



Town of Belmont

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Budget Committee Meeting Minutes Thursday, November 13, 2025, 6:00 pm Belmont Mill - Tioga Meeting Room

Present were Chairman Tracey LeClair, Vice Chair Jessi Fleck, Ron Mitchell, Selectmen's Representative Ruth P. Mooney, Members Marsha Campbell, Don House, Mark Roberts, Don Hurd, Rachel French, Paul Maggioli, Lee Cheshire, Brian Gardiner, and Susan Roache; TA Alicia Jipson, Executive Assistant Colleen Akerman, Town Planner Karen Santoro, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jenn Cashman, Finance Director Steve Forster.

Absent: Member Don Hurd.

Chairman Tracey LeClair opened the meeting at 6:00 pm and those present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Remote Member Participation via Zoom:

Chairman LeClair reported that boards may allow remote participation, but they are not required to. If it is allowed, it must be noted in the minutes why a member can't physically be present. Everyone must be able to hear all members and a physical quorum is still needed. If a member participates remotely, every vote will be a roll call vote.

Vice Chair Jessi Fleck moved to allow remote member participation for this budget session, according to the guidelines presented by Chairman LeClair; seconded by Susan Roache and the motion passed unopposed (11-0).

Handouts Provided to Members:

Members received an information sheet with details about the insurance coverage that Primex provides to Belmont. We are part of a pool, and all policies have a \$1,000 deductible per occurrence. Primex provides more coverage for municipalities than other entities such as immunities for recreation and our roads. It also covers cybersecurity, and other carriers do not. They also provide lots of education, training and conferences as well as human resources and legal support such as if an employee wants to sue the Town. Primex goes to court for us instead of our paid legal team. Our foot bridges are not covered under the plan and that could get pricey. R. Mitchell was concerned about vandalism.

Members received the MS-434-R form for revised estimated revenues, which will be discussed by the committee later. These revenues are used to offset the 2025 tax rate.

A PowerPoint was also provided that explains unexpended fund balance.

TA Jipson reminded everyone that adaptive hearing devices are available in headphone or mini earplug form. The ladies were asked to speak up so that the other side of the room can hear.

Ruth P. Mooney entered the meeting.

The tax rate announced at last week's meeting was not correct and handouts with the correct information were provided. NH Department of Revenue (NHDRA) has a new system that wasn't picking up a few of our values correctly. They agreed our rate was wrong and it was reduced by 10 cents because our assessed value increased. Our new rate is \$17.39.

An updated agenda for December 11th was provided. Department heads were amenable to moving the December 4th meeting to December 11th. There will be no meeting on December 4th.

Minutes Approval – 11/06/2025:

Draft minutes were not yet available due to the holiday, and approval of minutes was postponed until the next meeting.

Department Budgets:

Members were reminded to keep any questions relevant to the section that is open for discussion. TA Jipson has up to date actuals for 2025.

Land Use (10):

Town Planner Karen Santoro is in charge of Land Use, Building/Code Enforcement and the Conservation Commission, and acts as the staff liaison to the zoning and planning boards. The department is very busy and there are lots of properties for sale.

Chairman LeClair asked about the postage line. The department is still required by law to send abutters' notices by certified mail and some follow-ups must be by mail. They utilize email as much as possible. R. Mitchell asked if there are any large subdivisions coming up. Town Planner Santoro said there are some 6 to 8 lot subdivisions and the Mile Hill subdivision has posted all of their securities.

Lee Cheshire asked about staff wages and retirement. Chairman LeClair explained that retirement is a state retirement we are required to pay into. The Town pays a portion, and the employee also contributes. Lines 101 and 103 have a split with the Conservation Commission with 39 hours and 36 hours for Land Use, respectively.

There was some discussion about the subdivision by the Town Beach on Knotty Way. R. Mitchell had concerns about them using the trail. Town Planner Santoro said there is an access easement from Leslie Roberts Drive and they are not crossing the trail.

The health insurance line increased because someone joined the plan who previously did not use the plan. These changes can happen during open enrollment or with a life event.

The plotter line 441 was decreased because it is no longer under a service contract. This budget would have had a 0% increase if not for the insurance change.

Don House moved to approve the Land Use Budget of \$462,366 as approved by the Board of Selectmen; seconded by Ruth Mooney. Motion passed unopposed (13-0).

Building Inspection/CEO (11):

Town Planner Santoro reported the department has seen lots of activity including small projects and the new homes on Knotty Way. The department processes permits for buildings, generators, electrical and plumbing. Chairman LeClair said thank you for the decrease. The legal line is down because they are being conservative and use NHMA whenever possible, and there are some things that are closing out. There was a decrease in the plotter line, shared with Land Use, and they are also sharing another multifunction printer rather than having two printers close to each other.

S. Roache asked how many employees there are in the department. Town Planner Santoro replied there are two positions: the full-time building inspector/code enforcement officer, and one part-time (12 hour) building clerk. They plan to bring the clerk position back to 20 hours. Chairman LeClair commented the Code Enforcement Officer line is left open with \$1 because the inspector and enforcement positions used to be two separate part-time positions.

R. Mooney moved to approve the Building Inspection Budget of \$134,543 as approved by the Board of Selectmen; seconded by D. House. Motion passed unopposed (12-0).

Conservation Commission (12):

Town Planner Santoro noted the Planner has 1 hour per week in this budget and the Land Use Technician has 4 hours per week.

L. Cheshire asked why the invasive species line was not used this year. There were funds encumbered from last year that were used first, and a small amount will still be spent from this year's budget. The Commission focuses on aquatic invasives but also does some work on terrestrials. Volunteers can work on terrestrials but certified divers are needed for aquatics. The goal is to contain, not eradicate. Paul Maggioli asked where work is done and they work on both Winnisquam and Silver Lake. It is beneficial to the Town because we have a tax base on the water and property values would drop with invasives. L. Cheshire asked if it is enough, but the amount could be bottomless. They help with aquatics for certified divers, and the Winnisquam Watershed Network and the state assist as well as all of the Towns around the lakes.

R. Mitchell moved to approve the Conservation Commission Budget of \$20,201 as approved by the Board of Selectmen; seconded by L. Cheshire. Motion passed unopposed (13-0).

Town Clerk (13):

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Jenn Cashman explained everyone in the office started at the same time. They do motor vehicle registration and elections. There are three elections next year and the default budget only includes one. They also do vital records, dog licenses, water/sewer and property tax bill collections, as well as land use change tax, gravel and timber tax, deeds and liens. This year there were four properties taken and two have been repurchased.

The department collected \$300,000 in tax liens this year. In 2025 they processed \$1.4 million in motor vehicles, \$11,000 dog licensing, \$5,000 vital statistics, \$12.3 million first issue property tax, and \$1 million water/sewer. Chairman LeClair commented the budget increase is close to zero. TC/TC Cashman said there are some printer and software contracts. Chairman LeClair liked staff using online courses for training to save on travel costs, and to keep one window open in the office. It is a great use of resources. There was some discussion about deputy town clerk and tax collector positions. It is a hard job and a public acknowledgement of the work but with the default budget it is difficult to offer increases. Two deputies would allow each assistant to focus on one side of things and if there is an emergency, someone can always be a backup. The deputy tax collector would need to be a Belmont resident and that can be hard to find. The Town Clerk/Tax Collector is an elected position. The department uses BMSI for taxes and finance, and Interware/ClerkWorks for motor vehicles.

We need to start thinking about upgrading our BMSI software, which is a DOS-based program, but it needs to be compatible across Town Hall. There was discussion about the expense of newer software and the need to do homework to make the best decision. It is difficult to save towards a big software expense when our IT capital reserve gets voted down. Costs for a new system could run between \$80,000 and \$100,000 and it could come at a time when there is an urgent need to change because the DOS-based system is no longer supported. It is a necessity, not a want. Finance Director Steve Forster is concerned about the situation.

R. Mooney moved to approve the Town Clerk Budget of \$144,153 as approved by the Board of Selectmen; seconded by J. Fleck. Motion passed unopposed (13-0).

Elections & Registrations (14):

TC/TC Cashman reported they will have three elections plus the deliberative session in 2026: the Town Meeting, the State Primary and the State General Election. Last year we had four elections including the presidential election. The state is now requiring an accessible system for handicap computerized voting. The computer chip coding cost was \$850 last year. The accessible ballot can be listened to or read. We will have one unit. We are purchasing required voting booths out of the capital reserve fund. R. Mitchell asked if we purchased a new

voting machine. We did, and the Town Meeting will be the first time we use it. The state provided matching funds.

The increase in this budget is primarily because the default budget included only one election, while 2026 will have three elections. There is also an increase for supervisors and clerks and the checklist needs to be verified every year instead of every 5 years.

R. Mitchell moved to approve the Elections & Registration Budget of \$24,179 as approved by the Board of Selectmen; seconded by D. House. Motion passed unopposed (13-0).

Tax Collector/Finance (15):

Finance Director Steve Forster gave some background on changes in the department. He started in February 2024, and there have been two other finance directors since 2023. They hired a finance clerk last year and she also helps out with other work in the Administrative offices and for Water/Sewer/DPW. She is doing more than she was hired for. The department has put some good processes in place and has become more efficient. They try to find weaknesses and get better. The department processes payroll, deductions, taxes, healthcare, retirement and many reports. They must be accurate and two sets of eyes is important. Their budget is minimal. Every department works smoothly with the finance department and department heads are always on the same page. There are good communications and management. R. Mitchell asked about the process for POs. Every invoice is signed off by a department head and/or the Town Administrator. Anything over \$500 requires a PO. The payment process is stopped if everything is not signed. The audit looks at the signatures.

TC/TC Cashman agreed with Finance Director Forster. Everyone at Town Hall works well together. If anyone needs a hand everyone helps. It is not a bad place to work. FD Forster said other municipalities talk about the nightmares they have working with an elected official such as the Town Clerk/Tax Collector. There is a separation of duties so that the Finance Clerk does not have access to banking because she processes the reconciliation. The Finance Director moves the banking money and pays the state every day. There are a lot of checks and balances. Our auditor is Vachon Clukay out of Manchester. The audits are published on the website but 2024 has not been returned by the auditors yet.

D. House moved to approve the Tax Collector/Finance Budget of \$373,178 as approved by the Board of Selectmen; seconded by Mark Roberts. Motion passed unopposed (12-0).

TA Jipson noted that audit costs are shared with other departments such as the library, water and sewer.

Property Taxation (16):

TA Jipson presented this budget which covers a solo employee. Postage was added as a new line item to better capture expenditures. Previously it was under the Executive budget. The service contracts include the assessing software for tax cards, which merges with the BMSI software for tax bills, and the AxisGIS online tax maps. Legal, appeals and appraisals are

covered such as if a property owner goes to Superior Court instead of BTLA for an abatement. We had one court case this year. Conferences and dues are for NHA AO and NHMA. KRT and Sansoucy do our appraisals for property and utilities. There was no revaluation this year so there should not be many abatements.

R. Mooney moved to approve the Property Taxation Budget of \$145,784 as approved by the Board of Selectmen; seconded by L. Cheshire. Motion passed unopposed (12-0).

J. Fleck moved to review the Estimated Revenues tonight; seconded by D. House. Motion passed unopposed (12-0).

Estimated Revenues (21):

The MS-434 is created by working with the NHDRA. Reports are pulled and projections made about how much more revenue do we think we will take in before the end of the year. We look at last year's numbers and our actuals to date. The goal is to never underestimate because then we will not collect enough to offset taxes. Rooms and Meals Tax value comes from the State, as well as some other grants. Department income is reviewed such as applications, police details, and the sale of municipal properties. We have two more properties that could be repurchased by their prior owners. We have earned interest through NHPDIP but their rate was a little lower this year. P. Maggioli asked if the NHPDIP is tied to the Trustees of the Trust Funds. It is not, but they also use NHPDIP separately. Many municipalities use it and they have full liquidity. Our bank is Camden Bank, which used to be Northway. The total appropriations are \$14.047 million but with revenues we will only need to raise \$8.1 million for taxation.

We need to educate and promote the budget. It is going to be hard to sustain. We keep track of how close and tight we are, and the only thing that "saved" us the last two years were vacant positions in the police and fire departments. Without those vacancies, we would have had to cut services or personnel. The unfilled positions saved us from overspending the budget. Every year we are in a default budget, it takes 3-5 years to recover.

Capital Outlay (22) will be moved to the bottom of the December 11th agenda.

Other Old Business: None

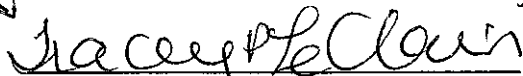
Adjournment:

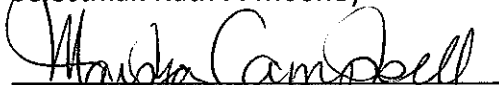
R. Mitchell moved to adjourn at 7:54 pm; seconded by R. Mooney and the motion passed unopposed (12-0).


Respectfully Submitted By:

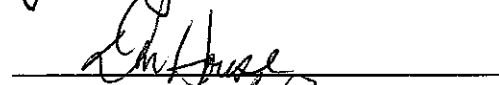
Colleen Akerman, Executive Assistant



Chairman Tracey LeClair



Selectman Ruth P. Mooney



Marsha Campbell



Paul Maggiali

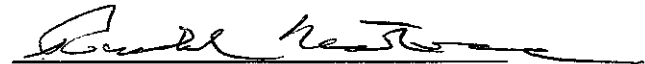

Don House



Lee Cheshire



Susan Roache



Vice Chair Jessica Fleck


Mark Roberts


Ron Mitchell


Don Hurd


Rachel French


Brian Gardiner