

Minutes
Culture, History and Governance (CHuG)
Sub-Committee
May 14, 2008

Present:

CHuG: Susan Brooks, Paul Giese, Karen Keane, Jack MacLean, Harriet Todd, Peter Sugar
COG: Angela Meehan (part time)

While waiting for the arrival of Angela, we discussed possible questions which need to be looked at as part of the do-nothing scenario:

- Town Meeting attendance is down. Is it critical that we retain the institution of Town meeting – especially as many of the decisions have been pre-vetted by the boards and thus they often only look for a confirmation. It was thought that, but for TM, boards/committees might not work as diligently towards clarifying the various issues.
- Lack of a sufficient number of candidates: this may only be true of certain boards (though recently there was no candidate for the School Committee). Perhaps some positions are superfluous?
- Town government has become more complex: perhaps all the troubles stem from the notion that the facts are not easily and clearly communicated and thus there are fewer candidates because of a lack of knowledge of the issues. Lack of adequate training may also be a contributing cause.
- The issue of orientation and training is critical. There perhaps should also be a handbook or similar compendium (and not just on the web) explaining each board's function, the legal requirements surrounding the board and other pertinent information to let potential candidates know ahead of time the task to be faced (Lexington apparently has a good website explain these points)
- There is a definite need to generate excitement!
- Regionalization: the reason: to pool resources. At the same time this may result in an additional burden being placed on the Town – to be able to reciprocate in an acceptable manner (e.g. the Fire Department needing to have a certain number of trucks for 'first aid' – while Lincoln as a smaller community may not require the same number of vehicles) One needs to investigate the cost benefits of each idea before moving ahead
- Development in adjacent towns is another issue – deeply affecting traffic (e.g. Waltham)
- We returned briefly to the question of whether we should hold any focus groups? The general feeling was that time is short, it takes quite an effort to organize a focus group and thus we should not really attempt to follow through on this – no definitive decisions has been taken.
- Communication: it is felt that a good website is important – but we should be cognizant of the fact that some of our older population may not be sufficiently computer savvy to be able to take advantage of this tool. Thus there need to be several parallel avenues of communication (web, paper, TV, etc.) – a 'tool box'
- We asked Angela to look at the issues stated above and give us feed-back - i.e. what do other towns do about these and similar issues. She indicated that we may get questions posted by her on our e-mails (but we must beware of the restrictions of the open meeting law!)
- Angela also read to us a series of questions (which turned out to have been taken from our (CHuG's) earlier work. We requested that she look at these questions and see how she may provide some responses – again as other towns have looked at these same points.

Next meeting: We will meet on Wednesday, 5/21 at 7:30 AM at the Library – Angela will attend