

Bethel Town Meeting Committee  
Minutes of July 27, 2015 Meeting

Present: Jean Burnham, Rick Benson, Chair, Davis Dimock, Victoria Weber, Rebecca Stone, Lisa McCrory, Ola Odel.

Rick called the meeting to order at 3:35 and we approved the minutes of the 6-22-15 meeting.

Town Meeting Survey:

We have survey forms at the Library and the Food Shelf. Rick will check on these and see if we can leave some at the recreation center. We will definitely have them at the September 3rd potluck gathering.

Mission statement:

The Selectboard approved our Mission Statement at their July 13th meeting. We voted unanimously to formally adopt it. It reads as follows:

Helping foster informed and engaged citizens: Creating an environment in which individuals are welcomed, respected, supported and valued.

September 3rd Potluck Gathering, 6-8pm at Town Hall:

Framework and Timelines on Bethel Town and School Budget Construction.

This gathering is a first step in educating and informing citizens about the processes involved in building both the Town and the School annual budgets. We are asking people involved in each to give 10 minute presentations explaining the basic steps involved in budget creation in Bethel, and the timelines involved, including the 'drop dead' dates after which people cannot make a change in the budget requests. This should allow citizens to become involved earlier in the processes, before the budgets are set and cannot be changed, except by a vote at town or school meeting, as happened with the school budget in 2015.

We are asking the town and school officials to give simple explanations of their budget's process and timelines, and to put the basic information in a handout, which participants will be able to take home. Handouts should include times when people can participate in the budget processes. We plan to also include these handouts in the Operators' Manual/Handbook which we are working on. Rebecca is willing to scan them and put them into electronic format if need be.

Besides these simple explanations, we ask each speaker to tell the audience how citizens can get involved in the budget process this fall. We wondered whether boards can post tentative/draft budgets so that citizens can see the content early in the process, and understand the tax implications.

After an introduction to our committee and our goals by Chair Rick Benson, Carl Russell will speak on citizen participation generally. Carl suggested we give out last year's Town Report, and we will do that.

The Agenda:

6- 7 pm: Enjoy potluck supper.

7 pm: Rick Benson introduces our committee and our goals/mission. This meeting is a first step to inform citizens of how the town and school budgets are created, focusing on the framework and timetables, not on any content. At this meeting we hope to identify other steps our committee may make to inform and empower citizens to take part in town and school budget processes and annual meetings.

7:10 Carl Russell on Citizen Participation.

7:20: Bill Hall, or perhaps Keith Arlund, on how the municipal budget is constructed.

7:30: School board chair Dave Eddy +/- board member Todd Sears +/- or principal Owen Bradley on how the school budget is constructed.

7:40: Questions, comments and suggestions from citizens. What is working for citizens and what is not?

Rebecca would like to know ways people can get involved when they cannot attend school or Selectboard meetings. Are there other options? Victoria sees our goals as trying to help people understand town meeting and the budgets that are voted on them (which result in our taxes), and also to encourage people to want to attend and take part.

Bethel Revitalization Initiative – BRI:

Rebecca is an active member of BRI and reported that they have not spoken about our committee since May or June, but they are conceptually happy to partner with us. Rick said we mostly want BRI to pass information about the September 3rd potluck on to their members.

Rebecca will write a memo to BRI about the following issues, and let us know what the answers are:

Is BRI okay with jointly sponsoring the potluck?

Can we market it that way?

We could use help with set up and clean up.

Can we use their screen and projector? Will it be compatible with people's laptops?

Potluck details:

- We need plates and utensils. Ola has some and we can use the 'real ones' in the hall so long as we wash them.
- Jean will help with set-up and she has a key to let us in.
- Davis will help with clean-up.
- Rick will bring a flip chart.
- Victoria will take notes to make a record to share with everyone afterwards.
- Physical lay-out should include food tables on the sides of the hall which people can access from both sides. The dining tables should be set up in a horseshoe facing the stage.
- We will make last-minute arrangements at our August 17th meeting.

Promotion:

Rebecca will try to make a poster, post on Front Porch Forum and create the ½ page insert that we want to insert in to the school children's 'packets' that they are sent home with at the beginning of the school year, August 26th (I think).

Davis will send a letter to the Herald of Randolph to run in the August 20th issue.

Victoria will ask Abbie Sherman to post it on the town website, and put it on the Herald's "Calendar" page.

Town Report and Operator's Manual

After the September 3rd presentations we will begin to focus on the creation of an 'operators' manual/handbook' for Bethel citizens. We need to speak with the Selectboard about this, and to explore grants to defray the cost. Rebecca has expertise in grants and explained there are four possible grants: Vermont Community Foundation's "Small and Inspiring" Grant for perhaps \$2,500, a NE Grass Roots Environment Fund grant for perhaps \$1,000, as well as possibly Mascoma Savings Bank and Northfield bank.

The Small and Inspiring Grant application would want information in four areas:

Questions about the project. They like projects that build community.

Logistical information about the fiscal sponsor = the Town.

A rough idea of a budget.

An estimate of volunteer or paid time. They like in-kind matches or volunteer time, and this adds up quickly.

We will probably want to hire a graphic designer for the layout and possibly an editor to give a unified voice and consistency to the entire handbook. Photos are also needed. We could solicit these from Bethel citizens generally or work with several photographers.

We also need to include a strategy for getting the finished manual out to the people. We'd like to speak with Middlesex's Susan Clarke for ideas on this.

Most of these grants have a couple of application deadlines per year, and typically they want the work done fairly quickly, so we will need to time our application to when we can reasonably get the work done. We are guessing it will take about a year to a year and a half.

Davis suggests we start with suggestions for the Town Report. He wants to work with Abbie Sherman to solicit her ideas and knowledge about the construction of the Report. We have divided our list of features that we suggest be added into items to include in the annual Town Reports and information to include in the longer-term Manual.

Our next meetings will be August 17th, September 28th and October 26th, all Mondays at 3:30 at the Town Clerk's office.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Victoria Weber, Secretary, August 1, 2015.