

Final Minutes of 4th Bethel Town Meeting Solutions Committee March 11, 2014

Attending: Jean Burnham, Rick Benson, Ola O'Dell, Victoria Weber.

The minutes of the 2-18-14 meeting were approved.

[These minutes of the 3-11-14 meeting have been approved by the committee members via email.]

- The **goal of this meeting** was to assess how our 'solutions' had affected town meeting a week ago and to decide what we could do in the future, as well as to identify issues for the Selectboard that we feel they should make decisions about. 145 people checked in, vs. about 305 (or more?) last year.
- Thank you notes to 14 businesses and individuals who had helped with parking, pies, etc. for town meeting were signed by the committee members. Victoria will also send a thank you note via Bethel Front Porch. [Done in # 58 , 3-12-14.]

Our impressions of Town Meeting :

- Rick felt it worked well. The new check-in procedures worked well. We could have fewer 'Reserved for... Limited Mobility' parking signs and saved parking spaces in the town lot [we had reserved 24 spaces, about half the lot]. Rick and Jean suggest storing the corrugated plastic *Reserved* parking signs in the garage on the south side of the town offices. These signs could be used at the school or any other venue in the future where there is a desire to assist people with mobility issues.
- There are stories of people who feel the handicapped back entrance to the hall is too hard to navigate with the slope, and the lack of very close handicapped parking spaces as well as a stigma to using an entrance labeled for handicapped people. Some of these same folks apparently are reluctant to use the front entrance with its stairs.
- Jean felt everything worked well, especially the signs at the check-in tables. She regretted that the reserved parking was not better used.
- Ola felt that in order to accommodate larger crowds and especially meals, we need to move back to the school gym. About 6 people checked in at the table she was manning by the rear, handicapped, entrance.
- Victoria felt the tone of the meeting was very genial and that the discussion in Other Business was especially free and relaxed with people making comments on several topics, such as the location of town meeting and water metering. The pies worked well -- people lingered some and enjoyed the social interaction. She also noted that the meeting started at 10 am as everyone had checked in successfully by then. There were no controversial votes or topics, which probably explains the low attendance compared with last year.

Selectboard decisions for next year's town meeting

- The Select board will need to decide **whether to move back to the school**. The decision is up to them and this committee is not making a recommendation one way or another.

Despite a fairly strong request to move back to the gym at the school meeting, there are stories of individuals who were not at the school meeting who want to stay with the hall. Whichever way we go, it need not be a decision forever. The number of people attending is a crucial factor but this cannot be predicted.

- Principal Dirth will try to work with the supervisory district **to have school closed for town meeting 2015**. This will allow teachers to attend their town's meeting, and for our kids to attend ours. It will also make it possible to hold town meeting at the school should that be decided. We do support this.
- Whether to **change the time of town meeting**. A suggestion of starting at 2 or 3 pm seems to be favored by quite a few people. It would be interesting to try. This would allow people who cannot take off the whole day to leave work a bit early and attend. The School meeting will probably need to stay at the current time of 7pm so working parents can attend. Supper could be served in the time between the two meetings – at 5:30 or 6 pm. Jean pointed out that when she was a member of the “Hopping Housewives” and served a lunch between the 2 meetings, they would switch year to year, with the town meeting first one year, and the school first the next year.
- Whether to serve a **meal** between the meetings.

Future work to be done.

- Rick will **teach about town meeting** to another group of **students** in April and hopes to again next year. As a committee we support teaching students about town meeting and involving them in it, like the students who helped at the parking lot and to escort people in and hand out Doyle polls, etc. during the meeting. Additional tasks for them could probably be found.
- **Child care**. Needs to be in the same building as the meeting. Perhaps Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H or Whitcomb seniors performing community service could help. Rick suggested they could have a bucket for donations for their group.
- **Transportation**. Jean echoed Joyce Richardson's comments that if someone really wants to come they can find a ride. Victoria wondered if we could offer an option, perhaps having a list of people who were willing to give people rides to town meeting. We could have something about this in the Town Report. People could phone the town offices and request a ride.
- In any event we'd like to continue to **have a page at the beginning of the Town Report** with information on the logistics of town meeting, as we had this year, complete with a useful parking map by Abbie Sherman.
- **Food**. This is popular. If the Selectboard decides 'yes' we will have to find a group willing to organize this, either donated dishes or a prepared meal, or a mixture of the two. Victoria hoped that there would be an option to pay for the meal with a donated dish rather than having to pay cash. If the meeting is still at 10 am then the pies afterwards would be appreciated. In any event there should be free coffee available during both meetings. Our committee supports having food and coffee served, but does not want to be directly involved in facilitating it.
- **Involving citizens more in town meeting**. Rick liked several ideas tried in Middlesex, Vt, such as sending a “welcome new voter” letter to new additions to the voter checklist. They also have

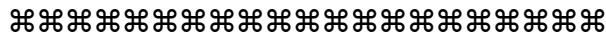
papers on "how & why to use the town report" and "common terms used at town meeting" that are part of a Middlesex Operators' Manual that is given to new residents. It could explain town meeting and the committees and offices we have. [It is interesting to look at the results of other towns' meetings to see what different sets of officers they do and don't elect compared with Bethel.] These could be given to people when they register to vote. However Jean pointed out that many people now register when they get their drivers licenses, not at the town clerk's office.

Victoria felt much of this Operators Manual could be on the town website, with links to the parts of the town website that deal with the particular committees, etc. People could access this information from anywhere, and it could be easily updated. Jean could have a card or flyer calling people's attention to it.

Town Hall use

- Although it is not in the official prevue of this committee, we all encourage the use of the town hall for many different uses by many groups, both from Bethel, and from outside. We hope that having new Town Hall Coordinator Linda Noyes will encourage and facilitate use.
- This will be our last meeting until fall. **No meeting is scheduled.** We will send a list of recommendations/things that need to be decided to the Selectboard (see below), and then take a hiatus until fall when we will work to facilitate the 2015 town meeting.

Minutes by Victoria Weber, Secretary, 3-17-14



TO: Bethel Selectboard
FROM: Bethel Town Hall Solutions Committee
DATE: March 11, 2014
RE: Decisions to be made concerning Town Meeting

Following our 3 months of work preparing for town meeting, and our impressions of how the meeting proceeded on 3-4-14, we ask that the Board decide several issues. There is information on these topics in the attached minutes of our 3-11-14 meeting, but we do not make a recommendation either way on any of these topics.

- 1- Location of the 2015 town meeting: school gym or town hall.
- 2- Whether to change the time of the meeting from 10 a.m. to another time, such as afternoon.
- 3- Whether a meal should be served, as it was, 40 or so years ago.