

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
BETHLEHEM 20/20 ADVISORY COMMITTEE
September 19, 2008 Meeting Record
Elsmere Fire Station, Poplar Drive
7:30 – 9:15 a.m.

Members Present:

Terri Egan, Co-Chair, Kenneth Ringler, Co-Chair, Keith Bennett, James Blendell, Mort Borzykowski, John Clarkson, Peter Conway, Joanne Cunningham, Lisa Evans, Cathy Griffin, Susan Hager, Terry Hannigan, Jim Lytle, John Piechnik, Ted Putney, Pam Robbins, Patty Salkin, Brian Stenson, Suzanne Traylor, Christo Zemerling

Members Absent:

Steve Baboulis, Steve Coffey, Dick Kotlow, Bob Verstandig, Jr., Bob Ward, Ann Wendth

Town Staff Members Present:

Supervisor Cunningham, George Leveille, Karen Pelletier, Nan Lanahan

1) **Co-Chair Report:**

- **August 22 Meeting Record:** The draft meeting record was approved without further amendment.
- **Update on July Action Items:**
 - **Organize Financial Modeling and Communications Sub-Committees:** Staff reported that the initial Financial Modeling Sub-Committee meeting has been scheduled for 8:00 AM on Wednesday, September 24 in room 101 of Town Hall. Staff also reported that the Communications Sub-Committee was in the process of getting its first meeting organized.
- **Other:**
 - **Discussion Board:** The co-chairs lead a discussion on the continuing utility of the discussion board that has been set up by the Town. It was suggested that a list-serve format might be more practical for the group and George Leveille said he would investigate it further. In the meantime, it was agreed that the discussion board would be temporarily shut down and then revisited when the committee begins to formulate recommendations later this year and into 2009.

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

Sub-committee chair Pam Robbins provided a brief report on the second meeting of the sub-committee, which was held on September 4, 2008 in Cathy Griffin's office. She reported that the committee recognized the importance of working closely with both the Financial Modeling and Communications Sub-Committees. The committee understood the importance of communicating the Town's long-term fiscal condition. Other highlights of her report included the following:

- Using the survey to help identify service priorities;
- The importance of encouraging civic-mindedness among Town residents;
- The use of "issue briefs" in advance of the survey to stimulate understanding of the issues facing the Town;

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
BETHLEHEM 20/20 ADVISORY COMMITTEE
September 19, 2008 Meeting Record
Elsmere Fire Station, Poplar Drive
7:30 – 9:15 a.m.

- The survey instrument might include sections on growth, programs and services, and the approach to reinvesting in Town assets; and,
- Distinguishing between essential and non-essential services.

The next sub-committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 6, 2008 at 7:45 AM in Cathy Griffin's office.

3) **2008 Financial Update, Judi Kehoe**

Former Town Comptroller Judi Kehoe introduced new Town Comptroller (and 20/20 Committee Member) Suzanne Traylor and then presented her final update on the Town's 2008 finances. She summarized her report by indicating the following:

- Town expenditures were at or below budgeted levels;
- Revenues were consistent with budgeted levels;
- There has been a positive budget variance of approximately \$580,000 to date regarding use of Fund Balance (although fund balances continue to diminish); and,
- Overall, all funds remain in good health heading towards year-end.

The following are some of the highlights of the discussion that followed Judi's presentation:

- Many communities in the region are experiencing financial challenges;
- Sales tax has been growing at a rate of @ 2.5% during 2008, slightly higher than expected although it might be attributable to rising fuel costs;
- Because the Town receives very little State aid, the impacts of the State's financial difficulties will not have a material effect on the Town's finances;
- It was clarified that sales taxes are distributed by a population based formula and are not related to the source (municipality) of the sale and that mortgage recording tax revenues are in fact based on mortgages recorded on property within the Town; and,
- The current climate is indicative of the potential for a sales tax rate increase.

4) **Part 2 Presentation of Major Programs and Services: Senior Services, Karen Pelletier**

Senior Services Director Karen Pelletier presented an overview of the Town's Senior Services Department. The presentation included the following:

- Identified and described the primary responsibilities of the department as
 - Information and referral services;
 - Transportation;
 - Nutrition programs;
 - Outreach services; and,

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
BETHLEHEM 20/20 ADVISORY COMMITTEE
September 19, 2008 Meeting Record
Elsmere Fire Station, Poplar Drive
7:30 – 9:15 a.m.

- Health related programs
- An overview of the department's budget indicating that it accounted for approximately 2% of the Town's operating budget and that the donated revenues for senior transportation exceed the annual vehicle maintenance and gas expenses;
- Identified the not-for-profit Bethlehem Senior Projects, Inc. as a key to the success of the department for its funding and other supporting activities;
- Identified the 265 member Senior Volunteer Corps as another key to success;
- Identified the growing senior population and the likelihood of increased service demands as a key issue;
- Key facts and figures: 43,000 ± program participants; 2,000± transportation users, 17,000± hours of volunteer services with a value of more than \$319,000.

During the discussion that followed the presentation, several committee members complimented the Senior Service Department on its history of great service and vision in understanding the needs of the senior population. There were also discussion about the New York Connects program, availability of State and Federal aid, the potential for management of multi-family senior residences (like the Watervliet Housing Authority), and the importance of understanding the fiscal characteristics of the senior population.

5) **Part 2 Presentation of Major Programs and Services: Parks & Recreation, Nan Lanahan**

Parks Administrator Nan Lanahan provided an overview of the programs and services of the Town's Parks & Recreation Department. The following are highlights of her presentation:

- The department has a full time staff of eleven and utilizes more than 200 seasonal workers throughout the year;
- Parks and recreation programs are important for health, community, environmental and economic reasons;
- There are nine Town Parks and the Colonial Acres Golf Course under the management of the department;
- The Town offers more than 125 recreation programs annually and more than 2,000 people attend special events offered by the Town;
- The majority of residents served by the department are children although growth is anticipated among the senior population;
- The department accounts for @ 5% of the Town's operating budget and derives revenues from user fees, facility rentals, grants and a modest amount of State aid; it maintains a capital reserve but it has not been replenished since 2006; it also collects parkland set aside fees from new residential developments to assist in funding facility related needs (not operating expenses);
- Approximately 40% of the departments expenses are offset by revenues;

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
BETHLEHEM 20/20 ADVISORY COMMITTEE
September 19, 2008 Meeting Record
Elsmere Fire Station, Poplar Drive
7:30 – 9:15 a.m.

- Among the trends, opportunities and challenges are the following:
 - Connectivity of parks and neighborhoods;
 - Environmental awareness, desire for walking trails;
 - Increased competition; and,
 - Participation of non-residents in programs
- Identified the following as key issues:
 - Maintenance and improvement of existing facilities;
 - Increasing need for technical (engineering) support;
 - Better control over facilities used for programming; and,
 - Planning for the future

A group discussion followed the formal presentation and a number of topics, including the following, were addressed:

- Is the use of parks by non-residents a potential revenue source?
- Are any program fees need based?
- Increasing enrollment in programs might be preferable to increasing fees;
- What is the potential for improved sharing of facilities with school districts? Is there a need for improved communications?
- Is transportation a potential solution to the challenges of connectivity?
- Do Town programs like Parks and Seniors use advisory boards?
- What process is used to identify youth services needed?
- We might consider establishing a standing committee of school and Town representatives to consider topics of mutual interest;
- It might be worthwhile to have a community discussion with leadership of athletic organizations in the community.

Next Meeting:

Friday, October17, 2008, Elsmere Fire Station, 7:30 – 9:15 AM

To submit comments and questions, contact:

George Leveille, gleveille@townofbethlehem.org, 518.439.4955 x1129