
Belmont selectmen consider making some downtown roads one-way

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BELMONT - Adding another wrinkle to the ongoing revitalization of downtown, the Select Board decided to tweak the traffic pattern in downtown Belmont, easing congestion and potentially making life easier for residents.

The new plan, discussed at Monday night's Selectmen meeting, would turn Mill Street Extension and part of Mill Street into a one-way road - from the library until it meets Center Street. Angled parking spaces would be created so that visitors would be facing in the correct direction when backing out.

The Select Board agreed that, with so many changes already made to the area, one more change won't hurt. The new pattern would minimize traffic in front of residences and allow residents easy egress out of the area.

"This is just like normal for residents of Mill Street Extension," said Selectman Jon Pike, "This just moves traffic to the other side of the library."

In order for the change to take affect, the board will have to approve a change in the traffic ordinance at its next public hearing on May 20. The public will be able to give input at that meeting.

The Board revisited a long-standing issue, during their meeting, regarding the hours of the Town Clerk's office. It was relayed to Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin that Town Clerk Cynthia DeRoy was interested in extended evening hours at the Clerk's office for a trial period from June 1 to Aug. 30.

According to Beaudin, in order to maintain their budget, the Clerk's office must be open 42 hours per week, which it is currently. Several options for new hours were bandied about, including staying open until 7:30 p.m. on Thursday nights but only working a half day on Fridays so as not to work overtime.

All in attendance agreed that at least one night of extended hours would be a positive change.

"In my 10 years on this government, the single biggest issue people ask me about is the hours of the town clerk," said Selectman Ron Cormier. "Most people I know work eight to five, and don't work in town. I have to take vacation time to get my car registered."

However, Beaudin remarked that, when this issue has been raised in the past, it has been shot down by the idea of having the clerk staff alone in the building at night while the rest of the town offices are closed.

Police Chief Mark Lewandoski reminded the board that there is a police buzzer in the office, and that he would post a patrol at town hall if he knew the town clerk was leaving late. The board approved the idea but decided to send it back to DeRoy to come up with the actual hours the office will be open.

Also on Monday night, the Select Board approved a change to the Police Department hierarchy. According to Lewandoski, the current layout is one chief, one lieutenant, one sergeant, and two corporals, with eight patrol officers. In the Police Department, only a sergeant is able to review paperwork, and the paperwork is piling up. Lewandoski admitted to the board that his department is missing state deadlines.

"We're failing," he said, "The paperwork multiplies like gremlins. We're not keeping pace with it and we're falling behind."

He proposed promoting one of the corporals to sergeant in order to tackle some of this paperwork and make the overall department more efficient. A sergeant is a more disciplinary role than corporal, and having two sergeants allows the chief to have supervision every night, which currently isn't happening.

Budget-wise, this represents a pay grade increase from Grade 10 to Grade 12, or roughly \$3,000. According to Beaudin, this money can be made up between the salaries from two currently vacant positions as well as unused part-time wages that are available.

While Cormier expressed some "chain of command issues," with the "top heavy" structure of the department, he also pledged not to micromanage and deferred to Lewandoski's judgment. The Chief will bring his prospective promotion before the board at the next meeting for final approval.

Another wage increase was discussed on Monday. Public Works Director Jim Fortin has been unsuccessfully trying to fill a vacant sewer position for six weeks, citing the hourly wage as the rate-limiting step in negotiations. He asked the board for a slight increase in the wage offer to entice more qualified candidates.

"We didn't have good lucking raising stellar candidates," said Fortin, "and the first thing people ask is 'what does it pay.'"

Selectman Ruth Mooney asked if Fortin had considered subcontracting out the work. However, the sewer maintenance position also does work for the water department and will often end up reading water meters among other duties, therefore it was determined that hiring an employee was still the best course of action.

Fortin asked for roughly 55 cents more per-hour than the current advertised rate.

"I would think any qualified person that you can bring forward with your recommendation, we would approve," said Pike.

The board advised Fortin to bring a qualified candidate forward to the board and it would work with Beaudin to approve the higher wage.

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