

Information Technology Advisory Committee

Presentation to Board of Selectmen

March 31, 2003

ITAC Members

- John Bowe (co-chair)
 - Guy Parsons (co-chair)
 - Simson Garfinkel (clerk)
 - Jonathan Green
 - Martha Gallagher
 - Kaleb Keithley
 - Kent Carlson
 - Myron Kassaraba
 - Charles Smart
 - Scott Stratford (School Committee liaison)
-
- We are also grateful for consistent assistance from: Joyce Munro, Lee McCanne, and Tim McCarthy

Process

- Fall 2002: ITAC renamed with new Charter
- Fall 2002-Winter 2003: IT Audit of Town Departments
 - 20 in-person interviews
 - Follow-on activities: review, discussion, analysis
 - Benchmarked against 10 other Towns
 - Arlington, Bedford, Lexington, Concord, etc.

Positive Findings

- Town-wide network is a success and has become mission-critical to Town operations
- Belmont has a few “islands of IT competency”
 - School Dept, Light Dept., Police Dept., Assessor
 - All reasonably well-equipped and providing limited support to other Town depts.
- Systems & Software (S&S) accounting system purchased by Light Dept. is the Town’s primary accounting system.

Areas of Concern (1)

- Inadequate IT proficiency in most departments.
 - Managers are generally not “tech savvy”.
 - Many users lack adequate training and expertise.
 - IT proficiency not part of job requirements.
 - Department problems that could be easily solved with existing resources are left unsolved.

Areas of Concern (2)

- S&S accounting system is problematic
 - Most Town departments not satisfied with support and functionality.
 - System is hard to use.
 - Inadequate support and training for Town users.
 - Reports very difficult to extract.

Consequence: Most Town departments operating “shadow budgets” in Microsoft Excel.

Areas of Concern (3)

- Town-wide network is fragile
 - Network lacks physical redundancy
 - Network security is an open question
 - Network management is split between School Department and Light Department
- Belmont's citizens can be better served
 - Town's website is an electronic newsletter.
 - Website needs to offer transactions (bill payments, registration for programs, licenses)

Summary Concerns

- IT is resource-limited.
 - No budgeting for technology life-cycle (upgrades, updates, repairs, etc.)
- Town lacks short and long-term IT plans.
- Town has only ½ FTE for tech support
 - Other towns our size have 3-5 FTEs.
 - Every town we spoke with has a central technology group with an IT Director.

Recommendations: S&S

- Address immediate issues with S&S
 - Have an individual with appropriate training and authority provide S&S support to the Town's users
 - Work to post transactions in a timely manner
 - Work to eliminate “shadow budgets” (a real, but hidden Town cost, in both time and money)

Recommendations: Network

- Network security and redundancy needs to be addressed.
 - All non-connected departments and users need to be connected. (COA, Assessor, Cemetery, Harvard Lawn)
 - School network should be partitioned from Town network
 - Redundant network “links” need to be added

Recommendations: Structural

- Town needs to centralize IT management
 - Option: IT Department
 - Option: Light Department provides IT service and support to other Town departments.
 - Option: School Department provides IT service and support to other Town Departments
 - Option: Outsource IT service and support to a third-party service provider.
- Town needs to have a full-time Town-wide IT and Communications coordinator

Recommendations: HR

- Town needs to invest in IT training for current employees
- IT proficiency needs to be an explicit job requirement for all new hires
- Town job descriptions need to have explicit IT competency requirements.

Conclusion:

- Belmont's minimal IT expenditures have achieved some positive results.
 - Much of the IT expenditure is invisible to the budget.
- Spending on IT is not optional
 - Town is increasingly dependent on its IT infrastructure
 - Belmont is living with considerable IT risk
 - Citizens expect, deserve, and are demanding, better web services, access to information, and communications with Town officials.
- Planning and centralization will allow Belmont to get more service from the money that it is already spending on IT.