

Freedom & Unity Task Force Meeting Minutes 11/14/23 Craftsbury Public Library, 7:00pm

Present: Jeannine Young, Carol Ceraldi, Daniel Solomon (on phone), Bru Mille (meeting recorder), Wendy Turnbull, Susie Houston, Susan Clark

Susan C recommended Freedom & Unity convene a follow-up gathering before the end of the year to get working on some of the issue areas and proposed activities that were dot-voted on by participants in the Nov 5 community event.

We have 15 replies to the meeting evaluation so far. All the information that was collected at both events plus the survey and evaluation will be compiled into a digital format report for sharing with the selectboard and others.

Debrief of the Nov 5 event:

Task Force members felt the second meeting came off very well and that our outreach efforts largely paid off. Childcare was offered again but it didn't seem to help turn out parents with school-aged children. The overview presentation was clear and helpful for framing the small group conversations. Many people signed up at the meeting (and via the meeting evaluation) to continue working on issues that emerged from the small group discussions.

Bru expressed concern that the issue of voting by Australian ballot didn't come out during the small group conversations. Discussion ensued as to whether those residents who've advocated for ballot voting came to either meeting to make the case. The group acknowledged that many feel disenfranchised, and even if they don't want to participate, they want to feel heard. Daniel noted that one of the issues that came up in his group was adding members to committees and to the selectboard. There was decided interest in exploring the pros and cons of a 5-person selectboard, to which Susie responded that such an exploratory committee would need to be appointed by the selectboard.

Susan C reminded us that the task force was charged with enriching the understanding of the structures that make up our democracy so we can make more informed and inclusive decisions throughout the year, not just once annually at Town Meeting. Participants in the Nov 5 session were focused on finding ways to strengthen community connections while also making Town Meeting more inviting and informative. Daniel noted that people want to know that something came of these sessions that creates positive change. From the small group discussion on leadership, a priority topic was getting more people to volunteer for standing committees, which spawned the idea of creating opportunities for leadership training and mentoring.

Jeannine reminded the task force that it's almost time for the select board to set the warning and agenda. She asked if one of the things we might help with is advertising to the public that now is the time to get things on the warning and how to run for local office. Susie commented that she hoped this group or another committee would be willing to take on publicizing and posting on FPF.

One piece of 'low hanging fruit' is the welcome program, at least a rudimentary one just explaining Town Meeting for this year. We could expand this to include the town operator's manual etc. in the future.

Wendy and Bru volunteered to report out to the selectboard the ideas and issues that came from the community sessions about ways to strengthen local democracy in Craftsbury. The group committed to continue functioning as the Freedom & Unity Task Force through early 2024 (Susie confirmed we could), by offering to the selectboard to manage logistics for Town Meeting Day and help get the word out about the budget and policy issues in the warning. Members agreed to remain the "Freedom & Unity Task Force."

Turning our attention to the results of dot voting by Nov 5 participants, the task force agreed we should start small. We shouldn't try to do it all at once, we can always grow it from year to year. Carol remarked that we could probably get the Craftsbury Community Month going as early as this year. Bru advised that we assemble a volunteer group to get started on community month activities ASAP, especially those activities involving the schools.

Based on the dot voting, four priority areas came into focus for Task Force members : 1) creating a Town Operator's Manual; 2) organizing Craftsbury Community Month; 3) carrying out civics education and engagement (in schools, across Craftsbury); and 4) studying the pros and cons of increasing the size of the selectboard. We discussed holding another meeting before year's end to report out to the community and get organized as 'working groups' to tackle the above issues. Susan C reminded us that several people signed up to continue working on democracy in Craftsbury. The Task Force will email everyone who attended and signed up for issue areas, as well as post on Front Porch Forum to announce we're reconvening and taking action.

The next meeting will be Dec 12, 2023. Wendy will see if the Craftsbury Public Library is available and reserve. Susan C will help with agenda, the focus of which will be the formation of the four working groups. Each group will be asked to set their own goals and identify activities that can be achieved in the coming months. Task Force members will serve as resources and liaisons to each issue group.

Jeannine asked for more information about the small grants that will be made available to Craftsbury to implement activities identified by the working groups. Susan C has asked the funder for clarifications around the funds. She will develop guidelines based on the funder's recommendations and share those with the Task Force. There is approximately \$4,400 earmarked for Craftsbury follow-on activities.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45pm