

**TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**  
**BETHLEHEM 20/20 ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**October 17, 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, Steve Coffey, Joanne Cunningham, Lisa Evans, Cathy Griffin, Terry Hannigan, Dick Kotlow, Jim Lytle, John Piechnik, Ted Putney, Pam Robbins, Brian Stenson, Christo Zemerling

**Members Absent:**

John Clarkson, Peter Conway, Susan Hager, Patty Salkin, Bob Verstandig, Jr., Bob Ward, Ann Wendth

**Town Staff Members Present:**

Supervisor Cunningham, George Leveille, Suzanne Traylor

1) **Co-Chair Report:**

- **September 22, 2008 Meeting Record:** The draft meeting record was approved without further amendment.
- **Other:** Co-Chair Egan lead a discussion of the status of the committee's work. She indicated that this meeting was the beginning of the final phase of the committee's work during which we would be looking at financial data and alternative growth scenarios and formulating recommendations. She asked if the committee wanted any additional information about programs and services at this point and it was suggested that a summary of budget/financial information be provided. This would be added to the action item list.

2) **Report of the Community Survey Sub-Committee:**

Sub-committee chair Pam Robbins provided a brief report on the third meeting of the sub-committee, which was held on October 6 at Cathy Griffin's office. The following are highlights of her report:

- the committee hoped to have a draft survey developed in December;
- in recognition of the need to educate the public about important issues, the committee was considering the use of an informational document that could be placed on the Town's web site; the document would be a resource to those citizens selected randomly to participate in the survey; it might include financial information and other facts and figures that were germane to the survey;
- the committee was considering the use of an on line survey as well to help create awareness of the issues being considered by 20/20
- The next sub-committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 17 at 7:45 AM at ReMax Premier in Delaware Plaza.

3) **Report of the Communications Sub-Committee, John Piechnik:**

Sub-committee chair John Piechnik provided a brief report on the first meeting of the communications sub-committee. The following are highlights of his report:

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- the purpose of the committee was identified as proactively communicating with community stakeholders for purposes of education, creating public awareness and in providing a vehicle for public input;
- a variety of communication tools were identified;
- the importance of coordinating with the community survey sub-committee;
- an overview of the elements of the communications plan including target audiences, issues identification and desired outcomes;
- identification of next steps including soliciting volunteers from the 20/20 committee to call on community organizations with the 20/20 message;
- The next sub-committee meeting has been set for Thursday, November 6 at 8:00 AM in Town Hall Room 107.

4) **Report from Financial Modeling Sub-Committee, George Leveille**

George Leveille provided a brief report on the financial modeling sub-committee that included the following highlights:

- the sub-committee met on September 24 to preview the alternative development scenarios prepared by Town staff and to discuss how the development scenarios would be coupled with Town financial information as part of the modeling to be completed by Camoin Associates;
- the sub-committee met on October 16 to preview the Town budget presentation for the October 17 20/20 committee meeting;
- the next meeting of the sub-committee is scheduled for Thursday, November 13 at 8:00 AM in Town Hall Room 101;
- The draft financial model will be presented to the 20/20 Committee at its November 21 meeting.

5) **Presentation of Projected Town Finances, Jack Cunningham and Suzanne Traylor**

Jack Cunningham began the presentation with a discussion centered on the Town's proposed 2009 budget. His presentation included the following information:

- the focus on percentage increases in taxes disguises the fact that the Town's tax rate per \$100,000 of assessed valuation is one of the lowest in the entire region;
- property taxes account for approximately 24% of the Town's budget and are the only major revenue stream that the Town Board has any control over;
- the Town is aggressively looking for ways to manage costs and to find more efficient service delivery mechanisms;
- the Town continues to use Fund Balance to balance its operating budget;
- an overview of service initiatives for 2009; and,

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- a summary of all proposed 2009 major expenditure categories and highlights of proposed expenditures in the General, Highway, Water and Sewer funds.

Town Comptroller Suzanne Traylor then presented a series of financial projections for each of the Town's Funds to demonstrate the effect that current operating trends would have on operations and Fund balances. Because expenditures continue to grow at a faster rate than revenues, the potential exists for the complete exhaustion of the Town's Fund Balance in the next five to seven years.

A spirited conversation followed this presentation and included the following questions and comments:

- Does the Town bond or use operating funds for capital expenditures?
- Can the Town continue to afford the increased costs of personal services?
- How are COLA's (Cost of Living Adjustments) established? Should this be coordinated with other public employers?
- Jim Lytle indicated that the Bethlehem Central School District was trying to find a better way to negotiate with the employee's collective bargaining units; he pointed out that the district was ranked #1 in the region by the Business Review but was ranked in the mid-twenties in terms of employee pay and cost of student education
- Has the Town considered using different tax rates for different types of lands use?
- The Town will clearly need to hone in on what's most important in using scarce resources;
- The AMD announcement might create better opportunities for tax base expansion and the Town might want to look at using a bigger percentage of any PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) payments for its own needs
- Are there more opportunities to cut costs?

6) **Action Items**

1. Provide the committee with summary financial information about Town programs and services as a percentage of the Town budget.
2. Identify committee volunteers who are willing to speak with community groups and organizations on behalf of 20/20

**Next Meeting:**

Friday, November 21, 2008, Elsmere Fire Station, 7:30 – 9:15 AM

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

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