

Vision Implementation Committee

Minutes , November 7, 2002

Amended and Approved, November 21, 2002

Members Present: Martin Greco, Joe Greene, Bill Hofmann, Meg O'Brien, Jennifer Page, Paul Solomon, Barry Winston

Members Absent: Matt Hausmann, Tim Higgins, Sara Oaklander

Also Present: Delores Keefe

Jennifer Page, Chair, opened the meeting at 7:14 P.M.

1. **ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS:** The minutes of the October 24, 2002 meeting were amended to include an additional item: that VIC members were interested in talking with Jane Howard and Jennifer offered to investigate possibilities. With this amendment, the minutes were accepted.

2. REPORT ON THE BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GROUP

In Sara's absence, Jennifer reported on the status of this Planning Group:

2.1 **Membership:** Most discussion focused on the membership of the group, which is not yet quite complete.

Jennifer read the membership as it now stands; most designated town committees have now named a standing representative; several businessmen are on board, as are two "citizen" representatives. The committee urged that there be a business rep from the Waverley area. They recommended Ted King, who is both a Waverley area businessman (insurance) and also a landlord. Bill Hofmann and Jennifer will follow up. Members also urged a rep from further along Trapelo Road, (in addition to the Rosens and two reps from Cushing Square) and mentioned several possibilities. Other individuals may be added if there are perspectives or expertise still missing.

2.2 **First meeting:** The group had its initial meeting on Wednesday the 30th. Not all members could make it, but it was a beginning. Sara convened the meeting and is serving as temporary chair. The agenda consisted mostly of raising questions and seeking clarification about the mandate and the extent of the work. The next meeting will be on Tuesday the 12th November.

3. FORUM FOR RESIDENTS: REPORT AND NEXT STEPS

3.1 **Report:** Members who had attended the forum the previous evening reported on it. There were 16 individuals present (including 6 from the Vision Implementation Committee.) Cavas Ghobai, as facilitator, led a lively discussion. The residents shared many thoughts about why it was important to have thriving businesses in town. There was also discussion about some of the concerns. Jennifer will circulate the notes of that meeting, taken by Lori (Cavas' assistant) as the meeting progressed.

3.2 **Next Steps:** The data from the meeting will be incorporated into the final report to the Selectmen; the final report will also be distributed to members of the Business and Economic Development Group.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FORUMS

As an initial step in beginning to formulate recommendations to the Selectmen, we broke into two-person teams, studied the draft report which compiled all the data from the forums (thanks to Meg O'Brien for this summary), and proposed recommendations which we might make to the Selectmen, based on data from the forums. Below are the recommendations that came out of this working session:

Note: No votes were taken on these recommendations; also, not all of those listed below were presented during the meeting because of a lack of time. Further, some of these recommendations were extensions of ideas which emerged during the forums – that is, Vision Committee members elaborated on or modified ideas which had already been made.

4.1 **Parking Recommendations**

- For the Waverley Sq. area, Waverley Square parking lot could be excavated for one underground level and the surface lot extended over the railroad tracks, which would almost double the street level parking.

Underground could be designated all day or longer than two hours. Also, we might get some revenue by renting overnight spaces for those in the area who do not have driveways.

- As part of the new garage proposal (see above), reconfigure Church Street: close the street to thru traffic, but allow the buses to come in from Trapelo Road; provide angle parking at both curbs and possibly in the middle if the area is wide enough. The entrance to the (new) parking garage would be at the beginning of Church Street, at Lexington St. This would provide more parking spaces and would give consideration to commuters as well as to businesses and residents. (A problem with this: we would need to re-work the matter of the entry to the bank's parking lot.)
- For the Belmont Center area: put a deck on the Channing Rd. lot. In this parking garage, designate some of the spaces as reserved for commuters – could issue commuter passes for a fee.
- As a general principle, look at the town as a whole for parking rules. The “spot” change should be eliminated.

4.2 Traffic Recommendations

- Traffic must slow down along the main thoroughfares. The primary instrument should be increased police visibility. Police should be out of their cruisers and highly visible in each of the centers.
- Again, look at the town as a whole.

4.3 Recommendations on Zoning and Permitting

- We must simplify the process for zoning and permitting.
- We must make the process easier, more user-friendly for new businesses. To accomplish this, establish a group of retired business people to act as mentors to people who wish to open a business in the town. Similarly, it was suggested that there be an “ombudsman” or “ambassador” for new people, to advocate and assist prospective businesses. (Dick Carlson and Paul Winters, Sr. were immediately nominated for this position!)
- Develop checklists for the various kinds of businesses (OCD and Town Engineer's Offices should do this.)
- Develop a training program for employees who have interface with the public, so they can be more effective in public relations.

4.4 An “overall” recommendation: Communications

- We must develop strategies for educating the citizens on what businesses do for a community, so that there will be wide-spread support for recommendations from us and from the Bus. & Ec. Devel. Group.

4.5 Recommendations on: rubbish collection and recycling

- We recommend that the town invite businesses to participate in the town program for a fee. (This will probably be a financial benefit to the businesses; possibly also to the town because of additional recyclable materials.) This recommendation should be referred to the Recycling and Solid Waste Committee.

4.6 Recommendation on: Transportation, Isolation of commercial districts, parking

- We recommend that the town investigate the possibility of providing a bus which would connect the various business districts. Investigation should include (a) determining how other towns have done this and to what success; and (b) the availability of grants to assist with start-up costs.

4.7 Recommendation on: generating new businesses

- The town should consider hiring or appointing an economic development officer whose job it would be to (a) determine what kinds of businesses have “synergy” and help one another by proximity; and (b) determine what kinds of businesses are most likely to succeed in Belmont, and (c) take steps to solicit and encourage such businesses to come to Belmont. *(Please note that there was objection voiced to this idea; it was not agreed to by consensus.)*

4.8 Recommendation on: generating favorable publicity for new businesses (“business-welcoming?”)

- Discuss with town newspaper the possibility of a “business-a-week” interview to bring attention to new businesses.
- Find ways to ensure that Town Day include all parts of town, or, alternatively, re-instate “Fall Festival” and have it traverse the length of Trapelo Rd.
- Make a decision about having businesses noted on the web. The present practice seems to generate few businesses and seems inherently unfair to businesses that do not have a web page for linkage.

4.9 Recommendation on: snow removal:

- Commercial snow removal could be contracted by the town for a fee, to be paid by the businesses. Example: a cluster of related stores in one block would pay to have their sidewalks cleared. Peter Castanino would designate where the snow is to be piled, and the highway removes the pile as soon as possible. This plan would clear the sidewalks and allow entrance to every storefront rather than one opening in the middle of the block, or none at all, causing customers to drive by (not stop to shop) or climb over snowbanks.

5. REPORT ON CONVERSATION WITH JANE HOWARD

Jennifer reported that she had talked by phone with Jane Howard, co-chair of the Arlington 20/20 Vision group. Jane is never free on Thursday evenings. She has offered to meet with those who are interested on an alternative date, if it can be arranged. She also went over their organizational structure in some detail, with Jennifer taking notes. Jennifer will circulate these to the committee shortly.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Barry Winston, Secretary Pro Tem