

Vision 21 Implementation Committee
Meeting Minutes -- April 6, 2006
Accepted May 4, 2004

Present: Vincent DeNovellis, Sara Oaklander, Meg O'Brien, Jennifer Page, Ann Rittenberg, Paul Solomon, Jay Szklut

Absent: Austin Bliss, Donna Brescia, Victoria Hasse, Paul Santos

1. Administrivia

- Jennifer Page called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.
- Jennifer served as recorder for the meeting.
- The minutes of the March 16, 2006 meeting were unanimously approved as written.

2. Updates:

2.1 Congratulations were extended to Vision Committee members who were newly elected as members of Town Meeting: Austin Bliss, Donna Brescia, and Vinnie DeNovellis.

2.2 Thanks and congratulations to Sara Oaklander and Jay Szklut

Several members of the Vision Committee had attended the charrette organized by the Belmont Center Planning Group. It was agreed that the event was well organized and interesting, and it led to thoughtful input by the attendees. It was an excellent model for identifying issues and for capturing our ideas about what Belmont Center might become. Our warm congratulations were extended to Sara Oaklander and Jay Szklut who are part of that planning group.

3. "Touching Base" with the Vision

Jennifer opened this discussion by reminding the group that we had agreed to explore how we might engage the community in reflecting on the Vision statement, checking its validity and relevance. She recalled that in August 05, when our group first convened with new membership, a new member asked if we had gone back to the public since the approval of the Vision. If we decide to engage the Town in reflecting on the Vision (either to validate or modify it) that process should happen in the fall of this year. Jennifer asked Meg O'Brien to lead the discussion of this question.

3.1 Reviewing the process by which the Vision was developed: Meg reviewed the steps by which the Town had developed and adopted the vision statement. These steps included a Process Development Committee (which determined how a Vision was to be developed), the Vision Committee itself (which developed the vision over a period of 10 months and by Town Meeting. The Vision was based on ideas and priorities expressed in focus groups, forums, and a town-wide survey in which some 30% of households in the town participated.

3.2 What is our purpose in organizing such an effort?

Meg asked if there is a compelling need to do this now? Do we have an obligation to do it? Our charge does stipulate that we should “*periodically identify Townspeople’s desires and priorities, and their perception of progress.*” This requirement does not stipulate how frequently we should do this, nor the degree of formality. Are we trying to revise or to reaffirm the vision? Some observations and ideas:

- Jay wondered if there is something magical about five years and suggested that it is a very short period of time, given how general the statement is, with without specifics. It would be surprising indeed if the goals stated in the statement had changed radically.
- Paul Solomon suggested that to do a major survey or other complex assessment would be very time-consuming and would detract us from other work.
- A suggestion: Perhaps our work with the public’s perception of the vision might tie in with the town’s 150th anniversary celebration. We might find a way to place it on a continuum, that is: here is what we were... here is what we can become.

3.4 Re-affirmation and town-wide “ownership” of the Vision --

After considerable discussion, it was agreed that our goal is to foster reaffirmation and ownership (“buy-in”) of the vision by helping the townspeople examine our shared community progress in realizing the vision. That is, to reinforce the notion that the Vision is our (Belmont’s) vision, rather than that of the Committee, and that we are all working toward it.

We should search for a way to engage the town in dialog about how the community is doing in achieving the vision. (Sara recommended that we learn about the “Public Conversations Project” – Google it) And we might also ask the question, where would you like to see us go with the Vision? We also contemplated personalizing the question, e.g. how are you doing as a member of the community in realizing the vision?

3.5 General agreements:

- We agreed that no formal assessment instrument such as a survey was appropriate or necessary
- We agreed that we would work out a strategy to hold such “public conversations” with some yet-to-be-identified groups to determine the progress that the Town in making in achieving the vision and to foster shared ownership. The strategy for accomplishing this is yet to be determined.

3.6 Another “public conversation”

We also touched on the challenge of educating the public about some of the challenges that the town faces and how to engage the public in understanding the trade-offs of choices we must make in the future.

4. Adjournment and next meeting:

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m. (Thank you, Meg!)

The next meeting will be on May 4, since Jennifer canceled the meeting of April 20, since it conflicted with the Warrant Committee discussion in preparation for Town Meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Page
Secretary Pro Tempore