

Minutes of Bethel Town Meeting Committee November 19, 2015

Present: Jean Burnham, Rick Benson, Lisa Hill, Davis Dimock, Victoria Weber, Ola Odell, Lisa McCrory.

Rick called the meeting to order at 3:35. The minutes of the October 29, 2015, meeting were unanimously accepted.

Holding discussions as part of *Operator's Manual* process:

Lisa Hill attended and spoke as an individual citizen, not as a selectperson.

She suggested that the *Bethel Owner's Manual* seems like an end product that we plan to create, but feels that a dialog at the front end of the process might be useful too. Discussions on a regular basis on 'the topic of the day' might get citizens engaged so that they flex their democratic muscle regularly. You can't just do it one time a year at town meeting. If we put out the opportunity for such a discussion on a regular basis we could see what would happen. Lisa cited two examples, describing the Susan Clark discussion last December as an opportunity for people to educate themselves, and the September 3rd 2015 joint Selectboard and school board potluck as powerful.

Two potential topics for discussions would be: are people's minds already made up as to how they will vote on issues before they come to town meeting ?, and the pros and cons of changing to a 5-member selectboard.

Lisa Hill feels that part of the reason the school board meetings are adversarial is that people don't understand the school board process. Our manual should help educate people some on how it all works, and on how to be informed and engaged.

PR

Lisa Hill pointed out the on-going issue of how to inform people of up-coming events. Tools we are using now include the Front Porch Forum, Facebook (which accounts?), the town hall sign, sandwich board signs on the sidewalk, and the *Herald* newspaper. Davis suggested small flyers or signs printed on a distinctive bright colored paper that were posted about town and whose color people would come to associate with these discussion meetings. The town web site's Community Calendar should be used more.

Rick informed us about a web site on deliberative democracy that Todd Sears is involved with. It can have discussion forums like this, including at physical meetings. Green Peak Thinking LLC. is the name.

Grants:

Rick had checked Mascoma Savings Bank grants. Their 'Foundation' grant is not for town or school projects, but their 'Sponsorship' grant, max of \$7,500, is less formal and just needs us to apply in writing. Rick will continue investigating this.

Victoria had found that the New England Grassroots Environment Fund's grants do not cover 'books or reports'. She had emailed them to see if our manual might be an exception and has not heard back yet.

The Windham Foundation's 'Focus' grant is a possibility and she has begun filling in the application. A sponsor that is an established non-profit group is needed or the town needs to sponsor.

Davis suggested that we try for grants before we attempt to raise funds from local corporations. Rick would hate to see the manual as a commercial document if we do get money from businesses.

Lisa Hill suggested that the Bethel Public Library may be willing to sponsor this project. Their board meets quarterly, the next meeting is in January. The library has similar goals to us – getting information to people and community involvement. Also they have a long history which would be better than a group like our committee which is only 2 years old. Davis will contact the president of the library board, Louise Ferris-Burt.

Overall, Lisa Hill reiterated that she would like to find a way for people to be welcomed into the process and that there is energy and commitment in our group, and she would hate to lose that. We appreciate the time Lisa took to meet with us and to share her ideas.

We will meet in late December on either the 21st or 28th. Victoria will query committee members as to which is better for them.

The meeting adjourned at 4:58 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Victoria Weber, Secretary, Nov. 23, 2015.