

# Meeting Minutes from Town of South Bristol Committee for Community Engagement

Tuesday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**Attendance:** Christopher Bennem (Chair), Deborah Denome, Lenore Friend, Tom Hawks, John Holtz, Amy Luersen, Beth Thomas  
**Observing:** Jaimie Hall (Board Liaison), Meg Fuller

## Overview

The Community Engagement Committee held its initial meeting to discuss plans for community conversations and events related to the town's 250th anniversary celebration. The committee, chaired by Chris Bennem, reviewed a draft charter and discussed the structure of future community engagement activities, including informational talks, panel discussions, and town hall-style events. They agreed to focus on three main topics: digital accessibility, landfill management, and lake preservation, with plans to organize events in March, April, and May. The committee also discussed implementing suggestion boxes at town facilities to gather community input. Members were assigned to reach out to potential speakers and explore available resources for their chosen topics. The conversation ended with agreement on the format and timing of future events, with a focus on making them accessible and engaging for the community.

## Next steps

- Lenore: Start reaching out to potential speakers/experts on the landfill topic for possible March informational talk and April panel discussion
- Chris Abraham: Assist Lenore in contacting potential landfill speakers
- Tom and Chris (Bennem): Start reaching out to potential speakers for digital accessibility topic
- Chris (Bennem): Create and bring to next meeting a recommended process for vetting suggestions from suggestion boxes
- All committee members: Review comprehensive plan and survey results (to be emailed by Chris) before next meeting to help select/prioritize topics
- John: Look into potential speakers for land preservation, trees/soil, and related environmental topics for future events
- Chris (Bennem): Email survey results to all committee members
- Committee members: Begin developing a "bank" of potential speakers for land preservation and environmental topics as a backup
- Chris (Bennem): Check with facilities management and town board regarding safety and procedural issues for suggestion box locations
- Committee: Develop methodology for suggestion box management and response (to be proposed by Chris at next meeting)

- Committee: Begin planning for South Bristol participation/booth at June 13-14 Freedom Festival/Bristol Fundays event (as discussed by Beth)
- Beth: Send information about next Bristol Center meeting (February 10th) regarding Freedom Festival planning to the group
- Committee: Consider and prioritize three main event topics (landfill, digital accessibility, and one other) and begin outreach to speakers for March and April events
- Committee: Review and prioritize suggested community conversation topics before next meeting to prepare for March board presentation
- Chris (Bennem): Prepare draft event sequence and potential speaker list for March board meeting presentation

### **Organizing Future Meeting Discussions**

The meeting focused on organizing and recording future discussions, with Chris suggesting the use of Zoom for recording purposes. Chris and others discussed the importance of geographic representation and expertise when selecting permanent members. Chris introduced Amy Luersen noting her community organizing background and discussed the logistics of in-person meetings. The group also touched on the need to post meeting details and minutes, and Chris offered to help with posting events on social media platforms.

### **Community Engagement Committee Formation**

The Community Engagement Committee was established with Christopher Bennem as chair and formalized the participation of six additional permanent members: Deborah Denome, John Holtz, Tom Hawks, Beth Thomas, Lenore Friend, and Amy Luersen. The committee's purpose is to leverage increased civic engagement following recent campaigns and to review the town comprehensive plan, facilitate community conversations, and make recommendations for the town's 250th celebration. The group discussed expanding membership to include additional alternate or associate members from the community, particularly noting interest from Casey Wood regarding the 250th anniversary.

### **Community Engagement and Environmental Initiatives**

The committee discussed plans for community engagement events and decided to focus on three main topics: digital accessibility, landfill closure, and lake protection. They agreed to organize a series of events including informational talks, panel discussions, and town hall meetings to address these issues. The group also discussed implementing suggestion boxes at town facilities to gather community input. Chris was appointed as chair of the committee and they agreed to meet on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 5pm. The committee plans to develop a comprehensive strategy for the town's 250th anniversary celebration and will collaborate with neighboring communities on regional events.