

Freedom and Unity Task Force Minutes May 27, 2023

Attending: Anne Hanson, Susie Houston, Bru Milne, Rudy Chase, Carol Ceraldi, Jeanine Young, Daniel Solomon (via Zoom), Farley Brown, Susan Clark

Absent: Wendy Turnbull, Cedar Hannan

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 pm and everyone introduced themselves since there were new members. Susan went over the agenda for the evening which included a review of the Selectboard members ideas of what would constitute a “home run” from the efforts of the group and what might broaden participation. This included get those who don’t come out to have a voice, bring in young residents, get new people to participate, and make sure that residents understand Robert’s Rules of Order. Concerns were raised about low voter turnout at town meeting and the same people volunteer to serve on commissions and committees. The hope is that there is a greater representation of the community and local participation which could bring a broader range of ideas.

The group reviewed ideas to increase participation from the previous meeting:

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.

Rudy raised the point that not everyone is comfortable with talking in public, but some might be willing to volunteer to do things such as “help move a grill at the Craftsbury Block Party.” The idea of a brochure describing what to know about your town would be useful; maybe a Front Porch Forum (FPF) post would be more effective. Susie posted “town meeting tidbits” on FPF before Town Meeting 2023. It was suggested that this type of information could also go into the Town Report before Town Meeting. This should include the ABCs of Town Meeting such as Robert’s Rules of Order. The idea of creating a document such as the “Middlesex Operator’s Manual” would be helpful. (The town of Bethel also has one online at [https://townofbethelvt.com/index.asp?SEC=E20094E3-1C19-431F-A50A-FCBA64A893DE.](https://townofbethelvt.com/index.asp?SEC=E20094E3-1C19-431F-A50A-FCBA64A893DE))

A discussion about how do we describe what we want the fall events to look like included, We want it to be representative of the town including a cross section of the town (e.g. diversity in age, income level, new and old residents).

Susan described a potential format:

2 session with a minimum of 3 weeks apart

First session (possibly 2 hours)

- The focus should be celebratory (Celebrating Democracy)
- Examples of ‘democratic community’ from around the state
- Plenty of interactive time

Second Session (possibly 3 hours and held on a weekend)

- Break into topical groups
- Goal = Actionable steps
- Susie commented that there are plenty of people in town who have the skills to facilitate the groups

It was suggested that the first session could include the Community Supper (either at the school or church) and then proceed to the church (maybe the sanctuary since it was used for the Community Visit in 2015).

Black out dates include Yom Kippur, Rosh hashanah, peak foliage, hunting season

The focus of the F&U June meeting will be planning for the fall events (time, date). Talking points will be developed at that meeting.

Susie created a list of groups in town that should be contacted about the event. Ideally, someone from each group would commit to attending the fall events.

Town Committees/Commissions:	Who contacts?	When	# of people reached, details
Conservation Commission (CCC)	Farley		
Planning Commission (PC)	Farley		
Planning Commission (PC)	Rudy		
Forestry Committee	Daniel		
Mental Health Group (MHRG)	Susie		
Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N)	Susie		
Recreation	Anne		
Fire Dept.	Bru		
Auditors			
Listers			
Village Improvement Society	Bru		

Other Craftsbury Groups:			
Historical Society (CHS)	Carol		
Library (Public)	Susie		
Library (East Craftsbury)	Carol		
Church groups	Jenny & Dave Stoner, Presbyterian United Church of Christ - reach out to Joan Simmons and trustees (Ned Houston)		
School board	Cedar		
Teachers Pre-K - 12			
Booster Club			
Other school clubs?			
PTO	Bru		
Sterling College, various groups	Farley		
Food Pantry			
Academy Woodlot Com.			
Trails Com.			
Farmers Mkt vendor group			
Little League			
Snowmobile club	Rudy		
Outreach & Tabling at events:			

Block Party			
July 4 Info tents			
Old Home Day (2nd Sat in Aug)			
Bike nights on the Common			
Town website			
Front Porch Forum			

Susan shared some OUTREACH QUESTIONS—A SAMPLING

What are our top priorities to learn from our outreach—what do we most want to know? What might be the most intriguing or inspiring questions to get folks interested in attending in the fall? (Questions to ask when meeting with Craftsbury organizations might be different from those we ask when tabling.)

A few ideas...

- If you could reinvent Town Meeting for the 21st Century, what would you change?
 - **What’s your craziest idea to make Town Meeting better?*****
 - **What’s your craziest idea to get more people to show up to Town Meeting?*****
 - What’s the hardest thing about going to Town Meeting?
 - What are three things that would make it better?
 - **What’s your “Town Meeting Moment”**—a unique memory, something that happened that you’ll always remember, a moment where you felt it was special, worth your time to go, unique, etc?*** *(Suggestion to post this question on FPF ahead of Town Meeting)*
- When you think about Town Meeting, what are the first three words that come to mind?
- If you go to Town Meeting, what brought you there the first time? What brings you back?
 - If you don’t go, what keeps you away? What might entice you to go?***
 - What’s the coolest thing you’ve heard about that another town does at Town Meeting?
 - [same line of thinking / question adaptations around year-round participation]
- When you think about a year of living in Craftsbury, what topic (s) throughout the year would you most like to be asked about, involved in?

Why does local democracy matter to you? ***

Questions in bold/marked with asterisks were the questions most meeting attendees agreed were the best ones to use in our outreach.

Carol came up with a great point about developing “Four Winds for Democracy”, a monthly program for the school. (Based off of the Four Winds Nature Program.)

The idea of sharing "Town Meeting Moments" was raised - put out a FPF post asking residents to share their town meeting moments.

Maybe a Democracy Committee could form out of the fall events. The committee could work on the issues around our Town Meeting (especially acoustics!)

The central question is how we can have both quantity and quality in the democratic process.

A discussion around online participation – including residents who want to participate in Town Meeting but cannot attend. Susan said people can watch from home but the Secretary of State's Office doesn't allow voting from home because voter identification is an issue. There is software but not currently allowed by law for use in town meetings (except Representative Town Meeting like Brattleboro).

Assignment for next meeting: Think about questions to help frame talking points and complete the town committee/commission worksheet with names of folks who will reach out.

Next meeting: Monday, June 26 at 7pm in the Town Hall.