

Community Conversation Group 3

***Members: Lisa Burns, Chairperson; Laurie Devaney, Secretary; Ken Hankinson;
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Problem statement:

- Tolland residents are not well informed about town affairs and are unsure of where to get accurate information that pertains to the budget.
- Some residents demonstrate a lack of awareness of and involvement in town affairs.
- Residents want to maintain the rural character of Tolland but improve economic diversity and opportunity for economic development.
- Residents want to maintain a strong educational foundation while preserving economic well-being.

Vision and Values Statement

(I) Improve town wide communication

GOALS:

- Improved communication from town to residents through cost efficient means
- Improved communication/participation from residents regarding town affairs/events
- Improved communication/networking between community groups
- Improved intergenerational communication (i.e. students with senior citizens)

(II) Improve community service opportunities

GOALS:

- Promote volunteer activity to reduce town expenses where appropriate
- Increased personal investment in the community
- Increased recognition of volunteers involved in community projects/programs

(III) Improve economic well-being with careful planning

GOALS:

- Improved housing diversity through careful planning consistent with Tolland's vision for growth
- Improved diversity as it relates to future land use and economic planning (residential, business, open space, recreational, mixed-use)
- Increased emphasis on recruitment of desirable companies to meet future needs of the community
- Improved networking with surrounding towns and communities

- Increased utilization of nearby university resources for future economic development

(IV) Maintain strong educational foundation

GOALS:

- Improved communication between schools and citizens through community activities, events, and other initiatives

Group 3 approached the process with the idea that improved communication is essential to improving our community as a whole. An increase in the levels and channels of communication would result in a more informed electorate, reduce the potential for misinformation and misunderstanding, and increase awareness of town activities. In addition, knowledge of the budget process and challenges faced by the town would serve to improve the development and acceptance of the budget. With this in mind, the following action items were identified:

Action Items:

- Establish a *Communication Committee* responsible for the delivery of relevant information to Tolland residents. This committee would consist of Tolland resident volunteers assisted by a town employee.
- Purchase and locate a large, permanent central activities sign near Town Hall which would list important information, dates, and activities. This sign could be used exclusively to inform people of town meetings, activities, and referenda.
- Dramatically increase subscription to the Town of Tolland eBlast service to improve real time communication with residents. This could be accomplished through a dedicated campaign that targets community groups, school events, Senior Center events, neighborhood networking, etc. In addition, residents could register for the eBlast when they pay taxes, check out a book at the library, register to vote, etc.
- The Town Council has implemented monthly “Council Hours”- time for residents to discuss problems in the town library. This group encourages other town groups to follow suit with representation from the Board of Education, Planning and Zoning, Economic Development Commission, Conservation Commission, etc.
- Investigate use of the Community Voice Channel to improve communication from the town to residents.
- Investigate the use of local businesses and strategic locations to facilitate communication through informational flyers, community bulletin boards, etc.

- Initiate a “Resident to Resident” series in local publications in which Community Conversation groups submit articles of interest regarding town operations to the community.
- Improve relationships with local reporters so that print news is informative versus inflammatory
- Use the websites of various community groups to disseminate town information when appropriate.
- Improve the communication of budget information to town residents at the front end of the process to encourage participation and increase understanding of the forces driving budget requests and decisions.
 - Regular updates in the Tolland Monthly
 - Regular updates through eBlast
- Continue the Community Conversation groups. Future groups could focus on specific topics and relay their findings to town staff and Tolland residents. This would continue to promote interaction among residents, promote interaction across various community groups, and make use of the human resources in our town.
- Establish a Community Conversation group with the specific task of identifying volunteer opportunities within town operations. Some possibilities include:
 - Identify community projects for groups including Boy Scouts, church groups, students, senior citizens, etc.
 - Explore the feasibility of creative initiatives such as fixed income residents volunteering time to work off a portion of their tax bill.
 - Initiate a Community Volunteer Day 1-4x/year
 - List community and volunteer activities on the town website
 - Challenge residents to contribute 10 hours/year to improve efficiency of services and overall quality of community life (i.e., maintaining fields, assisting with website, volunteering in schools, odd jobs for elderly residents, etc).