

# BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE/FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE REMOTE MEETING

*Minutes | MAY 28, 2020*

## **Attendees**

**School Committee Members:** Andrea Prestwich (Chair), Catherine Bowen (Secretary), Amy Checkoway, Michael Crowley, Tara Donner

**School Administration:** John Phelan (Superintendent), Janice Darias (Assistant Superintendent), Anthony DiCologero (Director of Finance, Business & Operations), Gioia Rizzo (Manager Business Operations & Transportation)

1. Call to order – 3:00 p.m.

Chair Prestwich called the meeting to order at 3:03 PM

Adjustments to the agenda were made per guidance as topics of immediate concern were brought forward within the previous 48 hours.

2. EDCO: Consideration to rescind previous action on membership

Superintendent Phelan summarized the basis for the previous recommendation and determination to withdraw from EDCO, and then summarized the revised recommendation to remain with EDCO for fiscal year 2021 based on: the new financial plan of the EDCO Executive Director, the financial cost to the district to leave EDCO, the potential for benefits with minimal investment over the next year, and potential for EDCO to improve their financial solvency. Member Checkoway, Belmont's representative to EDCO, concurred with the recommendation to remain in the EDCO for the upcoming fiscal year, and added that the majority of the member districts were planning similarly and that the financial plans had progressed positively such that EDCO is projecting a slight surplus.

On a motion from Member Donner, seconded by Member Crowley, the School Committee voted to rescind withdrawal or termination from the EDCO Collaborative. 5-0-0

3. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of April 28, 2020 School Committee Minutes; May 7, 2020 Finance Subcommittee Minutes; and May 12, 2020 School Committee Minutes were reviewed and amended as discussed.

On a motion from Member Donner, seconded by Member Crowley, the minutes of April 28, 2020 School Committee Minutes; May 7, 2020 Finance Subcommittee Minutes; and May 12, 2020 were approved. 5-0-0

#### 4. FY21 Budget Hearing (Vote)

Superintendent Phelan provided a brief overview of the adjusted budget process, a shift from the February budget as planned to a 25% revenue shortfall projected by Town Administrator Garvin. The primary priorities in the budget are the ability to respond to the growing enrollment and the demands of operating in the COVID-19 environment. The proposed budget does not maintain level services, but accounts for the Town's financial constraints.

Assistant Superintendent Darias reported that the CARES act funds, approximately \$124,000 were approved for the proposed Integration Specialists for Technology. Such positions are typically found in other districts, and the support of these positions will help enable greater response in the COVID learning environment.

Superintendent Phelan indicated the budget presentation would fulfill the public hearing requirement. Director DiCologero presented the updated budget narrative [see "FY21 PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING 2020-05-28 SC PRESENTATION rev 945 am"]. Initial budget plans totalling \$62,506, 441 accounted for rolling-forward existing obligations; strategic plan cost drivers that included 5.8 FTEs for enrollment growth and additional transportation costs; and external drivers of 4% health insurance increase, SPED transportation and education increase of 7%, and a one-time reduction in Circuit Breaker and IDEA balances. The amended Draft 2 budget proposed \$1,020,800 reductions, by removing the 5.8 positions proposed, reducing health insurance costs to a 3% increase, and reducing supplies and overtime hours. The total General Fund Budget for FY21 proposed was \$61,485,641, with a total budget recommendation of \$71,285.434 that includes anticipated state aid, federal funds, and revolving fees.

Superintendent Phelan relayed that the proposal assumes a 75% reimbursement rate for the Circuit Breaker, and expressed concern that the balances would not be adequate to absorb unexpected costs. He provided an update from the LABBB collaborative: the balance of credits for LABBB were expended in FY20, no new credits would be available for FY21, any additional credits would only become available in FY22. (Member Donner exited the meeting)

Committee members discussed the budget in terms of unanticipated costs and how to gauge those costs in the absence of current recommendations from the state and in the context of regional approaches including the areas of custodial demands, transportation changes, and Circuit Breaker reductions. Committee members acknowledged this budget would yield a drop in the level of service the district would be able to provide. Discussion of user fees and potential to avoid the reimbursement situations faced this past year. Recommended student-teacher ratios would not be achievable with the current plan, however the district reserves the right to adjust the budget as law permits, recognizing that much information will change in the coming months due to the operational demands of the health crisis. Member Crowley relayed that many

districts are voting provisional budgets, and offered a draft motion that will be considered prior to Town Meeting.

The Committee discussed the options for provisional approval. The Committee expects a commitment of the full Chapter 90 funds to be awarded to the School Department. The budget vote will take place at the regular School Committee meeting on June 9th. Additional meeting dates of June 23 (subject to change due to Town election), and in July and August will be used to respond to shifting conditions.

#### 5. Public Comment

Jack Weis asked how is this budget a less than level service budget?

Superintendent Phelan and Assistant Superintendent Darias relayed the simple numbers of increased students with the same teacher staffing creates a higher ratio and consequently less service to students and families. The current 6th grade cohort is 133 students on a 4-teacher team, an average of 33 students in a class. The disparities in service would be more pronounced in the COVID-responsive environment, and some needs will not be met. Positions found in peer districts, part of the strategic plan include SPED team chairs, Math coaches; Social Workers and Adjustment Counselors. Belmont spends approximately \$5,000 less per student than peer districts.

Jack Weis requested any additional comments for the Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee report to be sent to him by Friday morning.

Julie Crockett commented in support of the School Committee and School Department's work to support student-teacher ratios, and in support of district educators continuing to perform in extreme circumstances. She spoke in favor of identifying the funds to support the Middle School positions that would address the large cohorts.

Alina Lisanke, a Town Meeting Member and a parent of a 5th grader asked when the district would be able to or not be able to hire the middle school positions.

Superintendent Phelan and Director McAllister addressed the preferred timing of hiring teachers to best support students and teachers, as well as draw from the best pool of candidates, and relayed that plans have been drafted for both scenarios - an additional ½ team or no additional ½ team.

Lisa Carlivati, a high school math teacher, commented on the experiences of class sizes and their impacts for student engagement, monitoring by teachers, and performance struggles for students across academic levels.

6. New Business

Chair Prestwich requested any new business. Member Bowen requested that we may consider a resolution calling for more federal aid at an upcoming meeting. Superintendent Phelan outlined the restriction of the final SC date, which falls on an election day. A new date will be determined collectively. (Donner returned to the meeting)

7. Adjourn – 4:30 p.m.

On a motion by Member Donner, seconded by Member Crowley, the meeting adjourned at 4:45 PM. 5-0-0

Respectfully submitted by



Catherine Bowen, Secretary