(To be discussed at April 19 Task Force Against Discrimination meeting.)

Dear Task Force Members,

Approximately a month ago, Jen Rand sent out our questionnaire to heads of West Tisbury boards and committees and, apparently, town employees as well. Our intent was that the heads of town bodies would distribute the questionnaire to the members of their boards and committees. I have no way of knowing whether all heads received the questionnaire or whether they distributed the questionnaire to their members. Please review this brief preliminary summary of results in anticipation of our meeting Tuesday. I hope that it will suggest ways in which we can improve the questionnaire before asking Jen to distribute a revised version after our Tuesday meeting. I’m hoping that Susanna can incorporate this summary report into the minutes of Tuesday’s meeting so that we are in compliance with the open meeting law.

Ten people completed the questionnaire. In alphabetical order, they are: Ted Jochsberger (affordable housing committee); James Klingensmith (personnel board, Howes House feasibility committee, affordable housing committee); Richard Knabel (capital improvement committee); Katherine Logue (treasurer/collector); Bruce MacNelly (Preserve West Tisbury by law committee); Gregory Pachico (fire chief); Doug Ruskin (finance committee); Leah Smith (planning board); Granville White (fire department); Tara J. Whiting-Wells (town clerk). An eleventh person, Beatrice Phear (planning board, community preservation committee), called me to request that the questionnaire be sent to her in a computer-friendly form that allowed her to easily complete and return it to us (Richard Knabel also said “the form is not computer friendly”).

Four of the ten respondents are town employees and not members of town boards or committees. All ten are white, non-Hispanic and, no surprise, generally skew older.

In response to the question of how we can gain more participation on town bodies, people recommended: advertising of open positions on town website; more aggressive effort by select board and town administrator; public posting of open positions, with more detail in ads about the positions’ mission and role and how to apply; emphasis on personal fulfillment from making a positive difference; recognition that lower-income people as well as younger people are underrepresented on town bodies; offer of financial incentives for participation.

As for recommendations of individuals who might serve on town bodies, two people said they wouldn’t want to volunteer anyone without speaking to them first, but so far no names have been forthcoming from those two individuals; James Klingensmith recommended Rebecca Morrow (and provided her telephone number) for the affordable housing committee.

Doug Ruskin described a workshop held years ago at the West Tisbury Library, titled “What Makes West Tisbury Tick?” He thought it might be useful to hold such a public session again to generate interest in service on West Tisbury boards and committees. I will send you separately his description of “What Makes West Tisbury Tick?”

I welcome your thoughts on how to improve the questionnaire. Based on our experience thus far, I recommend:

1. Susanna or someone else on the Task Force more tech-savvy than I am make the questionnaire more computer-friendly than the current version; a more computer-friendly version is likely to encourage more responses.
2. Toward the bottom, right before we ask for telephone number and email address, have lines for, first, the person’s name and, second, the town body or bodies on which that person is serving.
3. Ask Jen to send directly to Beatrice Phear, as she requested, a copy of the questionnaire; she can be reached at beaphear2@gmail.com.

Thanks for reading this summary report. I look forward to our meeting Tuesday. Best, Loren