

**Bethel Town Meeting Committee
Minutes of April 27, 2015**

Present: Jean Burnham, Rebecca Stone, Ola O'dell, Neil Brooks, Lisa McCrory, Davis Dimock, Rick Benson, Lucien Hinkle, Victoria Weber.

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 and the minutes of the April 6th meeting were approved.

Survey results

Rick attended the Selectboard meeting where the results of the Town Meeting Survey were provided to the board. They were impressed with Rebecca's analysis and encouraged us to continue any way we can to get more surveys filled out by citizens who normally do not attend town meeting. We will take them to the Senior Project Night, the upcoming Post Card Fair, Neil will place more copies at the Library, and we can individually take them to neighbors. We will print more copies, and the survey is still available online at <http://tinyurl.com/bethelTM15>

We have an informal goal of another 100 responses from 'non-attendees'.

The Agendas and Minutes of Selectboard meetings are posted on the official Bethel website several days after each meeting. In order to make them more readily available to citizens, Lisa volunteered (with Lucien as back-up) to post links to them on the Bethel Front Porch Forum, the official town Facebook page (if possible), and the Bethel Community Forum Facebook page.

Working with the School Board

We would like to work with the current school board to help make their Annual School Meeting more accessible, and possibly to coordinate so that the two meetings are closer to one another and that perhaps a meal be served. These were ideas that a number of people expressed on the surveys. Rick will bring this up during Public Comments at the upcoming School Informational Meeting on May 18th.

Town Meeting: What worked this year?

Free pie clearly worked. It even got a mention in the British magazine *The Economist*. Rebecca said that child care was a success, and she had heard very good things from parents who used the child care service. We hope to repeat this next year, although we will need to have a specific person to care for babies, or restrict it to kids older than babies.

Victoria will send thank you cards to Laura Rubenis and Jolene Scott for pies, Bill Bonsignore for childcare, and the janitorial staff at the school. She will also draft a letter to the editor of *The Herald* to thank these people, thank everyone who did fill out a survey, and to solicit more survey responses from non-attendees.

Town Meeting: Ideas for next year

We would like to encourage more exhibits, especially of community groups. Jean reminded us that the federal primary election in 2016 will result in voting booths in the back of the gym, so exhibit tables may need to be in the hall behind the gym.

We want to help get information to people so they can understand and take part in town meeting, and town government processes, in a more informed manner. To the end of getting information to people, we will be making suggestions for improving both the content and the lay-out of the Town Report to make it more accessible, and the creation of a Bethel Operator's Manual with general information about all aspects of living in Bethel.

The Town Report includes 'summaries' of what each official and community committee or group accomplished during the fiscal year that that town report covers. We distinguished that from a description of each group, what its charge is, what its overall mission and purposes are. This kind of explanation of each group could be included in the Bethel Operator's Manual and would be useful especially to new residents to identify groups they might want to volunteer to work with.

Committee Goals for 2015

1- Town Report Revision

Identify ways to make the Town Report easier to understand and visually more accessible. Davis recommended that any separate agenda item (such as the \$5,000 request for police in 2014) have a narrative explanation in the Town Report so that people can educate themselves before town meeting. We will all look over the town report and Davis will also look at a half dozen reports from other towns that Jean lent him, to make suggestions of what we might include.

2- Bethel Operator's Manual

We would like to pull together a document with useful and explanatory information on how to live in Bethel and how town government works. We'd like to create magazine-sized paper edition, as well as post the information on the town web site. We expect it will take about 2 years to design and create both formats. As soon as we have more specifics we will check with the Selectboard and then investigate the possibility of one or two small grants to pay for design and printing. Rebecca has experience with grants and can help write them.

3- Information Meetings/Town Topics

We would like to work with Bethel Revitalization Initiative to revive their monthly potluck suppers which, originally, included a conversation about Bethel. Jean suggested that they all be held at the town hall rather than at someone's house. This would solve some logistical problems, as well as getting people into the hall and accustomed to talking about town issues there. The hall billboard could advertise these potluck discussions. Ideally we could have a stated topic, and one or more people to give some background and set up the topic. Then the group could generate some agreed-upon

outcomes, like: What works well in Bethel? What do you want improved? and, What 3 things came out of tonight's discussion?

Early Budget discussions

Come early fall we would like to help sponsor meetings to get people involved as both the town and school budgets begin to be developed. Citizens need to be involved at the beginning of the budgeting process, not just at the very end when the budget request and the agendas for the town and school meetings are already printed. Finding ways to help citizens take part in, be comfortable with, and discuss budgets as they are being developed is an important goal for the committee.

Schedule for the rest of the year

We will continue to meet on a monthly basis through the summer months. Normally our meeting will be the last Monday of the month at 3pm. However our May meeting will be WEDNESDAY, May 29th at 3 pm.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:10.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Victoria Weber, Secretary, April 30, 2015