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Winchester News

26th September 2023

OVERVIEW

Winchester News will be a nonprofit, digital news site reporting local government and community news. With the loss of the Winchester Star, Winchester lacks comprehensive, local news coverage. Winchester News will fill the information gap with a trusted and reliable source of local news, helping prevent the spread of misinformation. It will be a community asset. Bringing back a source of local news will also help increase civic participation and civil discourse. An educated electorate is key in a successful democracy.

Recent examples of insufficient coverage of important news that led to misinformation and/or poor civic participation:

- Waterfield development. Misinformation was plentiful and a Special Election was held with no reliable source of information to educate voters. Voter turnout was 32%.
- Lynch override vote. Turnout for this Special Election was just under 25%. And as Spring Town Meeting proved, there was some confusion among residents regarding Question 2 on the ballot due to a lack of reporting.

The need for greater communication of town issues and trusted reporting resulted in the creation of a Town Meeting approved Communications Study Committee (added to the Warrant due to a resident's petition). While this committee's focus was on how town government could improve communications, they realized an underlying cause was the loss of reliable and comprehensive local news. After completing their task, some former members began meeting to address the underlying cause. We have heard via email, social media and in person how much Winchester needs a community news source.

These residents formed a nonprofit corporation, Winchester News Group, which has a fiscal sponsorship with the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) while they prepare their own 501(c)(3) application. The nonprofit is also a provisional member of INN.

For community outreach, the Board has launched a pilot website - www.winchesternews.org - to provide additional information and updates, solicit community input, and generate support. It has also begun to provide some limited community news. The Board has held a community meeting at the library, had a table at Town Day, has been asked to present at the annual meeting for the League of Women Voters and presented at a summer Planning Board meeting. We also hope to spread awareness by publishing in other organization's newsletters and attending community events.

GOALS

1. Be a trusted and reliable source of local news reporting facts in an unbiased manner.
2. Raise enough local funding to hire professional staff, paid market rate salaries, to run the news site. Funding will also cover all expenses of the business, including insurance, legal and accounting.
3. Remain flexible in our funding goals, such as potentially using grants, philanthropy, advertising and subscriptions, in addition to community donations, to be a sustainable business model.

CONTENT

During its initial phase, content on Winchester News' digital site will likely include:

- Coverage of major issues facing the Winchester community
- Summary coverage of Town departments, boards, and governance committees, from Assessors to the Zoning Board of Appeals
- Listing of community events
- Community generated content
- A featured local personality or business/ photography

Soon, the site will expand to include:

- Calendar of community and government events or links to established calendars
- Logs (police, fire, etc.)
- Expanded coverage of local cultural, environmental, and historical events; and actions of Town departments, committees, and boards
- Local sports and recreational coverage
- Letters to the Editor
- A column written by high school students in Winchester
- Additional spotlights on local personalities and businesses/photographs
- Advertising

BUDGET

The Board of Winchester News Group has completed a 3-year operating budget, including costs for start up, staffing, insurance and legal and accounting costs. We estimate that the annual

operating budget for Winchester News in its inaugural year will be around \$150K-\$200K. The cost will increase with additional staffing hires.

Following the start up period, the Board will seek annual support from the Winchester community to fund operations. We are open to being flexible with funding options, to include advertising, sponsorships, grants and subscriptions, along with community donations, to help underwrite operating costs.

After its inaugural year, we expect that Winchester News will be self-sustaining through a combination of annual donations and other funding options

NEXT STEPS

The Board will work to increase its publication of local news under a volunteer editor with some guest contributor content in order to continue to generate interest.

The Board will also be initiating our fundraising effort. We hope to focus on larger donors, while also seeking grants and sponsorships. We have been accepted into INN's NewsMatch program. We will do a community wide NewsMatch campaign from November 1 to December 31, with individual donations up to \$1,000 being matched (with a current campaign match cap of \$15,000). Our initial fundraising goal is \$150K, which we hope to accomplish by the end of the year or early 2024 (depending on grant and fundraising schedules).

WHO WE ARE

A group of Winchester residents, a majority of which were members of the Communications Study Committee. We have varying backgrounds, but all of us wish to establish a sustainable, nonprofit community news source for Winchester. The following are our bios:

Casey Bauer

Casey Bauer is a Town Meeting Member, and 2021-22 Town Meeting Communications Study Committee member. She lives and works in Winchester, and has two children in Winchester Public Schools. A former non-profit development director and a project manager at a local university, she is also an active volunteer, including as a board member for the Town Common Task Force.

Emily Costello

Emily Costello is the Director of Collaborations + Local News at The Conversation, a mission-driven newsroom that partners with academic experts to explain the news. Beginning in the summer of 2023, Emily is working on an initiative to regionalize The Conversation's model to better support local news organizations. She formerly served as the editor of the Winchester Star and the Newton TAB. Emily is a graduate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

Tara Hughes, President

Tara Hughes is a former practicing attorney and Town Meeting Member. She was appointed to the Communications Study Committee created by Town Meeting in 2021. Previously Tara was an

active volunteer in the Winchester school system. She is interested in supporting a vibrant democracy through an informed citizenry.

Shukong Ou

Shukong Ou is a Town Meeting Member for Precinct 2 in Winchester, and participated in the Winchester Communications Study Committee. He helps out with local organizations such as the Farmers Market, Winchester Community Music School, Winchester Cultural Council, and Winchester Cultural District. Shukong provides tech support for local organizations and is an advocate for the privacy of personal information.

Alison Swallow, Treasurer

Alison Swallow is a current Town Meeting member. With a background in the financial services industry, she has served on the Winchester town Finance and Capital Planning Committees, and as treasurer of Family Action Network of Winchester (FAN) and various Winchester town election campaigns. She has two children in the Winchester school system.

Joyce Westner, Clerk and Editor

Joyce Westner spent her professional career writing materials, both for newspapers as a stringer, and as a technical training materials developer and project manager. She was the corporate clerk for Brattle Systems, Inc., and held offices in various non-profits, including the Winchester Historical Society. With a Northeastern University degree in journalism, she specializes in publicizing the activities of local community groups.