

Town Government Breakout Sessions at the Lincoln Public Meeting, February 9, 2008

1. Opportunities in Encourage More Citizens to Participate in Town Government and Town Meeting

Main Themes

Difficulties in getting citizens to participate in TG has several **roots**: different priorities of new citizens; both parents in careers; other interests

Need to create a *positive, inviting spirit* and conduct *active reach* out to groups and individuals. Concrete suggestions included:

- *Newcomers/old-timers meetings* to have boards/committees highlight important issues, respond to questions, and invite participation
- Create position of *volunteer coordinator* to develop and maintain a knowledge base of citizen skills and interests; serve as focal point for boards/committees that seek volunteers; and to lead active outreach. Such a position requires very special communication and organization skills.
- Form *League of Interested Citizens* (replace LWV) to serve as forum for community priorities and to monitor committee/board activities. Active feedback to citizens would be an important function.

Enhance role of the *Moderator* in appointing Task Forces –seek new and younger members.

Develop better forms of communication e.g. *website* similar to Sudbury's to encourage open interaction and encourage development of constituencies. Needs to be very user friendly. *Lincoln Journal* could be improved a lot as a vehicle for communication.

Other Comments

- Focus on reaching out to people who express their ideas – wherever they may do this TM, local gatherings, local institutions, etc.
- Also, need to identify and reach out to new groups/associations in town. Encourage these groups to engage in broader issues.
- Block parties are a good way to socialize and, at the same time, help neighbors “tune in” to important issues especially if there is a neighborhood concern
- A newcomer felt there was a virtual “wall” in Lincoln between insiders and outsiders - cliques of decision-makers versus “outsiders”
- There is a spirit of selectivity – insiders don't want “fruitcakes” to volunteer.
- It's important to orient newcomers to our method of town government
- Need to publicize needs for volunteers and describe the roles and time commitments desired.
- Reach out to new people rather than approaching people you know

- It's shocking to hear about people who volunteer and are never called
- Get to know younger people through schools, churches, etc, and reach out to them
- Newcomers' gatherings provide an excellent vehicle to "spread the word".

2. Ways to Reduce Time Commitments by Board Members and Volunteers

Main Themes

Need to *define* the role and expected *time commitments* out front – and then stick do them. Open-ended and ill-defined time commitments will scare people away.

Train board and committee chairs in the skills of group facilitation and time management. Set time limits for committee/board meetings and then stick to them.

Need more *support staff* for committees/boards to permit delegation of tasks – especially data-gathering and administrative arrangements.

Other Comments

- Time burden of being a Selectman is considerable. One approach to limiting this is to ensure Board takes a policy focus and does not become mired in details.
- Perhaps a 5 member (rather than 3 member) Board of Selectman would help to distribute the burden. Expressed opinions differed on this (attending Select felt 5 member board would make time management more difficult; citizen felt otherwise)
- Important to define self-limited tasks with satisfying endpoints
- Town Meeting runs around a defined, high sculpted agenda – and is not a place for new ideas (need to find a forum for expression of new ideas).
- Child care will be important constraint for young people
- Meetings can be shorter if relevant reports are distributed in advance.

3. Ways to Improve Communications among Committees/Boards

Main Themes

The *Moderator* should resume scheduling periodic meeting of all town boards and committees for interchange of ideas.

Joint meetings should be scheduled when issues involving more than one board/committee are involved in the issue (examples: Planning Board, Housing Commission, and ZBA; Selectmen and Finance Committee).

Liaisons from one board can facilitate communication with respect to specific issues.

The *Lincoln website* should be used more than at present to facilitate communication – among committees/boards; on specific issues of interest to public; and between volunteers

Other Comments

- Need to increase emphasis on sharing information – use all means available
- Lincoln’s website doesn’t appear to be widely used. Why not? How can it be improved?
- We should create a “Wickie space” for free exchange of ideas/communication
- Need to widely publicize topics requiring inputs from multiple people or groups.

4. Ways for Town Government to Deliver More Value at Less Cost

Main Themes

Better communication was a primary theme in reducing costs of government and facilitating decision-making. End result will be more effective decisions and better use of taxpayer dollars.

Watchdog role of a revived League of Women (Citizen) Voters could facilitate cost-effective government. Members would shadow boards and committees (as has been done in the past).

Other Comments

Are we really clear about who decides where we put our money? Though FinCom and Selectmen are primarily responsible for establishing budgets, is this really where the action is?

Questions were raised about the value to the Town of some equipment purchases - snow clearing machine, fire engines, police vehicles (explain better the cost benefit of the purchases)

Budgeting from a fresh base each year (zero-based budgeting) mentioned but not discussed