

Vision Implementation Committee
Meeting Minutes , March 16, 2006
Approved April 6, 2006

Present: Austin Bliss, Donna Brescia, Sara Oaklander, Meg O'Brien, Jennifer Page, Ann Rittenberg, Paul Santos, Paul Solomon

Absent: Vincent DeNovellis, Victoria Hasse, Jay Szklut

Also Present: Delores Keefe

1. Administrivia

- Jennifer Page called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.
- Sara Oaklander agreed to serve as recorder.
- The minutes of the March 2, 2006 meeting were unanimously approved with corrections.
 - The group had a brief discussion about recording and agreed on the need to strike an appropriate balance with regard to the level of detail that is recorded in the meeting minutes.
 - Jennifer commented on the interest expressed by some members in getting on with the work of the Committee, now that we have spent so much time reviewing what's been done in the past and getting familiar with the Vision itself. This was done for the benefit of our new members and now all are ready to get to work.

2. Reports

2.1 Density in Housing

Austin Bliss reported on the Belmont Housing Trusts' presentation on density in housing. The speakers were Julie Campoli of Terra Frima Design and Alex MacLean of Landslides. The key points of the presentation included:

- Smart growth requires some level of density and there are both environmental and economic benefits that can be achieved with some approaches.
- It is essential to have a shared understanding of what is meant by density.
- Density in this forum is considered a measure of the number of units per acre.
- The larger the unit, the fewer units per acre; the smaller the units, the more per acre. A willingness to build up allows for more units per acre.
- While density and design are two separate components of development, the design of a development can be the difference in ensuring that the density is considered appealing and attractive.
- The context of density (e.g., if surrounded by open space) is also critical to its appeal.

- A level of density is required for certain levels of services to work in a particular community – e.g., public transportation, neighborhood markets
- Density often results in higher property values.

As follow-up to Austin’s report, Jennifer explained that one premise of smart growth is densely clustered housing around transportation centers. The trade off is meant to be that there is open space, which would not be the case in the proposed “smart growth” development for Waverley Square.

2.2 Conservation Commission Meetings

Jennifer reported that she attended the first public meeting on the proposed wetlands by-law. The group has made progress with their presentation and still has more work to do to prepare for their presentation at Town Meeting. Jennifer encouraged VIC members to attend future public meetings on the by-law and to ask clarifying questions and make crisp and clear comments.

3. Developing a plan for the Vision Committee

Jennifer opened this discussion by reminding the group that we had agreed to spend some time on reviewing what the Vision Committee has worked on over the past few years. Now that we’re coming to closure on that process, Jennifer proposed that we take on three short-term actions while also selecting and pursuing a longer-term initiative.

The first short-term action will be to follow through on our plans to have Meg lead us in a discussion of how we will report at Town Meeting on the status of our work and consideration of the possibility of engaging the Town in reflecting on the Vision. If we choose to proceed with engaging the Town in reflection, that process should happen in the fall of this year.

The second short-term action is to assist Sustainable Belmont with their work on the Climate Action Plan (CAP) by handling the publicity for the upcoming public forums. If the CAP effort is to succeed, the public must be involved and opportunities must be provided for the public to give input. These initial public forums are designed to engage the public in discussion of what might be included in the CAP. Jennifer has offered the Vision Committee to facilitate these forums and invited Vision Committee members interested in assisting with this to let her know. In the meantime, we need to publicize the forums which are scheduled as follows:

- Tuesday, 4/4, 7-8:30 p.m., Butler School cafeteria
- Thursday, 4/6, 10-11:30 a.m., Library/Flett Room
- Wednesday, 4/12, 7-8:30 p.m., Library/Assembly Room

The third short-term action relates to the Newcomers Network. Jennifer proposed that the Vision Committee select one idea from the ideas previously generated having to do

with ways – other than Meet Belmont – to pursue the aspects of the Vision that relate to welcoming newcomers and maintaining connections in Town, and take action on that idea this spring and summer.

Jennifer’s longer-term proposal, in brief, is that each member of the Committee review our criteria and prior discussions about our work and on the basis of that information write a case for the selection of two areas of the Vision for us to pursue. We would then review all proposals – perhaps electronically – before discussing them in a meeting and settling on one area.

3.1 Climate Action Plan Publicity

The group discussed the difference between assisting Sustainable Belmont with publicity for the public forums and other aspects of the Climate Action Plan project. In particular, concern was expressed about the importance of clarifying what the purpose is of a CAP and why people should come to the forums. Jennifer explained that we have only offered to do the legwork of publicizing the forums, not of crafting the content of that publicity.

Ideas for publicizing the forums and who will take action are listed below. The content of this publicity, however, must come from Sustainable Belmont so we first need to receive the copy to use in emails and announcements, and the flyers.

The group clarified that we are encouraging the public to attend one of the three forums as each will offer the same content and discussion opportunities.

What	Who
Flyers – distribute throughout town including at businesses, churches, community bulletin boards, senior center	Meg – coordinate All – assist with distribution
Talk it up	All of us
Distribute the information (via email and other) to personal contacts	All of us
High school environmental club and science classes	Sara
Municipal Light Department – notice on bills	Paul Santos will talk with Heather Tuttle about this and then contact BMLD as appropriate.
Sandwich boards	Paul Santos
Church bulletins/newsletters First Church, UU	Donna Paul Santos
Town’s website and listserve	Jennifer

Belmont listserve (Yahoo group)	Sara
Channel 8 Bulletin Board	Sustainable Belmont
PTOs	Ann Rittenberg

3.2 Welcoming Newcomers

Jennifer reminded the Committee that this is an area we have talked about extensively but have not pursued beyond supporting the Newcomers' Network's efforts with regard to Meet Belmont.

There are extensive notes regarding this topic in the Committee's minutes of January 19, 2006.

Kathryn and Adine, co-coordinators of the Newcomers' Network, are happy to continue coordinating Meet Belmont but neither of them has the time to take on more, although they do have many ideas.

The discussion that ensued included the following points:

- The conversation should be expanded beyond newcomers to focus on becoming more of a welcoming community to all Belmont residents, whether they've been here a "day or a decade."
- The reference in the Vision to "small town" does not mean a town with few people but rather a town where people are well-connected to one another. Our efforts should help build a sense of connectedness through town by helping people to know their neighbors and people throughout town.

No conclusions or agreements were reached on next steps at this meeting.

4. Discussion: Environmental Initiative

Jan Kruse and Heather Tuttle, co-coordinators of Sustainable Belmont, joined the meeting to make their annual report to the Committee. Jan and Heather distributed a handout summarizing everything the group has accomplished since its inception in February 2005 (see attached).

Highlights of that report include:

- Sustainable Belmont (SB) currently has 15 active members and 150 people on its email distribution list.
- SB chose four initial priorities back in February 2005 and has made substantial progress on all fronts. Those priorities include:
 - Work with the Belmont community to develop and implement a climate action plan (CAP) for Belmont
 - Work with the Belmont community to develop and implement a municipal green building design bylaw and sustainable procurement practices

Provide ongoing public education and outreach on a variety of environmental topics
Support development of a wetlands bylaw for Belmont

After Jan and Heather's presentation, the Committee's discussion included these key points:

- Members expressed their appreciation and thanks for Jan and Heather's efforts as champions of this important work, and for their substantial accomplishments.
- The goal of the public forums on the Climate Action Plan must be clearly articulated in our publicity efforts. We need to know why people should want to attend a forum. Heather and Jan responded with these thoughts:
 - We want to get people on board with the idea of how everyday activities contribute to climate change and how we as a town can reduce our impact.
 - We want to raise awareness and get people thinking about the issues.
 - We want to involve people early on in the process, which will increase their sense of ownership of the plan.
- A regional effort is developing and people should know about that, too. SB is collaborating with the Lexington Global Warming Action Coalition to co-sponsor a forum entitled "Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble" with world renowned environmentalist Lester Brown on Thursday 4/6 at 7:30 pm in Cary Hall in Lexington. Heather and Jan distributed flyers to the Committee members.
- The group briefly discussed whether the May 2 presentation by Tufts students should be included in the publicity efforts for the CAP forums and agreed that it should not.

5. Meeting schedule

Our next scheduled meeting is on April 6; however, this is the same night as Lester Brown's presentation (see above). Some Committee members requested that we reschedule so that we can attend that presentation but we ran out of time to fully discuss the options. Jennifer will follow up. Our April 20 meeting has been canceled because it is the same evening as the Town Meeting Warrant discussion which all Town Meeting members should attend.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Oaklander
Secretary pro-tem