

Belmont Vision 21 Implementation Committee
Minutes, Meeting of May 26, 2011
(Approved 6/16/11)

Present: Tim Bowman, chair; Jane Feinberg, Sara Masucci, Jennifer Page, Wendy Rundle, Michael Sattler, Paul Solomon

- Tim Bowman convened the meeting at 7:07 p.m. in the Flett Room of the Library.
- **The minutes** of March 10, 2011 and March 31, 2011, were considered and each was accepted by unanimous vote, without amendment.
- **Final version of 10-year report to Town Meeting:** Discussion, Next Steps
Tim and Michael advised the committee that there was only one “public” comment regarding additions to the report. (This was Jenny Fallon’s comment on the expansion of the Belmont Media Center). It was agreed that Jenny’s suggestion would be added to the report, and that Tim would send a copy to Sandra Curro for posting on the Town’s web site; he would also send copies to the Selectmen and the School Committee.

The question was raised, whether the report made an impact, and it was agreed that it probably did not. Committee members agreed that in the future we can address the frequency with which we will make updates to it and in what form.

- **Meet Belmont** (“*We will be a welcoming community...we will welcome newcomers.*”)
Jennifer gave an update on progress in planning this event. The date (Aug. 30) is confirmed and the necessary “approvals” have been secured (from the School Department for the space, the Selectmen’s office for outdoor signage, the Health Department for food.) The Belmont Car Wash (thru Adam Tocci) will again be the sole “corporate sponsor” of Meet Belmont, donating \$600 this year. Adam is very pleased that some people in the community have thanked him for sponsoring it in the past.

Discussion ensued about how/whether to try to attract additional new residents to attend. Jennifer noted that with the help of BMLD’s “new hook-ups” address list last year, the number of renters attending increased significantly, an important step because renters comprise approximately 40% of Belmont’s resident population. Suggestions including organizing a raffle or door prizes. Jennifer explained that last year the room was at capacity most of the evening. She added that we intentionally do not use microphones, in order to minimize the noise level and promote conversation between newcomers and the people they want to meet. Another idea proposed to invite groups to do performances outdoors. Jennifer will take these suggestions to the organizing committee.

3 Co-sponsoring Events: e.g. the Freedom to Marry Ice Cream Social – (“*We will be a welcoming community... we will value diversity.*”)

Tim included this discussion on the agenda because the VIC had been invited to co-sponsor the ice cream social, which is held annually on the anniversary of the Freedom to Marry Act. In past years, the Committee has agreed to be a co-sponsor. This year, a member questioned the appropriateness of VIC co-sponsorship, and Tim notified event organizers that VIC would delay our reply until we could discuss it together. As it happened, the VIC was included in the co-sponsors list anyway. (The event was held on 5/17; therefore this discussion was “postmortem.”)

The discussion revolved around the question of whether it is our role, as an appointed committee, to undertake advocacy? Should we promote or support programs and activities that, though reflecting elements of the Vision, may be divisive within the community, or is our role as an appointed committee to remain neutral, thereby avoiding being seen as partisan. No agreement was reached regarding this issue, but we realized the need to review the criteria that the committee had developed some years ago regarding our co-sponsorship of events.

4 Continued Long-Range Planning for VIC – picking up from our January ’11 retreat.

We agreed that many good ideas had been proposed at the retreat, and we want to return to them. We agreed to focus on the most compelling issue: the budget, Town financing, and how to move beyond the level-service budget?

(“The town government practices sound fiscal management and plans for future generations... provides high-quality town services...will develop and use financial resources wisely...will ensure an excellent school system...promote the involvement of all residents in the life of our community... support citizen involvement in our town affairs...”)

Suggestions were offered as strategies for addressing this goal, including these:

- 4 Develop simulation games that help participants understand the issues and priorities; host “Benton Games Night” for players.
- 4 Create an on-line competition regarding budget and taxes
 - 8 Engage students (graduate level at Kennedy Sch) in a research project such as how other towns create their budgets (Linda Bilmes at Kennedy School does projects with students in Somerville)
 - 8 Consult with budget/ finance specialists e.g. Howard Raiffa, or Alan Altschuler.
 - 8 Organize panel discussions from town managers and budget managers from other towns.

General comments on this initiative:

- 4 We want to help residents develop a clear understanding of the process, preferably through engaging in participatory, hands-on experiences; to practice conflict-resolution; and to bring many new faces into the process.
- 4 We may want to look at parallel tracks for this initiative – many different kinds of programs – and will need a multi-year plan to do so.
- 4 A commitment to this endeavor will necessitate an intense time-commitment.
- 4 We need to develop time frames and goals; to recognize the value of both a “sprint” and a “slow and steady pace.”
- 4 We must discern the value of bringing a product to market vs. building civic space

7. Adjournment, Next Meeting:

The meeting was adjourned at 9 o'clock p.m.

The Vision Implementation Committee will meet again on Thursday, June 16, 2011.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Page,
Secretary Pro Tempore