

Avon Hills Executive Committee Meeting
July 20, 2004
Saint John's University, New Science Center, Natural History Museum

Avon Hills Executive Committee Members in Attendance:

Chris Schellinger, Avon Hills Initiative Chair

Steve Platenberg, Cultural History, Sense of Place Chair

Alan Davisson, Government Effects Chair

Mike Brown, Administrative Committee Chair

Sr. Phyllis Platenberg, Non-Governmental Opportunities for Land Conservation Chair

Cliff Borgerding, Education and Community Relations Co-Chair

Avon Hills Executive Committee Members not in Attendance:

Mark Conway, Education and Community Relations Co-Chair

Ernie Diedrich, Fundraising Chair

Avon Hills Staff in Attendance:

Tom Kroll

Avon Hills Observers in Attendance:

Emily Franklin

Background

After several productive meetings in the spring months, the Avon Hills Initiative (AHI) established an Executive Committee, as well as the Administrative Committee, Non-Governmental Opportunities for Land Conservation Committee, Education and Community Relations Committee, Fundraising Committee, Government Effects Committee and Cultural History/Sense of Place Committee. Each committee began to establish specific goals and points of focus for the coming months. With a unanimous resolution passed on May 14, 2005 to continue the work on the project, the Executive committee met at Saint John's University in the natural history museum for the first time on this day, July 20, 2004.

Review of Organization Structure and Purpose

-Structure of the Executive committee is composed of the chairs of each subcommittee

-Chris Schellinger pointed out that we are still drafting our structure and that the structure may change over time

-There was discussion about the goals and objectives of the group and what the Initiative would be doing in one year. Several points raised included benefits of the organization, and strengths the organization already has.

- AHI is an organization that seeks not to stop all development, but rather to educate citizens about and reinforce good growth strategies;
- AHI is an organization which creates a place for polarized parties to reasonably discuss the future of the Avon Hills and emphasizes that attendance, participation and decisions reached are voluntary in nature, and;

- AHI is an organization with dedicated and energetic participants. We must utilize the talents, energy and ideas of all members, observers, local land owners and community members to promote information sharing, networking and action.

-The discussion then moved on to the purpose of the Avon Hills Initiative organization and whether the body should begin to strive for 501(c) (3) non-profit status. One of the largest benefits to attaining non-profit status includes an ability to find willing, available and motivated donors. Aside from large donations, seeking donations from local citizens or other interested parties is easier with 501(c) (3) status, due to tax benefits associated with charitable donations.

-Difficulties associated with attaining 501(c) (3) status include convincing the IRS of the mission and charter of the Avon Hills Initiative. The mission needs to be well articulated in order to convince the IRS that the organization is educational, philanthropic, ect. This is a **very challenging** process.

-An executive committee member pointed out that the committee seems to be Struggling with finding a larger focus of the organization. Is what the AHI trying to do redundant with goals of planning boards?

-A suggestion was made to focus on one of the six goals/committees as a start. This may narrow the scope and help the organization to not fizzle out.

-Chris Schellinger suggested there may be a need for an entrepreneurial person to dedicate more time to the problems and goals at hand. Perhaps creating a new job, creating a full-time/part-time position in order to begin to attain goals would be helpful. Questions relative to creating a new position included. Questions related to how this position might be funded arose.

-An additional suggestion was made to have a longer session, perhaps a Two-hour session to “hammer out” a mission statement, statement of vision for what the purpose of the project or organization is. An entire meeting could focus on just this topic alone.

-The endorsed goals of the Avon Hills Initiative are as follows:

- Preserve the rural character of the Avon Hills
- Enhance economic viability of the area
- Preserve and protection areas of natural significance/natural areas

-The overall, recurring question of the evening is, “What is the mission of this organization in order to accomplish these goals?”

-Some reflection on the past year and discussion of accomplishments followed. Can the mission be extracted from all of the experiences and steps taken over the past year?

-Allan Davission pointed out that development strengths come from strong laws; strong adherences to those laws—also strong people around you, those people who share your values. A larger vision might include an education initiative in order to get all four townships on the same page; reinforce the goals of what this group is trying to do in order to make all of the communities stronger.

-Chris Schellinger articulated the continued need to affirm the existence and presence of the organization, as well as the purpose of the organization. The question was posed, “Does the group even need to exist at all?” Each executive committee member responded in the following ways:

- Allan: the group has potential, but we need to move beyond vague mission statements and begin moving towards completing and then following through with, a concrete plan.

- Sister Phyllis: this is not a redundant group. The population in St. Joseph is rapidly growing (addition of 900 homes). There is a need for this kind of a group to be active within the community.
- Steve: Also articulated the need for this group in order to foster connections and stay ahead of the game in terms of development pressures in the Avon Hills
- Chris: Believes this group has a both chance and purpose. The commonality of geographical area and the ability of the organization to be a voice for the constituency in articulating the long-term vision for the area as St. Cloud is encroaching on the Avon Hills are very important.
- Cliff: Believes the organization will serve a purpose but is discouraged by rapid development. Sees the danger of growth all around the area.
- Mike: The organization is not redundant at all as we seek to preserve and maintain the landscape and emphasize the commonality within the four townships.
- Tom: There is a strong support system for this organization as well as an abundance of energy. If well organized, the organization could be politically advantageous

-At the close of the meeting a motion was made in order for representative(s) from the Avon Hills Executive Committee to attend the next Avon Township planning meeting

-Motion seconded

-Motion passed unanimously and meeting adjourned.