

Belmont's Vision Implementation Committee
Report to Town Meeting, April 25, 2011
On the 10th anniversary of the creation of the Vision
April 23, 2001 – April 23, 2011

Final June 5, 2011

In celebration of the tenth anniversary of *A Working Vision for Belmont's Future*, the Vision Implementation Committee (VIC) seized the opportunity a) to reflect back on the significant progress our Town has made toward realizing this vision and b) to look ahead to the considerable challenges of creating a sustainable and prosperous future for Belmont. This document is designed as a "report card" to the leadership and citizens of Belmont, employing the Vision document that was created by the founding members of the VIC as our template. The document includes an overview of the vision and two main categories: Our Principles and Our Common Goals. In each category, we report on some of the progress made and articulate some of the key challenges that have been expressed in a variety of public forums. This "report card" is by no means exhaustive; it is intended to be a working document, and an invitation to all those who have a stake in Belmont's future to engage in a civil and productive public conversation.

*Please note: excerpts from the text of *A Working Vision for Belmont's Future* are in *italics*.

A Working Vision for Belmont's Future

Adopted by Town Meeting, April 23, 2001

Overview:

Belmont is a desirable and welcoming community that retains a small-town atmosphere within a larger metropolitan area. Our town provides excellent educational opportunities and high quality town services. We protect the beauty and character of our natural settings and historical buildings. Thriving business centers contribute economic stability while offering places for residents to dine, shop, and socialize. The town government responds to the concerns of the residents, practices sound fiscal management, and plans for future generations. We make a commitment to preserving and enhancing our strengths as a community while respecting our differences as individuals.

Our Principles

To preserve and enhance the qualities that we value, we, the Belmont community, make a commitment to:

- foster and maintain an open and inclusive decision-making process*
- develop and use our human and financial resources wisely*
- engage in comprehensive and integrated local and regional planning*

Progress:

- Department of Public Works created, consolidating the former Highway Department, Water Department and Cemetery Department (2003)
- New position of “Planning and Economic Development Manager” replaces former “Senior Planner” to ensure oversight of economic development as part of town-wide planning (2005)
- Community Dialogue to solicit public input toward the development of 18-month plan for Belmont Public Schools (2009)
- Comprehensive Plan developed over two years with extensive public input; unanimous approval (legal authority) by Planning Board and Board of Selectmen (2010)

Challenges:

- Strategic and financial planning
- Tension in the budget process between school and town
- Role of Comprehensive Plan in shaping Town’s future direction
- Effective and consistent communications between Town leadership and citizens
- Regional planning through intentional and systematic commitment to the development of long-term relationships with other communities and state

Our Common Goals

Quality of Life

- *We will ensure an excellent school system as a cornerstone of our community, providing for the learning needs of all our children and all residents*
- *We will manage traffic through and around town to ensure the tranquility of our neighborhoods and the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists*
- *We will be an environmentally responsible community and conserve our natural habitats*

Progress:

- Judith Record Memorial Fund established to support new conservation land on McLean Hospital property (2001)
- ESCO project implemented to reduce energy use in municipal buildings (2005 – 2007)
- Sustainable Belmont established as a task force of VIC (2005), offering public education, workshops and programs in areas of sustainability; drafted Climate Action Plan; organized anti-idling campaign. Sustainable Belmont received Regional EPA Environmental Merit Award (April, 2010)
- Beech Street Center/ Council on Aging – new facility, broader programming opportunities (2009)
- More than 70 Professional Learning Teams established across the school system, representing an overhaul of faculty development in line with best practice (2010)
- New Wellington School – new facility under construction (2010)
- Increased number of bike lanes on roadways; new pedestrian crosswalks increasing in number
- Town’s recycling program gradually expanded over many years
- Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting adopted the recommended carbon-reduction goal of Climate Action Plan (2009)

- Permanent Energy Committee appointed spring (2010)
- Community Preservation Act (adopted by town-wide vote, 2010)
- Follow-up to Community Dialogue to report out progress on 18-month plan for Belmont Public Schools (May 4, 2011)

Challenges:

- Loss of resources to ensure that Belmont Public School students are provided a solid 21st century education
- High school awaiting renovation

Character of our Town

- *We will maintain our libraries, public buildings, infrastructure, and recreational facilities as investments in our future and our historical buildings as witnesses to our past.*
- *We will work with all neighborhoods and residents to identify and support retail needs and opportunities.*
- *We will value cultural enrichments and encourage local talent and creativity.*

Progress:

- World Film Festival established, its reputation creating a following beyond Belmont (2001)
- New track and field complex at high school (2002)
- Re-use of Municipal Buildings: Temporary committees established to recommend re-use of three fire stations and Benton Branch Library (2004 - 2009)
- Belmont Gallery of Art opened in Homer Building (2005)
- Renovation of Town Hall Complex completed (2005)
- Planning process initiated for renovation/rebuilding of Library (2005)
- Continued implementation of long-range replacement program for sewer and storm-water drainage infrastructure
- Continued implementation of long-range plan for road repair; completion of Pleasant Street reconstruction
- Destination restaurants opened in Cushing Square and Belmont Center (2007, 2009)
- Two new fire stations dedicated (2006)
- The "Waverley Trail," a series of markers in Waverly Square describing the history of the area implemented (2007)
- Town Meeting by-law to preserve historic Town barns passed, in recognition of Town's agricultural past (2009)
- Economic Development Advisory Committee established by Board of Selectmen, to bring renewed vitality to business centers (2011)

Challenges:

- Financial planning for ongoing maintenance and renewal of public structures (such as roads, Police Station, old light department, existing library, Underwood pool, ice rink, high school, and newer Town facilities)
- BMLD substation
- Engage local expertise more fully

Sense of Community

- *We will welcome newcomers and value diversity, while caring for our neighbors and for the needs of children, youth and seniors.*
- *We will promote the involvement of all residents in the life of our community, support citizen involvement in our town affairs, and rely on an effective, representative local government.*
- *We will preserve our small-town atmosphere.*

Progress:

- Human Rights Commission established (2004)
- VIC developed booklet: “Welcome! An Information Guide to Belmont.” (2002-2005)
- VIC established task force, Belmont Neighbors Network, to organize “Meet Belmont” event annually since 2003
- Belmont Farmers Market established (2006)
- Highland Meadow Cemetery opens (2006)
- Established a Town Government Restructuring Committee (May 2008)
- Establishment of the Belmont Media Center and its since expansion, including increased programming on cable TV regarding town updates, discussions, issues
- Planning Board and Office of Community Development worked with two neighborhoods to design overlay zoning packages
- “Belmont Serves,” a service day sponsored by the faith community (2010)
- Library’s “One Book, One Belmont” launched (2008)
- Establishment of a new home for the Town Food Pantry (2010)
- VIC’s “Envision Belmont” launched, enabling citizens to participate in guided discussions on budget priorities and choices (2010)
- Town website enhanced to include information for newcomers and others
- Creation of the Belmont Afterschool Enrichment Collaborative, to ensure quality youth development activities for Belmont elementary and middle school children (2010)

Challenges:

- Earlier engagement of citizens in the budgeting process
- Clear and consistent communication from town leadership about status of on-going efforts
- Utilizing technology to improve communications between government and citizens and access to information, and increase citizen engagement and community- building

Moving Forward

The Vision Implementation Committee has welcomed the opportunity to assess Belmont’s progress toward the realization of the Town’s vision on the occasion of its tenth anniversary. Looking toward the months and years ahead, we have identified three urgent challenges:

1. Complete Town government restructuring to improve ability to govern and implement.
2. Create coordinated budgeting process and long-term financial plan for Town and Schools.

3. Improve two-way communication between Town and citizens

Thank you in advance for your engagement in the civic life of Belmont. We look forward to hearing from you! Please email your comments or feedback to info@envision-belmont.org, or sign up online to download the full report and continue the conversation at www.envision-belmont.org.

Members of the Vision Implementation Committee (April 2011)

Tim Bowman, Chair
Sara Masucci, Vice-Chair
Jane Feinberg
Jennifer Page
Wendy Rundle
Michael Sattler
Paul Solomon