



2016-09-20 / Front Page

Belmont selectmen endorse legislative proposal to lower property taxes

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BELMONT—The Board of Selectmen on Monday endorsed a proposal calling for the state government to fully meet its obligations to the New Hampshire Education Trust Fund, and thus reduce the property tax burden statewide—a burden which particularly affects taxpayers in poorer communities such as Belmont.

Selectmen voted unanimously to instruct Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin to vote in favor of the so-called "Warner Floor Proposal" at a meeting of the New Hampshire Municipal Association which is scheduled for Friday. Town administrators and other municipal officials will ask the NHMA to support legislation to reduce the tax burden on state property owners by having state government fully finance the New Hampshire Education Trust Fund.

The Warner Floor Proposal was put forth by State Rep. Clyde Carson of Warner, who also serves as that town's board of selectmen chairman. The introduction of the legislation will come with the opening of the 2017 state legislative session.

By having the state fully finance the New Hampshire Education Trust Fund, the result would provide relief to taxpayers burdened by increasing property taxes. Such legislation would have the effect of reducing some portion of \$363 million that is raised annually by state property taxes for education. With the property tax amount of \$363 million reduced, the difference would be made up by other state funding sources.

The Warner Floor Proposal was endorsed over the summer by selectmen in the towns of Warner, Andover, Hopkinton, Salisbury, and Webster.

The New Hampshire Education Trust fund is outlined in RSA 198:38, with the \$363 million raised in state property taxes detailed in RSA 76:3.

It was noted at Monday's meeting that while the local share of property taxes for education keeps going up, state funding for education keeps going down.

Beaudin said that it is obvious that there is huge public support for relieving the harsh property tax burden locally and throughout the state, and the issue has become a critical one. She noted that the board previously had not taken an official position on the property tax issue and state funding for education. She said that the board should now be on record regarding the Warner Floor Proposal.

Selectman Jon Pike simply said that the property tax burden on Belmont residents "is killing us."

Selectman Ron Cormier noted that a serious review needs to take place regarding the adoption of a state sales tax, which would relieve the tax burden on property owners.

With little discussion, board chairperson Ruth Mooney, and selectmen Pike and Cormier voted to endorse the Warner Floor Proposal, and authorized Beaudin to vote in favor at Friday's meeting of the New Hampshire Municipal Association.

In other business at Monday's meeting:

- Selectmen approved the purchase of a new SUV for the police department at a total cost of about \$29,000. An existing police "Nitro" vehicle will be transferred to the town's land use department for use by the land use technician. The money will come from the existing police capital reserve fund which now amounts to almost \$36,000.

- Selectmen received an update from Beaudin regarding security improvements to the Town Hall. The improvements include the installation of four security cameras, and electronic key fob access for all authorized town employees, similar to that of electronic access to rooms in a motel or hotel. Soon to be installed is an electronic system at the front door which will work on a timed system to permit entry during the day and also prevent entry during non-business hours. The security installation is being performed by A&B Locksmith Service at a cost of \$1,575. The stepped-up security measures were necessitated by a recent break-in at Town Hall.

- Selectmen approved the expenditure of \$21,850 to install a complete heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system at the town police station. The work will be performed by Dutile Refrigeration of Laconia. The money will come from an existing capital reserve fund and also with money received from grants. A similar heating, ventilation, and air conditioning project has already been completed at the Belmont Fire Station.

- After hearing from local Boy Scout troop leader Jim Carmody, selectmen gave their approval to having the Boy Scouts meet on the lower level of the Belmont Mill building for their weekly Thursday night meetings. Carmody said his group would be willing to make minor repairs to the space such as painting and fixing drywall. The Boy Scouts will now use the Mill space as a regular meeting place.

- Selectmen have been informed that the town budget committee will start to meet on Nov. 1 to prepare next year's proposed town budget, to go before voters in March. Selectmen will meet in budget review sessions on Wednesday, Oct. 5, and again on Monday, Oct. 17.

•It was noted by selectmen that at the opening of the Winnisquam Scenic Trail at Leslie Roberts Recreation area on Saturday morning, some 12 old tires, a mound of trash, and piles of old wood were spotted a short distance from the trail and hauled away.

The next meeting of the board will take place at 5 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 3 at the Corner Meeting House.

[Return to top](#)

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