

## VISION 21 IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MINUTES, AUGUST 8, 2002 -- *(Amended and Approved 8/22/02)*

**Members present:** Martin Greco, Meg O'Brien, Jennifer Page, Paul Solomon, Barry Winston

**Members absent:** Bill Hofmann, Matt Hausmann, Joe Greene, Tim Higgins, Ralph Jones, Sara Oaklander.

**Also Present:** Dolores Keefe

### **Convening the Meeting:**

Jennifer Page opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m. Minutes from August 1, 2002 were reviewed and discussed but not approved, since we lacked a quorum. Amendments to be offered at our next meeting will include: (a) on page 2, item 3.1: delete the word "broad"; and on page 3, item 4.5: change "these" to "the."

### **1. Reports on meetings with other Committees and Boards:**

Paul Solomon reported on his second discussion with fellow Board of Selectmen members regarding his proposal for long-range planning in Belmont. They met August 6.

1.1 Dr. Solomon's second proposal further delineated a process for the Vision Implementation Committee (VIC) to follow with the "planning groups" (a.k.a. "task forces."), specifying more clearly the steps to be taken in developing and refining the mandate, in determining members of the planning groups, and in following a reporting schedule to the VIC and to the Selectmen, so that coordinated planning occurs and so that those responsible for the process are kept fully informed. The sequence of actions he described to the Selectmen was roughly that outlined in our minutes of August 1.

1.1.1. Mrs. Mahoney asked why the Vision Committee should be responsible for overseeing planning, rather than the Board of Selectmen?

1.1.2. Dr. Solomon replied that the Selectmen don't have time; and that the role of the Vision committee – facilitating, coordinating, overseeing – does not diminish the role of the Selectmen in being ultimately responsible for planning in the town, since the Vision Committee reports to the Selectmen.

1.2 Dr. Solomon also recommended to the Selectmen that they adopt as their first priorities the three planning areas initially cited as examples (business and economic development; public information and communication; open space/recreation.). Of these, the Selectmen endorsed the first two. They contemplated others (.e.g. roads/ traffic/ transportation) and remain open to the open space/recreation idea, but adopted neither of these at this time.

1.3 Additionally, Dr. Solomon urged the Selectmen to provide funds for a consultant-facilitator for the initial meeting(s) of each task force. Mrs. Mahoney voiced objection, stating that in these hard times, and given the cut-backs in hours of the town employees, it was difficult to justify. However, the Selectmen did authorize Dr. Solomon to find out what it would cost.

1.4 It was agreed that Dr. Solomon and Mr. Kleckner would draft a mandate for each of the two areas now authorized for planning work.

### **2. Vision Implementation Committee (VIC) Proposal, Other Issues**

The VIC members present affirmed their general agreement with the process proposed and continued to explore informally how this work would be conducted. Dr. Solomon reminded us that we need to walk a fine line between defining specifically how we should proceed while allowing enough latitude so that we can modify the process as it seems appropriate. Since the town has never before written a comprehensive plan, we will be, to some extent, making this up as we go along. (Or, to cast it in a better light, we will be "breaking new ground.") Given that advice, we nonetheless discussed two questions regarding the planning initiative and our role in it. These were:

2.1 Should we stipulate that the chair of a task force be the VIC liaison, or should we preclude that possibility altogether by stipulating that it should not? It was agreed that the VIC liaison should convene the first several meetings (until the group is more or less "settled" in its

membership) and then encourage a chair to be selected by the group, someone who has the time, inclination, and leadership skills to take on this role. This might or might not be the VIC liaison.

2.2 Do we concur that each planning group/task force should “report “ to the VIC monthly? Much discussion ensued: Is the phrase “report to” appropriate, or will it raise territorial flags? The ensuing discussion centered on the natural “tension” between the responsibility which the VIC is being assigned — responsibility to ensure that a coordinated plan for the town is developed within a reasonable time frame, followed by initial implementation steps — and the possible resentment of the task forces. if we are perceived as directing them and having higher authority. We were reminded by Jennifer that none of the task forces will be “pre-existing” – that is, none will have a pre-conceived sense of its own autonomy; and that they will be created, drawing from many groups and individuals, expressly for the purpose of planning, under our direction.

2.3 However, the phrase “report to” was still felt to raise a red flag. It was agreed that, although with the assigned responsibility we will have some authority, the term “monitor” was a little softer; thus, we might say, “Progress of each planning group will be monitored monthly by the VIC.”

2.4 Why should the VIC stand “between” the planning group and selectmen in monthly reporting? Isn’t the VIC simply one among equals – or, in this instance, are we “first” among equals? Dr. Solomon and others pointed out that the Selectmen would not want to “micromanage” the process – if they had time to do this, it would have been done long ago! It will be our job to ensure that steps are followed and it gets done; but we must ensure that the Selectmen initially agree to the scope of the work and that, over time, we keep them informed of the general direction the planning is taking. However, the Committee has not yet reached consensus on this.

2.5 Additionally, Dr. Solomon suggested that “monthly” was not cast in stone: it could be every six weeks, for example... but the idea here is to keep their feet to the fire, to ensure that the job gets done, by expecting deadlines to be met on time and by monitoring progress.

### **3. Business Friendly Initiative: The Forums**

3.1 Report by Jennifer: Times and locations of the three forums are tentatively set. Thanks to the efforts of Ralph Jones, the three forums are scheduled to be held in the Community Room of the Chenery, on the evenings of 9/9, 9/12, and 9/25. These dates are currently available for Cavas, but we realize that since he will be donating his services pro bono, he may need to be elsewhere, working for remuneration. In that case, someone from the committee will facilitate the forums.

3.2 Jennifer reported that Cavas has drafted a 2-hour format, which she is reviewing with him.

3.3 Jennifer reported on her meeting with Clint Knight, Executive Director of the Belmont-Watertown Chamber of Commerce. Clint was enthusiastic about the idea of the forums and of consulting directly with business owners. He offered to write a piece for the Citizen-Herald urging business owners to attend the forums. Also Clint recommended that we consider scheduling one of the meetings in the morning for businesses that stay open late in the evening; he suggested we informally survey several businesses for their reaction to the schedule.

3.4 Jennifer circulated a draft of a flyer advertising the forums; she received helpful feedback and will revise accordingly.

3.5 Members present each agreed to talk informally with four or five business owners each, telling them about our plans and asking for advice on the question of timing and whether we should host a morning session. Jennifer agreed to revise the draft of the flyer within the next couple of days so that our members could show it to businesses owners during these conversations, to clarify our intent.

4. **Next meeting:** Members are reminded that the meeting of August 15 is canceled. Our next meeting will be on August 22, in the Staff Room of the Library.

5. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Page  
Secretary pro tem