

Minutes
Culture, History and Governance (CHuG)
Sub-Committee
March 19, 2008

Present: Susan Brooks, Paul Giese, Nancy Henderson, Jack MacLean, Karen Keane, Harriet Todd, Peter Sugar

We discussed the following:

- Governance:
 - We felt that it was very important to articulate the problems we foresee before we can offer any solutions. Therefore the points we are considering are highly conceptual and cannot yet be defined with any certainty. It is our feeling that the discussion with the Selectmen is an important first step. We will send the Selectmen two additional memos: the results of the Board survey as well as the comments we received from the public on governance during the break-out sessions.
 - Transparency is very important: while the Selectmen's meetings are televised, there are several committees/boards who meet generally without any of the public being present (even though all meetings are posted as required) – e.g. FinCom. One way to overcome this might be to have liaisons from other boards attend particular meetings (i.e. an outreach in both directions: from the board outward and from other boards inward)
- We went around CHuG to articulate what each of us is most afraid of for the long term:
 - Will we ever able to integrate new arrivals in town into our form of government
 - How can we get people involved?
 - When is the best time for meetings: week nights? weekends?
 - Would a civics curriculum at the schools be a help? (i.e. how to educate the next generation)
 - Does Town meeting really represent the town's views – as there are, relatively, so few who attend? (And yet TM is really the most democratic form of government possible every attendee being able to express his/her views.) (There is also the very real issue of people having less available time and thus not being able to attend.)
 - Will our boards be able continue to function: when there are ever fewer willing to serve – it is harder and harder to be able to fill the vacancies
 - Town government appears to be 'closed': the same people are always the ones serving
 - We are losing the once existing 'mix' of people (mostly due to the cost of housing)
 - How little we know ourselves - though surveys can help here
 - How to ensure that results of task forces and reports are not just shelved, almost immediately upon submission: implementation needs a better methodology: i.e. who will carry the responsibility; our current decision making process is potentially flawed
- We returned to the topic of following up on our interviews. Are focus groups the best way? It may be better to meet with all members of certain boards/committees. This is particularly true of certain cultural and historic groups who have some governance functions as well – e.g. the Historic Commission, Cultural Council, Bemis, etc. At the same time some focus groups with a good facilitator would also be useful. We did not reach any definitive conclusions
- We still need to speak with senior staff – though COG has met with some of these and we should await their report
- The immediate agenda is to meet with the Selectmen and hopefully this will take place at our next meeting on 3/26

Next meeting: 7:30 AM on 26 March, 2008 – place to be confirmed.