special ed are built into that. Belmont has a lighter special ed load than Watertown or Boston.

*Can you give us an update on the community path?*

Last thing that he did regarding the path was to get \$50,000 from Metropolitan area council for study of routes. Then a committee worked on it, but gave the initiative back to selectman in a still divided state. So now there is another committee – the community path implement committee that will try to work on it. Is there a chance for state funding if it gets passed? Yes, he would fight for that. He worked on the path that extended from Alewife – it was state funded. Another segment going in Watertown – Grove/Arlington over to Fresh Pond – that is moving forward. In general it's relatively easy to fund bike paths with state money – there is a federal mandate to put some money toward bike paths. So once we get a consensus, he thinks we can fund the project.

*What's on your agenda for local aid?*

Chapter 70 – the law that governs how the state education money is split up. His principal concern has been implementation of changes to the formula. The original formula was a mess; the 2006 formula is rational. But, the transition to that formula has not actually been completed. Watertown doesn't quite get its share. Also concerned about special ed formula and charter reimbursement. However, his biggest priority in this budget cycle is that the state pass a realistic budget. He felt very betrayed by what happened last year.

*We didn't get much federal money to help with the snow...*

Not as big a part of state budget so we can figure that out. 40% of state budget is health.

*Back to special ed funding – somewhat contentious climate – how are other communities solving needs that are evolving?*

Funding education full stop is a challenge. Overall cost grows faster than 2.5% so have to think about how you are going to solve that as a community. Fortunately, Belmont has stepped up to the plate to fund at a larger rate. Watertown has relied more on commercial base. Town has had fights with “labor” – teachers, firefighters. Belmont has more or less preserved the peace. Watertown has fewer students as

percentage of population. They spend more per student. They lose some kids to private/parochial schools.

*Does proposition 2.5% assume overrides?*

Some communities have never passed an override. Cambridge has not. They have lots of money to do everything because they've made dozens of choices to develop commercial property. Belmont still doesn't want traffic, density, shadows, etc. Selectman have gone along with that. Some years ago with the McLean property – Belmont actually paid them to reduce development.

*How do you think we should balance the budget?*

This year his biggest concern is integrity of budget. For example, he is against the early retirement incentive. Too much money if everyone takes it. But may lose that vote tomorrow. Core state agencies have taken cuts in recent years and now governor wants to cut 10% of employees but he would like to spread that "pain" as broadly as possible. Also, he is chair of judiciary committee – will lead a reevaluation of sentencing in state.

*How is Trapelo Road?*

Good to see that contractor had people working in winter. Feeling good about project moving along since they recently asked permission to start earlier and work on Saturdays so they will hopefully get back on schedule.

He is easy to reach at [Willbrownberger.com](http://Willbrownberger.com) – let him know what he should be thinking about!