

Bethel Town Meeting/Community Engagement Committee

Draft Minutes for Dec. 12, 2023

“Helping foster informed and engaged citizens: Creating an environment in which individuals are welcomed, respected, supported and valued.”

Attending: Rick Benson, Lisa McCrory, Lylee Rauch-Kacenski, Karen Bixler, Rebecca Stone, Cindy Metcalf

Meeting opened: 4:05; meeting adjourned: 5:14

Agenda:

1. Public Comment

None.

2. Approve Minutes of November 14, 2023

Approved unanimously.

3. Review of Susan Clark Event – November 17

- Question of what Susan thought, and if she favored the floor vote (Which both the Harold article and Owen from the EIC feel like the presentation did.)
- We got the impression she was speaking more to the data, rather than a personal opinion.
- Really she plugged the need for face to face dialog (regardless of when that is) to build engagement. And we are headed in that direction with this committee – an event at least quarterly – which is exciting.
- Do we want to put together a summary of the event from our committee – and share with partners and the general public
 - Emphasize what we heard from the session
 - Share what was shared at the small sessions..
 - Overview of themes and ideas
 - Strengths and what we value now – most people feeling welcomed, praise for operators manual and BU

- Ideas – holistic needs (Bethel Universal Income, expanding food shelf, everything shelf, connecting with historical society) specific and actionable for improving meetings (making it fun and celebratory, empty bowl dinner before school meeting, storytelling, slideshow)
- Communication Barriers (How do people find out what's going on, lots of comments about school specific involvement, youth town meeting, focus on town-wide communications in general (expand use of FPF, etc.)
- “Democracy deposits” If you got to town meeting or engage in committees you get some \$\$ back...
- Tim Calebro – special section in Harold about Town Meeting – how to get involved, how to “town-meeting”, what to expect, etc. We could help develop that language and use it.
- Engagement and support for town meeting this year and the
- **Possible Next Steps:** Another event? Follow-up with the people who attended? Write a summary of the event? Share links to Orca video, links to Susan’s website. **Put this on the agenda for January**
 - Send the summary when we are ready to advertise the next event - or get the summary out sooner while it is fresh.

4. Planning for Town Meeting and Budget Process

- Rick will put out a FPF notifying people that the budget is happening now. He will share the language and Lylee can make social media posts
- It would be great to have all the dates so we can holistically think about, plan, and coordinate our outreach.
 - What is the whole sequence of announcements, how do we develop them so they are easy to understand and engage with.
 - Pam will plan to have all of her information together and going to the Select Board meeting on January 8th - it has to be in by January 29th.
 - **Pam can get the language together soon - and share it with us** so that we can then format that language into easy to understand, well designed documents - social media posts, etc.
 - Maybe we should email out to the group who attended the SC event sooner so that we can get volunteers to help
 - Cindy would like to help with engaging volunteers
 - Can we have a shared Google Folder that we can all use?
 - Is that legal?
 - Does it need to be accessible to the public?
 - **Rick will check with Therese**

- **Before Jan 29 - We need to GeEt out the following Information:**
 - Candidate forms and signature information
 - Voter registration information
 - School and town budget process
 - **Superintendent question - Rebecca will follow up with school.**
- Put Something into town report? Deadline is December 22nd.
- **For Town Meeting**
 - Rebecca would be excited to think more creatively about what could make town meeting more fun, engaging, exciting.
 - Cindy shared how much fun she had at town meeting last year - so much about community, people were happy and lots of energy
- Google Folder
 - We could set up a folder, and add all committee information - meeting agendas, working documents, list of contacts, etc.

5. Schedule for 2024 events

- Quarter 1, town meeting
- So far we have had a few proposals from other groups:
 - EIC - Safety and Policing
 - Having dialogue and just listening about what people need and how people feel.
 - Opportunity for the sheriff (and his team) to come meet the team. Meet and greet. Or have the dialogue before the contract is signed.
 - It's important to follow-up the EIC's lead on what they want.
 - Rick will connect with them around more information on what they are thinking.
 - Local action from Jean Kraus on global warming and how to deal with that on the local level
 - The White River Valley Consortium reached out to Lylee about the potential to support a cross-generational conversation around housing sometime in 2024. This is a regional collaboration project exploring workforce housing solutions in the White River Valley, part of the Vermont Working Communities Challenge initiative. They are hosting similar conversations in other valley towns. They will provide food and facilitation, but need help on coordinating a space, publicizing, etc.
 - Vermont Futures also reached out to Rebecca about a conversation around workforce housing.
- Presidential Primary in March, Primary in August, General Election in November
- Food insecurity is a huge issue as well.
- Seems to be a growing need for an ongoing series... who can organize this.
- We will see different levels of people being ready to host and facilitate. Some we will have a much more passive role, some we will have to help structure and make sure this is done well.

- What is the process we want to have around what we support, and how we decide what we want to support?
 - Some people are overwhelmed by thinking about all of 2024, but agree that it would be good to have some systems and understanding of how we want to work as a committee.
 - Want to make sure what we decide to do we do well.

7. Other Business

- Pam will work on the language
 - Does the town have any budget for promoting town meeting, etc? No, just an advertising budget.
 - There may be things that cost money, and having a budget will help us get the word out there. Even allocating a small amount might be an important thing to do. Marketing and other engagement expenses.
 - Do we want to put a line item in the budget? Erik will talk to Therese - \$1,000

8. Next Meeting

- Next meeting will be Tuesday, January 9, 2024 at the Town Office and Zoom 4:00 pm .