

Demographic Change Task Force

Minutes of meeting on March 4, 2009

Present: Marian Cohen (2020 Vision Com. Liaison), Margaret Coppe (School Liaison), Ben Esty, Bebe Fallick (Chair), Dan Krupka, Candy McLaughlin (Asst. to the Town Manager), Carl Valente (Town Manager), Gavin Bates (Town Intern)

Invitees: William Hadley (DPW Director), Karen Simmons (Recreation Director)

Presentation by William Hadley

Bill began by observing that the elimination of water meters inside homes had coincidentally eliminated an opportunity of the town's meter readers to keep an eye on the health of the elderly population. His observation echoes that of Police Chief Casey, expressed at our meeting on September 24, 2008: because many seniors live alone in single-family homes, seldom seen by friends and family, some of their health problems escape detection until they become truly serious.

For the DPW, a recent topic of debate with demographic overtones was the choice of surface for the new sidewalks in the center of town on the west side of Massachusetts Avenue. The Disability Commission argued for the smoothest possible surface, while those favoring an historical look preferred bricks similar to those on the east side. The DPW struck a compromise by installing wire-cut bricks, which have a smooth surface.

All new sidewalk installations have wheelchair-friendly ramps at corners, although they are mandated only for State-funded improvements.

The ability to communicate with Lexington residents who don't speak English, an issue raised by several previous invitees, was also mentioned by Bill. As it turns out, DPW had an employee who was able to speak with residents from India. With her departure, the department has lost an important capability. No plans exist to replace her with her language capability.

The topic of Town employees who speak other languages led to a discussion of the methods used by the Town to avoid hiring undocumented immigrants. While the Town has a process for checking on the immigration status of its own employees, it doesn't check on the immigration status of its contractors.

Although the DPW is not responsible for Lexpress, the topic came up because the service is used extensively by seniors. (Students, however, are by far the heaviest users.)

The remainder of the topics covered by Bill concerned activities of the DPW without obvious links to demographic change. They included the management of Town facilities; the process for snow plowing; GIS for water mains, sewers, hydrants and trees; and the impact of the new building on the morale of the DPW.

At the conclusion of Bill's presentation, Marian Cohen and Ben Esty raised again the issue of improving the ability of the Town's departments to communicate with the growing number of people who don't speak English or speak it poorly. Marian inquired about the possibility of recruiting people who could speak with members of the various Asian communities. Ben Esty

suggested approaching these communities with a request to designate members who could serve as liaison with the Town departments.

Carl Valente returned to the subject of Lexpress and informed the Task Force that various ideas for expanding the type of service had been considered. Among these is the concept of dial-a-ride.

Presentation by Karen Simmons

Karen explained that the Department of Recreation functions as an Enterprise: its operating budget is derived from fees paid by the participants in its 400 programs. In addition to programs that it operates at the major venues – the nine-hole golf course, the swimming pool, tennis courts and basketball courts – the Department runs a summer day camp, a science program and a chess program.

To manage its programs, the Recreation Department relies on five full-time staff members and 150 seasonal staff members. Since the safety of participants is deemed to be of the highest importance, the staff is trained to deal with medical emergencies and threatening behaviors.

The Town's demographic evolution is most noticeable at the golf course, which is becoming increasingly popular with the Town's Asian population. Overall, Karen has noticed a growing participation by adults in all of the Department's programs.

When asked about her wishes for the Recreation Department, Karen responded with "a proper recreation center." This led to a discussion of the use of the schools' facilities. It transpires that the High School and Middle Schools are heavily used for the Department's programs. The elementary schools, on the other hand, see less use.

Other business:

The minutes of the July 9 meeting were accepted with minor amendments.

Bebe Fallick reminded the members that a representative of the Census Bureau would be conducting a workshop on the use of census data on March 5 at the Library. Candy McLaughlin and Dan Krupka said they would participate.

Next meetings:

Tuesday, April 14 – Discussion on one possible topic for study by the task force (Dan Krupka); discussion on other potential study topics; initial preparations for meeting with Planning Board

Wednesday, May 20 – Transportation

Wednesday, June 10 – Planning Board

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Minutes submitted by:

Dan Krupka