

Bethel Town Meeting Committee Minutes of March 20, 2017

Present: Jean Burnham, Rick Benson, Davis Dimock, Victoria Weber.

Meeting called to order at 3:38. Minutes of February 21, 2017 accepted unanimously.

Town Meeting Review/Critique

Davis noted that the *Valley News* article by David Corriveau about the Bethel town meeting began "Amid calls to maintain Bethel's momentum as a community on the upswing..." He recognized that current accelerating activities to improve downtown are part of a 25-year process starting with the Committee on Downtown and the Wall to the Hall efforts. We are making progress, and citizens seem pleased about that progress and 'upswing'.

Microphones: This year we added a microphone in the front corner of the gym which several people used, letting them face both the selectboard and the audience. Others continued to use the mic in the center aisle. We did not have students to bring the mic to seated people. Next year we discussed asking the girl scouts to do this, and possibly assist with the Pledge of Allegiance, or contacting the advisor of high school seniors' public service requirement early in the year to have a couple of seniors be microphone runners.

[A suggestion that came in after the meeting was to have a speaker in the hall behind the gym so people at the pie table, or with fussy children, could still hear what is going on in the meeting.]

Pie: Laura Rubenis again organized, displayed and served a long table of donated pie slices, cheddar cheese and grapes, as well as coffee to provide sustenance and sociability before and during the meeting. Citizens commented on how much they appreciated this effort, and our committee especially thanks all those who donated pies.

Dinner: The girl scout crock pot dinner at 5:30 was reasonably well attended. This is the first time they have arranged this. We suggest that they do more public relations ahead of time next year, and also post a menu and time of the dinner ahead of time, and at the morning town meeting so more people know about it. This is the second year there has been a meal before the evening school meeting, and it is becoming a tradition again.

Exhibits: There were at least 6, including Conservation and Energy Commissions, Stagecoach, Bethel Operator's Manual, Bethel Revitalization Initiative/Bethel University, Senior Class trip. Rebecca had sheets where people could list possible town topics and suggest animals for the mural to be painted for The Wall at the junction of Main Street and Rt. 107, as well as a 'Local Heros' clothesline.

Handouts: The Robert's Rules handout, and the new one describing the duties and time commitment of officers to be elected at town meeting were available to be picked up at the name-tag table, and few were picked up. Jean has saved them and we will plan on putting them on seats next year. We will also incorporate the elected officers information into the *Bethel Operator's Manual*.

Childcare: Morning care of K-5 kids by the One Planet Program organized by Amy Gray, and evening all-ages care by the PTO organized by Jamie Rainville went well as far as we know.

Town Report: The Town Report is the basis for town meeting and we feel it has improved significantly over the past couple of years. It is more readable and attractive, and so people are reading it more. Of

especial note this year is the inclusion of a Capital Plan. The selectboard, starting with former chair Bill Hall, have worked on this for several years and now a 5-year plan for capital improvements in several categories has been published so that both administrators and citizens know what needs the town will have over the next few years. The report on this, and select person Chris Jarvis' explanation during the meeting, provided transparency about how we will be spending money in the future. The voters approved an initial \$50,000 for the capital fund, so we have begun saving for future needs.

Other improvements to the Town Report include double columns, a table of contents, a flat binding, many more photos, including of a number of town employees, like Doug Marshall, Jean Burnham and firemen. There are tax calculations to see how much different monetary requests will cost individual home owners, and circled reminders within the report to where this information is, and a reference to where people can see the Auditor's Report. There is a map of the new Brandielier Town Forest hiking trail. Graphically, the use of text boxes and pie charts to set out information helped break up the report and make it more accessible.

We appreciate Assistant Town Manager Abbie Sherman's work to create this town report and to make it the most beautiful one yet. Town meeting was Abbie's last day of work as she moved on to a Department of Education job in Barre. Thank you Abbie.

Attendance was 186 this year and 213 last year in the morning and the school meeting had 116 attendees this year, compared with 102 last year. Overall town meeting was characterized as 'sweet', 'very civil', 'people were in a good mood', and 'people are feeling positive about the town'. Jean noted that people hung around afterwards to talk with one another. Rick had mentioned civility during his opening remarks, and Carl Russell mentioned civility too in his remarks when he encouraged citizens to get involved by taking some of the open committee seats in town.

To some degree our committee's suggestions and actions have produced all these changes to Town Meeting and the Town Report over the past four years. Moving the location of select board meetings to the Town Hall can be added to this list, as that facilitates more participation at select board meetings and gets people into the hall.

Victoria will send thank you cards to Laura Rubenis, Rebecca Stone, Amy Gray, Jamie Rainville, John Hubble and the school maintenance crew, and to the girl scouts.

Bethel Operator's Manual

Lisa Warhol has been editing, and Rebecca can do some graphic design starting in April. Victoria is finishing up gathering bits of information. She brought two copies to town meeting for people to look at and make suggestions about, but she failed to mark them "Do Not Remove" and both were removed quite quickly, but that means people were interested in the manual. The current draft is available for comment at: <http://tinyurl.com/bethelmanual>.

Davis reported that a citizen has made a donation of \$1,000 toward the production of the manual, bringing available funds up to \$4,500.

Rick is still waiting to hear about grant requests to Ben and Jerry's and Northfield Bank.

Our next meeting will be June 19th, 2017 at 3:30 at the Town Clerk's office.
The meeting adjourned at 4: 45.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Victoria Weber, Secretary, March 24, 2017.