

VISION 21 IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

Minutes, December 4, 2003

Approved December 18, 2003

Present: Jenny Fallon, Joe Greene, Victoria Haase, Tim Higgins, Bill Hofmann, Sara Oaklander, Meg O'Brien, Jennifer Page, Paul Solomon, Barry Winston

Absent: Matt Hausmann

1. The meeting began with an informal discussion of the status of the **Waverly Fire Station project**. Jennifer reported that the Town was notified today that it received a partial waiver on Executive Order 418 (on affordable housing compliance), meaning that Belmont is eligible to apply for discretionary grants related to affordable housing only. As a result, we are ineligible to apply for the Ready Resource Fund planning grant for the fire station and no funds will be available for the planning process as detailed in the completed proposal.

Discussion: The Committee discussed the possible ramifications of this decision and offered some ideas for follow up, including talking informally with interested developers to explore their ideas for the fire station and meeting with Town Meeting Members in the adjacent precincts. It was reported that some developers have expressed reservations about the concept of the Town determining exactly what business should go into the station. The timing of a zoning change (before or after it is purchased) was also mentioned. The VIC/BEDPG/OCD subcommittee working on this project will be meeting next week to discuss next steps.

2. Reports and Updates

- 2.1 **Newcomers' Network** – Joe Greene reporting.
Nothing new to report.

2.2 **BEDPG** – Sara Oaklander reporting.

Sara reported on the status of the survey, which had an October 31st deadline. Results are now being compiled and analyzed and will soon be ready for distribution. BEDPG sponsored a meeting on November 13 with business and property owners. The meeting was very well attended, including participation by some individuals who don't usually show up for meetings such as this. Sara had a follow up meeting with Clint Knight of the Chamber of Commerce. Additional follow up will be organized, pending discussion by the members of the workgroup that planned the meeting.

Discussion: Many perspectives were shared regarding how the business people in Town perceive the Town's efforts to become more business friendly. Many are aware of these efforts but remain skeptical. Some are now willing to get involved, albeit cautiously, and follow up is needed to encourage that involvement. Indications are that businesses in Belmont may need some organized representation, which some think ought to be provided by the Chamber of Commerce. Non-business people are beginning to approach BEDPG as if it were BEDPG's role to provide that representation, but it is not. Perhaps our goal should be to focus on aligning the interests of the business community with those of residents.

Jennifer reported on the Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Banquet, at which the VIC received an award for service to the community. Sara and Paul attended, as well, and all noticed a lack of attention to Belmont as one of the speakers shared an overview of the Chamber's history.

2.3 PIC-PG – Meg O’Brien reporting.

Meg reported that PIC-PG met with Town department heads to discuss ideas and recommendations gathered at the PIC-PG sponsored residents’ forum. Four areas of focus were identified:

- 1) Navigation and search capabilities of the Town’s website – Improvements are needed. If the current provider and make these improvements, we may need to shop around for something better.
- 2) Content and maintenance of Town’s website - Additional training needs to be provided to staff in order to enable them to make good use of the Town’s website
- 3) Phone service – Standards need to be developed for how phones are answered, with attention paid to higher standards of customer service.
- 4) Provision of information – The pushing of information – through newsletters, informational updates, etc. – is perceived as a good thing. Decisions remain to be made, however, regarding the availability of resources for these efforts, what information should be provided on paper vs. electronically, etc. Expanded Channel 8 coverage is considered valuable but is recognized to be constrained by limited resources, such as the number of volunteers trained to use the cameras.

There may be a bit more information to be gathered from the Belmont Citizen-Herald. Otherwise, the initial work of PIC-PG will be considered complete with a report to the BOS at their January 13th meeting. Some follow up may then occur.

2.4 Welcome Booklet – Barry Winston reporting.

Barry distributed copies of the new insert to the booklet, which was produced by Minuteman Tech with a high level of cooperation and a reasonable pricing structure. A time now needs to be found for VIC members to staple the inserts into the 1300 remaining booklets. Jennifer will arrange a time for some of us to help with that effort.

3. Regional Planning

Jennifer and Jenny reported on their attendance at a regional planning meeting sponsored by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The MAPC is working to create a region-wide vision encompassing many issues (environment, transportation, culture, quality of life, and more). Discussion at this regional meeting covered the benefits, challenges, and opportunities for change that people associate with living in this region. The process is ongoing and could ultimately be very beneficial to Belmont and the surrounding area.

4. Environmental Project

Jennifer attended the Massachusetts Climate Action Conference. She reported that this group has chosen a particular focus from the many possible environmental issues facing the state. Their chosen focus is to help communities make positive changes in their fossil fuel use because fossil fuels are considered largely responsible for adverse climate changes. By making this choice, this group is not worrying about other pressing environmental issues and can work on being effective within this one area. This approach prompted Jennifer to think about how the VIC’s environmental project has thus far lacked such a focus. Although there wasn’t time at this meeting to explore this any further, Jennifer suggested that we think about how this could be a focus of the VIC’s environmental efforts, as well. Another possible focus is sustainability. Jennifer distributed some articles on sustainability and asked VIC members to review those in preparation for discussion at our next meeting.

5. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the VIC will be held on Thursday, December 18th in the Staff Room.

Respectfully submitted,
Sara Oaklander
Secretary Pro Tem