

# Winnisquam Echo

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2018

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## Belmont town warrant moves forward to the polls

BY DONNA RHODES

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**BELMONT** — Belmont's First Deliberative Session took place last weekend, and with minimal discussion over the decreased budget and other proposed articles on this year's ballot, the finalized list of warrant articles will now be forwarded for a town wide at the polls on March 13.

Selectman Ruth Mooney began Saturday's deliberative session by saying while the town has no say over county and school taxation, the board worked hard to keep municipal taxes to a minimum.

"We're proud to announce that the (pro-



**(Left) Deputy Fire Chief Michael Newhall speaks to voters at Belmont's First Deliberative Session last Saturday to explain the need for a new Quint Fire Truck, one of 33 articles that will be presented on this year's March 13 ballot.**

DONNA RHODES

roles it will be to everyone's advantage."

Article 18, the annual Operating Budget, discounting any special tax-based funding requests

from warrant articles, has been established at \$7,593,919. Should that article be voted down at the polls, the default budget would become last year's total of \$7,776,548.

Town Moderator Alvin Nix read through the 2018 Warrant last Saturday morning, excluding Article 1, which is the election of town officials.

The first six articles concern zoning amend-

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posed) town taxes are down by one and one-half percent this year," Mooney said. "There's a nice little commercial bubble going on in town and if we can hold our tax rate and get more businesses on the tax

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ments that require voter approval, and of those, Article 8 drew a lot of attention.

Article 8 will essentially ask for a provision to allow a temporary, six-year tax exemption of 50-percent on municipal and local school taxes for any new commercial construction or additions to an existing commercial property that are approved by the town. Selectmen said the hope of this exemption, which is also being presented in a few other neighboring towns this year, is to attract more businesses to the area. The overall exemption proposal, offered under RSA 72:81, is limited in duration however, and would only remain in effect for projects presented and approved over the next five years.

While some voters felt it would benefit the town in the long run by promoting commercial growth, several residents felt that any new or expanded business would require additional water, sewage, and emergency response services. Those needs would only transfer the burden of the cost for such services to tax payers. The article will now be left up for voters to decide in March.

Article 12 also garnered a lot of attention. It presents a request by the Space Needs Committee to withdraw \$65,000 from the Municipal Facilities

Capital Reserve Fund (est. 2006) to send out Requests for Proposals for engineering studies of town-owned properties, including the library, town offices, police department, the Belmont Mill and the former post office. Examining current and future needs of the town, the committee seeks to present proposals on what adaptations, if any, may be made to existing structures, or what better options may be available through other town-owned buildings that are currently vacant or under-utilized.

Selectman Jon Pike and a few other residents felt that the amount was more than was necessary, siting studies being done on future use of buildings at the former Laconia State School property for approximately \$50,000.

Carmen Lorentz represented the committee and quickly countered by explaining that the amount requested for the Laconia State School project is for studies that are much more preliminary than those in Belmont and would eventually need more funds down the road. She said that Belmont's Space Needs Committee has already done considerable work through their membership of professional volunteers and are also considering information from past studies in the town. The sum requested for RFPs, she added, was determined through consultation with other towns

that underwent similar space needs studies. After the studies are completed, any left over monies would be returned to the fund.

"I think \$65,000 of the money sitting there in this account (currently reported to have a balance of \$419,096.34) is there for this type of project," she said.

Lorentz went on to state that the mission of the committee is to research and develop options that have actual costs associated with them so that voters can make an informed decision in the future. Money spent on the studies would bring the town one step closer to that goal.

Several voters agreed.

"I think that's a cheap price to pay to get on track with our buildings," said George Conodemetra.

Belmont Fire Department also has proposals to withdraw funds for equipment purchases, such as a \$950,000 Quint Fire truck.

Deputy Fire Chief Michael Newhall explained that the new truck would replace both their 1988 Ladder Truck and a 25-year-old rescue vehicle, depleting the size of their fleet of vehicles and the maintenance that goes along with it, while providing better services to the town.

Selectman Mooney also pointed out that the purchase would not impact taxes. The department is asking to withdraw \$250,000 from their established Fire/Ambulance Equipment and Special Revenue Fund, funded through their emergency medical services, while the remaining amount of \$700,000 would be raised through grants they are already seeking. In the event that they do not obtain such a grant however, the \$250,000 would not be granted. The article is being supported by both the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee.

Several other of the remaining articles pertain to transfers of funds, or approval of utility funds such as water and sewer, that will be offset by revenues.

With the March 13 ballot approval of all articles on this year's warrant, the overall approved budget would become \$10,630,382, with a projected revenue to the town of \$4,719,747. An additional \$25,000 would be reserved for abatements, \$246,700 would be given in War Service Credits, and there would be an unexpended fund balance of \$425,000. That would all translate into a property tax rate of \$9.51 per \$1,000 of assessed value.