

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) serves at the request of the Board of Selectmen but also acts as an advisor to specific Town departments and other Town committees on an as-needed basis. In this capacity, ITAC provides guidance on a variety of information technology (IT) issues. The Committee concerns itself with matters of information delivery; ensuring access to appropriate communications technology; increasing the efficiency of transactions involving the Town departments; and working to ensure the proper deployment of infrastructure and technology for the Town departments and citizenry. In addition, ITAC provides, as necessary, strategic IT planning advice for the Town's departments and committees.

Changes in Membership

The ITAC consists of 9 members, 4 of whom are appointed by the Board of Selectmen, 4 of whom are appointed by the School Committee, and 1 of whom is appointed by the Board of Trustees of the Belmont Public Library.

Matthew Berube resigned from the ITAC in May 2006 upon moving out of Belmont, and Julie Meringer resigned her appointment in June 2006 due to outside demands on her time. At the end of June 2006, the terms of Kent Carlson and Jonathan Green expired; Kent Carlson chose not to seek re-appointment and Jonathan Green was re-appointed by the Board of Selectmen. David Rich (appointed by the Board of Library Trustees) joined the ITAC in July 2006. As of 12/31/2006, Committee members were James Berets (Co-chairman), Elizabeth Firenze, Simson Garfinkel (Clerk), David Goldberg, Jonathan Green (Co-chairman), David Rich, and Charles Smart; two seats were open.

Summary of Activities

ITAC meeting participants also include Dr. Lee McCanne, Director of Technology, Belmont Public Schools; Mr. David Petto, Manager of Information Technology, Town of Belmont; and Mr. John Bowe, member of the Belmont School Committee. Dr. McCanne and Mr. Petto regularly update the Committee on IT issues facing the school system and Town respectively, and solicit feedback on issues of concern.

During the fall of 2002 and the winter of 2003, the ITAC conducted a survey of Town and school IT needs through a series of interviews with departmental staff, and identified a number of areas for operational improvement. One of the most commonly cited issues was the challenge that departments had in using Systems & Software, Inc.'s (www.ssiutilitysuite.com) financial management system to run the Town and school's financial operations, principally because the software was intended to support the operations of a municipal utility rather than those of a Town or school system. In mid-2005 the ITAC learned that Ms. Barbara Hagg, the Town Accountant, had begun an initiative to explore alternatives to S&S by hiring a consultant to determine the Town and school's requirements for a financial management system. Toward the end of 2005, the ITAC was requested by Mr. Angelo Firenze, Selectman, to provide input and feedback during the process of replacing the financial management system.

Because of the importance of the new financial management system to the Town, the ITAC devoted its initial meetings of 2006 to assisting Barbara Hagg, David Petto, and Mr. Floyd Carmen, Town Treasurer, with planning for and providing input on the replacement system. This included:

- Meeting with representatives of the Town and Mr. John Killoran of JFK Systems, a consultant retained by the Town, to review a draft RFR and provide detailed comments on additional requirements the Town might consider;
- Reviewing proposals submitted by potential vendors and providing insights into those proposals to assist the Town in its decision-making process; and
- After the selection of the MUNIS system from Tyler Technologies, tracking the implementation progress on an ongoing basis throughout 2006.

Also during 2006, Dr. McCanne presented to the ITAC various matters impacting the Belmont Public Schools. These matters included, among others, a system-wide Instructional Technology Audit conducted by the Massachusetts Elementary School Principal's Association, and the use of the free, open source course management system Moodle. The ITAC also reviewed a proposal from EdNets, Inc. to provide website services and revenue to the Town in exchange for affinity-marketing programs that would be established on the School websites. The ITAC recommended that the Town not engage with EdNets but rather allow EdNets to establish a track record and better define its business plan before the Town reconsiders its offering.

While the Department of Educational Technology has accomplished a tremendous amount with limited resources, and there exist within the school system areas of significant use, Dr. McCanne continues to report that information technology use as a teaching tool is sporadic and few technology-based educational activities are done consistently within grade levels or subjects. The Belmont Public Schools have no Educational Technology Integration Specialist on staff, and are ranked in the bottom 15% of Massachusetts communities surveyed by the Mass. DOE in educational technology.

Also during 2006, Mr. Petto updated the ITAC frequently on Town-related technology issues, including the Town's fiber network (particularly the need for redundancy), the deployment of a Geographic Information System (GIS) and Internet Protocol (IP) telephone system, the redesign of the Town's website (deferred until 2007 due to the MUNIS rollout), and other topics.

Respectfully submitted,
James Berets, Co-Chairman
Jonathan Green, Co-Chairman