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[CE SBAC] Survey and communications

1 message

Jennifer Bodenrader <joplinfan69@hotmail.com>

Sun, Oct 29, 2023 at 8:54 PM

To: "cesbac@capeelizabethschools.org" <cesbac@capeelizabethschools.org>

Dear SBAC,

Having lived in many areas of the U.S. I consider myself extremely fortunate to live in a town with accessible and transparent local government run by dedicated people who do the hard work and problem solve. This is a sincere privilege not available to many in our country and our world. I have found your efforts to do this difficult work as a team extremely impressive.

With appreciation and compassion I understand none of us is perfect. I provide this feedback to help support and improve your work. These comments are in response to the survey interpretation analysis presented by Mr. Larry Benoit at the most recent SBAC meeting. And also in regards to communications.

I do understand and appreciate the idea of proactively setting a budget for our school buildings project. It can be a method undertaken to ensure costs are kept in check and prevent consultants from making plans as if there is a blank check.

But with sincere respect to Mr. Benoit, I found his survey interpretation, analysis, and conclusions in the most recent SBAC meeting flawed and biased. It appeared to me a search for evidence to support the opinion that the SBAC should proactively set a budget based on one survey question. The presented assumptions for Mr. Benoit's conclusions were;

1. Mr. Benoit's previous experience interpreting surveys to win elections, and
2. that this question result; people would support a 5% - 10% increase in taxes for school improvements, was representative of how citizens would vote.

During the meeting and prior to Mr. Benoit's presentation, Mrs. Elizabeth Biermann made a salient evidentiary point undermining the validity and reliability of this one survey question result. Mrs. Biermann reminded us that 38% of people voted to approve a tax increase in excess of 20% in November 2022. In the 2023 survey, only 14% provided this as their answer.

This difference between voting behavior and survey question answer results is significant. This difference brings into question the validity (that the answer you are getting accurately measures what you want it to) and reliability (that you would get the same results if the survey question were repeated) of the 5%- 10% tax increase survey question result. It also invalidates Mr. Benoit's second assumption, that this one question represents how people would vote. These facts were not considered or responded to in Mr. Benoit's survey interpretation presentation.

I also found it concerning that results from one question would be interpreted so literally and applied so generally as to present it as evidence for setting school building financial policy. That to me is an example of personal bias in applying survey results.

It is a basic standard of survey results interpretation to rigorously understand and question one's own bias and the validity and reliability of results. Basic standards of survey interpretation were not met in this instance, in my opinion.

Although I appreciate the strategy of setting a proactive budget to control costs, the SBAC does not have the information it needs to do so. Setting an arbitrary budget untethered to reality could end up being the costliest option in the medium and long term. There are many other considerations outside of, whats the cheapest thing we can do right now?

I am grateful for all the current and previous reports made available on the project. I do believe I have read them all. Though honestly, it has been a ridiculous undertaking to locate, understand, and keep up with changes on this and any other Town issues. Many reports I read, found through spiderweb layers of links, I could not locate a second time.

As someone who has spent hundreds of hours researching and reading the town website, the need for communication professionals is self evident. There is no way volunteers or our few town staff can possibly maintain, understand, update, organize, summarize and make easily accessible the encyclopedias of changing related content in all its forms (video, pdf, excell, power point, emails, presentations, etc.).

I found the volumes of previous school project reports to be written in a passive voice circular indirect style of writing. Many words were written without things pointed out directly. For example, read all the reports then tell me what is the condition of the school foundation? That important question was answered in some meetings and presentations but not in the reports. Is a person or committee volunteer supposed to watch 2+ years of meeting videos to find that information and develop a way to communicate it to the public on the website? As elections and committee members change over time those details and where to find them get lost. Our best efforts are incredibly inefficient. Currently, the fastest and most effective way to find information about any aspect of the school building project, previous or current, is to ask Cindy Voltz, who somehow maintains a memory library of all this information and how to find it.

Vital information will continue to be communicated in a wide variety of styles and methods over long periods of time- such is the reality of different humans and long term projects. Our town should maintain a reliable, easy to understand and access repository of its knowledge, policy work, and project efforts. It's not only for communicating to citizens now, but vital to understanding our history, improving, and planning for our future. Finding a way to connect and update all this information in a clear accessible way over time is a basic expectation of any organization in the 21st century. It involves an amount of time and a skill set far beyond that of short term town volunteers.

Thank you very much for your dedication and for reading this.

Sincerely,
Jen

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Under Maine's Freedom of Access law, documents - including e-mail - about town/school department business are classified as public records and may be subject to disclosure.

To unsubscribe from this group and stop receiving emails from it, send an email to cesbac+unsubscribe@capeelizabethschools.org.

