

Vision Implementation Committee

Meeting of December 10, 2009

Minutes

Adopted 01/13/10

VIC Members:

Present – Tim Bowman, Kevin Heine, Jennifer Page, Jonathan Mascia, Sara Masucci, Sara Oaklander, Paul Solomon

Absent – Bruce MacDonald

Guests:

Joanne Coakley, Jane Feinberg, Dan LeClerc

1. Call to Order

Paul called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of Nov.12, 2009 were approved unanimously.

3. Town Website

Sara distributed some hard copies representing work done to date on the Town website and the group discussed next steps. Sara will follow up with members individually about those next steps.

4. Financial Initiative

Paul Solomon updated the committee on outreach done regarding the possibility of a VIC sponsored initiative regarding Town finances. Paul, Tim and Sara M. met with George Entwistle, School Superintendent; Tom Younger, Town Administrator; and Phil Curtis, Chair of the Warrant Committee. All three were positive about the idea of the VIC sponsoring this kind of program. Phil is aware that the trust of the citizens has to be earned, and that there are many sacrifices that must be made. All agree that an override will be indicated in the coming year.

George Entwistle surfaced the issue of psychological stress on high school students.

Sara added that there seems to be a range of perspective among these Town leaders, but that there is agreement on a breakdown between what the Town is doing and the decision making process and what the citizenry expects or is prepared to go along with. Phil expressed concern that even with information people will not see things the way the decision makers see it.

Tim added that he sees George having already embarked on this path of community engagement leading to priority setting. We're talking about the Town, which includes the schools, and the process is underway on the school side.

5. Jane Feinberg, FrameWorks Institute

The committee welcomed Jane Feinberg, Belmont resident and Deputy Director for Field Building with the FrameWorks Institute. Jane gave a brief overview of her background, stating that it is not in budgets and taxes. She comes at this instead from a background in journalism and television production.

FrameWorks is a think and action tank based in D.C. (Jane works out of her home here in Belmont). Their goal is to build the communications capacity of the nonprofit sector. They use a research-based approach to communications called Strategic Frame Analysis. They work to map the public conversation and then work to reframe that conversation.

Jane referred to a document entitled *Framing Budgets and Taxes: A FrameWorks Message Memo* and one entitled *How to Talk About Government*. She explained that this is not a finished project, but rather a work in progress for the FrameWorks Institute. She then made a presentation using a PowerPoint slide show that provided an overview of FrameWorks' methodology for their work and some of their relevant findings.

The discussion that followed Jane's presentation included her offer to pitch to FrameWorks that they use Belmont as a test case. FrameWorks might be interested in creating an on line tool that would take people through a budget simulation. At the very least, Jane offered to think about the messaging and a strategic format for the meetings the VIC wants to sponsor. She suggested we consider starting with budgets, start by celebrating Belmont...maybe get some of our high profile people to talk about what Belmont has done for them.

What might our next steps be?

- Should we have Jane look at the slide show, or should we step back and consider a new approach?
 - Jane will find out if FrameWorks wants to work with Belmont

We need to be careful if our agenda is to gain support for raising taxes.

The point was made that we are trying to help people understand the Town's finances and budget process, and to be clear about what kind of Town we want.

Tim asked if it's worth working on the slide deck in order to compile the information that's needed to inform people. He proposed that some of us get together to talk about the kind of information we're likely to want to present to people. Then we can work on compiling that information.

Jane will meet with Tim and Sara and Paul and anyone else who can attend.

6. Meeting Schedule

The group agreed to cancel the December 21 meeting and make an attempt to reschedule the January 14 meeting which conflicts with a number of other important Town meetings. Sara offered to survey the group via email to see if there is a workable date.

7. Mandate: The Board of Selectmen approved our revised mandate by a vote of 2:1. Angelo expressed concern that we would be out of control in our areas of activity. We did agree that we would report on those areas of activity to the Board on a regular basis.

8. Sustainable Belmont:

Jennifer reported that Jan Kruse has decided to step down from her role as founding chair of Sustainable Belmont. John McAlpin, vice-chair, has agreed to step up and serve as the chair. Jan will make SB's annual report to the VIC in February. The group agreed that the VIC will at that time recognize Jan's contributions, which have been many. Jennifer will check with the informal leadership of SB to confirm that they will support John as the chair and then she will bring the recommendation back to the VIC for his appointment. She requested that the VIC keep this information confidential for the moment as members of SB have not yet been informed of this change in leadership.

9. Comprehensive Planning

- Transportation and Energy Group – report posted on the website
- Open Space – report posted on the website
- Public Facilities and Finance - Tim reported that the last meeting was rather discouraging and it appears that the group is being disbanded in favor of the core planning committee taking on its responsibilities
- Commercial Development – work still underway

10. Adjournment

Paul adjourned the meeting a few minutes after 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Oaklander
Secretary Pro-Tem