

Minutes: Boxborough Town Meeting Study Committee Meeting: July 28, 2016

Morse/Hilberg Room Boxborough Town Hall

Approved August 16, 2016

1. Meeting was called order at 8:00 am by Susan Bak of the Board of Selectmen (BOS). Present were: Susan Bak, Jennifer Campbell, John Fallon, Jeanne Kangas, and Abby Reip. Absent: None
2. Administration:
 - a) It was noted that this was an informal meeting since, while the BOS voted appointments to the Committee on July 11, the appointment slips were to be signed by the BOS on August 8.
 - b) Committee voted that (i) the member of the BOS should be a member of the Committee, (ii) Susan would be the Chair and (iii) John would be the Secretary.
3. Documents related to the history of Boxborough Town Meeting (TM) and the 2005 TM Survey and 2006 TM Study Committee were briefly reviewed.
4. The charge of the Committee is to find ways to increase attendance at TM.
5. The Committee discussed outreach to the Town as part of the Committee process:
 - a) Susan will make sure that the existence of the Committee and an invite to others to join the Committee is mentioned at the August 8 BOS meeting and try to get this in the Beacon story on the BOS meeting.
 - b) Committee will do a letter to the editor of the Beacon with the same message as (5a).
 - No author was assigned.
 - c) The Committee will prepare a survey
 - Hard copy and on-line
 - Copy in November 1 tax bill
 - Questions could include among others "why do you come"; "why do you not come"; "what are barriers to your coming"; "What is your feeling about a Saturday Town Meeting".
 - Jennifer and Abby will work on a draft.
 - d) The Committee will have a booth at the Harvest Fair. This will possibly be in conjunction with the Police Chief. (See 6 b & c) John will reserve a space.
6. One major issue is getting people to come to Town Meeting especially for the first time. The Committee discussed methods of attracting people to come to Town Meeting. This would be a series of activities in the February-May time frame.
Some possibilities discussed included:
 - a) Mailing in May 1 tax bill
 - b) Reverse 911 Calls
 - c) E-mail notices to residents through the Police Department Nixle notice system.
 - d) "Bullet point warrant"
 - e) Social media: facebook event
 - Reaching out to the PTF to "share event"
 - f) Personalized letter to Newcomers from BOS with "Bullet point warrant".
 - g) Personal contact to neighbors

7. A second major issue is having people come back to Town Meeting a second time. The Committee discussed possible changes to Town Meeting process to improve the Town Meeting experience and attract more people.

a) The goal of the 2006 Town Meeting Study Committee was to improve the Town Meeting experience by making Town Meeting more efficient and less repetitive. All of the recommendations of this Committee plus other ideas have been implemented. Six of the last 8 Town meetings ran two nights versus only 2 of the 8 prior years.

b) Committee felt that more might be done to streamline the process

--More use of the consent agenda, e.g. simple zoning changes

--Perhaps reading fewer reports.

--More compressed budget process.

c) Currently one "hot topic" is sometimes scheduled for the "first item second night".

One idea to attract people would be, to the extent possible, "pre-schedule" time for more than one topic, e.g. "article 35 will be take up at 8:30 Monday evening".

--One school of thought it that this will attract "single interest" voters which might be considered a "bad thing"

--A second school of thought is getting people to come to Town Meeting for the first time might make them interested enough to stick around or come back.

d) Reconsideration limits of some kind might be useful.

e) Babysitting

8. The meeting adjourned at 9:40 am

9. Next meeting: Tuesday August 16 at 8:00 am at Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

John Fallon
Secretary