

Minutes of the Shutesbury Web Committee

Meeting date: December 3, 2008 at Shutesbury Town Hall

Convened: 7:20pm

Present: Fred Steinberg – Chair, Leslie Bracebridge, Paul Vlach (minutes)

Absent: Willa Jarnagin

1 - Westover Air Force Reserve Base staffer had asked us to post a link to their website. The rationale was that they had many job openings on a recurring basis, and residents may be interested in the openings.

Discussion: The link provided was a general link to their website. There was no obvious link to job postings, and they were rather hard to find. Although the link would be allowed under current town policy, it seemed to be a site of limited general interest to townspeople, and if they did want to find the site, they could do so rather easily.

Decision: No posting to be done, which was Fred's initial judgment on the matter. As Chair and webmaster, we rely on Fred to apply the policy, and this was consistent.

2 – Links page: As a result of maintenance work, we found a dead link to the Franklin Chamber of Commerce. This prompted discussion about our "links page", which currently is listed as "Legislators and State Offices", but has some miscellaneous links as well. Decided: Keep that page, and content; and add another "Links" page, named as Fred sees fit, with the other sites.

We reviewed the State website, MA.gov, and reviewed their site policy. We like the wording, believe it must have been reviewed and passed legal vetting, and offers a bit more latitude on posting of links to other sites. It would allow for links to affiliated agencies doing business with the town, or of general interest to the residents, providing services or info not generally available through town sources, such as the Franklin Chamber site, and the Center for Ecological Technology (CET).

We agreed to request that the Selectboard adopt the State website links policy, in place of our current one. Paul will draft that request to the Board.

3 – Tax Collector Page: It came to our attention that the surcharge wording on the Collector's page, which offers the link to pay taxes online through a bank, is not accurate. It states that there is a surcharge for each transaction (so the town does not pay credit card fees) but it does not make it clear, on the town or bank site, that if you pay directly from your own bank accounts, such as using check routing numbers, there is no fee beyond the tax amount being paid.

Paul and Fred will work on alternative wording, consult with Collector Ellen McKay, and try to make the system easier to use, by describing which tax bill reference numbers go in which fields

on the banking site. We hope to make the process better understood, and therefore more utilized, by all residents.

4 – TA Reports: In the past two months or so, David Dann has been forwarding his weekly Town Administrator Reports, which he prepares to brief the Selectboard, to the Web Committee. They are being sent out via the town wide email system to subscribers, and archived so they are available on the website, both generally by Fred.

David generally refers to attachments which he provides to the Board, and his summary does not generally provide much insight into those documents. Committee members, and we presume David as well, have received repeated inquiries about getting those attachments, where they're found, etc. Fred periodically indicates in emails, and has a note on the website, that they are available upon request at the Town Hall. Also, David had talked about providing the Selectboard meeting agendas in advance, for our distribution.

We agreed to recommend to David and the Board that the agendas be provided, and that one of the two scanners available to Town Hall staff be used to scan at least some of the TA Report attachments, if they are not already available as electronic files (or provided directly, if they are). It seems most reasonable that David handle the scanning, based upon his knowledge of the attachments, interest expressed in the past by residents, of past attachments, and his perspective on the value of the new documents crossing his desk, as he references them in his TA report. They could then be emailed along with the TA report to the committee, so they can be posted on the website. The current town emailing system (the "email blast", as David refers to it) does not handle attachments, and we would need to be cognizant of files sizes, with many subscribers on dial-up access. Paul will forward this request to David and the Board along with the links policy change request.

5 – Web counters: A town board member asked if we had any "hit counter" on town pages, which track activity on the site. We do not, but Fred will add a free Google Application to do this, which will provide info for the committee, and upon request, to others who ask. There will be no visible "counters" on any of the page displays.

6 – Spam: The amount of "spam", or unsolicited junk email, to all town account addresses, continues to be a problem, and source of (kindly, pleading) complaints to the committee. Fred suggests that free Google Messaging Apps would offer a very good filtering process. Town email account holders should be able to access their email via a Google web interface, or continue to use their desktop email program of choice; and send out under their town identities, while seeing virtually no spam content.

As a test, Fred will try to set up a test of this on the Recycling@shutesbury.org address, since Paul is currently handling traffic through that account, due to the recent resignation of the Recycling Coordinator. A concern would be the level of expertise needed, or training required, for other town users to switch over to this system. We will need to review this, prior to full implementation, but the spam factor that all have been dealing with, is thought to be a valid driving force for the change.

7 – Mailing list signup: Recently, we became aware of how awkward and confusing the automated MajorDomo signup and unsubscribe system can be for residents, when they want to get on or off the town email list. Given the relatively low volume of activity, and in order to make it as simple as possible for each resident using it, the wording will be changed by Fred, and we'll just direct people to send their requests to the web@shutesbury.org address, and one of the committee members will adjust the mailing list.

8 – Request for assistance from TA: David Dann, Town Administrator, inquired whether one or more from the committee could assist with a discussion and possible transition to shared software, and/or shared backups (ie: installing a town server) for the various financial officers of the town. There will be a meeting in January on this. Based on the info provided, it sounded like we did not have the expertise to be of assistance, and Fred will advise David of that, and our deferment on the matter.

9 – Winter Newsletter: The publishing date for the Winter “Our Town” newsletter is January 9th, with submissions required by December 23rd. Leslie will draft something up on behalf of the committee, and some possible content was discussed.

10 – Recycling and Solid Waste webpages have been reviewed, revised, and the adjustments have been posted by Fred over the past several months. Gail Fleishaker of the Recycling and Solid Waste Committee had spearheaded the project for that group, and Fred and Paul had helped out with content and formatting issues. Paul noted that having fresh and current content is a welcome step, and important to the credibility of the site overall, and the affected pages, of course. The RSWC had recently revised and reprinted the town Recycling Almanac, and the new electronic version of that is available on the town site, as well.

Fred and Leslie – a note here... didn't the Planning Board, Ken Holmberg for the Assessors, and Lisa or Janice from ConCom also update their pages and/or content over the past several months? We should mention them, too. I can do the rewording, just let me know who, or what group, and what content, if applicable.

11 – Paul read his meeting minutes back, and they were approved in concept.

Meeting adjourned: 9:15pm

Respectfully submitted,
Paul A. Vlach