

During 2004 the Vision 21 Implementation Committee continued to address its mandate, “to facilitate, enable, and help the Town to achieve the Working Vision of the Town of Belmont.” (See *Working Vision for Belmont’s Future*, page 6). During the year, the Committee met 13 times in formal session; additionally, much of its work was carried out through subcommittees and citizen groups working under the aegis of the Committee.

The following are initiatives emphasized by the Vision 21 Implementation Committee in 2004, with relevant extracts from the *Working Vision for Belmont’s Future*.

Business and Economic Development Planning Group (BEDPG)

“Thriving business centers contribute economic stability while offering places for residents to dine, shop and socialize.”

Established by the Board of Selectmen in 2002, with its work overseen by the Vision Committee, BEDPG’s mandate is to develop recommendations for facilitating the opening of new businesses, attracting desirable new businesses, and preserving and enhancing current businesses.

In 2004 BEDPG:

- (1) disseminated the results of the town-wide survey on revitalization of our business districts, indicating that Town residents would welcome a greater variety of retail and dining options;
- (2) encouraged greater participation in Belmont by the Watertown/Belmont Chamber of Commerce;
- (3) initiated and participated in the Waverley Square Fire Station Re-Use Committee (see details below);
- (4) contributed to the successful passage of a town-wide referendum approving three full liquor licenses for restaurants with seating capacity of 130–250;
- (5) investigated options for a reduced-cost trash removal program for businesses and began outreach to determine business interest;
- (6) developed a first-draft database of businesses and commercial properties in Town.

Belmont Neighbors Network

“We will welcome newcomers and value diversity.”

This citizen group, organized by the Vision Committee in 2003, sponsored two events in 2004:

- (1) “Meet Belmont”, a town-wide welcoming event, was held again this year in late August in the library. Representatives from some 60 organizations, clubs, groups, and town offices in Belmont gathered to share information about their work and invite participation. Approximately 200 enthusiastic residents, many but not all of them newcomers, attended to learn more about opportunities, activities and practices in our town. It was a dynamic and crowded event. Clearly “Meet Belmont” has outgrown the library site, and the Newcomers Network will seek a larger venue for next year.
- (2) On May 17, the Belmont Neighbors Network acknowledged an historic day in Massachusetts: the first day that gay and lesbian couples could apply for a marriage license. To honor this expansion of civil liberties in our state and to celebrate the diversity of our community, the Neighbors Network gave a rose and congratulations card to every couple, both straight and gay, that applied at Town Hall that day.

Waverley Square Fire Station Re-Use Committee

“We will maintain our...historic buildings as witnesses to our past.” “We will foster and maintain an inclusive decision-making process.” “We will promote the involvement of all residents in the life of our community.”

Proposed by BEDPG in 2003 and continued through most of 2004, this initiative was a joint project of the Vision Committee, BEDPG, and the Office of Community Development. A seven-person Steering Committee, including several residents of the Waverley area, was appointed by the Board of Selectmen and was charged with seeking consensus for a re-use alternative for the Waverley Square Fire Station, one that would allow for the prompt disposition of the building with the stipulation that the façade of the building be preserved. The Committee was assisted by technical consultants in real estate, commercial development, finances and group facilitation, funded through a grant from the State’s Ready Resource Fund.

By achieving consensus for an appropriate re-use prior to the building’s sale, the Town expected to forestall the potential for subsequent protracted public debate and thereby accelerate the flow of tax revenue. The committee developed an open, consensus-building process that included a series of town-wide public forums. The final report, with a recommendation that the fire station become a condominium complex, was submitted to the Board of Selectmen in July, 2004; the recommendations were also forwarded to the Planning Board for development of zoning by-laws reflecting the proposed new use.

Environmental Initiative

"We will be an environmentally responsible community and conserve our natural habitats."

During 2004, the Vision 21 Implementation Committee focused on planning a public event with the goals of sharing information about current environmentally-responsible policy and action in Belmont, raising awareness and inviting involvement to further action on issues of conservation and sustainability. We chose to organize an environmental fair.

The fair, held in the Field House at Belmont High School on October 23, was broad-based with 80 exhibitors organized under the categories of earth, air (transportation), fire (energy) and water, including 26 Belmont town departments, committees, and citizen groups. The planning group received major financial support from Cambridge Savings Bank, Citizens Bank and Grants for Peace of Belmont, which made the event possible. The fair was also made possible by over 150 volunteers and attracted over 1200 participants.

Surveys revealed an enthusiastic assessment by both participants and exhibitors. We believe the fair was a successful start in meeting the goals of raising environmental awareness and sharing information about environmental action. We intend to follow up by inviting interested citizens to join a task force affiliated with the Vision Implementation Committee to broaden the focus and outreach on environmental responsibility in Belmont.



The "Segway" is demonstrated at the environmental fair



The Belmont Environmental Fair, held in October, was a busy day for the 80 exhibitors

Public Information and Communications Planning Group (PICPG)

"We will promote the involvement of all residents in the life of our community, (and) support citizen involvement in our town affairs."

Established by the Board of Selectmen in 2002 and overseen by the Vision 21 Implementation Committee, PICPG concluded its work in January 2004 by submitting its final report to the Board of Selectmen. (Text of report is on Town's web site, see Belmont Vision Committee web page.) The report included commendations for the variety of ways the Town obtains and provides information. Primary findings noted difficulties experienced by residents in obtaining information. The report also found that, though the content and organization of the Town's web site is improving, some users still have difficulty finding information, or the information is not current.

PICPG recommendations included:

- Continue to provide communication through many channels.
- Improve telephone service levels.
- Continue to improve and invest in BTWS for easier navigation and updating information.
- Plan for increasing investment in the BTWS technology and training to support online transactions, more extensive and searchable document repository, better navigation, and e-mail tracking.

- Ensure that all Town Departments and employees are maintaining BTWS.
- Educate residents about how to find and provide information on the BTWS.
- Encourage and enhance use of cable TV.

The Vision 21 Implementation Committee is especially grateful for the staff support provided by the Senior Planner, Timothy Higgins, and by Sandra Curro, Committees and Commissions Coordinator in the Office of Selectmen.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Page, Chairman