

5/4/23 Freedom and Unity group meeting
Craftsbury Town Hall
7-9:15 PM

Present:

Suzie Houston, Selectboard Liaison
Farley Brown
Carol Ceraldi
Cedar Hanan
Anne Hanson
Bru Mille
Daniel Solomon (via speakerphone)
Susan Clark, facilitator
Absent: Wendy Turnbull

Carol invited Jen Linck to join this group. She will also speak to Steve Moffatt.

Suzie summarized “must dos” for this group to function as a town committee:

Designate a chairperson, recorder, tech person if zoom is being used. Meetings must be posted on town calendar. Within 5 days notes from the meeting must be available, and within 2 weeks must be available on town website.

Jeanine Young wanted to attend but had a conflict.

Farley is a liaison for the Town Planning Commission.

Anne volunteered to record for this meeting.

Cedar noted he is a liaison for the School Board; he and Michele Menard will trade off in this role.

Susan lives in Middlesex. She is serving as lead facilitator this project for Craftsbury. She has worked for years on democracy in Vermont, is a facilitator and author, and coauthored “All Those In Favor” a book about Vermont town meetings with UVM professor Frank Bryan. She is working on this project with Rebecca Sanborn Stone of Bethel, Vt. The project description is attached.

March '23 Craftsbury had 130 voters at Town Meeting, but after lunch Craftsbury's \$4million School Budget vote was voted on by 49 people. Across the state during Covid many towns experienced that ballot voting tends to get higher turnout than in-person meetings. This year 18 towns considered moving some element of Town Meeting to Australian ballot due to similar concerns (most of them did not choose to do so). Most towns in Vermont continue to have floor vote meeting. This project helps towns explore how to find balance between democratic quantity and democratic quality. There are probably different answers for each town—every town has its own story.

Plan is for building interest for some Fall '23 event(s) / workshops(s) that will be held to solicit feedback from Craftsbury voters on participation and best model for Town Meeting, given concerns about attendance and conversations circulating that some people cannot get to Town Meeting to vote. Susan would facilitate these fall meetings. It is important that all groups are represented.

Susan distributed a worksheet for attendees to rank their top priorities for this process and asked attendees to rank their top three (list is attached). She will gather info and create some outreach questions to help this group get people to the fall event, or to smaller scale "living room" meetings.

Suggestions from the group: Go to groups that already exist or locations where people gather: School Booster Club, Parent/Teacher organization, Fire Department, Food Share, Community Dinner, libraries and related functions.

Bru suggested Town Meeting be treated like an event to ensure someone is doing needed outreach, food planning, child care, getting the buzz going to be there. This could increase interest and attendance.

Next meetings:

5/24 7-9 PM Town Hall

6/26 7-9 PM Town Hall

Craftsbury Freedom & Unity Task Force 5/4/2023 Discussion topics

PARTICIPATION

Which of these statements feels most true about who you want to participate, and how? (Feel free to make changes)

- We want **as many people as possible to participate in the workshops**. It'll be successful if we get at least ____ people.
- We want **as many people as possible to share input** on local democracy in Craftsbury – whether at the workshops, or outside of them (survey, summer booths, interviews, focus groups, etc.). It'll be successful if we hear from at least _____ people.

- We want a **representative cross-section or good mix of the Craftsbury community** to participate in the workshops, share input, and help decide next steps (ages, genders, newcomers/oldtimers, political beliefs, races, etc.).
- We want the **most interested and excited people** to participate in the workshops. We can have a great conversation and event with whoever ends up in the room.
- We **absolutely want _____ to participate in the workshops**. Beyond that, we welcome anyone interested.

PRIORITIES

What do you most want to walk away when we've completed the fall processes? Prioritize 1-6 (or at least your top 3)

- _____ **Specific Town Meeting improvement ideas**, based on good information, that we can start implementing or planning immediately
- _____ **Longer-term ideas to improve local democracy year-round**
Recommendations or actions to strengthen year-round cycles of participation on local issues
- _____ **Sense of community energy & volunteerism**. More people feeling excited and willing to help with future engagement and local democracy in Craftsbury
- _____ **Communication**. People more willing to share their views, listen for understanding, engage in community dialogue on key issues
- _____ **Inspirational ideas**. A broad range of ideas and inspirational examples to consider, and a shorter list of potential ideas to explore

- _____ **Resources.** Ideas on funding sources, organizations, websites or guides that Craftsbury can use to pursue actions
- _____ **Other?**

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Strengthening Democracy in Vermont Towns for the 21st Century

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar?

- *Whether due to Covid, climate change, or other forces, our town has seen a lot of new people moving in. You wonder: what's the best way to retain a sense of community and ensure new folks understand how to engage productively?*
- *With increased awareness around equity and inclusion, many are asking how to make our democratic systems more welcoming. Every community has its own history, demographics, and stories; which strategies will be most effective in our town?*
- *When using ballot voting during the Covid epidemic, in many towns more people voted than had previously attended town meeting. Should towns give up town meeting and switch to ballot voting permanently? What might be gained or lost, and are there other options?*
- *It seems like everything is more polarized and combative these days, and people are losing faith in democracy. Are there improvements that could remind us how to see, hear, and understand each other, and build bridges across our differences?*
- *Local leaders want more volunteer help from residents, but everyone is so busy. What are effective ways to enlist community energy and talent to help the community realize its potential?*

If some or all of these scenarios ring a bell, you're not alone. In towns across the state, both residents and local leaders have been raising concerns. Communities care about their local democracy and are wondering what to do to strengthen it.

How can we strengthen our local democracy? In this facilitated discussion, townspeople will come together to share stories, discuss our common values, and come up with ideas for strengthening community engagement for all. Topics will include town meeting, voting, and identifying action steps to support local democratic engagement throughout the year.

Workshop element: Using balanced, data-based materials, participants will examine and weigh potential action steps and learn about how they have been applied in other New England communities. Through a series of lively, small- and large-group conversations, participants will consider what makes our community unique. Participants will come away with a clearer

understanding of local values, help choose methods to strengthen engagement, and identify ways to get involved.

This project incorporates polarities navigation and best-practice dialogue and deliberation models. The project is currently in the pilot stage, in collaboration with the UVM Center for Research on Vermont.

Discussion leaders: **Susan Clark** is a facilitator, educator, and coauthor of *Slow Democracy: Rediscovering Community, Bringing Decision Making Back Home* and *All Those In Favor* (a book about Vermont town meetings). She consults with communities across the northeast about how to build inclusive, deliberative, and empowered community engagement. Her work can be found at www.slowdemocracy.org. **Rebecca Sanborn Stone** is Senior Planner and Engagement Specialist with [Community Workshop](#). She brings a diverse skillset to public outreach and facilitation, focusing on community engagement, communications, and creative placemaking. Recent projects include coordinating community resilience networks and launching the community pop-up Bethel University.