HOPKINTON COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
July 23, 2022

The meeting was held at 9:30 am at the Hopkinton Town Hall, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833. The meeting was a hybrid meeting; in-person and on Zoom.

Present: Etta Zasloff, Sarah Steverman, Caleb Grant, Council Liaison Robert Marvel (virtual), and Jeff Frenette (virtual).

Call to Order:
The meeting was called to order at 9:38 am with a salute to the flag and moment of silence.

Approval of June 30, 2022 Meeting Minutes:
A motion was made by Sarah Steverman to accept the 6/30/22 minutes as written, which was seconded by Etta Zasloff. The motion passed unanimously.

Report on meeting with town manager Brian Russo:
Sarah was unable to meet with town manager Brian Russo before he recently left on paternity leave. She will follow up in the coming weeks.

Report on status of website redesign:
   Council Liaison Marvel reported that the town council has approved the website redesign proposal by Civic Ready/Civic Plus, and the town is currently going through the process of starting the rebuild. He also spoke at some length about the benefits of the new website system, including the ability to communicate with town residents over phone, email, text, social media, etc. This will be a great improvement over what is currently in place.
   Caleb Grant asked about (1) printing pdf information off the website for residents who do not use computers or smartphones, (2) whether residents would be required to download the Civic Plus App to receive communication from the town. Mr. Marvel and Mrs. Steverman responded that residents will not be required to download an app to receive communication, but they elaborated that signing up for a town account (such as tax payers currently have with the existing town website) would allow residents to access multiple town departments through one account (ex. Recreation, zoning, and taxes).
   Jeff Frenette responded that all information on the site will be in a pdf-ready format that can be "pulled off and printed." And in terms of timeline, he stated that Brian Russo and he are "actively" working on developing the site, using the Civic Ready/Civic Plus templates to save time and money, but that there are multiple steps to the process so it will take several months. They plan to use photos of the town taken through each of the four seasons to keep the site fresh and inviting but make it visually less crowded than the existing site. The websites of the town of Westerly and Stand Up For Animals were used as references.

Etta Zasloff posed the question: "What is this committee's role in helping the town to 'get this right?'" Mr. Marvel and Mr. Frenette responded that the biggest need is for increased engagement, at meetings, at votes, and overall in town affairs. Mr. Marvel said the task force's role would be to be the voice of the public regarding what types of information residents want to receive and how they want to receive it. Mr. Frenette said a big piece of that could be answering the question "who is this town?" This is a question posed to him by the web developers, and establishing that identity will be a key to fostering engagement and web traffic.

There was a general discussion of coordinating with the Hopkinton Historical Society. And generally it was agreed that, in it's role of making suggestions to the town council, that the three specific areas the task force should focus on are:

- 1- Clarifying our town's identity.
- 2- Increasing engagement through a wide variety of communication tools.
- 3- Developing new content for all communication tools, related to the town identity.

Etta Zasloff asked if there will be a beta testing phase of being able to use and navigate draft versions of the website. Jeff Frenette responded that this will be part of the contract with Civic Ready.

Public Comment:
Joe Morroe, Director of Public Welfare, spoke as a private citizen and thanked the committee for its work so far. He emphasized the importance of having "old fashioned" ways to communicate with residents in addition to improvements in the technology. And he noted there are facilities in the town, such as Cannochett Cliffs and the Rockville Mill Housing site, where many community members could benefit from old fashioned communications (printed flyers, etc.).

Discussion and vote on preliminary update to the town council:
Motion made by Sarah Steverman (seconded by Caleb Grant) to prepare a committee update including suggestions for improved communication across the town of Hopkinton, to be included in the Hopkinton Town council agenda of August 1st. The motion passed unanimously.

Sarah and Etta will prepare an update in GoogleDocs, with input from Mr. Grant and Mr. Marvel, to be submitted to the town clerk by Monday 7/25 or Tuesday 7/26 so it can be included in the information packets provided to Town Council members for the next meeting. Mr. Marvel restated the potential importance of using the tax bill mailing, or a separate mailing, as a way to have residents opt in to the new town website's communication system.

The following agenda items were skipped due to being redundant:
-Discuss and possibly vote on recommending Civic Ready/Civic Plus
-Discuss and possibly vote on options for initiating a town email list

Discussion and vote on having the Director of Public Welfare connected to the communication system:

Motion made by Caleb Grant (seconded by Sarah Steverman) to include a suggestion in our August first report to the town council, that the town council consider a way to connect the Director of Public Welfare to the town's communications systems, such that part of their official role would be to foster and facilitate communication. The motion passed unanimously.

Future agenda items:
-Schedule of meetings beyond the next scheduled meeting of August 5th
-Meeting with Brian Russo
-What will a "newsletter" look like as part of the new website.
-Potential continued and/or long-term role of the task force in website development
 and roll out.
-Discussion of "who is Hopkinton?" tied into fostering public engagement.
-Update on the status of the website

Adjournment:
Motion to adjourn made by Caleb Grant at 10:51, seconded by Sara Steverman.
The motion passed unanimously.