

Vision 21 Implementation Committee
Minutes-November 4, 2004
Approved Dec. 2, 2004

Members present: Jennifer Page, Sara Oaklander, Barry Winston, Meg O'Brien, and Victoria Haase.

Members absent: Matt Hausmann, Tim Higgins, Diane Stafford, and Paul Solomon. (Joe Greene and Bill Hofmann have submitted resignations; see below.)

Guests: Jenny Fallon, Dennis Fitzpatrick.

Jennifer Page, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm

The Committee had not met since August. Jennifer had cancelled the September and October meetings because so many members were heavily involved in the Environmental Fair which was held October 23.

Administrivia

Minutes from the August 12, 2004 meeting were reviewed and approved

Agenda for tonight's meeting was distributed and reviewed

Mission and Strategic Plan for Belmont Schools-Denis Fitzpatrick

Mr. Fitzpatrick was introduced as the Director of English at Belmont High School

Mr. Fitzpatrick came to interview members of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee "to gather feedback about the school system and to learn how to better serve the entire community".

A handout prepared by members of the public school system was distributed by Mr. Fitzpatrick to focus on specific topics (a copy is attached).

Questions and discussion followed with information from Vision 21 Members gathered and summarized (also attached).

Announcement of Resignations

Jennifer Page- announced the resignations of Vision 21 Implementation Committee members Joe Greene (due to poor health) and Bill Hofmann (whose 3-year term as liaison from the Warrant Committee has ended.) Jennifer explained that she has heard from Mike Widmer, chair of the Warrant Committee, who feels that his Committee is sufficiently stretched that he cannot replace Mr. Hofmann with another sitting member. Jennifer suggested that she approach the Selectmen to see if we could change our structure, omitting the requirement of a member representing the Warrant Committee. She asked members to consider what qualifications we might seek for new members replacing Mr. Hofmann and Mr. Greene. It was pointed out that they both are members of the Belmont business community, and long-time residents of the Town, and these are valuable perspectives and are likely to bring an important set of contacts. The committee will reflect on the matter of qualifications and also possible names to propose to the Board of Selectmen, since it is not the usual time for making appointments.

BEDPG-next steps, recommendations: Sara Oaklander

Sara Oaklander reported that the committee hoped to put together final recommendations in time for the upcoming November town meeting. In this process it was realized that several topics which include "trash project", "business advocacy efforts" and, "assessment of financial benefits on property taxes" need further evaluation. The new time frame for the final report is January or February 2005.

A discussion ensued regarding BEDPG's interest in finding a way to attach a dollar figure reflecting the "financial loss" the town incurs from underused/vacant business buildings. Sara

suggested that there are two important reasons for pursuing this idea: first, to make clear to the Selectmen and other decision-makers the potential cost-effectiveness of hiring a part-time business advocate; and second, to expose the fallacy (frequently heard in town) that “filling all the empty buildings” will resolve Belmont’s financial problems. Suggestions were proposed to about how she might go about this.

Minutes recorded by Victoria Haase (7:05 – 8:50) and Jennifer Page (8:50 – 9:00).

Addendum:

Summary of the Questions and Discussion Led by Mr. Denis Fitzpatrick, Director of English, from the Belmont Public Schools

What are the High Schools strengths and successes?

- Meets the needs of high performing students and parents
- Community service program provides a wide range of interaction with the larger community and teaches kids to reach out into neighborhoods
- Anticipate what skills will be valuable for kids in the future and what curriculum is the most meaningful
- Promote High School activities well
- Strong music and drama program with many opportunities
- Students benefit from the general school system despite budget constraints

What is not working so well or what could be done better?

- Passive, quiet, not obviously outstanding students lack attention and advantages
- Learning is very girl oriented
- Don’t reach beyond a finite skill set, projects tend to emphasize fine motor skills and artwork; this can be frustrating especially for boys
- Bright students can be under-challenged by undefined learning objectives and meaningless experiences
- Foreign language staff does not take advantage of a diverse student population
- Need to include more serious study of current world events
- Need to build on community service ideas with more civic experiences
- Not a comprehensive High School; is geared to academics. Technical programs have been eliminated
- Increasing impact of testing dampens creativity
- Teaching to the tests

How do you get your information about the schools?

Belmont Citizen Herald, posters and sandwich boards to announce special events, direct mailing

Do additional opportunities exist?

Link from town web site, community bulletin board, forums held by school committee, Community TV, information about each school listed in the local paper, orientation nights for new students as well as extended community

What trends do you see in the community that will impact the schools?

Many more international families and children from different cultures who must find their place in the community.

Belmont's financial struggle will challenge budgets.
Proposed future development may require regionalization and urban planning.