

**TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**  
**BETHLEHEM 20/20 ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**June 13, 2008 Meeting Record**  
Elsmere Fire Station, Poplar Drive  
7:30 – 9:15 a.m.

**Members Present:**

Terri Egan, Co-Chair, Kenneth Ringler, Co-Chair, Steve Baboulis, Keith Bennett, James Blendell, Mort Borzykowski, John Clarkson, Steve Coffey, Peter Conway, Lisa Evans, Cathy Griffin, Terry Hannigan, Jim Lytle, John Piechnik, Ted Putney, Pam Robbins, Patty Salkin, Brian Stenson, Suzanne Traylor, Bob Verstandig, Jr., Bob Ward

**Members Absent:**

Joanne Cunningham, Susan Hager, Dick Kotlow, Bert Trombly, Ann Wendth, Christo Zemerling

**Town Staff Members Present:**

Judi Kehoe, George Leveille, Kim Ryan, Gregg Sagendorph, Howard Hyer, Josh Cansler, Erik Deyoe, Lou Corsi, Tim Beebe

**1. Co-Chair Report:**

- a. May 9, 2008 Meeting Record:** The draft meeting record was approved without amendment.
- b. Update on May Action Items:**
  - i. Discussion Board: The Co-Chairs encouraged the members to utilize the discussion board. George Leveille reported that he periodically received usage reports from the Town's MIS department.
  - ii. NYS Commission on Local Government Efficiencies and Competitiveness: The co-chairs asked Commission Executive Director and 20/20 member John Clarkson to provide a brief overview of the commission's work. Mr. Leveille indicated that the full report of the Commission and a link to its web site were posted on the discussion board. Mr. Clarkson provided a brief overview and indicated that the role of the Commission was to facilitate not mandate changes. He also promised to bring information to share with the committee at the July meeting. The following are some highlights of Mr. Clarkson's comments:
    - Local government structure has been largely unaltered for the past two centuries;
    - Consolidation of shared services; encouraging ways to assist this; guided by local initiatives (about 200 ongoing ones) – helped to uncover multiple aspects that may have otherwise been overlooked
    - Encourage voter participation at all "governmental" levels (it declines significantly at the school district and special district (fire, library) levels)
    - Program bill addresses this under Government Paterson, look for more legislation to come in the future
  - iii. Finalize 20/20 Mission Statement: Staff received several comments on the draft mission statement through the discussion board since the May meeting. Several committee members offered comments on the draft statement and the

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committee agreed to prepare one final draft for posting on the discussion board, with adoption scheduled for the July meeting. On comment of note related to the sustainability of the committee beyond this initial charge. There was sentiment among the members that this committee might be a sustainable way of encouraging citizen involvement in Town affairs.

- c. **Other; Community Survey:** It was noted that committee member Pam Robbins had volunteered (through the discussion board) to lead a sub-committee that would assist in developing and interpreting a community survey. In fact, Mrs. Robbins volunteered the technical services of her firm in conducting the survey. The Town would only need to be responsible for costs associated with printing and mailing of the survey instrument. Upon request of the Co-Chairs, the following members volunteered to join the survey sub-committee: Patty Salkin, Brian Stenson, Cathy Griffin, Terri Egan and Pam Robbins.
2. **2008 Financial Update, Judi Kehoe:** Town Comptroller Judi Kehoe presented a Financial Update to the Committee that included, among other things, the following highlights:

  - a. Information related to annual sales tax trends;
  - b. Information regarding the overall increase in Town spending from 2007-2008;
  - c. The projection that the Town would use \$300,000 less of its fund balance than budgeted for 2008;
  - d. Sales tax proceeds are trending higher than anticipated for 2008 at 3.3% compared to the actual 2007 increase of 1.1%; however, annual totals are expected to be closer to 1% overall growth;
  - e. Investment income yields are running about 50% behind 2007's yield, which might increase the Town's operating shortfall by close to \$200,000;
  - f. In sum; expenditures are at or below budget, revenues are close to budgeted levels, the projected use of fund balance is below budgeted amounts, and all funds are projected to remain in good fiscal health at year end.
3. **Group Discussion:**

  - a. **Public Safety:** The discussion was prompted by the following two questions:
    - i. From a citizen's perspective, what is the most valued service provided by the Police Department?
    - ii. What would be the impact of increasing reliance on external public safety organizations?

A lengthy group discussion covered a variety of topics and ideas including, among other things, the following:

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- i. BPD as a resource to the Bethlehem School District;
- ii. Desire to see more BPD presence in the neighborhoods;
- iii. Is the community safe because of BPD or because of the composition of the community?
- iv. Should there be fees associated with home checks? What kinds of revenues could be generated?
- v. The home checks create a presence in the neighborhoods;
- vi. One of the benefits of local policing is a better ability to connect to the residents;
- vii. A county level police force might not see big box retail crime as a high priority;
- viii. Concern about proximity to higher crime community (City of Albany) and need to maintain high visibility of BPD;
- ix. Visibility of patrol officers is key but are there opportunities to streamline back office functions?
- x. Passing responsibilities off to higher level of government does not mean that costs will be reduced;
- xi. As the economy declines, crime increases and criminals look to the more affluent areas to commit crime;
- xii. Public safety training has already been streamlined;
- xiii. Residents are generally happy with BPD, but what can be done to cut costs?
- xiv. All across the country there are efforts to consolidate and streamline public safety;
- xv. How can we learn more about what other communities are doing to reduce costs?
- xvi. Is it necessary to support an emergency call with a police officer?
- xvii. It might be useful to re-look at the competitive set that was reviewed by the Town a few years ago;
- xviii. Aggressive traffic enforcement by the Town is a crime deterrent;
- xix. The Town has made many technology advancements.

- b. Highway, Engineering and Public Works:** The committee's discussion of Highway, Engineering and Public Works was prompted by the following question: What are the opportunities and constraints related to shared services and departmental consolidation?

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An abbreviated group discussion covered a variety of topics and ideas including, among other things, the following:

- i. The Town's previous discussion of this topic was complicated by the fact that it could result in the elimination of an elected position;
- ii. The State Commission on Local Government Efficiencies is currently recommending that Towns move away from elected highway superintendents to appointed ones because the position is now recognized as being a professional occupation for which there are specialized qualifications;
- iii. The elected Highway Superintendent controls all aspects of the Highway Department other than the budget, so it makes sense to make the position appointed; legitimate concern that a qualified elected official might not be appointed because of political affiliation;
- iv. Is it possible to start some consolidation within the framework of the existing structure?
- v. Fortunately, there is a great deal of cooperation between the Town and the Highway Superintendent and some progress has been made in consolidating certain functions and services;
- vi. Eliminating an elected position will have political ramifications, it is unavoidable; also need to make sure that the benefits of consolidation are worth the effort required;
- vii. If recommending a consolidation is the type of recommendation 20/20 will make, then a sub-committee should be formed that includes individuals with appropriate expertise;

**Action Items:**

1. John Clarkson will distribute to the members at the July meeting copies of information related to the recommendations of the NYS Commission on Local Government Efficiencies and Competitiveness
2. Prepare final draft of mission statement and post on discussion board for final comments; consider adoption of final draft at July 11 committee meeting.

**Next Meeting:**

Friday, July 11, 2008, Elsmere Fire Station, 7:30 – 9:15 a.m.

Discussion Topics: Group Discussion on topics presented to date

**To submit comments and questions, contact:**

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