

Topsham Community Center Committee
Minutes October 16, 2023 Time: 5:00 PM

The mission of the Community Center Committee is to understand the desires and needs of the Topsham Community to identify accessible, affordable, sustainable recreational solutions that will serve the multi-generational community and social connections among Topsham citizens.

1. Call to order. Time: 5:00 p.m.

Members present: Leslie Byrne, Ann Callahan, Steve Kessler, and Alison Cary-Blais

Staff present: Pam LeDuc and Mark Waltz

Members absent: Lynn Sirois

Staff absent: none

Guests present (if any):

Brian Robertson, Ph.D., Vice President Research, Market Decisions

Allison Tippery, Qualitative Research Manager, Market Decisions (via Zoom)

Mark Lee, CEO, Harriman

2. Any changes to this agenda? None

3. Team meets with Brian Robertson and Alison Tippery from Market Decisions (subcontracted from Harriman) for The TCCC Needs Assessment/Focus Group implementation.

Mark Lee – Suggested we focus on the aspect of what the community **is** looking for in a community center function. Focus groups and engagement of the community. Brian at Market Decisions could provide the experience the TCCC needed.

Brian Robertson explained that their firm does qualitative research and works with towns and non-profits. Many towns involved work on comprehensive plans. They are familiar with obtaining public opinions. He recently worked with the **Brunswick/Topsham** land trust.

Alison is a focus group moderator. She likes the design piece, she focuses on the topics to learn from, and determines the priorities to get the most information we need. Alison will be creating a moderator's guide for the team. Recruiting, analysis and reporting are enjoyed by her.

A discussion was held differentiating quantitative research vs. qualitative research (not specifically accurate- open ended). Brian explained quantitative has a known level of accuracy but limit information gathered. Qualitative has in-depth piece, depth behind the questions to get the nuance of the answers. Focus groups and surveys **will be used** to obtain needed information.

What are the issues or questions we want to ask the stakeholders? Many non-profits and others groups like athletics, boys and girls clubs, mental health and child care. Leslie added arts, and additional stakeholders. We want to take Brian and Alison's lead on focus groups.

The Committee wants to know what questions to ask, determine if we have the right groups or are there more we haven't thought about and who do we need to talk to?

Qualitative research – gather information from the people this will impact. Then we will have information to conduct a survey. You can't do a focus group of 1000 people. Different topics of interest may come up and not be part of the original guide. See what comes up in discussion with focus group attendees' minds. Ask, "Why are these important to you?" Allison will provide a moderator's guide Brian

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– what is the goal here? What can the community center do? Ann said we do not want a repeat the original survey but more detailed information.

Allison Tippery (Ally) has the focus groups start with an ice breaker. Usually 90 minutes time frame for each group.

Leslie referenced stakeholders in the community: arts, athletics, seniors, veterans, library, volunteers, teens, youth, therapists, counselors, theatre, health center, PTOs, Home schools, day care, librarians, Land Trust, caterers, business who may want to rent space, disabilities, churches. We have addresses and emails. Where to begin and end is our question.

Leslie gave a list of potential questions on the Google drive.

- If Topsham had a community center would you attend?
- How often do you think you would come to a community center?
- Would you volunteer to help with community service programs?
- What is Topsham lacking for Seniors?
- Are you supportive of paying higher taxes to have a community center?

The list of questions will be forwarded to Ally Tippery.

Ally likes those questions and make them open ended questions and a guide that would allow us to address various groups. Ally says it's a lot of work to organize groups. Mixing up the groups and come together rather than like-minded groups. The end in qualitative research is the quality of the information. We usually do four to six groups. More than that will have similar themes. Mix different voices in each group. Mark a mid day group, a Saturday group, and an evening group. We would like to limit the groups to five. For an in person 10 -12 hoping 6-8 show up. The sweet spot is 8. More than 10 is chaotic. Online group is a sweet spot of 6. Invite 8-10. Pam asked online or in person best? Ally said with a good moderator it doesn't matter. Pam, as we begin to move forward how to we document and gather? Is there a scribe. Focus groups are largely consultation. Ally will not be the moderator. She indicated that the TCCC should assign a moderator and a notetaker.

Brian said they pre-recruit people and then invite them. We have a screener to go out. Are they available, age, race, etc. and you can build the groups yourself. Mix these people into specific focus groups by time. Then send specific information. Mark said create times and dates and see who is available on what dates. The town has the capability of announcing the focus groups to the community. Record the groups and then provide transcripts. A moderator should have a notetaker as well. Offer incentives such as pizza and drinks to enjoy during the focus group. Ally suggested it's best if the focus group attendees don't know each other.

The moderator guidelines will be ready in two weeks. Pam will send Ally Tippery the list of stakeholders, questions and the mission of the TCCC and a paragraph of the purpose of the focus groups. The November 6th meeting will be the recruitment phase of the focus groups. The goal will be to come up with 50 to 60 email addresses of residents to contact who represent different stakeholders in the community. Ally will look over any narratives we plan to send out.

Leslie reviewed the mission statement. *The mission of the Community Center Committee is to understand the desires and needs of the Topsham Community to identify accessible, affordable,*

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sustainable recreational solutions that will serve the multi-generational community and social connections among Topsham citizens. Explain the mission, what are we expecting in the conversation, ice breaker. Write down the one thing you would like in your community. Then more focused. Focus groups are fluid and the conversations can change. New topics can be explored but not locked into.

Questions suggested for focus groups:

- What is the needs of the community?
- What would get you to go to a community center?
- Don't just vent. What are the solutions? What would make you go?
- You gave us great ideas, what kind of activities would you want?
- Access part, what would make you go there.
- You can talk about funding. Great ideas. How do we pay for this? What ideas do you have? Needs vs. wants. There is a cost. What funding mechanism do you want us to use?

Use the same moderator for all five groups. The moderator should know the guide before they start.

Ally and Brian will assist with translating the information from the focus groups and what we learned into a survey. Focus groups can bring additional information.

How can Topsham go about providing these needs?

Ally – ask - define what a community center is?

TCCC why we are doing the focus group?

What do you think about our senior citizens, what do you think they need? Probes to give.

No arts mentioned, what about arts? Anyone have thoughts on the arts?

4. Review minutes from the October 2, 2023 Meeting. A motion was made and seconded to accept the October 2, 2023 minutes. The motion passed.

5. Action Steps:

Pam will email the mission statement, stakeholders list, questions prepared by the committee, and a paragraph on why we are doing the focus groups.

Ally Tippery will set up SharePoint for the committee to review the moderator's guide. Pam will issue the TCCC members email addresses to give them access to SharePoint.

Allison Cary-Blais volunteered to serve as moderator for the focus groups.

6. Meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Parking Lot:

- Membership – two vacant positions on the TCCC.