

Minutes
Culture, History and Governance (CHuG)
Sub-Committee
May 7, 2008

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

As previously agreed, we continued our discussion on the goals as enumerated by Jack (points raised would be looked at for support from the survey):

- 7.: Improve electronic data systems for all major Town databases:
 - The board survey pointed out the comments that more databases are desired
 - Town staff apparently is of the same mind and they (Susan B, Anita and Chuck) are meeting about records management at this time
 - As an example: the ZBA's decisions are kept by the Clerk; it would be very helpful if, as one files an application, the critical and legally required deadlines would automatically appear rather than having to rely on looking at, and calculating the dates from, a calendar
 - The Planning Board and the Conservation Commission have similar issues
 - It was felt that creating a database, maintaining and preserving it would be a good thing – but there are obvious cost implications. How can we get a handle on these costs? (Likely to be sizable with the effort anticipated to be spread over a number of years)
 - On the other hand, having one could cut staff hours/costs - it is an issue of scale and payback.
 - We may be able to handle this with other towns, preparing a database and tweaking it for particular towns' requirements
 - Who would use the data base? Who has the need? How is it to be accessed? (From a town computer? Or from a home computer?)
 - Having a database available would also make town government more transparent
 - Data entry could be achieved through the use of volunteers
 - Having a database would also assist in conforming with the State's record keeping requirements/regulations
 - A good first step might be to assess more accurately the needs of the staff, and then prioritize the effort
- 2.: Facilitate opportunities for volunteers, including important but time-limited contributions to the Town, and cultivating volunteers for assuming public office:
 - How to establish an available skills portfolio: one thought was the annual census but the information submitted is often too vague: it could possibly be made more specific by sending out a questionnaire as an attachment with the census
 - Such questionnaires are sent out by the schools – and generated by the responses there is often a proactive follow up to try and involve the respondent in particular volunteer tasks (the follow-up can take the form of newsletters, e-mail/chat rooms, etc.)
 - The skills questionnaire could ask such questions as the respondent's profession, interest and background – all of which may be helpful when looking for certain skills in inviting people to interview for certain vacant positions
 - The greatest difficulty is to attract people for elected positions, where a more concentrated and time consuming commitment is required – there seems to be no dearth of volunteers for specific organizations: e.g. the Library (Friends), Schools (PTA, LSPO)
 - Another factor for public positions may be the perceived intimidation of public exposure
 - The skills portfolio/questionnaire could be tried with a sunset clause – to evaluate whether it is the right tool and how helpful it may turn out to be
 - One question the town wide survey may help with is to see how responses to the above correlate with people with school age children

Next meeting: We will meet on Wednesday, 5/14 at 7:30 AM at the Library (Note: Judi will come to our meeting - it will not be a presentation: rather a discussion of the 'do nothing' scenario)