

**MINUTES FOR THE
VILLAGE INNOVATION PILOT PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM
OF THE TOWN OF EXETER, RHODE ISLAND
675 TEN ROD ROAD
EXETER, RI 02822
JANUARY 29, 2008
7:00 P.M.**

MEETING LOCATION: Exeter Public Library
Program Room
773 Ten Rod Road, Exeter

CALL TO ORDER:

Scott Millar called the meeting to order, thanking folks for their patience with the meeting's late start. He gave Shelia Reynolds-Boothroyd the floor to announce the creation of the Exeter Historical Society. She let them know when the first meeting of this group will be.

INTRODUCTION: Susan Westa, Borderlands Village Innovation Pilot Coordinator

Susan Westa provided an overview of the meeting's schedule and reviewed the selection process for the visioning consultant, noting that it would be a partnership decision among the two Pilot towns, the bi-state Advisory Group's Review Team and the core project partners.

CONSULTANT PRESENTATIONS

The Cecil Team presented its proposal first. Team members present included Ken Buckland and Donald Powers. Following their presentation, Pilot Team members asked questions that arose from the presentation and/or the written proposal. Questions included:

- Location of two firms and background on presenters: The presenters described where they were from and in response to a specific question, Donald Powers described the genesis of his firm, which works at the intersection of planning and architecture.
- Whether any of the projects presented as examples had been realized: Presenters responded that many of them had made progress, noting that with longer term plans, elements are not accomplished all at once. Some resulted in zone changes, some in bricks and mortar projects; with the visioning projects, success is measured in decades vs. a 5-five year increment. One presenter emphasized that you can put the design elements in place to create the conditions for growth vs. waiting for a place to evolve organically over time.
- The process for Pilot Team training and tasks under proposal: The presenters noted they would be looking for the local group to help with the logistics of events, provide information on local media, research on specific issues in the town and research on positions of key agencies and neighboring towns.
- Whether the staff be the same throughout the project: The presenters responded yes and that resumes were indicated in proposal.

- Tools and processes planned for use: The presenters described the importance of layout logistics for events and noted they could provide graphic services, slide shows, materials for website. They would facilitate events, such as the retreat described in the proposal.
- How they would create feedback loops in process: The presenters would mirror back to larger community what had been collected by Local Pilot Team members and consultants (at events) to see if they were synthesizing information accurately.
- Products from process: Presenters responded that it would depend on what came out of process and gave examples of different formats.
- Question of source of demographics presented: U.S. Census
- Whether consultants had concerns about the 6-month proposed schedule: Presenters responded that they thought it was reasonable because the visioning phase would be followed by others focused on greater detail and implementation. They noted that they would have enough lead time to plan key events.
- Whether only means of community input is four public workshops: Other means would include online survey and blog. They noted the success had with a survey in another project in Jamestown, noting that it allows folks to respond in ways they may not feel comfortable doing in big meetings.
- Where did responsibility for online tools, including database, fall: Consultants could help with set-up and link from town website. Ariana McBride noted that the Borderlands Project may be able to help with some of the development of the online components.
- Question of how to engage folks at big meetings: Presenters noted that they often break into smaller groups and use of different hands-on activities to get people engaged. They noted the importance of setting ground-rules in all these activities.
- Have consultants looked at past failures in planning and lessons learned: Presenters said they have seen projects fail when alternatives were not considered or when there was not enough community discussion or analysis.

The Dodson Team presented second. Team members present included Peter Flinker and Patrick Field. Following their presentation, Pilot Team members asked questions that arose from the presentation and/or the written proposal. Questions included:

- Questioned why CBI presented the wind farm project as an example given that the final vote was almost evenly split in the town: Mr. Field noted that there was an important distinction between the two projects he had described with this one being a project framed to be reactive to a particular proposal (vs. a more proactive planning process). He noted that while the town ultimately chose to not support the windmills (by a small margin), folks felt that the issue had been properly studied and vetted from all angles.
- Questioned whether team members had worked together before: Team members have not but came together specifically around the Pilot RFP.
- What is the critical mass for some of the higher tech tools presented: Presenters noted that this is a key question for any kind of planning activity and that they would work with the Pilot Team to identify the best tools to use. Specifically, they noted that for the chip game, any size group worked well for this but for keypad polling, a larger group was better.

- Questioned how the consultant team reached the time estimates they did for the process: Presenters noted that they had described a general approach that would need to be tailored through the initial assessment in the town.
- Questioned what presenters meant by the “story of the place”: Mr. Flinker responded that the story is a way to think about the heart and soul of a community, what has been important over time and that we all carry a story in our own minds of our community. Some ideas to capture this are through collecting photographs and gathering oral histories. Presenters noted the experimental nature of the Pilot and how they are excited to test ideas with the town. One Pilot Team member noted that you could say that the town participants are the “designers of this process”, to which the Flinker agreed.
- How would the right tools/process be determined: Consultants would work through initial assessment (interview process) and with Pilot Team to determine the right activities. Flinker noted his excitement in working with CBI given their consensus building approach.
- Questioned what consensus was in this kind of project or whether it was more about building trust and finding some common ground: Presenters noted it depends on project, in some cases a broad consensus can be found, in other cases they are dealing with a far more complex set of interests. The hope for this project is that there is a high level of community engagement and shared information sharing so that conflict can be reduced.

DISCUSSION

Following the two presentations, the group discussed the finalists. Although it was felt that both proposals were strong, the group preferred the Dodson Team proposal. Some reasons included:

- They presented more clearly new ways of gathering information and getting folks to participate
- Folks seem to connect better with their approach and language used to describe the project
- Was some concern since members had not worked together before but others felt that it was normal for folks to form new partnerships in these kinds of projects
- Would have like to have met Steve Mullen from Foresee to discuss the mix of tools more
- Some folks had experience working with Dodson and noted it had always been a very positive experience, with the consultant often going above and beyond to make a project a success.
- Liked how the team had talked about the natural ecosystem and the importance of its protection.

ADJOURNMENT

At the next meeting, the group will discuss appointing a spokesperson for the Local Pilot Team. The meeting adjourned at 9:40PM.

The next meeting will be February 27, 2007 at the Exeter Public Library.