



Long Range Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC+)

Thursday, August 12, 2010
Minutes

Attendance

Name	Present	Name	Present	Name	Present
Rebecca Casey	√	Bud French	-	Hugh Coxe	-
Paul Bergkamp	√	Kurt Klebe	-	Jim Thibodeau	-
Steve Hendry	-	Sandra Lipsey	√	Julie Motherwell	-
Rachel Reed	√	Sam Rudman	√	Steve Walker	√
Claudia King	√				

Council Liaison:

Staff present: Theo Holtwijk

Guests: Brian Robertson and Jason Maurice, Market Decisions

Sam started the meeting around 7:00 PM.

1. Video

Theo showed the survey video that Becca and Claudia produced with big help from Mike McDade. It was 4:23 minutes long. Claudia did the narration and Becca the interviews. Everyone thought it was a very well done job and applauded afterwards. Theo stated that, to date, 440 people have responded to the survey and that about half of them supplied an e-mail address in order to be kept periodically informed of the committee's work.

The video will be posted on the web site/YouTube and will air on cable TV. The suggestion was made to also show it during the next Council meeting. The group thought that was an excellent idea.

2. Survey Discussion

The group introduced itself to the guests from Market Decisions and Brian and Jason introduced themselves.

Rachel asked what the group should do with the results of the current mini survey, particularly if they contradicted with the results of a statistical survey. Brian responded that the issues raised in the mini survey could help the committee to figure out what questions to ask in the statistical survey.

Brian has been involved in 10-15 community surveys that tackled long range planning issues, including Falmouth, Cumberland, Yarmouth, Freeport and Brunswick. Preparing a survey is an interactive process with the planning committee, he added. Initially the committee should think broadly about what topics it wants to cover. The State Planning Office offers some guidance for that and Market Decisions has prepared a guidebook for clients on that as well.

Paul asked if Market Decisions could help code the open-ended responses from the mini survey. Theo clarified that Market Decisions had not been hired to do a survey by the Town of Falmouth, but that the principals were here tonight pro bono to educate the committee on survey issues it may want to consider.

Sandra replied that she felt that the results of that survey were less important to her than the fact that to date 440 people have heard about the committee and are engaged about the plan. She felt that was the primary purpose of that survey.

Claudia wondered how a desired response rate that is representative of the community is typically obtained. Brian responded that in the analysis part of a survey, mathematical adjustments based on Census data can be made to the responses to make it sure the results are representative of the population surveyed.

Market Decisions has found that long range planning is a topic that many people are interested in and response rates are often twice as high as with product surveys. Typically a mail survey is followed by a reminder notice. Often a mail survey is used as visual information needs to be conveyed.

Sometimes complaints are received from citizens if they are not the ones being asked to respond to a "sample survey," and communities often send surveys to all households or residents to avoid that issue. In Brunswick a sample of 1600 surveys were mailed out and 400 responses were received.

It was asked if people resist doing phone surveys. It depends on the topic. People seem eager to respond, for example, to phone surveys on health topics, but not to product surveys, Brian said.

It was asked what role the internet could play in conducting surveys. The question is what percentage of the population would be reached by that mode. It is possible to conduct a multi-mode survey, and do an internet /mail survey or internet/phone survey. The issue with internet surveys is that some people have no access to that and that a community needs to have an accurate list available to use. Sending people to the local library adds an obstacle and separates people and responses.

The group discussed if the State's "Rapid Renewal" car registration system could be a source of e-mail addresses. Privacy concerns may be raised by that. Sandra felt that knowing how many people in Falmouth use Rapid Renewal could give an indication as to the community's receptiveness to using the internet.

Jason stated that the data source that is typically used is the one where communities have the most contact with the targeted recipients. In some case that is the voter registration list. In other cases the property tax database or residential addresses through USPS are used. E-mail addresses must be tied to something else, Jason said, and that can be difficult.

It was discussed if a survey should be sent to each household or to each resident as there may be multiple people interested in responding, and that they may hold different opinions. Another concern was raised about internet use in that some may use an address while being away and that address is not tied to them personally. Sandra stated that she felt that it was appropriate for the committee to wrestle with these issues in 2010. Brian said that most communities opt to send one survey to each household, out of cost considerations. In Falmouth that would mean about 4200 households.

A discussion on weighting of survey results followed and what criteria are typically used. These include gender, age, and sometimes education and/or income. It depends on the community and survey topic. Brian stated that a random sample was a little more representative than mailing one to each household, but ultimately for each survey there is a person who decides to respond or not, so true randomness is hard to achieve. He has found that typically the age group between 18 and 34 is underrepresented.

Brian said that for a Hartford, CT survey 6000 surveys were mailed and an internet response option was made available as well. About 30 people used the internet to respond.

Sandra asked about the staging to roll out the survey and build community interest for it. It was stated that communities typically use every available media outlet to promote their surveys. Theo mentioned a lecture series that he was involved in Brunswick on open space topics. These provided opportunities for community discussion. Because they were also video taped and shown on the cable channel, a lot of people became aware of the project, which helped to build interest. It depended on the interest and energy of the committee.

Jason said that communities often do surveys and then follow up with a community meeting to further discuss topics. Sometimes survey respondents are followed up with for additional feedback, questions, or to test specific policies, as long as they provided their contact information.

The recent surveys that Freeport and Yarmouth did cost between \$25-35K.

It is important for a committee to decide its focus. Typically three meetings are held between a consultant and the committee to design the survey and determine specific survey questions.

Some commented that in past Falmouth surveys the results did not distinguish between anything and wondered how useful that was. Brian and Jason responded that that meant that these topics should be tread on lightly, or that they should be explored in more detail (as there is always a limit on what can be asked in a survey).

Depending on the survey it may take 4-6 weeks to execute it, 2 weeks to tabulate results, and 2 weeks to write a report. Typically 60% of a fee is fixed and 40% is variable based on the number of responses received.

Sam asked what the Town should include in a survey RFP. Brian said the desired survey mode (mail, phone, internet); survey scope (random, mail to all household, mail to all residents); survey size (number of pages, number of questions); desired interaction between consultant and committee; product deliverables. Sometimes a public presentation is included.

It was asked if there was an ideal survey size. That would range between 12-16 pages. The survey should not be too short as some may then feel it was not serious or comprehensive enough.

Responses to an RFP could be turned around in 2-4 weeks, depending if the scope is specific enough or if consultants would have questions.

Should the group be concerned with seasonality, i.e. when to send out a survey? In some communities the presence of a summer population may make a difference. The period between Thanksgiving and Christmas should be avoided. There may be slight uptick in responses for a January survey.

Sam thanked Brian and Jason for coming to the meeting and answering the committee's questions.

The group continued to discuss the survey topic after Brian and Jason left.

Some suggested that a time separation between the mini survey and this survey may be useful.

Steve felt that the current momentum should be maintained, that he wanted to do a thorough survey, and that if such added a few months to the overall project that it was OK, as long as the committee was making progress.

Sandra felt it was important to first get through all research topics. She has found some surprises already and wanted to be informed of all issues. She felt that doing a survey in January was more realistic than trying to get one out before Thanksgiving.

Claudia agreed with this and felt that also talking with community groups would allow the committee to become richer in knowledge.

Sandra felt that for \$35K the committee should collect important data.

The consensus was to design a survey in November and December, but do the RFP sooner. The community groups that should be met with need to be identified. The question was if all groups should be asked about all topics or not. The sense was that there will be some groups who will be interested mostly in a very specific topic. It was recognized that all topics are integrated and there may well be a need to come back to these groups.

3. Next Meeting

By the committee's next meeting (9/9), each subcommittee is asked to:

1. identify any Town committees or citizen groups that relate to their topics and should be met with;
2. provide a representative to serve a to-be-established Ad Hoc Survey Subcommittee. This is a subcommittee of four people to help design the survey. One representative from each of the current subcommittees plus a at large member to volunteer, or be chosen, at the September 9 meeting, will be the working committee with the survey firm to be selected. The ad hoc survey committee is expected to draft a Survey Services RFP after discussion on September 9 and work with LPAC and the survey firm to winnow the questions to be included in the survey.
3. provide draft questions that it feels should be included in the survey.

At the 9/9 meeting the committee will also discuss the parameters for a survey, so an RFP can be drafted and sent out. The desire is to have consultant start work by November 1st.

The committee will also discuss research topics 2 and 3, as time permits. The subcommittees are asked to meet to conduct that work.

It was noted that a January survey may be good to avoid any reactions that people may have on the November ballot.

Paul commented that he felt it was important that what the committee was doing now would stay alive during the next few months.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 PM.

Draft Meeting Notes by Theo Holtwijk, August 19, 2010
Revised September 13, 2010