

MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL:

**How Well Does Belmont's Representative
Town Meeting Reflect the Community
At-Large?**

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PART 1:

INTRODUCTION AND DATA COLLECTION

This study considers the extent to which the “representative Town Meeting” of Belmont, Massachusetts reflects the demographic make-up of the underlying community. Belmont is a small inner-ring suburb of Boston. Under Massachusetts law, Belmont operates under a representative Town Meeting form of government. In addition to the Town Meeting, Belmont has a three-member Board of Selectmen.

Belmont’s Town Meeting consists of 296 members. That membership consists of 36 Town Meeting Members (TMMs) elected from each of eight (8) precincts (36 members per precinct x 8 precincts = 288 members) along with eight (8) “at-large” members. One-third of each precinct’s membership (12 TMMs) is elected each year.

The Data Collection Process

This study began with a list of all Town Meeting Members as of April 2009.¹ The at-large members were excluded from further analysis.² Publicly available information was obtained for each TMM, including:

- The street address for each TMM, along with the precinct from which each TMM was elected, was obtained from a list published by the Belmont Town Clerk.
- Each TMM’s name and address was then matched against the names listed in the annual Town Book which publishes the results of the annual Town Census. That annual Census provided the age (i.e., birthday) and stated occupation for each TMM.

¹ The list was obtained from the Belmont Town Clerk’s World Wide Web site.

² The At-Large members include the State Representative, Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, Town Moderator, Director of the Department of Health, Town Assessor, Town Counsel, and Chair of the Board of Selectmen.

- Each TMM’s address was matched against data published by the Belmont Town Assessor’s office regarding the property at that address. The ownership of the property, along with the type of housing unit,³ the value of the property in specified years,⁴ the number of rooms, the number of bedrooms, the date the home was constructed, and the date of the last sale of the property⁵ were obtained from property tax assessment records.

All of Belmont’s TMMs were mapped against the eight Census Tracts comprising the Town of Belmont by precinct number using MapPoint as the mapping software.⁶ The results of that initial mapping are presented in Map 1. As can be seen, Belmont’s eight precincts and Belmont’s eight Census Tracts closely, but do not identically, overlap. The relationship is largely as follows:

- Precinct 1 overlaps Census Tract 3572
- Precinct 2 overlaps Census Tract 3571 and Census Tract 3578
- Precinct 3 overlaps Census Tract 3577 and Census Tract 3578
- Precinct 4 overlaps Census Tract 3576
- Precinct 5 overlaps Census Tract 3575
- Precinct 6 overlaps Census Tract 3574
- Precinct 7 overlaps Census Tract 3573
- Precinct 8 overlaps Census Tract 3571

Using MapPoint, addresses for each Town Meeting Member were also matched to individual Census Block Groups for purposes of the analysis below.⁷

Finally, in addition to the data obtained for each individual TMM from public records, aggregated data for each Census Tract and for each Census Block was obtained using the 2000 Decennial Census.⁸

³ Building types included single-family home, two-family home, three-family home, condominium, mixed-use home, and multi-family home.

⁴ The years for which values were obtained included 2000 and 2008.

⁵ Only sales that were non-family sales or done for purposes other than “convenience” were considered.

⁶ All but one of Belmont’s 288 TMMs could be matched against MapPoint’s geocoded addresses.

⁷ According to the Census Bureau: “A census block group (BG) is a cluster of census blocks having the same first digit of their four-digit identifying numbers within a census tract. . .BGs generally contain between 600 and 3,000 people, with an optimum size of 1,500 people.”

⁸ Data from the 2000 Census was used because sufficient data is collected to allow reporting down to the Census block level. Data from subsequent annual American Community Survey (ACS) collection, as well as the annual Current Population Survey (CPS), only allows reporting at the level of Public Use Micro-Areas (PUMAs).

The Points of Comparison

Having collected the data identified above, the make-up of Belmont’s representative Town Meeting was compared to the Belmont community as a whole, along with each Census Tract and Census Block Group within the community on a combination of characteristics relating to housing units and individuals. This type of comparison reflects the data reported by the Census Bureau (PCT: personal characteristics; HCT: housing characteristics). The points of comparison are set forth in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Points of Comparison: Belmont Community vs. Town Meeting Members

Housing Characteristics (HCT)	Personal Characteristics (PCT)
Housing building type	Age
Home value as of 2000	Gender
Number of rooms	Occupation
	Tenure (owner/renter)
	Mobility

The specific data underlying each point of comparison is operationally defined in the discussion of each comparison below.

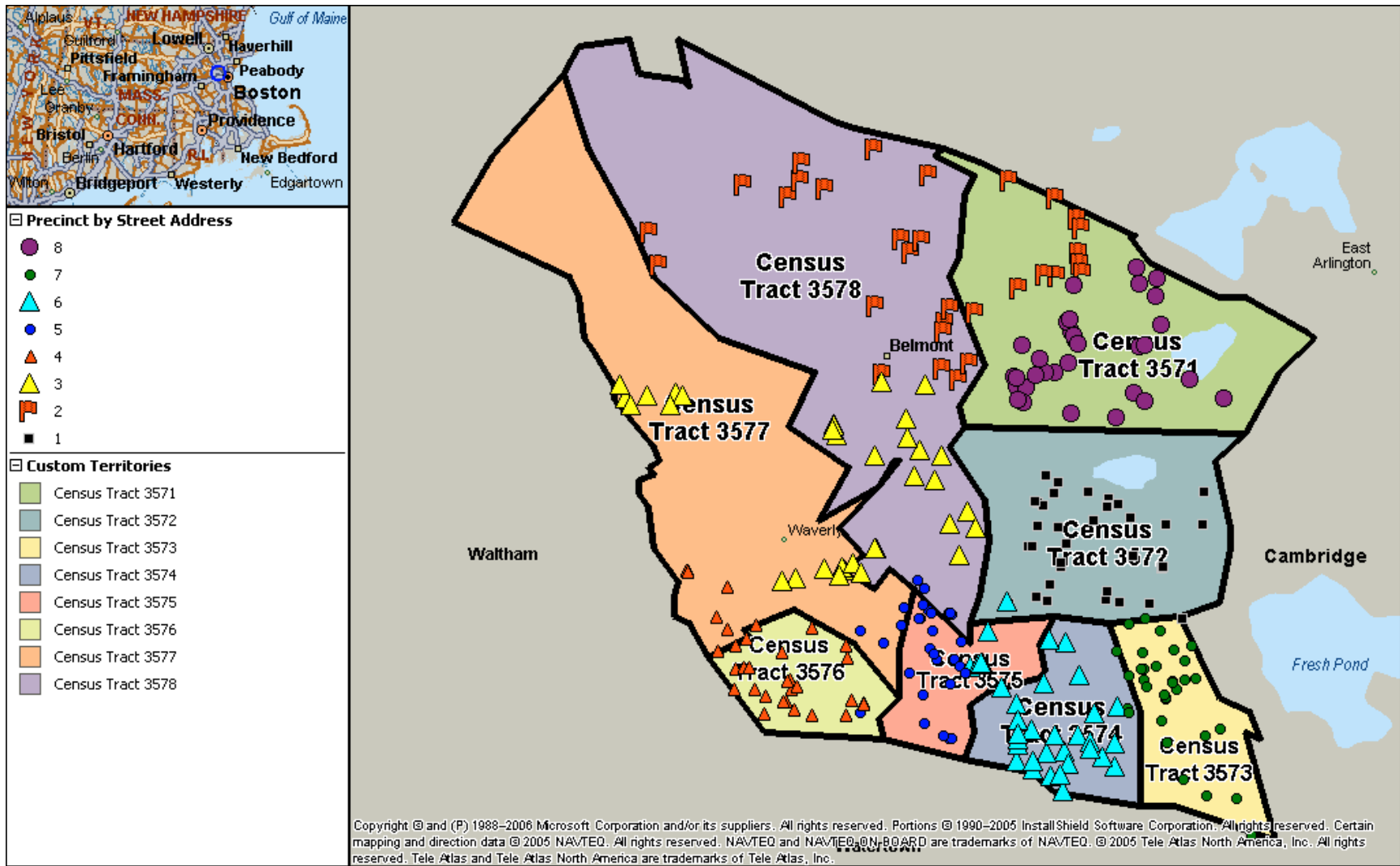


Figure 1: Belmont Town Meeting Members by Precinct and Census Tract

In addition to points of comparison made on an individual basis, certain points of comparison were made on an aggregated basis. These points of comparison are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Income Comparisons: Belmont Community vs. Town Meeting Members
Median income
Household income below \$30,000
Household income below \$50,000
Household income above \$100,000

Given this overview of the data collection and processing, the comparisons of Belmont's 2009 Town Meeting to the Belmont community as a whole, in addition to smaller sub-components of the Belmont community, are presented below.

PART 2:

Comparisons Based on Personal Characteristics

The first section of this inquiry examines characteristics that inhere in “the person.” These may be specific to the individual or might apply to the household in which the Town Meeting Member lives. Nonetheless, the characteristics do not relate to the physical housing unit, to the surrounding neighborhood, and the like. They are “people-related.”

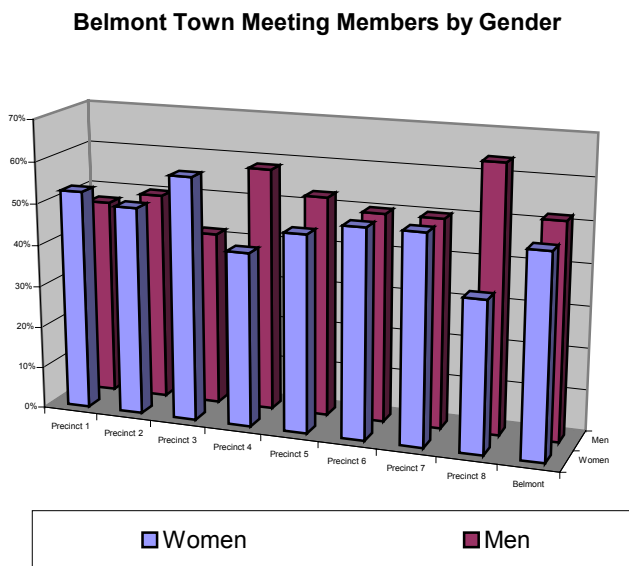
The personal characteristics that are examined in this analysis include the following:

- Gender;
- Age;
- Housing tenure (owner/renter status);
- Occupation; and
- Mobility.

The specific data elements used to measure each of these factors are described in each section below.

Gender

Belmont's Town Meeting is evenly divided by gender. Of the Town's 288 Town Meeting Members,⁹ 149 (52%) are male and 139 (48%) are female. Not all precincts have gender equity. Precinct 4 has a disproportionate number of men (21 of 36 = 58%) as does Precinct 8 (23 of 36 = 64%).



Despite the roughly equal number and percentage of men and women in Belmont's Town Meeting, men are somewhat over-represented relative to their proportion of the overall Belmont population. According to the 2000 Census, the most recent Census data available for the Town of Belmont, men comprised 45% of Belmont residents age 18 or older.

The gender distribution within Belmont is reasonably consistent throughout Town. While 48% of the adults (i.e., age 18 and over) in Census Tract 3573 (roughly corresponding to Precinct 7) were men, the distribution of men

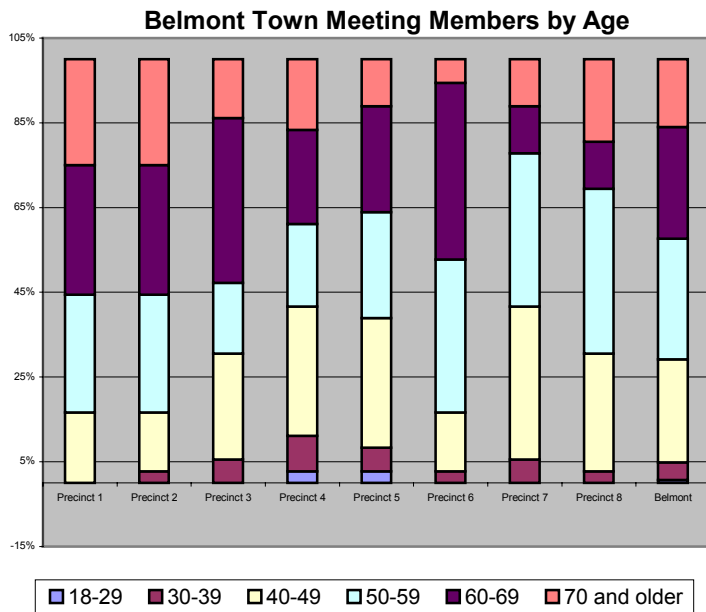
throughout the remaining seven Census Tracts varied from 44% to 46%.

Age

Belmont's Town Meeting is systematically older than the Town as a whole.¹⁰ The largest age group represented in Town Meeting involves persons age 50 to 59 years old (28%). Followed closely to that are TMMs aged 60 to 69 years old (26%) and TMMs aged 40 to 49 years old (24%). Persons within the age range of 40 to 69, in other words, represent nearly 80% of TMMs. One-in-six TMMs (16%) are age 70 or older.

⁹ Throughout this discussion, references to Town Meeting Members will be to the 288 TMMs that are elected from Belmont's eight precincts. At-large TMMs have been excluded.

¹⁰ Age was determined from the birth year of the TMM relative to 2009. If a person was born in September 1954, for example, they were deemed to be 55 years old (2009 - 1954 = 55) for this study, irrespective of the fact that they had not yet reached their 55th birthday by the Spring Town Meeting in April.

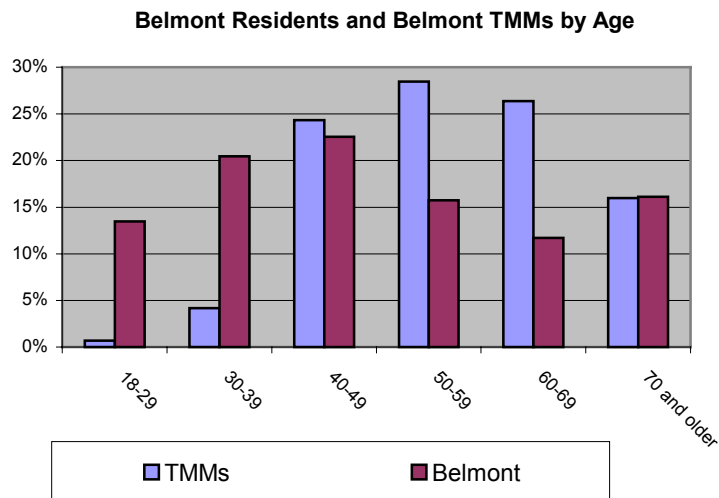


In contrast, there are very few young Belmont residents in Town Meeting, and virtually no very young Belmont residents. Only two persons (1%) in the age range of 18 to 29 years old are TMMs, while only 12 (4%) fall into the age range of 30 to 39 years old.

Town Meeting’s representation virtually reflects the make-up of the community as a whole for persons over age 70 (16% of Belmont adults are age 70 or older; while 16% of TMMs are age 70 or older) and for persons age 40 to 49 (23% of adults are age 40 to 49, while 24% of

TMMs are age 40 to 49).¹¹ Under-representation occurs in the young and very young (5% of TMMs are age 39 or younger while 33% of Belmont residents are age 18 to 39).

The overrepresentation comes in the middle and upper-middle ages, with TMMs in these age ranges twice as high as the incidence of persons in these age ranges in the population. While 54% of Belmont’s TMMs are age 50 to 69 years old, only 27% of Belmont’s adults fall into that age range.

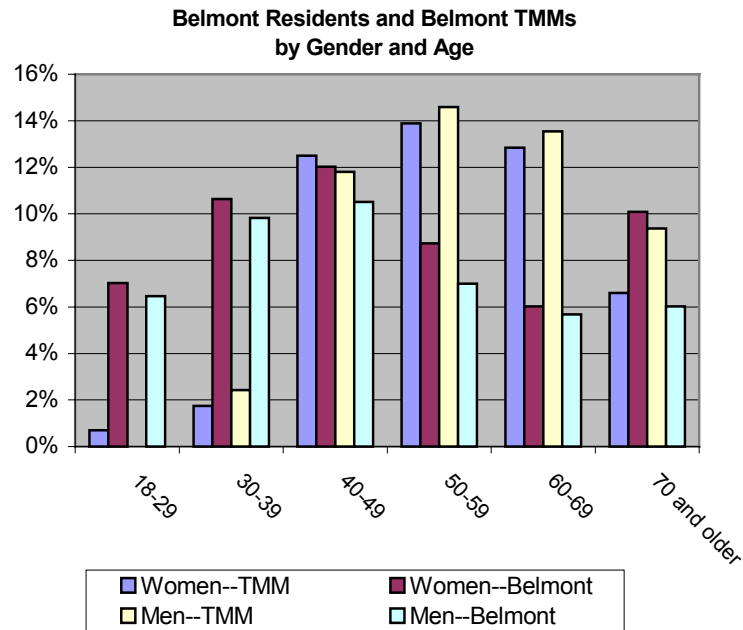


The TMM age distribution, when disaggregated by gender, reflects the gender equality found in the TMM population as a whole. In each of the age groups studied, the distribution of TMMs between men and women is virtually identical. In none of the age groups studied did either men or women represent a substantial majority of the TMMs within that age group. Consider that:

¹¹ References to Belmont residents are to Belmont residents that are age 18 or older.

- While 13% of TMMs between the ages of 40 and 49 are women, 12% are men.
- While 14% of TMMs between the ages of 50 and 59 are women, 15% are men.
- While 13% of TMMs between the ages of 60 and 69 are women, 14% are men.

The largest distinction between men and women, by age, fell in the group of TMMs age 70 or older, where 9% of TMMs were men while only 7% were women.



The extent to which certain age groups (age 18 – 29; age 30 – 39) are under-represented in Town Meeting, while other age groups are over-represented (age 50 – 59; age 60 – 69) is consistent over both men and women. There is, however, a slightly greater over-representation of men aged 50 through 69 in Town Meeting relative to their incidence in Belmont’s population as a whole. There are somewhat fewer men in those age groups in the community as a whole, while there are somewhat more men in those age groups in Town Meeting.

Housing Tenure

Belmont’s Town Meeting is comprised almost exclusively of homeowners. In this regard, TMMs differ sharply from the community as a whole. Of Belmont’s 288 TMMs, 275 (96%) own their own homes. In contrast, within Belmont as a whole as of the 2000 Census, only 61% of occupied housing units represented homeownership units.

The proportion of TMMs who are homeowners is consistent across all of Belmont’s precincts. The greatest representation of non-homeowners arises in Precinct 4, where five (5) of the 36 TMMs are not listed as owning the home in which they live. In contrast, in Precincts 1 and 2, no non-owners are included amongst TMMs, while in Precincts 5 and 8, only one (1) non-owner has been elected (for each precinct) amongst the 36 TMMs per precinct.

Table 3. Homeowners vs. Non-Homeowners within Belmont’s Town Meeting Members
By Precinct (2009)

Precinct	Census Tract /a/	Town Meeting Members (2009)				Census Tract Percent Homeowner
		Non-Homeowner	Homeowner	Total	Percent Homeowner	
1	3572	0	36	36	100%	72%
2	3578	0	36	36	100%	81%
3	3577	2	34	36	94%	44%
4	3576	5	31	36	86%	65%
5	3575	1	35	36	97%	54%
6	3574	2	34	36	94%	46%
7	3573	2	34	36	94%	40%
8	3571	1	35	36	97%	80%
Belmont totals:		13	275	288	95%	61%

NOTES:

/a/ The relationship between precincts and Census tracts is discussed in the first section of this report.

In contrast to Town Meeting Members, Belmont has a substantial renter population. In only two of Belmont’s Census tracts did the homeownership rate reach or exceed 80%. In only three of Belmont’s Census tracts (3571, 3572, 3578) did the homeownership rate exceed 70%. In contrast, in three Census tracts (3573, 3574, 3577), the homeownership rate was less than 50%, while in one additional Census tract (3575), the homeownership rate was more than 50% but less than 60%.

Occupations

The most common occupation amongst Belmont’s Town Meeting Members¹² involves a participation in education or academia (n=44 TMMs, 17%). The groups of occupations next most commonly included are: attorneys (n=27 TMMs, 10%), engineering/computer work (n=26 TMMs, 10%), and persons who report themselves as at-home (n=23 TMMs, 9%).¹³

Persons involved with the health care field (which includes, but is not limited to being a medical doctor) represented 18 TMMs in 2009, while an additional 18 persons reported themselves as being “retired.” Persons reporting themselves as being in “management” positions represented 17 TMMs, while persons reporting themselves as being a “consultant” represented 13 more. The complete breakdown of 2009 TMMs by employment is presented in the Table below.

¹² Occupations were obtained from the self-reporting of TMMs published in Belmont’s annual Town Book. Those occupations were grouped according to the Census Bureau’s categorization of occupations.

¹³ The “at-home” category incorporates several terms used in the self-reporting of occupations. It includes terms such as “at-home,” “housewife,” “homemaker,” and related phrases.

Table 4. Belmont Town Meeting Members by Occupation

	Number of TMMs	Percent of TMMs /a/
Administrative support	4	2%
Architect	8	3%
Arts/Media	10	4%
At home	23	9%
Attorney	27	10%
Consultant	13	5%
Contractor	2	1%
Education/academia	44	17%
Engineering/computer	26	10%
Financial services	9	3%
Health care	18	7%
Maintenance	1	<1%
Management	17	6%
Miscellaneous professional	12	5%
Property/Real estate	6	2%
Retired	18	7%
Sales/Marketing	12	5%
Scientist/high tech	11	4%
Social Worker	5	2%
Unlisted	14	---
Unspecified "employed"	8	---
Total	288	100%

NOTES:

/a/ Percentages calculated based on number of TMMs with listed occupations.

Among the populations of workers under-represented in Belmont’s Town Meeting relative to the proportion of Belmont workers in the community as a whole are:

- persons involved with sales and related professions (8% of total Belmont workers age 16 and older);¹⁴
- persons involved with office and administrative support (10% of total Belmont workers);
- persons involved with construction, extraction and maintenance occupations (3% of total Belmont workers); and

¹⁴ All references to “Belmont workers” are to workers age 16 or older.

- persons involved with production, transportation and material moving (3% of total Belmont workers).¹⁵

As can be seen, Belmont’s Town Meeting tends to be somewhat more “white-collar” than is the community as a whole.

Mobility

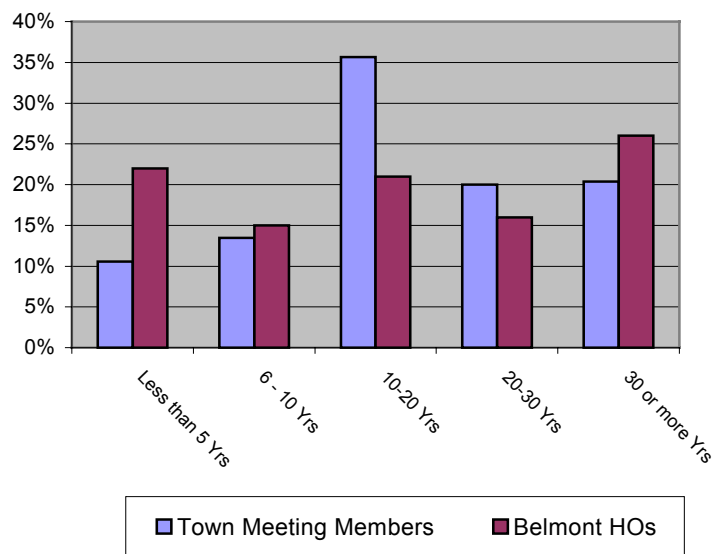
Belmont Town Meeting Members tend to be somewhat less mobile than are residents of the Town as a whole. They are substantially less recently mobile. For purposes of this analysis, “mobility” is defined as the length of time a person has resided at his or her current address. The mobility analysis is limited to homeowners. Townwide data on the mobility of homeowners was obtained from the 2000 Census. Town Meeting Members were assumed to move into their homes at the time they purchased their home.¹⁶ The purchase date for homes was obtained from tax records for Belmont TMMs who own their own home.

Fewer TMMs have moved into their homes within the preceding five years than is true for the Belmont homeowner population as a whole. While nearly one-in-five (22%) of Belmont homeowners moved into their homes within the past five years, only one-in-ten (11%) of Belmont TMMs did. In contrast, roughly equal proportions of Belmont homeowners and Belmont TMMs moved into their home between five and ten years ago (13% vs. 15%).

Homeowners who have lived at their present address for between 10 and 30 years are significantly over-represented in Belmont’s Town Meeting. While nearly three-fifths of TMMs have lived in their current home for that period of time (56%), less than two-fifths (37%) of Belmont’s total homeowner population has.

The same observation can *not* be made for long-time residency. A proportionately higher number of Belmont residents (26%) have lived in their current homes for more than 30 years than is true for Belmont Town Meeting Members (20%).

Belmont Homeowners and Belmont TMMs by Length at Current Residence



¹⁵ This listing is not intended to be a comprehensive list of occupations that are over- or under-represented in Town Meeting.

¹⁶ To the extent that a TMM lived in a home before purchasing it (i.e., purchased it after having previously rented the home), the mobility of TMMs is over-stated. This situation is sufficiently uncommon that the absence of the rent-then-own phenomenon is reasonably used as a simplifying assumption in this analysis.

Some Census Tracts have more Town Meeting Members that are recent movers than is true for the Town as a whole.¹⁷ In two Census Tracts (Tract 3575, Tract 3576), more than one-in-five TMMs have lived in their homes for fewer than five years (21% and 22% respectively). In contrast, the Census Tracts with the most long-term homeowner TMMs include Tract 3572 (24% lived at current address for more than 30 years), Tract 3574 (26% lived at current address for more than 30 years) and Tract 3576 (30% lived at current address for more than 30 years). In two of those three instances, however, the proportion of homeowners that are long-term residents is less than the proportion for the total population of homeowners as a whole in that Census Tract.

Table 5. Percentage of Town Meeting Members by Census Tract by Length of Residence at Current Address

	Length of Residence at Current Address									
	5 Years or Less		6 – 10 Years		11 – 20 Years		21 – 30 Years		More than 30 Years	
	TMMs	HOs	TMMs	HOs	TMMs	HOs	TMMs	HOs	TMMs	HOs
Census Tract 3571	4%	22%	20%	17%	33%	21%	20%	20%	22%	21%
Census Tract 3572	3%	18%	5%	15%	35%	16%	32%	21%	24%	30%
Census Tract 3573	13%	25%	23%	13%	45%	19%	10%	11%	10%	31%
Census Tract 3574	6%	20%	6%	15%	45%	28%	16%	15%	26%	23%
Census Tract 3575	21%	22%	14%	18%	34%	22%	14%	15%	17%	23%
Census Tract 3576	22%	17%	9%	13%	30%	18%	9%	10%	30%	42%
Census Tract 3577	16%	25%	16%	8%	29%	19%	19%	18%	19%	30%
Census Tract 3578	9%	25%	11%	15%	34%	24%	30%	13%	16%	22%
Total Town	11%	22%	13%	15%	36%	21%	20%	16%	20%	26%

In brief, Belmont residents who have recently moved into their home are under-represented amongst Town Meeting Members. Twice as many homeowners who recently moved into their homes are present in the community as are present in Town Meeting. In contrast, homeowners who have a moderately long-term term of residence in Belmont (11 to 30 years) are substantially over-represented amongst TMMs. There are 1.5 times as many TMMs with a term of residence between 11 and 30 years as there are homeowners in the overall Belmont population.

¹⁷ Note, again, that this analysis does not discuss the term of residence in Belmont, but rather the term of residence at the current address. A person could have lived in Belmont for fifty years, but if he or she purchased and moved into a new home five years ago, that person falls into the “5 years or less” category.

Summary and Findings

Despite the size of its membership (288), Belmont's Town Meeting differs in demographic make-up from the community as a whole in several important ways. Based on the data presented in detail above, the following observations are appropriate:

- Despite the roughly equal number and percentage of men and women in Belmont's Town Meeting, men are somewhat over-represented relative to their proportion of the overall Belmont population.
- Belmont's Town Meeting is systematically older than the Town as a whole. The largest age group represented in Town Meeting involves persons age 50 to 59 years old; followed closely to that are TMMs aged 60 to 69 years old (26%).
- In contrast, there are very few young Belmont residents in Town Meeting and virtually no very young Belmont residents.
- The TMM age distribution, when disaggregated by gender, reflects the gender equality found in the TMM population as a whole. In each of the age groups studied, the distribution of TMMs between men and women is virtually identical.
- Belmont's Town Meeting is comprised almost exclusively of homeowners. In this regard, TMMs differ sharply from the community as a whole.
- The most common occupation amongst Belmont's Town Meeting Members involves a participation in education or academia. The groups of occupations next most commonly included are: attorneys, engineering/computer work, and persons who report themselves as "at-home."
- Belmont's Town Meeting tends to be somewhat more "white-collar" than is the community as a whole. Among the populations of workers under-represented in Belmont's Town Meeting relative to the number of workers in the Belmont community as a whole include persons involved with sales and related professions; persons involved with office and administrative support; and persons involved with construction, extraction and maintenance occupations.
- Belmont Town Meeting Members tend to be somewhat less mobile than do residents of the Town as a whole. They are substantially less recently mobile. Belmont residents who have recently moved into their home are under-represented amongst Town Meeting Members. Twice as many homeowners who recently moved into their homes are present in the community as are present in Town Meeting. In contrast, homeowners who have a moderately long-term term of residence in Belmont are substantially over-represented amongst TMMs.

PART 3:

Comparisons Based on Housing Unit Characteristics

In contrast to an examination of characteristics that inhere in Belmont residents, this section considers characteristics that inhere in the physical housing units occupied by Belmont residents (along with Belmont Town Meeting Members). Particularly given that Belmont views itself as a “Town of Homes,” it is appropriate to consider the characteristics of homes occupied by TMMs compared to the characteristics of homes in the community at large.

Building Type

Households living in single-family homes are over-represented in Town Meeting as compared to the proportion of all Belmont residents living in single-family homes.

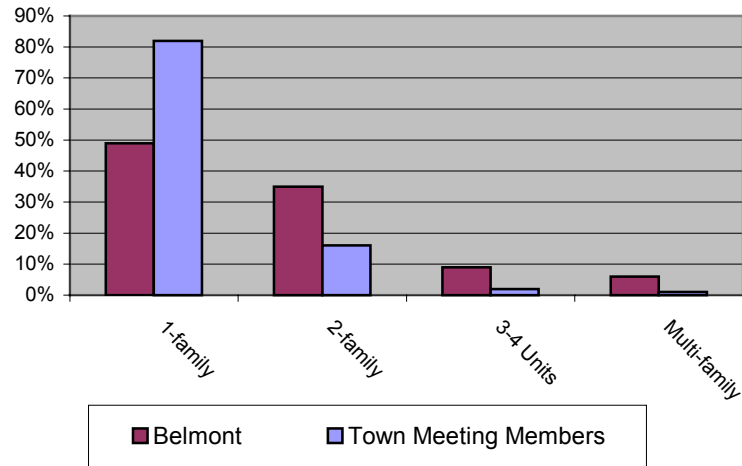
Belmont as a whole is not a community of single family homes. One-half (49%) of Belmont’s roughly 10,000 housing units are single family homes. In addition, 35% are two-family homes, while nine percent (9%) are homes consisting of three or four units.

When viewed on a more disaggregated basis, of Belmont’s eight Census Tracts, four have 30% or *fewer* housing units that are single-family homes. In one additional Census tract, more than 30%, but fewer than half, of all homes are single-family homes.

In contrast, throughout Belmont, three Census tracts have half of their homes as two-family homes, while two additional Census tracts have more than 60% of their homes as two-family homes. In two Census tracts, between 18% and 26% of all homes involve housing units with either three- or four units per building. Six percent of Belmont's homes are in multi-family (more than four units) buildings.

This diversity in housing is not represented in Belmont's Town Meeting. Fully 82% of Belmont's 288 TMMs live in single-family homes. Only 15% of Belmont's Town Meeting Members live in two-family homes.

Belmont Residents and Belmont TMMs by Housing Unit Type



As can be seen, the proportion of housing units in Belmont comprised of two-family units, 3-4 family units, and multi-family units, are all substantially under-represented in Belmont's Town Meeting.

Some Census tracts have particular disparities as to the over-representation of households living in single-family homes.

- While 27% of all occupied housing units in Census Tract 3573 are one-family units, 79% of TMMs living in this Census Tract live in single-family homes;
- While 30% of occupied housing units in Census Tract 3575 are one-family homes, 83% of TMMs living in this Census Tract live in single-family homes;
- While 22% of all occupied housing units in Census Tract 3577 are one-family homes, 73% of TMMs living in this Census Tract live in single-family homes.

Similarly, some Census tracts have particular disparities as to the under-representation of households living in two-family homes:

- While 46% of all occupied housing units in Census Tract 3573 are two-family homes, only 18% of TMMs living in this Census Tract live in such homes;
- While 48% of all occupied housing units in Census Tract 3574 are two-family homes, only 21% of TMMs living in this Census Tract live in such homes;
- While 63% of all homes in Census Tract 3575 are two-family homes, only 17% of TMMs from this Census Tract live in such homes;

- While 50% of all homes in Census Tract 3577 are two-family homes, only 21% of TMMs from this Census Tract live in such homes.

Belmont's TMMs are overwhelmingly residents of single-family detached homes. The diversity in housing types exhibited throughout Belmont is not reflected in Town Meeting.

Home Value

Belmont Town Meeting Members do not own housing units that are of higher value than the population as a whole. The median value for all owner-occupied properties is reported for each Census Tract in the 2000 Census. The 2000 home value for the residence in which a 2009 TMM resided was compared to that median value to determine whether the TMM's home value was higher or lower than the median. More often than not, TMMs live in homes that were valued, in 2000, lower than the median for their Census tract.

The inquiry into home values divorced the value of the home from the individual living in the home.¹⁸ Home values were compared to data for the population as a whole as of the 2000 Census.¹⁹ Home values as of 2000 were obtained from the Belmont property tax assessment data base for each housing unit in which a TMM was the owner in 2009.²⁰

¹⁸ For example, the value of the housing unit was ascertained as of a specified date whether or not the particular TMM lived in that housing unit as of that date.

¹⁹ As with other Census material, Census data for the Town of Belmont, or its component sub-parts (e.g., Census Tracts, Census Block Groups) is most recently available from the 2000 Census.

²⁰ Accordingly, if a TMM was an owner-occupant in 2009, the 2000 home value was obtained for that housing unit irrespective of whether the TMM was *also* the owner-occupant in 2000. The inquiry focused on the housing structure, not on the person living in the housing structure. Some housing units were also deleted because they did not have a 2000 value listed. Housing units that have been converted into condominiums since 2000, for example, did not have a 2000 home value listed. Overall, home values were obtained for 267 housing units, out of the 288 Belmont Town Meeting Members.

Table 6. Percentage of TMMs (2009) by Whether Value of Home (2000) was Higher or Lower than Median Value of Homes in Census Tract in which Home is Located

Census Tract	Number of TMMs /a/	Median Home Value for Census Tract	Percentage of TMM Homes with 2000 Value:	
			Below 2000 Median	Above 2000 Median
3571	41	\$425,700	76%	24%
3572	40	\$458,700	50%	50%
3573	29	\$366,000	45%	55%
3574	30	\$457,000	83%	17%
3575	30	\$408,100	73%	27%
3576	18	\$291,200	56%	44%
3577	27	\$338,400	81%	19%
3578	52	\$587,600	60%	40%

NOTES:

/a/ There are fewer than 288 TMMs since the TMMs in this analysis are limited to those who are homeowners that were valued in 2000.

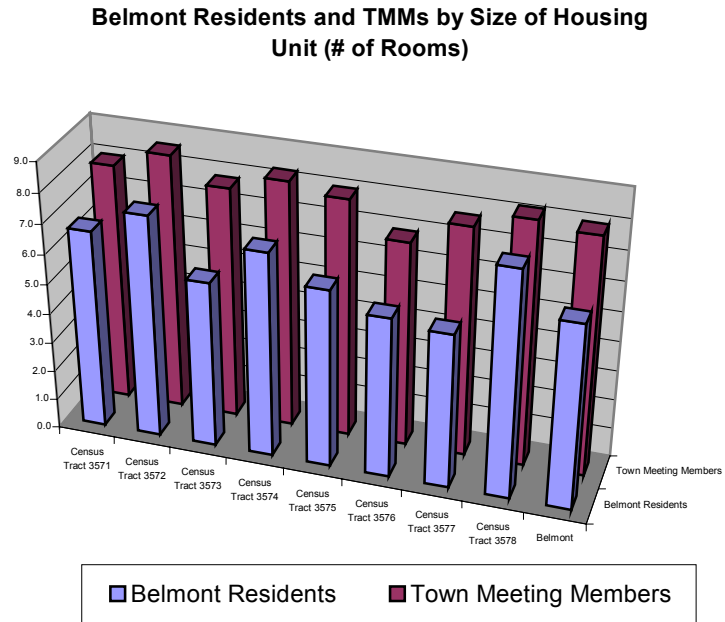
In four of Belmont's Census Tracts, roughly three-quarters or more (from 73% in Census Tract 3575 to 83% in Census Tract 3574) of the TMMs live in homes that were valued below the median value for their Census Tract in 2000. In only one Census Tract (3573) did more than half of Town Meeting Members (55%) live in homes that were more valuable than the median for their Census Tract in 2000.

The value of homes in Belmont, however, *does* vary greatly by the Census Tract in which they are located. The median value of owner-occupied homes (2000) ranged from a low of \$291,200 in Census tract 3576 to a high of \$587,600 in Census Tract 3578.

The difference in home value by Census Tract has some significance when viewed from the perspective of the representativeness of Town Meeting. Note, for example, that the Census Tracts with the four highest median home values have more than 60% of the total number of TMMs who are homeowners (163 of 267). Moreover, the Census Tract with the lowest median home value in 2000 has only one-third of the owner-TMMs (18 vs. 52) that the Census Tract with the highest median home value has.

Housing Unit Size

Belmont Town Meeting Members live in housing units that are substantially larger than the housing units for the Town as a whole. The size of housing units in this inquiry is measured by the number of rooms in each housing unit. A housing unit with eight (8) rooms is deemed to be a “bigger” housing unit than one with six (6) rooms. While Belmont housing units in total have 6.2 rooms per unit, housing units occupied by Belmont Town Meeting Members have 8.0 rooms, a 30% difference.



The larger size of housing occupied by TMMs occurs throughout the community. While on average, TMMs have 1.8 more rooms in their homes than does the typical Belmont housing unit, the range in difference between TMMs and the housing units in the Census Tracts in which those TMMs live falls between two or more additional rooms (Census Tracts 3573: 2.2 additional rooms; Census Tract 3575: 2.0 additional rooms; Census Tract 3577: 2.5 additional rooms), and fewer than 1.0 (Census Tract 3578: 0.6 additional rooms).

The larger size of housing units occupied by TMMs is consistent with other data. As discussed elsewhere, TMMs tend to be owners rather than renters. TMMs tend to live in single-family homes rather than two-family homes (or multi-family homes).

Summary and Findings

Despite the size of its membership (288), Belmont’s Town Meeting is substantially different from the community as a whole in terms of the types of housing units in which Town Meeting Members live. Based on the data presented in detail above, the following observations are appropriate:

- Belmont’s diversity in housing is not represented in Belmont’s Town Meeting. Belmont as a whole is not a community of single family homes. One-half (49%) of Belmont’s roughly 10,000 housing units are single family homes. In addition, 35% are two-family homes, while nine percent (9%) are homes consisting of three or four units. In contrast, fully 82% of Belmont’s 288 TMMs live in single-family homes. Only 15% of Belmont’s Town Meeting Member live in two-family homes.

- Belmont Town Meeting Members do not own housing units that are of higher value than either the population as a whole. More often than not, TMMs live in homes that were valued, in 2000, lower than the median valuation for their Census tract.
- The value of homes in Belmont does vary greatly by the Census Tract in which they are located. The difference in home value by Census Tract has some significance when viewed from the perspective of the representativeness of Town Meeting. For example, the Census Tracts with the four highest median home values have more than 60% of the total number of TMMs who are homeowners. In contrast, the Census Tract with the lowest median home value in 2000 has only one-third of the number of Town Meeting Members that the Census Tract with the highest median home value has.
- Belmont Town Meeting Members live in housing units that are substantially larger than the housing units for the Town as a whole. The larger size of housing occupied by TMMs occurs throughout the community.

PART 4:

Comparisons Based on Income Characteristics

Belmont's Town Meeting Members under-represent lower-income households and individuals relative to the incidence of those lower-income persons in the community as a whole. The representation of TMMs was considered relative to the following points of comparison:

- Median household income; and
- Gross household income.

Income data is not available for individual TMMs on either an individual or a household basis. Instead of considering personal income data, income data for each Census Block Group in Belmont was matched to the number of TMMs whose residence falls within that Census Block Group. The income data for each Census Block Group was compared between Block Groups, as well as compared to the Belmont community as a whole.

Each Census Block Group in Belmont has at least one (1) TMM living in that geographic area. Belmont's seven (7) Census tracts are sub-divided into 27 Census Block Groups. A listing of the Census Block Group, along with an identification of the number of TMMs who have been elected from each Block Group, is presented in Appendix A.

Median Income

Median household income identifies the level of annual income at which half of all households exceed it and the other half have annual income below it. As of the 2000 Census, the median income in Belmont as a whole was \$80,295. In looking at median income, the median income for Belmont as a whole was compared to the median income for each individual Census Block Group.

Belmont’s TMMs disproportionately live in areas of Town that have median incomes above the Town median. Of Belmont’s 288 TMMs, 160 (56%) live in Census Block Groups with median income above the Town median, while 128 (44%) live in Census Block Groups with median income below the Town median.

This majority representation of higher income neighborhoods occurs despite the fact that the majority of Belmont residents live in Block Groups with median income *below* the Town median. As of the 2000 Census, 12,577 Belmont residents (52%) live in Block Groups with median income below the Town median, while 11,617 (48%) live in Block Groups with median income above the Town median. The Table below presents the data.

Table 7. Relative Percentage of Town Meeting Members and Belmont Population by Census Block Groups with Income Above/Below Belmont Median Income

	Population	TMMs
Percentage in Block Groups with Income above Belmont Median	48%	56%
Percentage in Block Groups with Income below Belmont Median	52%	44%

Belmont median income as of 2000 Census was \$80,295.

In addition to comparing the median income of Belmont’s Census Block Groups to the Town median, this inquiry compared Census Block Groups to each other. Belmont’s 27 Census Block Groups were ranked from lowest median income (#1) to highest (#27). The 27 Block Groups were then divided into quartiles (fourths). Quartile #1 includes the seven Block Groups with the lowest median income. Quartile #4 includes the six Block Groups²¹ with the highest median incomes. The percentage of TMMs living in the Block Groups falling in each quartile was compared to the percentage of Belmont’s population living in the Block Groups comprising each quartile. The Table below presents the data.

Table 8. Percentage of Town Meeting Members and Belmont Population by Quartiles of Census Block Groups by Census Block Group Median Income /a/

	Quartile 1	Quartile 2	Quartile 3	Quartile 4 /b/	Total
Population	29%	27%	22%	22%	100%
Town Meeting Members	20%	26%	28%	25%	100%
Average of the Medians /c/	\$56,527	\$76,260	\$91,747	\$123,783	\$80,295

NOTES:

/a/ Quartile 1 contains the Census Block Groups with the lowest income, while Quartile 4 has the Census Block Groups with the highest median income.

/b/ The fourth quartile has only six Census Block Groups in it, since Belmont has only 27 Block Groups.

/c/ The available data shows the median income for each individual Census Block Group. This row presents the average of the Census Block Group medians in each quartile.

²¹ Since Belmont has only 27 Block Groups (a number not divisible by 4), the quartile with the highest median incomes was assigned only six, not seven, Block Groups.

The Quartile with the lowest median income is under-represented by one-third in Town Meeting. While 29% of Belmont's population lives in the quartile of Census Block Groups with the lowest median incomes, only 20% of TMMs live in those same Block Groups. In contrast, the two quartiles of Block Groups with the highest median incomes are over-represented by one-quarter. While 44% of all Belmont households live in these top two quartiles of Block Groups (by median income), 53% of TMMs live in these Block Groups.

The quartile of under-represented Block Groups has an average median income of \$56,527, roughly 70% of the Town's median income. The two quartiles of over-represented Block Groups have an average median income of \$91,747 (114% of the Town's median) and \$123,783 (154% of the Town's median) respectively.

Gross Household Income

The examination of Gross Household Income presented in this inquiry considers three levels of Gross Household Income:

- Households with annual income at or below \$30,000;
- Households with annual income at or below \$50,000; and
- Households with annual income at or above \$100,000.

As with the discussion of median income, gross household income data is not available for individual Town Meeting Members. This inquiry thus approaches a consideration of Gross Household Income in the following manner:

- The analysis identified the percentage of households Townwide that had annual income at or below either \$30,000 or \$50,000, or annual income above \$100,000.
- The analysis identified the percentage of households in each Census Block Group that had annual income at or below either \$30,000 or \$50,000, or annual income above \$100,000.
- The analysis determined whether the percentage of households identified for each Census Block Group was above the Town average (i.e., had proportionately more households with the specified income levels) or below the Town average (i.e., had proportionately fewer households with the specified income levels).
- The analysis summed the total population of households living in that group of Census Block Groups with proportionately more or proportionately fewer households with the specified income levels; it then converted that sum into a percentage of the number of households Town-wide.
- The analysis summed the total number of Town Meeting Members living in that group of Census Block Groups with proportionately more or proportionately fewer

households with the specified income levels; it then converted that sum into a percentage of the number of TMMs Town-wide. and

- The percentage of population living in the Census Block Groups with proportionately more (or proportionately fewer) households with the specified income levels was compared to the percentage of TMMs living in those same Census Block Groups.

Gross Household Income at or below \$30,000

Town Meeting Members under-represent the number of households living with annual income at or below \$30,000. For Belmont as a whole, one-third

Percent of Households and TMMs in Census Block Groups Above and Below Town Average Incidence of Households with Income =<\$30,000		
Percentage that Reside in Block Group where Proportionately More/Fewer HHs with Income =<\$30,000		
	Proportionately Fewer	Proportionately More
Population	68%	32%
TMMs	81%	19%

(32%) of all households live in Census Block Groups where the percentage of households with income at or below \$30,000 is higher than Belmont as a whole (i.e., Block Groups have proportionately more households with income at or below \$30,000). In contrast, the number of Town Meeting Members living in these areas is just over half this percentage. Only one-fifth (19%) of Town Meeting Members live in those same Census Block Groups.

Viewed conversely, while 81% of TMMs live in Census Block Groups where the percentage of households with lower incomes is less than the Town as a whole, only 68% of the total Belmont population lives in those same areas.

In those Census Block Groups that have disproportionate over-representation amongst Town Meeting Members, 12% of households have income at or below \$30,000 (compared to 17% Town-wide). In contrast, in those Census Block Groups that have disproportionate under-representation amongst TMMs, 27% of households have incomes at or below \$30,000 (compared to 17% Town-wide).

Gross Household Income at or below \$50,000

The gap changes, but not dramatically, when \$50,000 is used as the income demarcation rather than \$30,000. While half (47%) of all Belmont households

Percent of Households and TMMs in Census Block Groups Above and Below Town Average Incidence of Households with Income =<\$50,000		
Percentage that Reside in Block Group where Proportionately More/Fewer HHs with Income =<\$50,000		
	Proportionately Fewer	Proportionately More
Population	53%	47%
TMMs	67%	33%

live in Census Block Groups where the proportion of households with income at or below \$50,000 is greater than the percentage for Belmont as a whole, only one-third (33%) of Town Meeting Members live in those same areas.

Conversely, while for Belmont as a whole, half (53%) of all households live in Census Block Groups where the percentage of households with income at or below \$50,000 is lower than Belmont as a whole (i.e., Block Groups have proportionately fewer households with income at or below \$50,000), two-thirds (67%) of Town Meeting Members live in these areas.

In those Census Block Groups that have disproportionate over-representation amongst Town Meeting Members, 22% of households have income at or below \$50,000 (compared to 31% Town-wide). In contrast, in those Census Block Groups that have disproportionate under-representation amongst TMMs, 40% have incomes at or below \$30,000 (compared to 31% Town-wide).

Gross Household Income at or above \$100,000

Just as lower income areas of Town are under-represented in Belmont’s Town Meeting, higher income areas are over-represented. This conclusion is based on an examination of the percentage of households in each Census Block Group with income greater than \$100,000. An income of \$100,000 is roughly 120% of Belmont’s median income.

A disproportionate number of Town Meeting Members are elected from Census Block Groups where the percentage of households with annual income exceeding \$100,000 is higher than the

Percent of Households and TMMs in Census Block Groups Above and Below Town Average Incidence of Households with Income =<\$100,000		
Percentage that Reside in Block Group where Proportionately More/Fewer HHs with Income =>\$100,000		
	Proportionately Fewer	Proportionately More
Population	53%	47%
TMMs	33%	67%

Town-wide percentage. While 47% of Belmont’s households live in Census Block Groups where the percentage of households with income greater than \$100,000 is higher than the Town as a whole, 67% of TMMs are elected from those same areas.

Overall, 38% of Belmont’s households had income greater than \$100,000 as of the 2000 Census. In those Census Block Groups where the number of households having such income is higher than the Town as a whole, and having an over-representation of TMMs, 52% had incomes greater than \$100,000. In those Census Block Group where the number of households having such income is lower than the Town as a whole, and having an under-representation of TMMs, only 25% had incomes greater than \$100,000.

Summary and Findings

Belmont’s Town Meeting Members under-represent lower-income households and individuals relative to the incidence of those lower-income persons in the community as a whole. Based on the data presented in detail above, the following observations are warranted:

- Belmont’s TMMs disproportionately live in areas of Town that have median incomes above the Town median. This majority representation of higher income

neighborhoods occurs despite the fact that that the majority of Belmont residents live in neighborhoods with median income below the Town median.

- The Quartile of Belmont's Census Block Groups with the lowest median income is under-represented by one-third in Town Meeting. In contrast, the two quartiles of Block Groups with the highest median incomes are over-represented by one-quarter. The quartile of under-represented Block Groups has an average median income of \$56,527, roughly 70% of the Town's median income. The two quartiles of over-represented Block Groups have an average median income of \$91,747 (114% of the Town's median) and \$123,783 (154% of the Town's median) respectively.
- Town Meeting Members under-represent the number of households living with annual income at or below \$30,000. The gap changes, but not dramatically, when \$50,000 is used as the income demarcation rather than \$30,000.
- Just as lower income areas of Town are under-represented in Belmont's Town Meeting, higher income areas are over-represented. A disproportionate number of Town Meeting Members are elected from Census Block Groups where the percentage of households with annual income exceeding \$100,000 is higher than the Town-wide percentage.

PART 5:

Analysis and Recommendations

Town Meeting is Belmont's governing body, its local legislature. Each year, Belmont's Town Meeting is called upon to vote upon such fundamental local operating issues as the Town's budget. In addition, certain quality-of-life issues routinely come before Town Meeting for its consideration. Zoning issues present questions of traffic and density, along with having implications for the Town budget. Legislative decisions are made as to:

- How (or whether) housing affordability should be preserved and promoted;
- How historic preservation can be enhanced;
- How much noise is "too much";
- What role the Town plays in conserving energy.

Paving the streets and preserving trees. Educating our children and electing our officials. Serving our aging population and supporting our local business districts. Building fire stations (and schools) while budgeting in a time of fiscal constraint.

In theory, Belmont's Town Meeting is democracy in action. Through Town Meeting, 288 residents come together to decide the issues facing the Town. The process of melding these various interests, again in theory, yields a decision that represents the interests of the community as a whole.

To reach that conclusion, however, is not to say that Town Meeting does not create "winners" and "losers." Rare is the decision where *everyone* benefits and no-one feels consequences.

The question this report poses is whether all parts of the community have equal access to the decisionmaking process to determine those winners and losers. It would be inappropriate, of

course, to assert that segments of the community cannot be represented unless one of “their own” is a Town Meeting Member.

It would, however, be equally inappropriate to assert that all segments of the community are represented simply because Town Meeting is “big.” This is the learning of more than one hundred years of effort relating to adequate representation of gender, ethnicity and race in legislative bodies in the United States.

The facts about Belmont’s Town Meeting are pretty indisputable. Those facts present a consistent (internally consistent) pattern of exclusion from Belmont’s Town Meeting:

- Renters are excluded from Town Meeting;
- Persons living in other than single-family homes, including two- and three-family homes, are disproportionately excluded from Town Meeting.
- Not only new-comers, but even persons living in Belmont for a moderately short time (5 – 10 years) are disproportionately excluded from Town Meeting.
- Persons living in areas of Town with smaller and somewhat less valuable homes are disproportionately excluded from Town Meeting.
- Persons living in lower income neighborhoods are disproportionately excluded from Town Meeting.

While it cannot be said with certainty that a group excluding specific demographic characteristics will fail to reflect the attitudes, beliefs and interests of those excluded persons, it unquestionably can be said that it is more likely that it will not reflect those attitudes, beliefs and interests. Certainly, it is reasonable to believe that:

- A group of older Town Meeting Members who own larger single-family homes will have a different collective attitude toward density than a group with a proportionate representation of younger households living in smaller two- and three-family homes and in neighborhoods of two- and three-family homes.
- A group of older Town Meeting Members living in the post-school-age children part of their life-cycle will have a different collective attitude toward school funding than a group with a proportionate representation of younger households with school-age children.

Belmont can do better in making its representative Town Meeting reflective of the entire community as a whole. The Town should consider both operational and structural improvements in civic participation:

Engagement

Town officials should take additional steps to engage diverse elements of the community in local public affairs.

One of the primary mechanisms for reaching young families with children, for example, involves the school system. Organizations such as the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) for individual schools should be routinely approached on two levels.

- On the one hand, PTOs should be informed about pending and expected public policy debates that will directly or indirectly affect the education of, or educational services offered to, Belmont's children.
- On the other hand, PTOs should be provided the opportunity for Town officials to explain, in a timely fashion, the substantive decisions that might be expected to be addressed by Town Meeting in the following year along with an explanation of the process for becoming a Town Meeting Member. Substantive discussions of Town policy decisions should be offered to PTO officers for inclusion in newsletters to families.

Town Meeting participation is likely to improve to the extent that a broader sector of the community is engaged in local affairs. "Engagement" involves more than participation as a volunteer in one of Belmont's multiple committees. Engagement includes the act of paying attention sufficiently closely to see the interdependence between what happens in a family's day-to-day lives and what happens in the Town's formal decision-making processes. Additional effort such as working with PTOs could promote such engagement.²²

Education

Town officials should take additional steps to educate the diverse elements of the community on important public issues. The Town excessively relies on the "posting" of meetings to notify residents of the scheduling and content of important public policy discussions. "Posting" a notice of a public meeting is substantively different from taking proactive action to inform the community of important deliberations, ongoing decision-making processes, or key public meetings.

Belmont has community assets that are under-used in reaching out to educate the public on ongoing policy discussions.

- Belmont's community newspaper (*Belmont Citizen-Herald*) is perhaps the primary communications mechanism between the local government and the local community. As of December 2009, however, the Town had listed on its Web site the existence of 35 *permanent* local government boards, committees and commissions, and 13 additional temporary local government boards, committees and sub-groups. Given the limited reporting resources of the Town's small community newspaper, it is unreasonable to expect the paper to have sufficient staff to "cover" each committee meeting. Existing

²² Working with PTOs is intended to be illustrative of this process of promoting engagement.

non-elected public officials should be impressed with their obligation to provide narrative discussions of their ongoing work through the local community newspaper.

- Belmont’s community television station (TV Channel 8) offers a communication mechanism capable of reaching the broader public. While locally-produced broadcast “shows” on key local issues may, but need not be, beyond the norm of what local officials offer, the willingness and ability of TV8 to air text announcements in its continuously scrolled public announcements is under-utilized. Belmont’s community television station is accessible to the general public through the assistance of the Belmont Media Center.
- Belmont’s public library represents an asset that could be better utilized for communicating with the broader public. Belmont’s library has a history of offering various “series” of concerts, presentations, and discussion groups. Publicity is posted at the library and around town. Both pre- and post-event coverage often occurs in the local newspaper. An appropriately named and publicized, and quality-driven, four- to six-part annual “series” on the public policy issues facing the community as a whole might well pull persons in that would not otherwise have knowledge about the issues facing the community.
- Belmont should make better use of its municipal utility as a communication mechanism for Town Meeting. As a component of local government, the municipal utility is well-suited to place information in the hands of every resident in Belmont. Periodic inserts with electric bills identifying issues that Town Meeting is expected to deliberate, providing information both on the substance of the decision and on the process of decision-making, and perhaps even on the points of contention, if any, could place important information in the hands of every Belmont resident.

Belmont has communication assets that appear to be under-utilized as mechanisms that could reasonably promote engagement in local affairs. Indeed, Belmont has assets that many communities might not have: a local newspaper that is devoted almost exclusively to community news; a local library that serves as a community gathering place as well as a repository of books and media; a community media center that is both able and willing to provide broadcast media services devoted to local affairs; a municipal utility that communicates directly with every resident on a monthly basis.

The question of education and communication is not one of capacity. Rather it is a question of willingness and priority setting. The mechanisms for communicating with the community at-large are available should policymakers choose to use those mechanisms.

Elections

The regular annual Town Meeting in Belmont is often viewed as a one-month affair. From the moment the “warrant” is announced—the “warrant” is that document setting forth the legislative articles that will come before Town Meeting for deliberation—to the time at which Town Meeting is “dissolved” involves a flurry of activity. During that month of activity, warrant

articles are circulated, briefings are held, policy-makers take positions, and Town Meeting participants presumably pay attention.

Belmont would be well-served to extend the time period in which people focus on Town Meeting. It is reasonable to expect that Town officials, be they the Board of Selectmen or Town Committees, or Town Department heads, would *know* at the beginning of each year whether they expect to have a warrant article coming before Town Meeting during the upcoming year.

Notice of the expected issues to be resolved by Town Meeting should be compiled and published at the beginning of the year.²³ A “year-in-preview” report from either the Town Administrator or the Board of Selectmen should be published and publicized. This year-in-preview report should identify the issues that local officials reasonably expect to present to Town Meeting for resolution.

Through such a process, information on anticipated Town Meeting issues can be made publicly available *before* the election process begins. Community members should know what’s substantively at stake in the Town Meeting elections before the decision-time arises about who wants to stand for election and whether participation as a Town Meeting member is meaningful.

Summary

Town officials can take specific steps to promote a more representative Town Meeting. To the extent that persons in particular demographic groups affirmatively consider participation in local affairs, and make specific decisions *not* to engage in such participation, their non-representation is self-imposed. To the extent, however, that the failure to participate in local government can be attributed to barriers to such participation, including information barriers, that non-participation poses concerns.

Participation in local affairs does not “just happen.” The broad public participation that, in theory, lies at the heart of the New England Town Meeting process is not the result of passive action (or inaction) on the part of local government. Instead, broad public participation is the result of concerted active effort to educate the public, engage the public, and provide the public with a meaningful opportunity to participate.

Given the shortcomings in the extent to which Belmont’s representative Town Meeting actually reflects the community as a whole, further attention to what active effort is needed is merited.

²³ The purpose of this compilation would not be to limit what Town Meeting could consider, but rather would allow public notice of what issues that Town Meeting will *likely* be facing.

Appendix 1: Census Tracts, Census Block Groups, Town Meeting Members and Population

Line	Census Tract	Census Block Group	Population (2000)	Number of TMMs (2009)
1	3571	1	1,005	14
2	3571	2	1,155	7
3	3571	3	935	15
4	3571	4	1,053	14
5	3572	1	1,079	3
6	3572	2	744	12
7	3572	3	747	10
8	3572	4	634	12
9	3573	1	878	7
10	3573	2	1,018	24
11	3573	3	970	2
12	3574	1	768	7
13	3574	2	699	24
14	3574	3	755	2
15	3575	1	651	5
16	3575	2	701	6
17	3575	3	830	19
18	3576	1	975	8
19	3576	2	1,445	19
20	3577	1	645	10
21	3577	2	779	10
22	3577	3	873	7
23	3577	4	986	6
24	3578	1	911	9
25	3578	2	1,217	21
26	3578 /a/	4	897	6
27	3578	5	844	9
Town total			24,194	288
/a/ There is no Census Block Group 3 in Census Tract 3578.				