

Belmont Vision 21 Implementation Committee
Meeting Notes, June 26, 2003
Accepted, July 24, 2003

Members present: Jenny Fallon, Jennifer Page, Meg O'Brien

Members absent: Joe Greene, Matthew Hausmann, Bill Hofmann, Tim Higgins, Sara Oaklander, Paul Solomon, Barry Winston

Lacking a quorum, no decisions were made nor minutes accepted. However, data gathering -- in the form of an "environmental conversation" -- proceeded.

Members of represented groups present:

Roger Wrubel Director, Habitat
Ken Siskind Chair, Solid Waste and Recycling Advisory Committee
Stew Sanders Associate Member, Conservation Commission
Fred Paulsen President, Mystic River Watershed Association
Anne Paulsen State representative from Belmont, especially knowledgeable about legislation and funding
Jim Graves President, Belmont Citizens Forum

Also present: William Engstrom, Steve Kliensky

- I. Jennifer Page called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. She noted that a quorum of the VIC was not present.
- II. Jennifer's introduction outlined the Vision 21 Implementation Committee's decision to take on, as its next initiative, that part of the Vision which describes Belmont as an "environmentally responsible Town." She then asked each guest to share what their organization was already doing to support the Vision 21 mandate.
- III. Roger Wrubel said that Habitat's primary goal is environmental education, primarily for children but also including courses and lectures for adults.
 - A second responsibility is managing the Habitat lands. He is also looking at the surrounding lands, working with the Waltham Land Trust and people from Lexington.
 - He samples the water of the Winn Brook where it enters Little Pond for the Mystic Watershed. He has found human waste in the waterways with E Coli counts of 10,000, far above the acceptable count of 100. The source of human contamination is leaking pipes in the aging Belmont infrastructure. Belmont is slowly finding and repairing the leaks.
 - He noted that Massachusetts Audubon supports the Community Preservation Act, which, on adoption by a city or town, provides a 1-to-1 dollar match for open space and affordable housing from the Commonwealth.

IV. Ken Siskind noted that the Solid Waste and Recycling Committee has increased the types of recycled materials. Additional materials that can be recycled are Plastics grades 3 to 7, mixed paper and yard waste.

Janice Beterman finds articles on websites about recycling and submits them to the Belmont Citizen-Herald for publication.

In addition, the committee sells composting bins for individual household use. The Committee is currently investigating the pluses and minuses of “Pay as You Throw” trash collection. They will present their report to the Selectmen on June 30th.

Currently trash disposal is paid out of general taxes with no fees levied for the individual household. The proposed system would charge for every bag of household trash to provide an economic incentive to the resident to reduce what is thrown out in the trash, and the attendant costs. Research indicates that this increases recycling.

The Solid Waste and Recycling Advisory Committee expects \$600,000 in savings per year, some of which could fund a Solid Waste officer.

V. Fred Paulsen provided highlights of the needs for Open Space in Belmont and surrounding areas such as Alewife and the Met State area. The Watershed Association addresses communication, education, and water quality orders. The EPA has issued a 308 order against Belmont, Arlington, and Cambridge for having too many contaminants in the water. Four-fifths of Belmont is in the Mystic Valley watershed. Belmont has antiquated pipes that allow the sewers to overflow into the storm drains, especially during heavy rains. This is evident in the brook behind the Unitarian Church. The contaminants are carried by sediment that settles in Claypit Pond.

Unlike many communities, Belmont’s wastewater is measured by gauge. Excess wastewater is billed to Belmont, and in turn to its taxpayers. Sanitary/sewer water is similarly billed.

Possible solutions included:

When a house is sold, any illegal water connections should be identified and fixed prior to sale.

Households and businesses pay for sanitary and storm water according to use. The Town could require that owners put in drains with dry wells at the street end of the driveway so that run off doesn’t flood out people and drains down the street.

Rain barrels to collect run off from rooftops are being sold at ½ price in Cambridge. The impact of such water collection to prevent run off is currently small but could be significant if more people become involved.

Belmont Health Department can require that household pipe connections be checked for compliance. Currently the Town notifies owners when they are coming to inspect suspect connections. Often, owners are not at home.

Belmont water flows from the Cambridge Reservoir area down through the Grove Street Playground, which is often wet underfoot. The water that makes the ground soggy is sometimes contaminated with sewage.

Belmont's current program is identify and reline weak pipes at the rate of \$1-million per year.

VI. Stew Sanders spoke in brief about the Conservation Commission's work. The Conservation Commission has cooperated with other groups in promoting clean water. He praised the work of the Mystic River Watershed Association in helping to get the 3 towns of Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge to work together and Selectman Brownsberger's work with the other towns. He indicated that State testing of fish in Claypit Pond several years ago indicated unacceptably high levels of chlordane. Warning signs posted thereafter indicated that the problem would not be remedied quickly. The Commission has supported efforts to manage water and to prevent increased run off. It has also supported efforts to protect the quality of drinking water.

The Conservation Commission has considered and turned down proposals to "regulate" the land, such as a dog run area or other uses.

VII. Anne Paulsen. Citizen and State Representative

Anne Paulsen noted that *every* community is required to have Storm Water Plans and National Pollution _____ Permits. Usually, fees are collected from large buildings, malls, and those with heavy run off and used to mitigate the effect.

Cambridge is now changing and replacing its storm drains to create holding tanks under the streets to prevent heavy run off. It is also improving street cleaning. It has decided not to use sand in the winter months because it clogs the drains and creates a silt problem. Instead, Cambridge will use only a small amount of salt carefully calibrated to provide the right amount of anti-slippage.

Belmont might consider a similar program to prevent sand washing into drains and, thereafter, causing the removal of sandbars from Spy Pond.

Belmont needs to mount a major education program for environmentally responsible behavior.

A possible Belmont initiative is to follow Arlington's program that has homeowners and shops focus on slow-release phosphorus fertilizers.

VIII. Jim Graves, President, Belmont Citizens Forum

The goal of the Belmont Citizens Forum is to inform and encourage participation. It sends newsletters to 1,700 Belmont households 6 times a year. It has held numerous forums on environmental topics. Its forum on Water Quality led to the 3 communities of Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge working together. Topics of interest to the Citizens Forum membership include water quality, bikeways, open space protection and

support, green space, nontoxic gardening, and toxics and biohazards which led to the Town rewriting its bylaws in this area 3-4 years ago.

The organization has several committees working on environmentally related topics including the Planning and Zoning Committee and the Traffic and Transportation Committee. Michael Baram chairs its Environmental Committee.

Jim Graves sees many areas in which the Citizens Forum and other groups could work. First is the "State of the Town," then establish priorities for environmental initiatives.

IX. General Discussion followed:

The Board of Health can promulgate laws to restrict a public health problem. Can require that homeowners' water connection be legal, even though money to test water in Winn Brook and Alewife has been cut back by the State. Board can require safer lawn pesticide us.

Massachusetts has a home rule initiative that enables any Town or City to petition without the Commonwealth's passing a law. Therefore, Belmont can do a lot to be environmentally friendly. However, it is difficult to coordinate across numerous small town boards.

Storm Water Utility District can be enabled by pending state legislation. It enables cities and towns to establish a district within which a water fee can be levied on each household.

It would be desirable to limit leaf blowers to limit noise and dust. The noise by-laws excluded "intermittent noise" where leaf blowers might be categorized. But they can be limited if they are noise produced by a business.

Joint Regional Transportation Committee would be a good group to tie into.

Belmont is experiencing the growing problem of cars. The Belmont Center Parking Committee is experiencing a growing tension over this. Promotion of biking instead of driving would be a partial solution.

IX Steve Klionsky added some comments about the consumption of energy. He noted that the major utilities tax customers a few cents and from that tax offer them ways to save energy. The Belmont Electric Light Dept. may offer the same opportunities but they are not publicized so few take advantage of them. Also, the energy deregulation bill was to provide savings from solid waste to the NESWIC communities. The status of this is unclear.

Respectfully submitted,

Meg O'Brien,
Recording Secretary Pro Tem