Town of Wenham
Citizens’ Leadership Academy

Peter Lombardi, Town Administrator
Jackie Bresnahan, Special Projects Assistant
MMA Conference
January 19, 2018
About Wenham

• 5,035 residents
• BOS/TA/Open Town Meeting
• Full-time employees: 45
• Elected officials: 36
• Appointed officials: 115+
• FY 2018 Operating Budget
  • $17.9 million Total General Fund
  • $9.3 million of which is apportioned to regional school district

Photo courtesy of Jay Burnham, Wenham resident
Citizen Engagement Efforts
2015-2017 / Ongoing

• *Wenham at Work* department profiles
• *Welcome to Wenham* packet for new residents
• Website content update
• GFOA Budget Document
• Community Compact: Citizen Engagement Best Practice
  • SeeClickFix App
• Expanded senior volunteer program
• Annual workshop on local government for graduating seniors
• Citizens Leadership Academy
Citizen Engagement Efforts
2018

- Website re-design
- Community Compact: Citizen Engagement Best Practice
  - Visual Budget
  - Resident Survey
- Community Compact: IT grant
  - Accela Civic Platform upgrade (e-permitting)
- Open Space and Recreation Plan – survey & forums
- Affordable Housing Trust Action Plan – survey & forum
- Age Friendly Community Initiative – survey & forums
- Wenham’s 375th Anniversary celebrations
Why Run a Citizens Academy?

• Opportunity for residents to learn about services and functions of each department or board/committee

• Familiarize new residents with Town personnel and services

• Provide long-time residents with fresh perspective and chance to learn about different areas of town government than what they’ve previously experienced

• Teaches residents about volunteer and leadership opportunities
Goals of our Academy

• Increase participation of residents in elections, Annual Town Meeting, and public hearings

• Recruit volunteers to serve on Town boards and committees (elected and appointed) as active policy/decision makers

• Create social connections between citizens and staff that foster positive working relationships and interest in town government

• Enhance understanding of services, physical assets, and benefits offered by each department, especially in the context of the Town’s current financial situation and upcoming budget process
Wenham’s Academy

- 10 weekly sessions
- September (last week) through December (first week)
- 15-18 residents
- Wednesdays
- 6:30 – 8:00 pm
- Various locations

Town of Wenham
Citizens Leadership Academy 2017
Wednesdays 6:30 – 8:00 pm
Sessions and Locations

- Day 1: Getting to know Town Government (Selectmen’s Meeting Room)
  September 27th – Peter Lombardi, Catherine Harrison, Jackie Bresnahan
- Day 2: Fire Department (Begin at Town Hall, Continue at Fire Station)
  October 4th – Chief Blanchard and Fire Dept.
- Day 3: Budget / Financials & Permitting (Selectmen’s Meeting Room)
  October 11th – Leslie Davidson, Christopher Holak, Jackie Bresnahan
- Day 4: Water Dept., Cemetery, & Land Use (Selectmen’s Meeting Room)
  October 18th – Erik Mansfield, Gary Chesseman, Margaret Hoffman
- Day 5: Council on Aging & Board of Health (Council on Aging)
  October 25th – Jim Reynolds, Lucy Sprague Frederiksen, Jackie Bresnahan
- Day 6: Public Works, Assessing, and Veterans Services (Council on Aging)
  November 1st – Bill Tynick, Steve Ozahowski, Karen Tyler
- Day 7: Police Department (Begin at Town Hall, Continue at Police Station)
  November 8th – Chief Perkins and Police Dept.
- Day 8: Recreation & Library (HW Public Library)
  November 15th – Sean Timmons, Jan Dempsey
- Day 9: Boards & Committees (Selectmen’s Meeting Room)
  November 29th – Various Boards & Committees
- Day 10: Town Meeting & Town Clerk (Selectmen’s Meeting Room)
  December 6th – Dianne Bucco, Trudy Reid, Jackie Bresnahan
Where does a Community Start?

- Select point person
- Set aside small budget for snacks and folders
- Build buy-in with Town staff and officials
- Identify and communicate goals
Resources for Building Your Academy

• Citizens Academies Project – UNC School of Gvt
  • Database of existing academies
  • https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/citizens-academies#!/

• TED Talk: “The Secret Structure of Great Talks”
  • https://www.ted.com/talks/nancy_duarte_the_secret_structure_of_great_talks/transcript

• Lexington, MA
  • https://www.lexingtonma.gov/2020-vision-committee/pages/development-lexington-citizens-academy
Developing Session Content

• Point person should schedule 1:1 meeting with Department Head or Committee person making presentation

• Three items needed from each presenter
  • Goals of the presentation
  • Activity or tour
  • Media or materials

• Develop handouts and have them ready for the point person to reference as they provide support during the sessions
Scheduling Sessions

• Schedule the sessions early – fall sessions should be scheduled with committee members and Department Heads in July for a late September start

• Align some sessions by topic area – such as Treasurer/Collector and Finance Director, so participants understand how they interconnect

• Plan others with dissimilar topics – such as Assessing and Public Works, to provide content variety and allow back-end departments to be balanced by more easily relatable departments
Marketing

- BOS meetings & Town website
- Local newspaper & local cable access
- Flyers in post office/local businesses; with staff who interact with the public regularly (Permitting, Town Clerk, COA, Veterans, Library, etc); and at community events
- Last year’s graduates can be your best advocates
- Encourage elected officials to invite people they know... and people they don’t
- Have a resident you’ve worked on an issue with you would love to see get more involved? Send a personal note or email of encouragement!
Engaging Presentations

• Same MC for every session
• Videos and tours
• Keep it interactive!
• Anonymous question box
• Be the jargon police
  • Avoid acronyms without explanations, common phrases or shorthand that residents who don’t read the budget, attend land use meetings, or aren’t regular volunteers don’t understand.

• Get back to the basics
  • How does the municipal water system work? What’s the difference between the Assessor and the Treasurer? What is the general ledger? When you start a project, who permits you first (ZBA? Building Inspector? Planning Board?)?
Quick Tips and Tricks

- Offer snacks
- Utilize videos & photos
- Take tours
- Change locations every few weeks
- Employ activities such as mind maps, mock town meetings, and equipment demonstrations
- Provide handouts of all presentations for residents who want to follow along or who miss the session
- Take attendance
- Have electronic and hard copy evaluation forms available
Importance of Feedback

- Multiple stages of feedback
- Beginning: Understand background of each participant
  - Board/Committee member? New resident? Involved in other organizations? Why are they here?
- During: Weekly evaluations on each session
  - Goals of the presentation met? Was the activity/approach engaging?
- End: Final evaluation on logistics and lasting impressions
- Questions to ask:
  - What did residents learn? What were they surprised by? What did they want more time for?
  - Was the day/time feasible? Was the length of the program too short/long? How did they learn about the program?
Feedback on our Academy

• Positive responses:
  • Logistics, including location changes, format of sessions, day/time, scheduling
  • Dedication, knowledge, and enthusiasm of staff and committee members who presented
  • Variety of activities, tours, videos, etc. in each session

• What we’re working on:
  • Daytime version for the Council on Aging
  • More time for each presentation
  • Continuing to refine our presentations and helping new staff to develop their presentations
Tangible Results

- 31 residents have completed the Wenham CLA
  - 16 in 2016 and 15 in 2017
- 3 (soon-to-be 4) graduates have filled various board/committee vacancies & 2 graduates have pulled papers for this year’s Annual Town Election
- 14 were already on boards or in the senior tax work-off program
- Several residents who used to volunteer have “re-engaged”
- Other value created by engagement
  - Developing local champions
  - Town Meeting attendance and participation
  - Connections between residents, staff, and town officials
  - Building outreach list for other engagement efforts such as forums and surveys