

SUSTAINABLE BELMONT

History, Governance and Structure

Introduction/ Overview

In 2005, Belmont's Vision 21 Implementation Committee, a permanent committee of the Town whose members are appointed by the Board of Selectmen, created a task force to focus on implementing one aspect of the Town's vision: "We will be an environmentally responsible community."

The task force adopted the name, "Sustainable Belmont."

The "charge" or "mandate" of Sustainable Belmont is derived directly from the Town's Vision statement, "to assist Belmont's government, residents, and businesses in becoming a more environmentally responsible community."

In some ways, Sustainable Belmont is an experiment: it is neither an "appointed committee" (that is, a government entity established and appointed directly by the Board of Selectmen) nor is it a residents' "advocacy" organization, fully independent of the Town's government. It is an attempt to merge the best elements of both. Thus, we sometimes refer to it as a "hybrid."

Similarities to a Town Committee

- **As a task force of an appointed committee**, Sustainable Belmont is part of the government of Belmont. It is expected that Sustainable Belmont – like all of Town government -- is non-partisan, that it follows the general practices of other town structures, that its work is transparent and open to examination by the public, that it adheres to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Laws <<http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/39-23b.htm>>. Further, it is assumed that the relationship between Sustainable Belmont and other Town committees, departments and elected officials will be courteous, cooperative, and respectful.
- **Appointed leadership:** In establishing Sustainable Belmont as a task force, the Vision Committee appointed two individuals to serve in a leadership capacity. These appointed leaders were charged with soliciting volunteer members to join in the effort of helping Belmont become an environmentally responsible community. Working under the auspices of the Vision Committee, the appointed leadership (co-chairs or chair and vice-chair) reports to the Vision Committee regularly to review goals and accomplishments, identify problems, and seek advice. It is this important link, signifying that the task force is working at the behest of the Vision Committee, that provides Sustainable Belmont with its authority, responsibility and privilege as part of the Town's government. Oversight by the Vision Committee also ensures that the work of the task force is transparent, that the task force remains dedicated to its mission and that it maintains a positive working relationship with all parts of the community. The

appointed leaders serve as the official “spokespersons” for the task force in communicating with elected officials, other committees of the town, department heads, media and the public.

- **Working Groups:** Members of Sustainable Belmont may form small groups to work on specific projects. Such working groups are expected to report back to Sustainable Belmont's leadership and other members of Sustainable Belmont with recommendations for decisions regarding their work and also to report their progress toward goals. This arrangement ensures that the work is transparently and fully integrated with the work of the larger body. Such reporting should occur monthly. One person of the working group shall be designated the main contact for the working group between Sustainable Belmont and elected officials in Belmont.

Similarities to an Advocacy Group:

- **“Open membership”** This is the feature that distinguishes Sustainable Belmont from other traditional government structures in Belmont. That is, with the exception of the appointed leadership, it has an “open” or “volunteer” membership, rather than an appointed membership. In this regard, it has the “feel” of an independent advocacy group. The volunteer membership tends to consist of residents who are concerned about environmental issues, are committed to helping Belmont become an environmentally responsible town, and are eager and willing to give their energy, time, and expertise to the cause. As part of the Town’s government, members will offer collaboration, inspiration, ideas, information, and education in ways that help the town move forward.

Financial Questions

Sustainable Belmont’s existence as a quasi-government body means that – through the Vision Committee -- grants and gifts to the organization are handled by the Town’s financial structures. This relieves Sustainable Belmont of the burden and accountability of seeking status as a not-for-profit organization and gives the group automatic tax-exempt status. However, this also means that it cannot generate income by charging dues or fees or from sales. Like many, but not all, Town Committees, Sustainable Belmont does not have a budget from the Town. Funding comes exclusively from grants and from donations and gifts, freely given; the Town supports the group’s work by providing a variety of services to its committees.

Grant Opportunities

Members are encouraged to keep an eye out for possible sources of funding to support projects. Should a member learn of a possible source, please notify the leadership immediately so that the group can consider what project(s) the potential funding might support and determine when and by whom a proposal might be developed.