



Envision Arlington Standing Committee

Date: Wednesday, November 17, 2021
Time: 7:30 - 9:00 PM
Location: Remote participation via Zoom

Minutes

Members in attendance: Scott Lever, Greg Christiana, Juli Brazile, Alex Bagnall, Michael Brownstein, Jagat Adhiya

Other attendees: Len Diggins (liaison from Select Board), Rebecca Gruber (Chair of Diversity Task Group), Elizabeth Dray

1. Introductions

Introductions all around.

2. Approval of Minutes

October minutes approved unanimously.

3. Task Group Updates

Rebecca gave an update on DTG. Their last meeting included a "temperature check" with the question: "What would we like to see changed in Arlington?" Chief Flaherty took part in discussion, mainly about DEI and policing. Superintendent Homan will be attending the next DTG meeting, along with the new school DEI director. The Director of Veterans Services will be attending the January DTG meeting.

Michael and Scott gave an update on the Education Task Group (ETG). Scott gave a brief history of ETG starting a few years ago with conversations he had with then-Superintendent Bodie. Workshops were held from 2015-2017, mainly around the high school rebuild. There was a lack of alignment at the time between ETG and some members of the School Committee with regard to a visioning process given the bandwidth consumed by the high school rebuild. More recently, a discussion at an AEF meeting raised the prospect of re-engaging the possibility of a visioning process, e.g. a 5-year plan for realizing a vision within the schools. Scott reviewed some slides about a visioning process, including concepts of "vision of student as a learner" and "vision of student as a global citizen". The proposed process, still being drafted and discussed, would involve an outside facilitator with a 5-year plan starting execution in January 2023.

Len suggested that 5 years isn't nearly long enough for a vision, but rather 20+ years should be considered as well. Rebecca agreed with Len's point, since most students in the public schools are there for longer than 5 years, and we should have

a vision that spans that time. Len asked if there would be children or young adults included in the process, and Scott confirmed there would be. Elizabeth asked about the expected impact of a vision on the educational experience of students. Scott answered that a vision would provide more consistency as students rise through grade levels. Michael pointed out that success has a personal definition, and the vision process will surface community values which we can't predict before we go through the process. Len said he'd like to see students view themselves as residents of the world. Greg asked about potential resistance from school administration or staff about externally motivated changes to curricula. Scott has heard this concern before, and Michael suggested that changes made in response to COVID might create room for more movement on curriculum changes than before. Elizabeth shared her experience with the Teosinte project and the successful changes the project was able to work into the elementary curricula.

Greg gave a quick update on CEG which is proceeding along two main tracks: one which is engaged in planning of objectives and key results across the 3 focus areas (Outreach, Facilitation/Convening, and Civic Education), and the other which is ad hoc public forums like the recent Reprecincting Forum and Town Counsel's workshop on Town Meeting Warrant Articles. Len has been instrumental in identifying and handling logistics of the latter. Juli mentioned that Joan Roman holds a monthly meeting about communication with other Town staff. That meeting may be relevant to CEG's outreach efforts. Greg to follow up.

4. Town Survey

Scott gave a tentative timeline for survey results. He expects Adam Chapdelaine (Town Manager) and Jenny Raitt (Director of Planning) to do an internal review in mid December, targeting publishing of survey results in late December. They're looking at data especially with respect to DEI, and getting help from a member of AHRC on the analysis.

Scott explained that most of the work on the survey is done on a volunteer basis. The cost of Survey Monkey is covered by CDBG funds.

Jagat asked about the design of the survey. Scott expressed that while the process has begun, there's still opportunity for input. Jagat expressed an interest in diversity, which Scott is happy to make part of the December agenda.

Rebecca would love to see a visual timeline for the production of the survey, akin to the proposed visioning process that Scott presented earlier. Scott to follow up in December.

Len suggested that CEG could gather input from the public to include in the development of the Annual Town Survey. Scott suggests that Len take that up with the Planning Department. Greg is interested to be involved in those conversations.

Scott highlighted the importance of year-over-year consistency among questions so that there's a basis for longitudinal analysis. There can be tension between a longitudinal approach vs the Planning Department's desire to rotate among different town departments and commissions to ensure that all have an opportunity to be covered over the years.

Elizabeth highlighted the importance of a focus on outreach to a broad and diverse population, and that CEG may not be ready in time for this year's survey to assist with outreach given the early stage of the group's maturity. Elizabeth asked how the survey results would be shared with the community in December and that she hoped it would be something beyond just the email from the Town.

Juli gave some historical perspective around the continual difficulties with outreach that's both broad and deep.

Greg suggested that CEG could pivot priorities from longer term planning and group self-organization to more concrete, short-term outreach for this year's survey. Greg would be willing to pivot CEG's short-term focus if we felt that would be helpful.

Rebecca suggested that CEG could use this as a very practical, hands-on exercise to better understand where outreach is lacking and the difficulties involved in those cases.

Elizabeth voiced concern about the validity of the town setting policy based on results that we generally accept as not fully representative of the views of residents.

Greg suggested that survey results, even if poorly representing some demographic groups, can be correlated with the town's known demographic makeup. And extrapolating from those results based on known demographic composition isn't ideal, but better than having no survey feedback into town policy and priorities. That said, we should always strive to improve the representation of our survey through better outreach.

Scott gave some examples of some demographic groups that are well-represented and others that are under-represented, e.g. Black residents are well-represented in terms of response rates, while Hispanic residents are under-represented.

5. New Business

Elizabeth wanted the committee to be aware that she has been attending the Standing Committee meetings for 22 months; 13 months since applying for the open position; 5 months since interviewing with the Town Manager; and has volunteered on numerous occasions. She asks for the respect of a response, and that it be public record. And she asks that if members of the Standing Committee support her nomination, to express that support to the Town Manager.

Meeting adjourned at 9:19 PM.