

Long-Range Planning for Lincoln's Future. Challenges of the Culture, History and Governance Subcommittee

The energy in Bemis Hall was palpable on June 19 as Lincoln's Comprehensive Long Range Planning Committee described overall objectives and the five subcommittees highlighted their challenges and possibilities for the eventual plans and the planning process. Over a hundred people attending joined in the responding exercises to suggest preferences and priorities for the directions the Town might pursue.

The Culture, History and Governance Team would like to expand on this feedback over the summer and into the fall to develop a broader understanding of Lincoln citizens' interests, preferences and priorities in our topic area. To this end, we are reaching out to obtain your views through the Lincoln Journal and on the Town Website. We hope it is obvious that broad input from citizens is critical to the success of this process.

We begin by highlighting the definitions and challenges of Culture, History and Governance in Lincoln.

History: Lincoln was made an independent town by the Massachusetts General Court in 1754 and joined neighboring towns in the events of April 19, 1775 that led to the Revolutionary War and the creation of our country. History is in our bones and spirit - a spirit that has been maintained to the present by the commemorative activities of the Lincoln Minute Men and is evident daily in the fields, roads, stone walls, cemeteries, homes and buildings that grace our fair community. One focus of our committee's work could be aimed at surveying and enhancing historic features of the Town, preserving special homes and sites, creating or modifying historic overlay districts, and fostering neighborhood conservation. Looking both back and ahead, historic preservation will be viewed as an integral force in the evolution of Lincoln's character.

Culture: Culture can be defined many ways, but for Lincoln it seems wrapped in the diversity of its citizens' interests and character. How to maintain and expand this philosophy and adjusting it to encourage new ideas and change in the future is not easy without bogging down into platitudes. One important focus could be to enhance Lincoln's long-term relationships with its many in-town cultural institutions and activities. These range from the Lincoln Library to the Pierce House, from Audubon to Codman Community Farms to the Food Project, from Bemis Trust to the Thoreau Institute, from the Council on Aging to the Lincoln Journal, etc. In addition, there are over a hundred smaller "cultural jewels" too that should not be ignored. Priorities will want to be set, and natural tensions between residents and institutions and activities, such as traffic effects, will have to be faced. Lincoln is blessed with rich natural and man-made resources that need to be enhanced and kept in balance.

Governance: The other major focus of our subcommittee's work relates to Town Governance. Here we refer to the style and nature of Lincoln governing itself that creates the "Lincoln Way," focusing on governance as a part of the culture of Lincoln. As an example, in our Town Meeting form of government, we strive for an appropriate balance between volunteers and paid staff in running the Town. With our citizens' apparent support of Town Meeting, we intend to explore and implement ways to attract and encourage better attendance there. Recognizing that volunteer participation is essential to our chosen governing structure and that volunteers still play a critical role, we must also explore strategies to find volunteers, define their roles with greater care and provide better support for them through town resources. An excellent example of how burdens may possibly overwhelm volunteers is the case of Lincoln's Selectmen. If this burden should become too onerous, it might be alleviated by changing their numbers or redistributing the load to other groups and committees.

Now is a perfect time for us to hear as wide as possible a range of views. We encourage you to contact us to express your opinions – in whatever way suits you best. Letters-to-the-editor in the Lincoln Journal, emails, notes and comments in the CHG Chapter of the Town Website are all encouraged. Emails should go to Bill Stason wbstason@comcast.net We look forward to hearing from you.

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