

Belmont Vision 21 Implementation Committee

Meeting Notes, April 17, 2003

Approved by the Committee May 15, 2003

Members present: Jenny Fallon, Joe Greene, Matthew Hausmann, Bill Hofmann, Jennifer Page

Members absent: Martin Greco, Tim Higgins, Sara Oaklander, Meg O'Brien, Paul Solomon, Barry Winston

Members of the Welcoming Community/Newcomers Task Force present: Catherine Bonfiglio, Rena Hedeman, Adine Storer

Also present: William Engstrom, Dolores Keefe

I. Jennifer Page called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. No quorum of the VIC was present at any one time, but it was determined to move ahead with the meeting so as not to lose time starting the work of the Welcoming Community/Newcomers Task Force (WC/NTF). Lacking a quorum, no minutes were offered for acceptance.

II. WELCOMING COMMUNITY/NEWCOMERS TASK FORCE Jennifer Page introduced the members of the WC/NTF who were present. She gave a brief history of the Task Force. One of the things learned from the original Vision 21 survey and forums was that many newcomers, as well as longer term residents, have trouble finding a niche in Belmont and feeling a part of the community. Jennifer gave introductory background descriptions of each of the task force members, including those not present, describing their varied interests in serving.

There was discussion of the many dimensions of this task and how to begin.

Task Force members were asked for questions which included:

1. What do other communities do? Rena has experience in other communities, especially Wellesley and the Newcomers Club there.
2. What is the timeline for the Task Force? We expect that there will be a lot of solutions presented and many different ideas leading to both short and long term goals. Initially the Task Force should use three months as a deadline for reporting back with a preliminary plan.
3. What resources are currently available in Belmont? Jennifer Page distributed copies of the new introductory booklet. It was noted that the School Department has a new booklet also. Catherine Bonfiglio mentioned the "Connectors" program at BHS as a possible model for establishing personal connections for newcomers. Harvard's program for international students might be another model.
4. How can we help people connect in their neighborhoods? Block parties were mentioned as effective ways of including and welcoming people. Matthew Hausmann raised the idea of realtors sending postcards to neighbors on the day a family moves in, including ages and grades of children.

Jennifer Page began a discussion of the “realities” facing the Task Force:

1. No money is available to support activities.
2. Where will the leadership come from to support initiatives, and how can we expect to sustain and renew the leadership?
3. How can we identify newcomers? Identifying new renters may be especially difficult. The Electric Light Department may be the best source. Dolores Keefe gave the best estimate of the number of newcomers per year as 500.
4. How can we manage to communicate with newcomers? Suggestions included: through schools, churches, and public bulleting boards. We might invite people to some sort of orientation event several times a year.
5. How can public participation in this process be invited? People need a way in to the decision-making processes in the town to help make them feel a part of the community. How will the public get reports from the Vision 21 process? What information sources do people pay attention to? Good communication is a clear need for all task forces and planning groups.

The Task Force will report to the VIC and Joe Greene will serve as our liaison to the Task Force. The WC/NTF then adjourned to meet separately.

III. AN ENVIRONMENTALLY-RESPONSIBLE COMMUNITY For those who had not been at the previous meeting, Jennifer Page reviewed the question, which had been discussed, of what the next steps for the VIC should be. Groups addressing business development, communications, and newcomers are launched. Schools, the environment, and regional planning remain from the original list of broad categories for attention by VIC. Environmental issues seem to be the best area for next steps. There was discussion about how we should proceed to tackle these issues – as a committee of the whole, as a sub-committee or task force reporting to the VIC, or as a new planning group appointed by the Selectmen. There had been some discussion at the previous meeting of starting to seek public participation by interviewing people in the field. Four possible broad categories to pursue had also been identified:

1. Community education
2. Planning for the future
3. Town operations
4. School operations and education.

There was agreement that environmental and conservation issues are areas of strong interest and there may be many people who would be interested in working on initiatives in these areas. Identifying what efforts already exist here was discussed as a first step. Suggestions for departments or groups to be contacted included:

1. Highway Dept.
2. Solid Waste/Recycling Task Force
3. Health Dept.
4. School Dept.
5. Town Planner

6. Conservation Commission
7. Garden Club
8. Citizens' Forum

IV. ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE LICENSES Jennifer Page raised the question of the VIC's response to the article on the Town Meeting warrant proposing full alcoholic beverage licenses. There was discussion of the warrant article and how to provide context and substantive background information for the Town Meeting discussion. Information about the benefit to Belmont's business community, state constraints and regulation of liquor licenses, the experience of other communities, and questions surrounding the definition of restaurant size in the proposed article should be considered. The VIC's support for the article, and possible putting over of the article to gain time for informed public discussion were discussed. A sub-set of BEDPG is working on a presentation as well. We will try to get as much information as possible to present within the time available.

V. The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m. Our next meeting will be on Thursday, May 1, at 7:00 P.M. in the Flett Room of the Library.

Respectfully submitted,

Jenny Fallon
Secretary Pro-tem