

Bethel Town Meeting Solutions Committee
First meeting to support the 2015 Town Meeting
November 14, 2014 at Town Clerk's Office

Present: Eric/Rick Benson, Jean Burnham, Victoria Weber and Carl Russell

This was an organizational meeting to identify our tasks. Our overall goal is to increase attendance and participation in town meeting.

1- Location. We believe the first issue is where the 2015 town meeting will be held. At the end of last year's town meeting season this committee referred that decision to the Selectboard, and they have yet to make that decision. Selectman Carl Russell informed us that the board would like this committee to facilitate a community discussion. They want to give the people opportunities to have discussions and to engage in ownership so that they won't be cut out of decisions that the board ultimately makes. The second reason to hold a public discussion is to give the citizens opportunities to practice tough decision-making in public.

Victoria suggested using the Bethel Front Porch electronic bulletin board/listserv for part of the discussion to engage folks who are comfortable with electronic communication. She will facilitate this discussion which will be between November 24th and December 19th in advance of the selectboard's decision of town meeting location on Dec. 22nd.

We will also hold a facilitated public discussion on December 11th at 6:30 pm at the town hall. It will feature an optional desserts potluck. Everyone will be welcome whether or not they bring along a dish to share.

We will aim to discuss a number of topics involved with town meeting, including:

- Location
- Time of day
- Whether to have food, and what
- The atmosphere/ambience/character of the 2 possible venues, the gym and the town hall.
- Parking
- Access
- How to get off work to attend town meeting (state law allows everyone to attend, with 2 weeks notice to your employer/supervisor).
- Increasing attendance
- Increasing participation
- Child care
- Multiple use

Carl will see if Middlesex's Susan Clark will attend and begin the evening with a short 15-20 minute talk on direct democracy in Vermont. Rick will facilitate the discussion focusing on each of the above topics in turn.

Rick will work with one of the pair of new *The Herald* Bethel correspondents to get an article in the newspaper that announces these forums, and also solicits more members to the committee.

2- Education. Our second goal for the year is to make information available in both electronic and print form on how to participate in town meeting, how to get items on the agenda/warning, how to register to vote, etc. In short, on how to participate in direct democracy.

The Middlesex town website has a lot of this information, including a document titled “The Meeting will Come to Order” from the Vermont Institute of Government. See the Middlesex website at <http://middlesexvermont.org/about/local-democracy/>

Topics covered include:

- Vermont Democracy and You
- Voting: A Primer
- State and Federal Representatives
- Vermont Voter Rights
- Middlesex Annual Report: Take a look
- How to Run for Local Office
- ALL ABOUT TOWN MEETING
 - “Robert’s Rules” + Basic Law of Town Meeting
 - Basic Parliamentary Motions: A Quick Look
 - Remote Town Meeting Participation
 - Civility: It’s not just “Robert’s Rules”

3-Child Care. We would like to provide child care this year at town meeting. Last year’s investigations turned up that there are barriers to the students doing it, so we will check with people in Bethel who are involved in child care. We need someone to coordinate this.