

- **Vision 21 Implementation Committee**
  - **Meeting Minutes**
  - **December 15, 2005**
  - **Accepted January 5, 2006**

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- The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.
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- Members Present: Austin Bliss, Vinnie DeNovellis, Victoria Hasse, Meg O'Brien, Sara Oaklander, Jennifer Page, Paul Santos, Jay Szklut
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- Also in attendance: Dolores Keefe, Town Clerk
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- Members absent: Donna Brescia, Ann Rittenburg, Paul Solomon
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- **1. Administrivia**
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  - Introductions were made to Jay Szklut, the Town's new Planning and Economic Development Manager, and the newest member of our Committee. Jay comes to us most recently from Hull. He has an MA in Regional Planning from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
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  - Corrections were made to the minutes of December 1, 2005 and subsequently they were approved unanimously.
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  - **2. Discussion of progress and achievements on economic development/business initiative**
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  - Our discussion was based on two reports: "Is Belmont Business Friendly?" (2/2003) written by the Vision Implementation Committee and "BEDPG Final Report" (3/2005) developed by the Business and Economic Development Planning Group, a task force of the Vision Committee. We agreed that the goals of this evening's discussion would be to pass on institutional memory and endeavor for the newer members to fully understand the issues before proceeding to detailed examination of the recommendations; and that we would devote at least two meetings to deal with the business initiative.
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  - 2.1 Sara, Jennifer and Meg asked for questions about the process and conditions that resulted in these reports.
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  - Why were there two reports? They were written by two different groups, at different times. The first report (Vision Comm.) was intended to inform the Board of Selectmen about concerns raised by members of the business community, with specific recommendations arising from these concerns; the second (BEDPG) was focused on developing recommendations specifically for facilitating the opening of new businesses, attracting desirable new businesses, and preserving and enhancing current businesses. The first was much broader in scope; the second more focused on specific action steps within its mandate.
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  - 2.2 We continued with a discussion of BEDPG, of the lessons learned and history of the work.
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- BEDPG ventured into uncharted waters; no committee like it had been composed of both residents and business people working together. At first, the business community wanted BEDPG to solve problems and be business advocates. Gradually it became better understood that this effort was about the benefits of business development to the rest of the town. It was also seen as a relationship-building effort between the Town and the businesses it wanted to encourage.

- Some of the inhibiting factors were the inability of Committee members to make promises, the fact that they had no official authority to affect some of the issues that interested the business community, and that there was not enough people-power or other resources to do in-depth, sustained work.

- In conclusion, we want to be seen as a force to facilitate a thriving business community that supports the working vision for Belmont's future.

- 2.3 Given the time remaining, we discussed a process for examining the existing recommendations.

- The evaluation questions we developed (100% implemented? If so, effective? New solutions emerged? Further action? –See 12/1/2005 minutes-) had one addition: Have any new relevant issues emerged? We discussed the level of detail at which we wanted to examine the recommendations in the two reports. There was consensus that we begin with the big ideas, and spin off separate groups/meetings if needed.

- For our next meeting, Jennifer will provide a package of “recommendation” pages (~seven) copied from the reports in order to guide this top-level examination of the recommendations.

- **3. Review of proposed schedule for upcoming meetings**

- Jennifer distributed a proposed schedule of topics for our work over the next several months. We decided to exchange the topics for February 2 and March 2.

- \* On February 2, the topic will be education and we hope that Ann will be able to come. It is also possible we will invite others, e.g. a specialist in continuing education.

- \* On March 2, the topic will be our continuing discussion of the business initiative. Sara and Jay will identify and invite others who may be helpful as we go through the recommendations that evening.

- When we take up the topic of welcoming community on January 19, we will talk about how we tackle updating the booklet.

- **4. Discussion of “parking lot” items**

- We agreed to attend to the issues we had placed in the “parking lot.”

- \* We decided to retire the “dead horse” issue. There was the perception that we spent too much time trying to justify our existence, but that is no longer the case. If we need to reflect on our process, we will do so.

- \* We will wait for Ann to introduce her alternative model for a framework at a later time.
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- \* We discussed the various interpretations of “business friendly”. There was a general consensus on what we mean to connote with the term. We agreed we could retire the issue, as we are now more prescriptive with our recommendations in the business initiative.
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- **5. Next Meeting:** Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006 from 7-9 p.m.
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- The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 p.m.
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- Respectfully submitted,
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- Paul Santos
- Secretary Pro Tempore