

Tara Lynch

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From: Chris Hawkins <chrishawkins1066@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 2, 2024 11:09 AM
To: Christopher D. Hawkins <CHawkins@dtclawyers.com>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Haverhill Tomorrow Committee

----- Forwarded message -----
From: Chris Hawkins <chrishawkins1066@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Mar 20, 2023 at 7:57 AM
Subject: Re: Haverhill Tomorrow Committee
To: srobbins <srobbins@earthlink.net>

Happy to help

Sent from my iPad

On Mar 19, 2023, at 9:24 PM, srobbins <srobbins@earthlink.net> wrote:

Chris

That is a great idea, and very detailed proposed plan.

I can't thank you enough for taking the interest, and moreso the time from your weekend for us.

Steve

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

----- Original message -----

From: Chris Hawkins <chrishawkins1066@gmail.com>

Date: 3/19/23 17:52 (GMT-05:00)

To: srobbins@earthlink.net, kemoyse@icloud.com

Subject: Haverhill Tomorrow Committee

Here's the background.

In 2000, I chaired the Newmarket Tomorrow Committee. That was a large committee of 30-40 people. It was greatly facilitated by our Regional Planning organization. Its purpose was to develop the design concepts that were used to redevelop our downtown area. The Committee was a total success (in my opinion) and the ideas we developed were implemented in the reconstruction of our downtown, which was finally completed in 2009.

Haverhill faces a different set of challenges, but the process used by the Newmarket Tomorrow Committee can I believe be adapted for Haverhill. The attached memo is a very rough summary of some ideas to facilitate a low-stakes community visioning process that I believe can help the community on many levels.

Based upon what I heard yesterday, and my overall experience with both Woodsville and the Town, there seem to be a lot of people who want to figure out how to pull the community together but there is currently no constructive mechanism to bridge the gap from where the community is to where it wants to be.

The Haverhill Tomorrow Committee is intended to be that bridge.

Please review carefully and happy to discuss at your convenience.

Haverhill Tomorrow Committee

This is not legal advice and is not billed to the Town. This is from the perspective of a semi-informed outsider. This is very rough and intended only to trigger thought and discussion. If you believe this idea has merit, we can discuss informally how to refine it to more fully meet the Town's needs. If you believe some of the ideas in this document have merit, you can bring it forward to the Board and the community for further discussion and refinement before it is implemented. I'm happy to talk this through with you, the Board or anyone else at any time.

The first and most important thing for you to understand is that this process will take a lot of time. That's a feature, not a bug. However, I believe this type of process can help the entire community turn around the current unhealthy dynamic and move towards consensus on the important challenges it faces.

The Big Picture

The Town of Haverhill is at a critical crossroads. The Town has a unique governance structure that poses challenges to the community as a whole. The Town consists of several precincts or districts with interests perceived to be at odds with the community as a whole. This structure is largely the result of historical conditions that may or may not pertain to the community's current conditions and may hinder the community's ability to address its current and future challenges.

In recent years, these structural issues have resulted in tension that has broken out in actual or threatened legal disputes. The legal disputes have been expensive and have exacerbated tensions, but have not addressed the underlying structural and political issues. More importantly, these tensions have resulted in a corrosive political environment that threatens to fray the underlying connections that bind the community together and has resulted in fraught political discussions and governance issues.

These conditions have real consequences to the community as a whole. In order to survive and thrive, the community must develop a consensus vision of its future and means to discuss and resolve disputes without resort to litigation or corrosive political discussion.

It is necessary to change the current dynamic and restore a constructive dialogue so the community can constructively address its challenges and exploit its opportunities. This is necessary so that people can invest their lives, families, energy, skills, and talents with confidence and we can provide our children a positive vision for the future.

The First Step

The first step is to develop a low-stakes means for the community to candidly discuss its current challenges and start discussing means to address those challenges.

Why Is This a Good Idea?

If the community can develop a consensus vision for itself and its future, that vision should become the basis of every other action the community takes. This includes all levels of policy-making, such planning and zoning, marketing and business development, public projects, grant

funding, and allocation of government resources. In short, this consensus will drive policy making and decision-making at all levels of the community.

So What's the Proposal?

The proposal is for the Board of Selectmen to create a "Haverhill Tomorrow Committee" to facilitate the community visioning process.

How will the Committee Work?

This question will be broken down into subquestions.

What is the Committee's Mission?

To develop a document that outlines the community's current challenges, opportunities, resources, and consensus vision for the future.

Needless to say, all Committee meetings will be conducted in public and detailed minutes should be kept.

How Big Should the Committee Be?

The Committee should be large, but not so large as to be unmanageable. In the range of 30-40 people. It should include local business owners, representatives of significant community institutions (e.g., health care providers; churches; community service agencies), community activists, school employees, and ordinary residents both young and old. Each precinct should have at least one representative. To the extent possible, it should include long-time residents, newer resident, members of working families, and at least one responsible high school student (perhaps the senior class president).

The Board should strive to ensure the committee represents a fair cross-section of the community with balance among the various constituencies.

The Board, Planning Board, Budget Committee, Conservation Commission and School Board should each have members on the Committee, but the Committee's work should be driven by the community and not by the elected leaders to the extent possible. The underlying purpose is for a community vision to be developed from the ground up and not from the top down.

The Town Administration, including the Town Manager, Police, Fire and Highway Departments, as well as the administrator of the Woodsville Village Fire District, should provide members on an ex officio basis to provide information and support as required.

How Will the Committee Work?

The Committee will work primarily through subcommittees. This will make the Committee more efficient and manageable.

The subcommittee structure needs to be very carefully considered. I don't know enough about how Haverhill works to formulate very specific idea. This is only a springboard for discussion.

The subcommittees may, for example, consist of the following:

History and Governance

Review and summarize the history and development of each precinct. What they are and why they were created. A lot of this work has already been done through the various lawsuits. This subcommittee could consist of one member from each of the precincts: East Haverhill, Haverhill, Haverhill Corners, Mountain Lakes, Pike, North Haverhill and Woodsville.

This Committee would also describe the rules under which each precinct operates and how they relate to one another.

Resources

This committee would essentially take a community inventory: how many people do we have? What are their demographics? Where are they located? What public utilities do we have? Where are our businesses located? Where do we sleep, eat, shop, entertain ourselves, and send our kids to school? What is our tax base? How much is residential, commercial, industrial? What property do the various precincts own? What is the state of our transportation system? What are the current plans for our infrastructure? A lot of this information is in the Town Report (but how many people really read the Town Report?).

On reflection this subcommittee might be further broken down into economic and non-economic resources.

This would include natural resources and amenities. Where do people play ball, hike, hunt, fish, trap, ride ATVs and snowmobiles, listen to music, grab a burger and a beer, boat, etc.

This committee would also discuss business development issues. How can we allocate our resources to more effectively foster and attract business to our community?

This may seem mundane, but there is tremendous value in members of the community investigating these issues for themselves.

Survey

A subcommittee can work on developing a community survey. This can be a combination of "canned" and open-ended questions.

For example: what do you like best about living in Haverhill? What do you like least about living in Haverhill? What do you think are the biggest challenges¹ currently facing this community? Please describe three things² the community can do to improve the quality of your life. If one thing in the community could be changed to improve the quality of your life what would it be?

Surveys can be tricky because they can be abused. They should include general demographic information, especially age. However, I do not think the person's precinct should be identified – the idea is to pull the community together. The questions should be carefully crafted to ensure the results are meaningful. They should be framed at a high level and not suggestive. They should be anonymous. They should be printed on colored card stock with the Town seal to make them more difficult to counterfeit (to prevent one person from sending in 100 responses, for example). The total number distributed should be carefully tracked. The Committee needs to consider whether to send one per household or one per person. There are risks and benefits to both approaches that need to be thoroughly discussed.

How Will the Committee Be Led?

Ideally, the Committee will be chaired by a non-employee and non-elected community member who has superior organizational skills, a great deal of patience and energy, and is credible across all constituencies. The Chair would suppress their own opinions and would not participate directly in subcommittee work, but would focus on ensuring the Committee as a whole stays on track. This is a critical function and this person will probably be hard to find.

If there is a regional planning organization, they may be able to provide support and guidance or perhaps even provide a facilitator.

How Often Should the Committee Meet?

The Committee should hold an organizational meeting to discuss the mission and organize the subcommittees. The Committee should meet again within the following 30 days to ensure the subcommittees are up and running and discuss any issues that may impede progress or other issues that may arise. Once the subcommittees are up and running they should one once per month and the Committee as a whole can meet every two months.³ All meetings should be public and detailed minutes should be kept of all Committee and subcommittee meetings.

How Long Should the Committee's Work Take?

¹ I would use “challenge” rather than “problem.” People like challenges but shy away from problems.

² Three is a manageable number and themes are more likely to emerge.

³ As you know, two extra meetings every month is a lot.

I suggest the Committee be directed to issue a preliminary report to the Board within 12 months. The report should include any issues the Committee believes still need to be addressed and the amount of time it thinks it needs to complete its work.

At that time, the Board can consider holding a charrette: a facilitated free-flowing public discussion of the preliminary report. People should be encouraged to provide their input and discuss what's important to them about the community. The themes that emerge from that discussion will be included in the report and used to refine the Committee's work going forward from that point.

What Happens when the Report is Complete?

Let's say it takes another 6 months after the first charrette to develop a complete final draft report. That report would be published and another charrette would be held to ensure the community is satisfied it fairly reflects a consensus (consensus does not mean unanimous) vision of the community.

Any remaining details would then be incorporated into the report and it would be finalized by the Committee.

How does the Community Use the Report?

The report, and the vision of the future that it represents, would be used to drive all manner of community decisions from the town budget, board policies and procedures, planning and zoning, allocation of government resources, marketing and attraction of business, etc. It can be handed to developers and posted on the website for future residents. The Board would have clear and unmistakable guidance from the community as to its direction.

The process in itself is hugely beneficial because the community members would be given a direct voice in developing the future vision of the community. Because the process is low-stakes (no taxes will be increased and no political office won or lost due to the Committee's work) it will give people a constructive outlet for their concerns.

From the Committee's report, the Board can develop a list of priorities and directives for the Town Manager so that resources can be allocated appropriately and accountability can be maintained all the way around. The Board can develop policies and procedures consistent with the community vision.

Further, the Board can use the report as a springboard for the constructive use of legal counsel and other professionals, and possibly for the development of future legislation if necessary. For example, to identify and help rectify any legal obstacles to accomplishing the community vision. This is a much better use of attorney dollars than on endless litigation.