

Old Colony Planning Council & PO 313 The Policy and Politics of HBO's The Wire

Proposals for Improving Public Engagement in OCPC's Service Area

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HANOVER: “Hanover Day”

For our community engagement plan, we plan on utilizing events that occur regularly in the town. The next upcoming event is the annual holiday ‘Hanover Day’. This two day event occurs in June, and hosts engaging activities for families such as a carnival, an art show, sports games, and music events. The event is sponsored by the town’s Cultural Council and encourages Hanover spirit among the residents. There are various small family owned businesses and restaurants with booths around the area. Our suggestion is to work with the booth owners and have brochures there that would include information about local politics. Since we have identified parents as being a powerful political group that is underutilized, we wanted to gear the brochures slightly to them while still having it broad enough that it would be useful to everyone else. To do this, we thought it would be easiest to remove some of the barriers people face when trying to participate in local politics. Obviously, Hanover has already moved to having Zoom participation allowed in their meeting formats, so people have that access, but we also wanted to address some of the other common barriers like: inviting everyone, childcare worries, and educating people about what their local government does.

The brochure would start by going over the main committees in the town and a quick example of their responsibilities, followed by the time and dates they are meetings, a quick overview of what power citizens have, and lastly, a list of nearby day-cares and babysitter if they need to make childcare plans. To make things easier, we would have one standard brochure with a more general broad scope of information, and then include a QR code that you can scan for a more detailed look regarding meetings, and what is on the agenda for the committees. The QR code would then direct them to either a website, a social media posts, or any other online format that can be updated regularly. This way the brochure can stay the same for long periods of time and only a website/online platform would need to be updated, thus allowing for this proposal to be applicable throughout the year. We believe that by inviting people through this informal method, laying out clear and concise information, attempting to lessen the barriers people face will be effective in helping to engage the local community.

PLYMPTON: Spaces for Community**Encouraging Participation - Spaces for Community**

We recognized the problem of lack of participation in the Town of Plympton as stemming from a deeper issue of insufficient spaces for developing deeper community engagement between the

town officials, like the Board of Selectmen, and other volunteer members on governing boards with the broader community. We propose cultivating greater participation in the Town of Plympton, especially with a younger population, through returning to previous in-person spaces where community members can approach their officials and officials can in turn recruit a broader selection of the community to serve in the decision making process.

We believe that there are two existing spaces that will be the most effective for increasing community participation: the local library and the local school. We propose two locations for a multi-pronged approach that will capture the attention and support of current young adults in the community who are absent as well as recruit the next generation. We found that the Town of Plympton is exploring many important policy questions that will shape the politics of the current residents as well as future constituents. From funding mental healthcare for students to debating conservation policy that determines housing availability in the town, town officials in Plympton are making policy decisions that will influence how attractive of a location it will be to recent college graduates or working professionals looking to move just south of the greater Boston area.

Space #1 - Local Library

First, we recommend that town officials return to a model of holding regular informational meetings at the local public library. We observed that the library is a space where prior to the pandemic community groups and town officials would meet to share information about upcoming developments as well as solicit public feedback. As communities across the Commonwealth return to more in-person activities, we recommend that local officials in Plympton consider hosting weekly or monthly town meetings that are less formal and structured as their annual Town Hall meetings. We suggest that the local library is the best space for local officials to share accurate information and respond to concerns from local residents because it is a neutral, shared environment. We also recommend that these town meetings be hosted on Saturday mornings or after business hours so that community members with jobs and children can attend. We hope that by hosting these meetings at the public library younger families will feel more comfortable bringing their children rather than searching for childcare.

Space #2 - Public School

Second, we recommend that town officials and volunteers on committee boards begin to engage a younger generation of residents by hosting informational sessions at the local public

high schools in the area. In practical terms, we imagine volunteers or elected officials will work with the school to set up school assemblies or after school activities where they can share with students more about what local politics looks like in their community. For example, the chair for Plympton's Open Spaces Committee could share with students the importance of balancing the desire to create more parks and trails for the public to use while protecting the environment. We hope to show students that they have the power and opportunity to influence policy in their community, even if they cannot officially elect town officials. In turn, we also believe this program will lead to mentorship relationships between students and officials so that students learn how to effectively run their government as they mature.

WEST BRIDGEWATER: Youth Council

We acknowledge that West Bridgewater's government meetings, as well as all other town's meetings, are taking place in the middle of the COVID pandemic. We also understand that during this time encouraging increased civic participation has been very difficult. However, in all of the meetings our group observed, we recognized several potentially impactful barriers to entry. In order to increase civic engagement among younger West Bridgewater residents (ages 18-40) we propose that town officials work to eliminate these barriers through legislation and new meeting protocols. These barriers include:

1. A paywall when calling in to a meeting over the phone
2. Lack of identification of all participating members when calling in over the phone
3. Poor audio quality resulting in difficulty hearing the details of the conversation
4. Could not participate in the meeting if not in-person

Attending these meetings virtually came with a number of difficulties. The first being that there was a small paywall (one cent per minute) in order to listen in over the phone. Although this was a small barrier, it could discourage the younger demographic from attending the meetings considering they might not pay their own phone bill. The quality of the audio over the phone was poor, so an alternative visual group meeting platform such as Zoom could encourage younger people, and people with hearing disabilities, to participate. Lastly, when calling in, you are not able to participate or identify anybody speaking in the meetings. Using the previously mentioned platform would help eradicate this problem. There are cheap and effective ways to

make it easier to participate during meetings for people of all backgrounds and abilities. Using a cohesive platform such as Zoom will help all parties involved better access meetings.

Recommendation to increase youth engagement: Bridgewater should start a youth council following a youth-centric model to improve participation among younger residents. Further, Bridgewater should classify the youth council as a community service project for students at Bridgewater-Raynham Regional High School. A youth council is an established decision-making group that advises prominent decision-makers and elected officials on youth issues in local communities. A youth council has many benefits for both the municipality and the youth members (typically ages 16-18). According to Collins Ausberger, “[youth] councils affiliated with local governments may provide a formal opportunity to facilitate youth engagement in the community, thus reducing social isolation, and may offer the opportunity for youth to voice their interests, thus resulting in more effective policy.”^[1] There are several different structures of youth councils. However, the youth-centric model is most effective in providing youth with a legitimate voice in municipal government.^[2] This model is defined by its majority youth membership and the inclusion of a minority of adult facilitators who supervise council activities, provide municipal information, training, and guidance. Despite adult presence, in this model, youth maintain status as full members of the council through their enthusiastic participation in all council proceedings.^[3] The development, maintenance, and success of youth councils are contingent on the interest and willingness of adults. The current participants in Bridgewater’s municipal government have proven dedication to the betterment of their community. Their enthusiasm is evident in the active volunteering of their time for the town. Based on current city council members’ observed community interest level, recruiting adult facilitators from that pool may prove most effective. A BRRHS faculty member should also be recruited as an adult facilitator – even if not a council member in other capacities. As Hugh Matthews reports, “[many] local government officers, too, have little experience of working with young people in this way and may be slow ‘to understand children’s needs and concerns or understand the barriers than impede their involvement’.”^[4] Having a familiar faculty member present on their council will also provide the youth with a sense of comfort and belonging when starting in a presumably intimidating setting. In their youth council recruitment strategy, Bridgewater should ensure membership on the youth council will be classified as community service. BRRHS employs a 60 hour community service requirement for graduation. With an estimated 91.5% of Bridgewater students in the typical youth council member age demographic enrolled in BRRHS (relative to private high school enrollment) it can be reasonably concluded that many potential participants would likely be coming from BRRHS.^[5] Further, partnership with BRRHS would be a successful recruitment strategy as students would be more likely to have initial participation interest with this additional benefit. With a 60-hour community service requirement, likelihood of regular participation in the youth council would increase. Regular participation in the youth

council is necessary because, “one-time involvement in a youth council [does not have an] impact on the individual, only through regular participation will young people develop a sense of competence and effectively participate and enact change in their communities.”^[6]

Bridgewater’s investment in a youth council membership will have both short term and long term payoffs. Civic engagement is likely to extend for former members of youth councils into adulthood. Moreover, research shows that high school participation in community service predicts higher rates of voting in adulthood, higher rates of volunteering, and overall increased civic engagement.^[7] This adulthood increase in civic engagement of the former youth council members may benefit the town of Bridgewater. Evidence shows that, on average, 42% of U.S. adults live in or near the community where they grew up, and this is actively increasing in suburban areas.^[8] As the likelihood of hometown retention increases for young adults, investing in a youth council will most likely result in youth engagement and develop into young adult civic engagement. While one cannot be certain that the youth council youth members will continue to live in Bridgewater after high school graduation, a youth council will rebrand Bridgewater as a great place to raise a family.

^[1] Augsberger, Collins, M. E., & Gecker, W. (2018). Engaging Youth in Municipal Government: Moving Toward a Youth-Centric Practice. *Journal of Community Practice*, 26(1), 41–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2017.1413023>.

^[2] Augsberger, Collins, M. E., & Gecker, W. (2018).

^[3] Augsberger, Collins, M. E., & Gecker, W. (2018).

^[4] Matthews, Hugh. (2001).

^[5] "Educational Attainment." United State Census Bureau. Accessed April 27, 2022. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Education&g=1600000US2508130>.

^[6] Augsberger, Collins, M. E., & Gecker, W. (2018).

^[7] Hart, D., Donnelly, T. M., Youniss, J., & Atkins, R. (2007). High School Community Service as a Predictor of Adult Voting and Volunteering. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(1), 197–219. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831206298173>.

^[8] Parker, Kim, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Anna Brown, Richard Fry, D'Vera Cohn, and Ruth Igeilnik. "Americans' satisfaction with and attachment to their communities." Pew Research Center. Last modified May 22, 2018. Accessed April 27, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/americans-satisfaction-with-and-attachment-to-their-communities/>.

BROCKTON: Student Voucher Program

Problem: Not enough young people are participating in local politics.

To increase the political engagement of Brockton's young residents, Brockton's schools should work to connect students to their local government directly. Studies show youth participation in local government leads to increased attainment of higher education, especially in lower-income communities (Kam). Furthermore, Brockton is the ideal community for this type of engagement as two of its major policy issues are limited opportunities for economic success as well as its subpar education system. While the district is underfunded, they have a long history of providing additional educational programming for its community (BPSMA). Research has found that the main factor that drives low rates of youth participation is a lack of direct incentive for participating in local government (Kam). Thus, a successful solution would incentivize younger residents to participate in local politics and foster a greater connection between government and Brockton's youth so they will continue their increased civic engagement through adulthood.

Implementable Solution

The proposal includes establishing an optional school incentive program to increase participation in local politics. The voucher program at Brockton's public high schools will incentivize students to participate in local government and engage with their local community. Local businesses, such as movie theaters and restaurants, can opt into the program and choose what kind of options they will offer, such as discounted meals or gift cards. In order to earn these vouchers, students must participate in various community engagement activities: attending local government meetings or joining community organizations and outreach programs. Students then log their hours and submit them to school administrators or teachers in charge of the program during the school year and receive corresponding vouchers in return.

STOUGHTON: Integrated Marketing Campaign

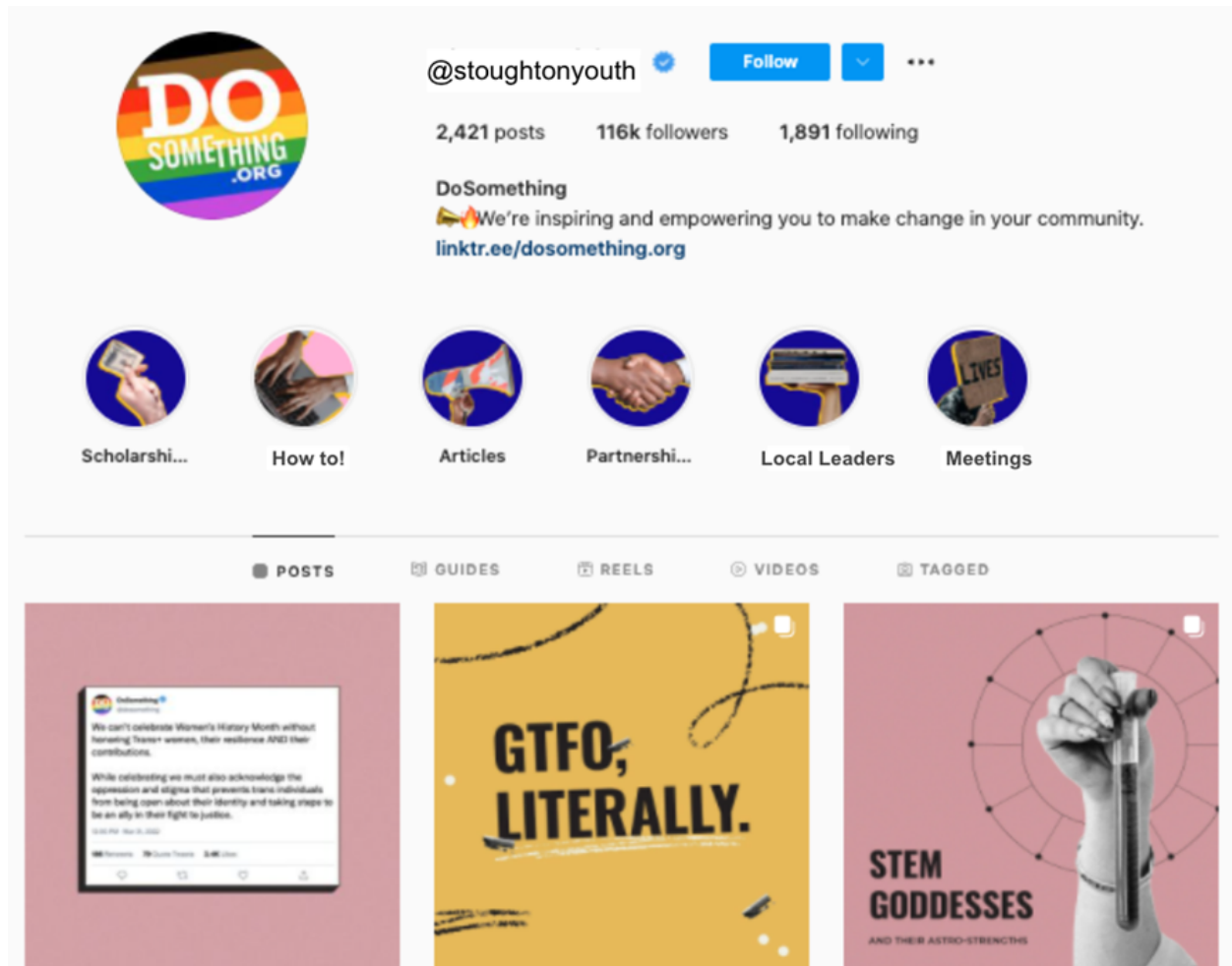
One realistic idea to help improve participation among younger residents would be to launch an integrated marketing campaign. An IMC campaign is a cross-channel marketing strategy that involves creating consistent campaigns across a variety of platforms. Specifically, an increase in participation could be achieved through a highly vocal social media crusade directed at the young people of Stoughton. This campaign would allow them to possess a platform in which they could interactively stay updated with local Stoughton politics, and voice their opinions. Multiple social media accounts could be created on platforms such as Instagram and Tiktok geared to the younger people of Stoughton. Such accounts could be run by a newly formed committee called the Stoughton Youth Advocates for Involvement Committee (SYAIC). This committee could encompass a group of educated, politically passionate, qualified, under 40-year-old Stoughton residents verified to speak on local issues through an experience assessment. The committee and campaign could be supervised by local advisors.

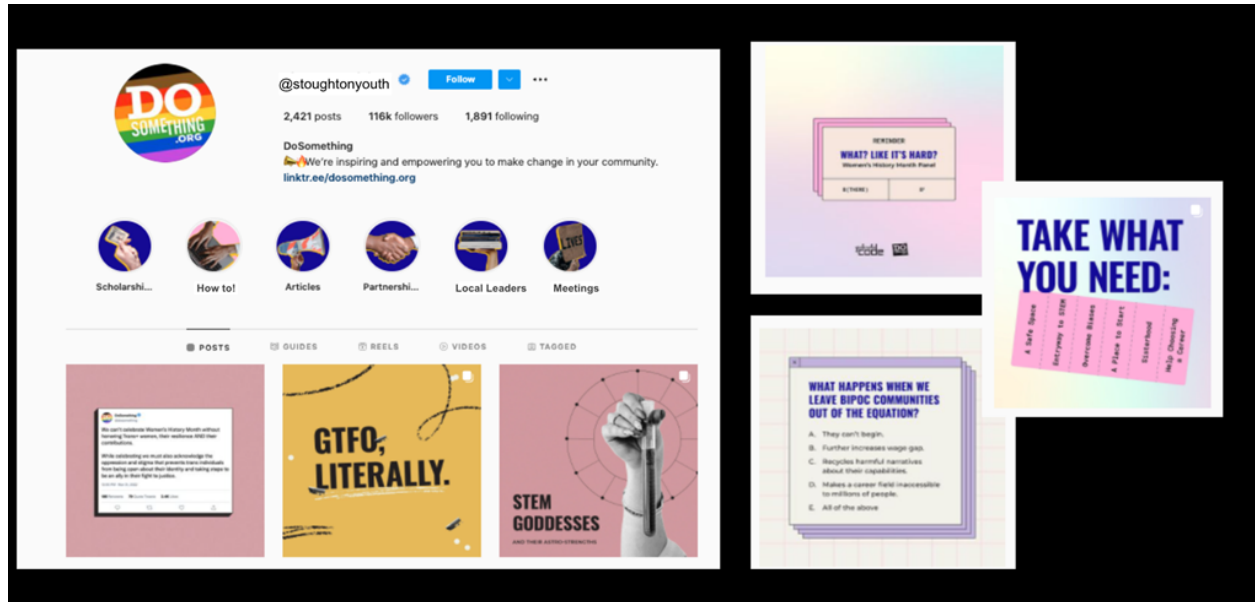
Younger generations today can connect to social media. A recent example is President Biden's utilization of social media influencers to educate the youth of America regarding the war on Ukraine and the inflation of oil prices. According to Pew Research Center, more than eight-in-ten U.S. citizens (86%) say they get news from a smartphone, computer or tablet "often" or "sometimes," including 60% who say they do so often. Since the younger generation obtains most of their information from social media, an IMC campaign would be an effective strategy. The campaign would entice the young people of Stoughton to care about local government, politics, and issues in their community. Young people often have a lot to say, especially students, and a social media campaign could not only inform them of their communities' problems, but also could give them a platform to voice their opinions, concerns, and constructive ideas.

In terms of specific content, the campaign could focus on two extremely popular platforms among today's youth: Instagram and TikTok. Individual posts on both platforms could explain local news and issues in entertaining and creative ways, including with photographs and enticing graphics, while also being informative and calling upon the youth to take a stand or get involved politically. The campaign could make young people aware of local events or meetings, which is a large current problem in Stoughton – as the current main website is highly unclear, disorganized, and archaic. A large reason for lack of involvement in smaller communities and local affairs can be attributed to lack of accessibility. Citizens are often apprehensive to seek out information that might be difficult to find, especially if they are busy with their daily lives. However, if a young person cares about an issue and sees a social media post that advertises an

easy, accessible, local meeting, then they'd be much more inclined to attend as they don't have to work as hard to find out when and where they are being held.

Launching an IMC and social media campaign would be sure to increase participation in Stoughton's government by younger residents.





BROCKTON: Partnerships with Local Businesses

In order to increase local government participation among Brockton residents under 40, we propose a plan to promote local businesses during city council meetings. This “partnership” between the local government and businesses of Brockton could be beneficial for both parties in promoting the other. Basically, Brockton city council meetings could feature goods and coupons from local businesses as an incentive for more, younger people to attend. Below we have attached an example of a flyer that could be posted in businesses and around Brockton to advertise this new partnership. This partnership could also extend to a city council presence at the Brockton Farmer’s Market once it starts back up again. A booth could be set up with councilors announcing the partnership for the next meeting and doing direct constituent service.

This partnership could work by increasing awareness of local government while simultaneously promoting local businesses. The two problems this proposal seeks to address are incentives and information. It can incentivize attendance at city council meetings because free samples and coupons are positive motivations to take part in the meetings. Also, it can increase the circulation of information about city council meetings through posting flyers in the local businesses with which the city council partners with.

Additionally, Brockton is home to a young, diverse generation of voters with historically low turnout in local elections. We suggest putting an emphasis on partnerships with POC-owned

businesses that are already integrated in Brockton’s younger community so that Brockton city council could further help engage the next generation of black and Latino citizens in civic affairs.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brockton’s local businesses are suffering. The town is taking actions to ensure these enterprises feel supported and able to remain open in the pandemic’s aftermath. One project that the mayor is working on is the “Open For Business Initiative.” This involves an app called Brockton MA City of Champions that gives a guide to local restaurants and businesses for residents and visitors. As a part of this proposal, city council meetings could promote their partnerships with local businesses as a “spotlight” on this app.

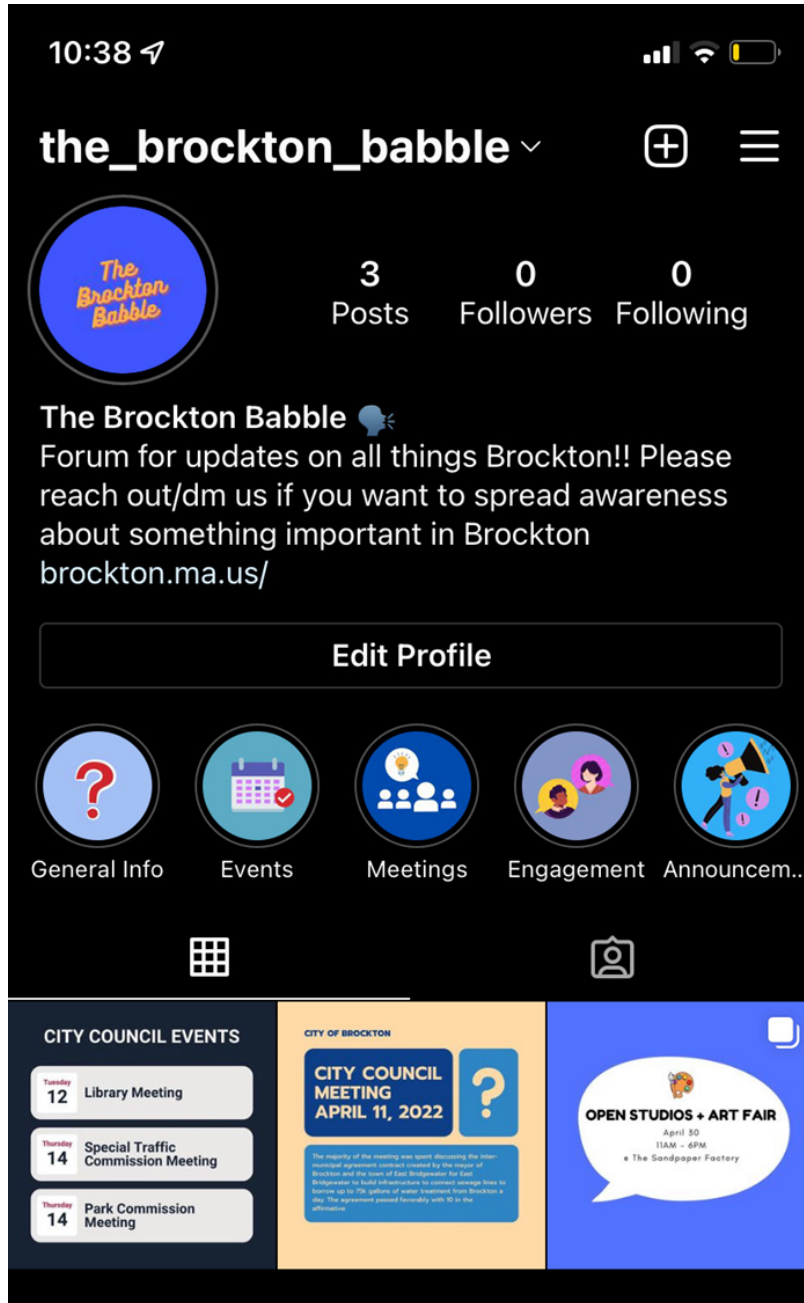
This proposal is just an outline of a possible way to increase information and incentivize attendance at city council meetings. We understand that a direct partnership between business and government could get complicated if there is incentive misalignment; however, we feel that as this plan develops we can take steps to make a solid, mutually beneficial partnership between the city of Brockton and the business community.

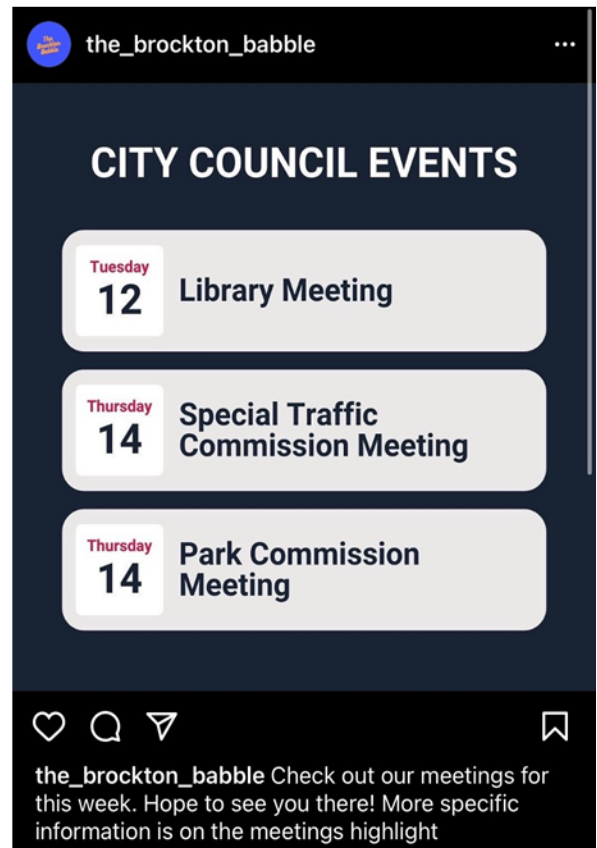


BROCKTON: The Brockton Babble

To increase engagement with local politics within the community amongst younger people, we were thinking it would be beneficial to start a social media campaign that promotes relevant local policy issues and events through the use of infographics, and potentially even memes. From our research, we found that there are many members in the Brockton community that are extremely active on social media. We found a Facebook group, called the Brockton Hub, where members, who are generally older, seem to post about everything related to the neighborhood, including reviews, recommendations, questions, and local politics. This public group has over 72.5 thousand members and there are regular posts from community members several times a day.

Using social media is the most efficient way to promote and recap important events within the community because it is instant and reaches many people at once. Most adolescents and young adults use social media as a means to keep up with news and learn about current events. Social media platforms, like Twitter and Instagram, are most popular with a younger audience, which is the group we are trying to reach. Social media also allows for easy access to and summarizes complex issues, through the use of infographics and even memes, which makes politics seem less intimidating to inexperienced constituents. By creating posts and infographics that advertise community events and meetings, as well as those that provide summaries of important community meetings that break them down into layman's terms, we believe that more young people will be inclined to engage with the community.





EASTON: Town Meeting Accessibility & Communications

In contemporary times, younger generations have decreasing amounts of time, interest, and effort to put forth in local government. Modern-day technology has uniquely shaped how politics and humans interact with one another. In fact, such technology would be thought to rapidly increase the participation of the younger generation in local government, should it not? Though such an increase should be present, we observe a stagnant and almost decaying percentage of youth participating in local government. Such an anomaly as this must have a root cause. After a thorough investigation into Easton Massachusetts, it became clear that participation is directly affected by the convenience of said participation. With a wide variety of information available through the use of technology, younger generations seem to cater to their interests based on what is accessible to them through technology. With that being said, it is essential to create a method of communication with younger town members with the use of technology. To supplement such a need, it can be proposed that a monthly email newsletter would be efficient to not only draw younger generations into local government but also create a sense of community while doing so. Specifically, the newsletter should contain a clear name, such as “Easton News”, a section catered to local government schedules with links to online viewing options, and a section that highlights the greatness of the Easton community.

In communication options such as email, the subject and title of said email are what draw readers in. To create a sense of attraction to open the email newsletter, it should contain a clear and concise title, which conveys to the reader that they should pay attention to the email. The title “Easton News” provides readers with a sense of identity (town name), while also alerting that the information is important (news!). The email newsletters should be emailed to those who have either elected to receive the newsletter or those whose email addresses are currently on file.

As a means to address participation, accessibility to local government meetings and minutes is essential. To incorporate this into the newsletter, a schedule section can be implemented. In this section, titles to local government and town meetings for the month will be displayed alongside the date of said meeting. Additionally, town meetings should be recorded and accessible through a connecting link included within this part of the newsletter. This addition will allow readers to simply return to the emailed newsletter and click the link when the date of a meeting has come. In addition, included in this section will be a link to a survey, which will relate to each meeting. For participants who want to contribute to local government but cannot make time to attend meetings virtually or in-person, a survey of related content can gain massive insight into

the opinions of local residents. This additional information could play a vital role in local government involving public opinion within Easton.

Finally, a section should be included that contributes to the interconnectedness of local residents. For example, the newsletter could implement a monthly “family shoutout”, where a local family is featured within the newsletter with a small description of how this family contributed to the ideals and morals that surround Easton. This important sense of community will allow readers to gain an increased appreciation for their town, prompting them to possibly take interest in local government. Those who feel loved and appreciated by their town will want to increase their efforts to care for their local community, prompting an increase in participation.



This title is easily recognizable to busy, younger populations. It quickly identifies how it includes the viewer (being an Easton resident), while also relaying what the purpose of such email may be (Monthly Newsletter)

With a family shoutout, members of the town of Easton would feel more appreciated, providing and incentive to them as a means to involve themselves in their community more often

Access to not only the dates of important meetings, but also a means for the viewers to express their own opinion (through survey link) about the topics being discussed within each meeting allows youngsters populations the motivation to include themselves in local government

PEMBROKE: High School Civics

Our idea for increasing participation in public meetings is mandating high school students to attend town meetings as part of a broader civics curriculum. This idea was inspired by some group members who had a similar requirement in their high school. The Pembroke high school curriculum already includes three civics classes: Street Law, U.S. Government, and AP Government. However, these are not required to graduate. We are proposing a one-semester, mandatory local government class taken by students, ideally in their first year. In this class, students will learn about local government, specifically issues facing Pembroke.

They will be required to attend five town meetings, either on Zoom or in-person. They will not be required to verbally participate, but will have to take notes on the meeting proceedings. The semester will then wrap up with students choosing one issue they heard discussed in town meetings and conducting a presentation, such as zoning laws or education policy. The presentations would be done in front of their teacher, but also ideally the School Board or other prominent community members. We chose to propose this because it will teach students about local politics from a young age, specifically why they're important and how they directly affect people's lives. For example, the School Board directly affects the lives of these students. This will then trickle down onto parents and other family members. As the students will be in their first year of high school, parents will have to drive their children to in-person meetings, and will maybe accompany them into meetings. For Zoom meetings, parents will likely be in the house and might want to watch it with their children. Students will be encouraged to talk about the issues with their parents afterwards. Therefore, their parents — who have more considerable power in local politics — will hopefully get involved. Also, students will be able to exercise their political power. Being under 18, they are unable to vote, but since these issues directly impact them, they will be well-informed and can choose to participate in these meetings. Students are also already involved in town meetings in Pembroke, such as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. Pembroke is also an extremely family-oriented community; 40 percent of the town has a child under the age of 18 living with them, which is a very sizable part of the community. Therefore, we believe it makes sense to make meetings more family-friendly. As we understand, town meetings are usually dominated by wealthy, old homeowners, so we hope that introducing young audience members will increase the diversity and make it a more equitable and accessible forum, which will hopefully incentivize other members of the community to join.

STOUGHTON: Government Day

One realistic idea to improve younger resident participation in Stoughton, MA is to host a government day for local twelfth graders. The premise of this annual event would have high school history and government teachers elect highly interested students to attend a day long event at the local town hall in which current board members would have the students work on a current local policy issue. As such, the students would essentially take on the role of the board members and grapple with real life public policy issues to come up with a proposal to help fix the given issue. Working together, like the real board members do, the students would gain firsthand experience into what local policy looks like as well as what local governments do. After spending the day collaborating on the proposal to help with the issue, the board members would “elect” certain students to the board and other students to present the proposal to said board.

Later in the day, the elected students would put on a mock town hall meeting in which their proposal was presented. After hearing the proposal, the elected student board members would then vote on the proposal and give their reasons for voting for or against the proposal. This government day will allow students who are either already eighteen, or nearing the legal age to vote, to become involved in the processes of their local government in a manner they would not otherwise gain. Through this program, we anticipate younger residents to feel more of a sense of urgency and necessity to participate in local politics, or at least, understand the importance of voting in local elections. Considering that the latest board election only drew in 5.8% of voters, we believe this plan could help to increase younger political participation within the town of Stoughton by inspiring the next voting group to be fully engaged in their local government^[1].

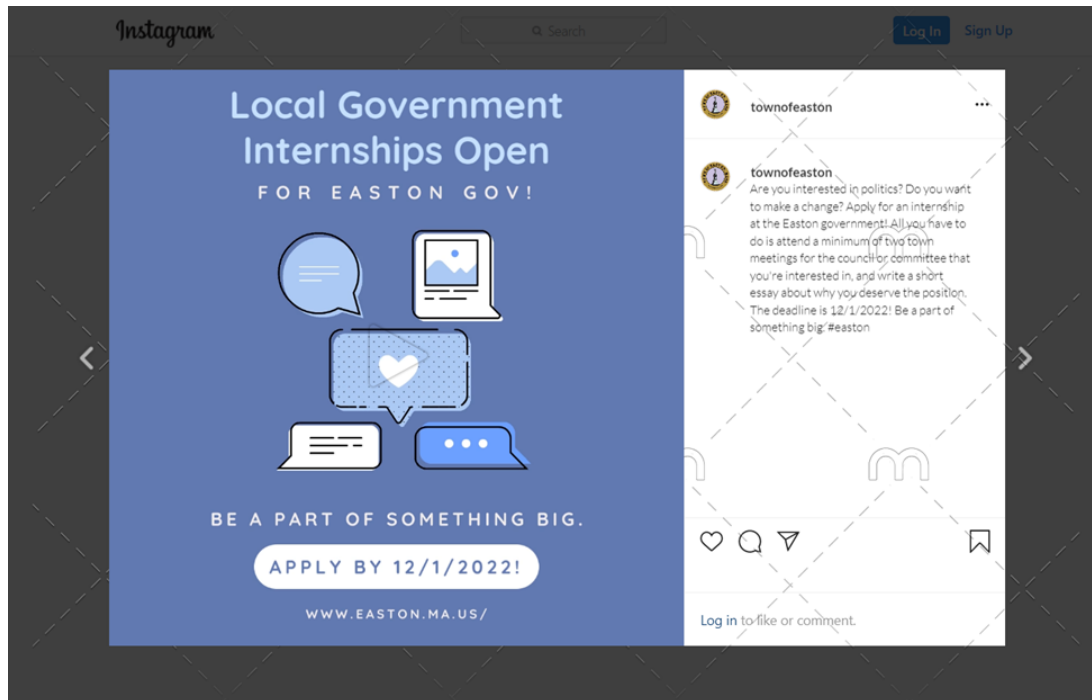
^[1] Bentley, J. (2021, June 24). *Louis Gitto to push for new Stoughton fire station right away*. Stoughton, MA Patch. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from <https://patch.com/massachusetts/stoughton/louis-gitto-push-new-stoughton-fire-station-right-away>

EASTON: Internship Program

To increase participation of younger members of the community in the local government of Easton, our group suggests creating an internship program with the local government designed for high school and college students. This internship program would feature internships with different boards, councils, or committees in the Easton government. Some examples of possible internships are: Legislative Intern (Select Board), Economics Intern (Economic Development Council), Finance Intern (Finance Committee), and Town of Easton Social Media Intern. The areas for the internships can be at the discretion of Easton, as members of the Select Board or the Town Administrator may have a better grasp on which board would be the most beneficial for a student to intern for or could benefit the most from having interns. The interns for councils and committees can shadow meetings, assist in the organization of materials, help plan events, and perform any other tasks that will assist the board members in their duties. The social media intern can create and run accounts on different social media platforms, like TikTok or Instagram, that are frequently used by younger audiences to gain their attention for issues that would concern the Easton community.

To apply for this internship, we recommend requiring applicants to attend a minimum of two meetings for the council or committee they are applying for and write a short essay about why they believe they should receive the position with that specific board, drawing on their experience in the meetings. We believe that this would increase the participation of youth in Easton because students in high school and college are typically very interested in internship opportunities, especially in their own communities. This would allow for students to gain experience in areas they may want to pursue as a career, while learning about the structure of their own town.

EASTON GOVERNMENT INTERNSHIP CAMPAIGN MOCKUP



ABINGTON: Digital Surveys before Town Meetings

The small town of Abington, Massachusetts, has a poor representation within its local government. Roughly ten individuals were present at the bi-weekly housing committee meetings, while approximately a hundred people attended the annual town hall meeting. Given the town’s [population of approximately sixteen thousand](#), these numbers are insufficient and do not authentically represent the views and opinions of the entire town. After observing Abington’s Annual Town Meeting and housing committee meeting, the issues discussed have primarily dealt with fiscal concerns. However, our concern is the topics being discussed at these meetings do not match the widespread voices of the Abington community. The constant discussion of irrelevant issues for most residents discourages them from participating in town meetings. To solve this issue, we propose that Abington send a digital survey to allow residents to elect the topic of discussion in town meetings. The survey will give an incentive for residents to attend meetings where the subject of debate is more relevant, mainly for those forty and younger who are the future of the town.

While fiscal issues are essential to the upkeep of the town, the constant discussion of finances at town meetings does not attract the majority of residents to participate in local government. The funding of the local police is raised far too often, primarily due to Abington experiencing

low crime levels. We believe the discussed topics must shift. Our idea is to publicly post a survey on the town's website and recruit other key agents in the town to share the survey amongst residents. In local social media groups, residents can identify problems they believe are essential to discuss. A few examples of questions the survey would ask residents are as such: if they observe a lack of diversity, desire a betterment of local schools, or wish for a decrease in the cost of housing. In addition to a list of potential issues, a space will be left for individuals to fill out problems they are experiencing that are not listed. With topics elected by the majority of residents, mainly those forty and younger, we believe the discussion of issues faced by the majority of residents will increase participation in local government.

Below is the generated survey we would forward to residents, and post on the town website and local social media accounts: [TOWN OF ABINGTON PUBLIC SURVEY](#)

BROCKTON: Civic Learning Partnerships

As our goal is to increase political participation in residents under forty, our proposal is to implement a district-wide civic learning curriculum in the City of Brockton. According to the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, students who receive civic learning in their education are more likely to vote, discuss politics at home, volunteer and work on community issues, and are more comfortable reaching out to their political representatives.^[1] A recent school committee meeting that discussed curriculum for the remaining school year made it clear there is no substantial political or civic literacy program in place for students in Brockton. While the city has had high voter turnout in national elections in recent years, with 80% voter turnout in the last presidential election, voter participation in the local elections has been far lower and, in fact, decreasing with time.^[2] In the 2019 Brockton mayoral election, 31.55% of registered voters participated while in 2021 this number dropped to 19.7% of registered voters.^[3] Through our proposal and partnership with local organizations and key stakeholders, we hope to reverse this trend.

Throughout our research on the City of Brockton, there are a number of organizations that work specifically with youth on community-minded projects that our project would partner with to build on pre-existing community engagement strategies. One effective program that was highlighted in a community meeting we observed was “Empower Yourself” which focused on providing high-achieving students with financial literacy skills. With organizations such as this one, it is clear that there is already infrastructure in place for nonprofits to work through schools to reach youth in Brockton. Implementing civic literacy lessons in Brockton Public Schools will provide a foundation but partnering with important community nonprofits will

provide a real-world context for this curriculum. When students are equipped with this kind of toolkit, they will not only be more informed but also possess a deep investment in their community. For more information on this multifaceted program, a pilot poster to be distributed to Brockton Public Schools can be found in the appendix of this paper.



Mock-up of possible poster, above

^[1] “Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools,” Publications (Carnegie Corporation of New York), accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.carnegie.org/publications/guardian-of-democracy-the-civic-mission-of-schools/>.

^[2] Marc Larocque, “Brockton Official Predicts 80 Percent Voter Turnout; 1/3 of Ballots Already Cast,” Enterprise News (The Enterprise, November 2, 2020), <https://www.enterprisenews.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/11/02/exert-some-patience-brockton-official-predicts-80-percent-voter-turnout-13-of-ballots-already-cast/114616764/>.

^[3] Marc LarocqueThe Enterprise, “Sullivan Wins Decisive Victory to Become Brockton's New Mayor,” New Bedford Standard-Times (Standard-Times, November 6, 2019), <https://www.southcoasttoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/11/06/sullivan-wins-decisive-victory-to/2360123007/>.

PLYMPTON: Social Media & Polling for Town Meetings

Plympton is a small town with a population mostly over 40 years old. Currently, the meetings are held amongst middle-aged and elderly members and last for about two and half hours. In the meetings, members are able to express the opinions which they believe are shared with their neighbors. Considering how small and densely populated Plympton is, this may be a reasonable assumption. However, it can lead to excessively long meetings due to personal disagreements and emotional outbursts. This, in turn, discourages those who did not attend to view the long and unorganized recording. Since the meetings follow a structure it is safe to assume there is a predetermined agenda which can be distributed to the townspeople ahead of time to allow them space to directly voice their opinions. To prevent back and forth arguments and speed up the pace of the meetings there should be one third-party facilitator who ensures the group works efficiently and respectfully. In order to increase engagement we have to use a method that retains the existing and older members while recruiting new and younger faces. To achieve this, our group proposes that Plympton’s local government hire a publicist who will send out polls through mass email *and* social media. They should send out an email the week before with the agenda outlined and simultaneously make posts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok outlining the topics of discussion. By Friday, a link to a poll should be sent out both by email and each social media platform. This poll will require members to input their address and age to help the city gather accurate data about who is responding and why they align with certain ideas, thus creating an avenue for accountability by measuring growth and provoking good change. The poll will have one small character restricted short response section for those who click “other”. The publicist and/or facilitator (this can be one person) should

gather any questions or statements from that short response question and distribute it to the board ahead of time allowing time for individuals to gather their thoughts ahead of time.

WEST BRIDGEWATER: Locations for Town Meetings

Our proposal to gain greater youth participation in local meetings and committees is to appeal to the younger-aged voting residents of West Bridgewater. From our viewings of town and committee meetings within West Bridgewater, we noticed that significantly younger residents were absent from much of the audience. The meetings are currently held at either the high school in evening hours or in small rooms with just a dozen residents in attendance. As we are looking to improve participation with residents under 40, we are proposing that West Bridgewater relocate their meetings and information sessions to a more approachable venue that many residents are already familiar with.

Barrett's Alehouse is a large restaurant and bar in West Bridgewater. Upon viewing geotagged photographs posted on Instagram, our group became aware that this location is a well-known destination in West Bridgewater that is already popular with many residents. This location also houses an arcade, which can be beneficial for younger parents who would be able to bring their kids along to meetings rather than needing to hire a babysitter. Our group is insisting on making participation less of a burden and more of a beneficial engagement. The issues already impact these young residents' lives, the goal is to mobilize them and get them to participate in local government. By doing this, we conclude that utilizing Barrett's Alehouse as a setting for town meetings creates a more casual tone and will make many more residents feel comfortable to participate in a setting they already associate with.

KINGSTON: Partnership with Dunkin Donuts

In Kingston, community participation in local affairs is dominated by older populations with little to no contribution from members of the younger generation. However, it is our mission to increase participation among younger residents in the Kingston community. In Kingston, out of 6,300 residents, only 1,500 residents voted in local elections. In other words, only 24% of this community's population actively engages in their local government, with the majority of engagement from the community's senior members. This is a strikingly low engagement rate that we believe could be improved with the addition of incentives and accessibility.

From a community perspective, incentives will serve as a form of motivation and encouragement to push participation and engagement among younger members. In the town's

Board of Selectmen meeting from April 5th, board members discussed the town's above-average budget for the size of the community. With that in mind, we would plan to allocate the necessary capital towards a partnership with the community's local Dunkin'.

Using our partnership with the coffee chain, we plan to increase attendance at government meetings, participation in local elections, and an overall awareness of community issues and events. We realize that with younger adults, time is of the essence. Therefore, part of the initiative would be to establish a "one-stop-shop" set up. In other words, representatives would be stationed outside local establishments, such as gyms or grocery stores, with Dunkin' gift cards, flyers, and a willingness to speak to residents about town issues and events. The idea of a "one-stop-shop" would allow citizens to engage in their community while still completing their daily tasks. Another aspect of our incentive plan is to offer free coffee, or gift cards, to residents who attend meetings or vote in elections, as more people are likely to attend when they know they will receive something for free.



KINGSTON: Agendas for Town Meetings

Our proposed solution to these problems of meeting structure and organization is that the city of Kingston set time limits on each issue being discussed, have set barriers on who can speak and when, and publicize the meeting schedule, including timestamps of when each issue will be brought before the council, using modern amplifiers such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. It is unrealistic to expect locals to attend a four hour meeting if they are only interested in discussing one or two topics; however, if the specific time for the discussion they want to attend is live-tweeted or broadcast through other social media platforms, it is reasonable to assume that more locals would attend these meetings because they could engage with the issues they care about, and not be forced to sit through issues which they do not.

Utilizing social media as a primary source of publicizing meetings also has the combined effect of reaching a younger audience than may usually attend these meetings, as well as striking where there is already intense debate about local issues. As discussed previously, “Town Locals,” boasts substantial engagement, activism, and debate; the fact that the Kingston City Council essentially operates separately from this hotbed of ideas and participation is a missed opportunity which can be easily remedied by immersing itself in this platform.

There have already been substantial attempts to modernize the debate about local politics in Kingston which have enjoyed moderate success. Local journalist Donna Rodriguez of Plymouth Area Community Television (PACTV) interviewed all candidates for the local school board elections and posted them to YouTube. Although these videos do not enjoy widespread viewership, they are a step in the right direction and show that yearning for modernization already exists in the Kingston community.

WHITMAN: Student Competition

Whitman has a civic engagement problem that primarily stems from a lack of participation from their younger population. We noticed that at Whitman’s Board of Selectmen and other committee meetings there were no participants under the age of 50. This has negatively impacted many policy areas and their outcomes, including the efficiency of applying and distributing grant money, which directly affects younger demographics. We propose enhancing youth participation and civic engagement through a student centered competition that addresses how to best use grant money.

Encouraging the younger generation in Whitman to participate in civic conversations would influence them to continuously have an impact and say in local politics. This program aims to be part of all elementary, middle, and high schools in the Whitman-Hanson School District in order to prime students to think and act within the town. Classes and related clubs should facilitate public outreach at the schools. In addition, assemblies for both parents and students should be established to explain the competition and the importance of students' participation.

This civic engagement program would partner with the Whitman Think Tank which is familiar with public policy and the politics of Whitman. Students would be encouraged to use their resources and expertise, allowing students to get a better understanding of the project as well as a baseline understanding of Whitman and its policies. Student participation would be centered around brainstorming and proposing ideas rather than grant proposal logistics. The competition would start off at a school level and have an elimination process before making its way up to the selectmen (to limit the amount of burden on the counsel). This program would drastically increase both interest in Whitman's local politics in younger generations as well as allow for policies that benefit voices that are currently silent in the realm of Whitman politics.

BROCKTON: Student Incentives

A realistic way to improve the participation of younger residents in Brockton's local government would be by creating an incentive program through the school districts. Connecting the next generation of voters to the local government and making them aware of issues that will affect their futures.

As cynical as it sounds, it is found in today's world that many young adults are not motivated to participate without receiving something in return. As Brockton's school system is divided by district lines, our group proposes a program that unites both sides and allows the public and charter schools to cooperate on local government issues. In return, students will receive credits towards an elective course or community service hours that goes towards their graduation requirements.

Throughout our research, we have found that the city of Brockton allows its residents to have controlled school choice. Meaning that within established guidelines, parents can choose which school their child will attend. As we dove deeper into the foundation of Brockton's education systems, it seems that the majority of its residents pick between: Brockton High School, Champion High School, and New Height Charter School for their child's high school education. All of which are "free", but not exactly equal.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, each of the schools offer different programs and assistance. Which can lead to various types of educational inequality. For example, Brockton High School is known and highly desired due to their esteemed “International Baccalaureate” program. The IB program academically challenges and prepares students from ages 16 to 19 for the world’s leading universities. While also setting New Height Charter School at a disadvantage. With our program, we believe that we can set the students up on an equal footing and provide them with experience in their own communities. Regardless of what they are being taught within their classrooms, the student will be given the opportunity to see real change alongside their peers.

Our team hopes that by creating an incentive for the students to work with the local government, it will also push for parents and guardians to get more involved in the community as well. It will not matter whether one is from the West or East side of Brockton because the policy work will affect Brockton as a whole.

PEMBROKE: Town Meeting Frequency

While local governments are tasked with making many decisions throughout the course of a year, few residents participate in community decision making, and if they do, representation is often unevenly distributed across age, race, and income. The Town of Pembroke, Massachusetts is no exception to this political pitfall. With an older, affluent community, Pembroke's key policy decisions often reflect the political views of its older residents and mask the views of the younger residents, which causes younger residents to participate less in the town’s political processes.

A possible solution to Pembroke’s issue of low political participation from younger residents is to make local open town hall meetings more frequent. Pembroke already practices a direct democracy style of governance, which we believe is the most effective in encouraging younger voter turnout because it gives residents tangible influence over the town’s policies. However, the downside to Pembroke’s direct democracy is that the town hall meeting is only held once a year in May. This is a problem because younger residents are likely employed, and their busy work schedules make it difficult for them to attend the single designated day to participate in town proceedings. If meetings were held more frequently, more residents would be able to attend, allowing more voices from the community to be heard. By providing Pembroke’s residents with more opportunities to be involved in the inner workings of their town’s political proceedings, it helps make municipal politics more accessible and improve civic engagement.

HALIFAX: Community Festival

Halifax's percentage of over 65 residents is 14.2% . The percentage of people under 65 is approximately 85.8% with 23.6% of that being under 18 individuals. The people involved in local government are noticeably older, despite the fact that the majority of the town is under 65 (US Census Bureau 2021). The majority of people we have observed on boards, committees, and other sects of local government are older individuals. This highlights the problem of low participation of under 40 year old individuals within the operations of the town. Halifax is an extremely small town, and the lack of age diversity and community dynamics observed in town meetings reflect this. Hence we believe that the problem of the lack of under 40 community engagement could be lessened with an increase in community activities that involve local government, but where local government is not the only focus to make it interesting and attractive to younger audiences. The idea we developed is a community festival that has the local community interacting with the local government in ways that are fun and enriching for both the residents and the government. Many communities do community festivals already, but what is unique about our idea is that the booths at the fair would consist of local government boards, councils, and committees as well as local businesses. It would ideally be a mix of a job fair, educational experience on local government, and festival. The festival aspect consisting of the petting zoo, fire trucks, and live music would appeal more to the younger children of Halifax, and hopefully also encourage their parents to attend. It would also increase the amount of knowledge local residents have of businesses in their own community as they would be invited to set up booths to advertise. Local restaurants would also be invited to sell food. The goal of the festival would be just to get some interaction with younger residents and local government and hopefully inspire some to participate.

PLYMOUTH: Young People's Advisory Committee

Plymouth, Massachusetts is currently undergoing a school redistricting plan, which provides a perfect opportunity to promote involvement for younger people in town affairs. Our proposal is to take advantage of this redistricting and establish, alongside the new districts, an advisory council consisting of representatives elected by students. This body will consist of 14-16 representatives (depending on the number of districts chosen), and there will be two seats. One seat will be reserved for high school students, while the other is to be selected from the young candidates who reside within that school district. The electorate for this council will be students themselves, who will hear appeals from the candidates and select on two using a ranked-choice system. The winners of the election will then be granted a seat on Young Peoples' Advisory Committee, which will formally meet once per month to discuss important issues faced by

people younger than 40 in the community, with regular opportunities to present ideas to the Town Council. The rationale behind this proposal is that, by having youth be the electorate, there will be a natural inclination to elect younger people to this board. Since half the seats will be high school students, and the other half will be elected from the general populace, there will inherently be a level of youth voice on the council, but it will not be constrained to just high schoolers. While the council will not have any formal, legal powers (as this would likely not be compatible with state law), the council will provide incentives in terms of political experience, resume building, and a genuine opportunity to make positive political change in Plymouth. Furthermore, the council and the unique method of selection for council members will help to foster a respect for the institutions of democratic governance and participation within that structure among students in Plymouth. As a result, it is likely that students who are involved with the process will have heightened political efficacy and be more likely to continue to interact with city government.

BRIDGEWATER: Flyers & QR Codes

In discussion of the role of community participation in local government, young people's lack of involvement in politics is most commonly blamed on apathy or laziness. However, while young people do participate in local government at a lower rate than older Americans, we believe their disengagement is stimulated by limited access to the education and resources necessary to drive civic engagement and promote positive change in local communities.

With this issue in mind, our team created an advertisement to help young people in Bridgewater better understand how to engage with their local government. This advertisement is structured in two parts: First, we designed a colorful flyer that will be posted in areas around Bridgewater that attract a high concentration of younger residents. Examples of locations include the Bridgewater Public Library, Bridgewater's MBTA station, Bridgewater-Raynham Regional High School, local restaurants, and the Bridgewater State University campus. This flyer includes a QR code linking to the second component of the advertisement, which is a downloadable infographic outlining how residents can participate in Bridgewater's local government.

Implementing a QR code is useful for our advertisement because it enables versatility in the locations where it can be displayed. In addition to physical distribution, we will email our advertisement to our well-connected contact list, encouraging them to post and share the flyer and infographic. This digital method of communication can increase the reach of our advertisement across town to include a wide range of community associations and student-led

organizations. In effect, this advertisement aims to make information about government participation readily accessible to young people in Bridgewater, without having to search for it themselves. We hope that presenting this information in an easy-to-read, digital format will inform younger residents that getting involved with Bridgewater’s local government is not as daunting as it seems and encourages them to contribute to their community.

IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOU.

LEARN HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH BRIDGEWATER TODAY.

Scan the code below to get started.

Stay Informed and Get Involved

Attend Town Council Meetings

- Town Council meetings are a great way to learn about the issues and events going on in the community, listen to the perspectives of others in the community, and voice your own opinion on important matters in Bridgewater.
- Meetings are held on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month on Zoom.
- Meeting links can be accessed online at bridgewaterma.org/calendar or on Facebook @Town of Bridgewater, MA.

Join a Committee or Board

- Bridgewater is always seeking new, dedicated voices to serve on its diverse selection of committees or boards to address town issues. Serving as a member of a committee or board can provide residents with an opportunity to participate in a leadership role and improve how the government serves its people.
- Apply to join today at www.bridgewaterma.org/198/Boards-Committees-Commissions.

Connect on Social Media

- Rewatch town council/committee meetings, voice questions and concerns, and keep up-to-date with everything happening in Bridgewater via social media.
- Facebook: @Town of Bridgewater, MA
- Twitter: @BridgewaterMA
- YouTube: @Town of Bridgewater, MA
- Instagram: @townofbridgewater

Register to Vote

- Register to vote—and then, go out and do it.
- If you're 16 years of age or older, you may pre-register or register to vote in MA online today at www.sec.state.ma.us/svr/.
- Once you're registered to vote, you can find all the essential information for upcoming elections online at www.bridgewaterma.org/1430/Vote.
- If you have any other questions on voting, call 508-697-0921 or e-mail Townclerk@bridgewaterma.org.

To learn more call (508) 697-0919 or visit bridgewaterma.org
#ItAllDependsOnYou

AVON: Free Child Care at Town Meetings

We propose that incentivizing Avon residents with free child care during Town Meetings would improve participation amongst Avon’s younger residents (< 40 years old). According to the 2020 census, the median population of Avon is 40 years old with 28.8% of the population falling between the ages of 25 and 44.^[1] In addition, 26.7% of the 1,705 households in Avon had children under the age of 18 living in their homes.^[2] This indicates that a significant percentage of Avon’s younger residents who are eligible to engage in electoral races have children. Although there is no available data on the ages of the children residing in Avon we can assume that there is a number of families who have young children. Therefore, in order to increase

engagement amongst this sect of the younger residents (parents with young children), we propose that the town government funds free childcare services for the duration of Town Meetings. If young parents were able to access free, quality childcare services, they would be more likely to attend and participate in town meetings. Other towns in Massachusetts such as Hanson, just a few towns over from Avon, have implemented similar services provided by the YMCA for children 5-12.^[3] In addition, towns such as Ithaca have implemented such measures and seen positive results.^[4] In a small town like Avon, trusted child care providers could be found within the upper grades of the Avon Middle-High School. These older children would be provided with part-time jobs, become more aware of the town's government, and potentially have more interest in engaging with Avon's local government. Ideally, this would lead to increased participation in Town Meetings amongst this population as well, and they would become part of the local electorate when they are of age. This solution would only be possible if meetings moved from Zoom to in-person, a transition that we recommend due to lack of participation and frequent technical issues.

^[1] Bureau, US Census. "Census.gov Homepage." *Census.gov*, 25 Apr. 2022, <https://www.census.gov/en.html>.

^[2] Bureau, US Census. "Census.gov Homepage." *Census.gov*, 25 Apr. 2022, <https://www.census.gov/en.html>.

^[3] "Free Childcare for Town Meeting Participants - Read for Details." *Town of Hanson MA*, <https://www.hanson-ma.gov/home/news/free-childcare-town-meeting-participants-read-details>.

^[4] *Offering Childcare at City Meetings May Be Key to Diversifying Civic Engagement*. <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/offering-childcare-at-city-meetings-may-be-key-to-diversifying-civic-engage>.

HANOVER: Weekly Town Newsletter

Hanover is a town in which, unsurprisingly, there is very little public engagement with local politics. Public meetings are scarcely attended and those who do attend, do so out of necessity to help sway the town board to take quicker action to fix problems that directly affect them. In attending these meetings, we are of the opinion that the main factor deterring people from

engaging in the meetings and local politics is how long and boring they are. Even people whose lives are centered around politics would have a hard time staying engaged with everything that goes on during meetings. Simply put, average people do not care about the majority of things discussed in local politics. This is particularly true about younger people. They do not not have any interest in things that are not entertaining or are pertinent to their lives. One could offer an easy solution of simply cutting meeting time but that does not solve the issue of getting people the information they need. Therefore, we propose an alternative. We suggest sending out a weekly local newsletter to town residents' emails that briefs them on the most important things going on in the community. By doing so, younger residents would not have to attend long and boring meetings to know what is going on in the community. All the information is accessible to them in a place where they are quite familiar: email. Our hope is that by providing this as an alternative, the town will begin to see more engagement as people will have more information on local politics and will be able to engage in the issues that interest them. There will not be a dramatic increase in the amount of engagement. Most people still will not care enough to become active in addressing the issues, but we believe that over time more and more people will feel encouraged to participate because it is easier for them to know what is going on in their community. In turn, there will be an increase in the amount of younger residents becoming involved in local politics.

ABINGTON: Communications for Younger Audiences

As community-oriented as Abington is, the township has a minimal presence on social media. While the Facebook page has just under 1,500 followers – and the organizers and moderators of the platform make an effort to post on a daily basis, with most content revolving around community outreach and prompt public service announcements – the viewership and interaction within the page is minimal. Posts that cover matters that require communal input for a developmental purpose (such as a recent post that put out a survey surrounding the repurposing of the town's Center School, with a corresponding invitation to a Zoom meeting to discuss how the land should be used in the future) receive little engagement – this being primarily in the form of shares and likes – and posts that highlight other cultural matters or infrastructural initiatives (e.g. a recent advertisement for a Veterans Breakfast) received almost no engagement at all. This all said, the youth within the community are shown to be exceptionally tuned into social media. The Abington CAM YouTube channel, an official platform of a “nonprofit organization proudly serving the residents of Abington, Massachusetts,” includes several segments stemming from Abington High School students, including a student podcast series from the Class of 2022 and a local sports coverage series called “The Madden Report” among other bits, with these projects bringing in a hefty amount of the viewer base of said channel – and said students are evidently and actively tapped into the fibers that bring Abington

together. Naturally, one idea to improve general participation in and engagement with local government would be to further encourage like-minded students to broadcast information surrounding local government and developmental initiatives to the younger base of which social media usage is a more significant factor within – this might start with expanding to new platforms such as Instagram and TikTok that skew towards a younger demographic. Similarly, we think it would be in the town’s best interest to post and repost more frequently. Another way to encourage younger audience participation is to have town officials talk about what they do on a usual day, talk about how they got into local government, and host AMA’s (ask me anything) on the town’s Facebook.

EAST BRIDGEWATER: Flyers

A major issue with East Bridgewater’s public town meetings is the lack of participation of younger residents. The limited interactivensess and use of complicated jargon in the meetings are the main factors contributing to this problem. The meetings contain terminology that may be difficult for those who are not experts in the respective fields to understand. For example, the East Bridgewater Old Colony Planning Council meeting on March 30th was about the council’s trust fund and budget allocations. A large portion of the meeting was dedicated to reviewing the Declaration of Trust, but the importance and relevance of this document were not explained, so it was difficult for attendees who were not well-versed in trust funds to understand.

In order to rectify this issue and increase youth attendance and participation in town meetings, we are proposing the use of flyers to help young residents follow along during the meetings. Each flyer should include a list of key terms that will be used during the meeting, along with their definitions, a recap of the topics discussed at the last meeting, and an agenda for the current meeting. The definitions of key terms will help young attendees understand the issues being discussed so that they are more likely to pay attention and participate. The recap will allow attendees to understand the context of the issues being discussed, and the agenda will allow them to get a preliminary look at what will be discussed, allowing them to both budget their time and follow along during the meeting. We believe this will be helpful because individuals are more likely to participate and contribute to conversations if they have a good understanding of the topic and concepts and feel that they are able to intelligently engage with the group. The more confident someone feels discussing a topic, the more likely they will be to participate (Attree et al.). The flyers will help attendees feel more confident discussing the meeting’s topics, thereby increasing participation and attendance.

HALIFAX: Youth Committee

In Halifax, there appears to be a lack of easily accessible public information. Likewise, attendance in public meetings seems to be predominantly attended only by those on town committees or who have immediate vested interests in what is being discussed. As a result, it creates an environment that feels somewhat unwelcoming to outsiders, those unfamiliar with existing town policy, and young people.

To combat this, we propose that the town of Halifax should create a youth committee, run by the town youth, that discusses issues that affect young people, runs town social media accounts, and promotes youth engagement in town affairs. Teenagers, in particular, typically need an incentive to get involved. Our theory is that if getting involved in local politics by way of a youth committee is something that they can add to their resume, they will be more inclined to get involved. By getting teenagers tangibly involved, the two key issues of lack of accessible information and lack of youth engagement can be solved. In addition to discussing the issues that matter to them, we envision the youth committee running town social media, specifically Instagram, where they post when meetings are, what is being discussed in meetings, a brief overview of how town politics work, and profiles on members of the town committees. This would help make information about the town more visible and understandable to a younger audience, and it would allow young people to have more of a voice in the town. Every year, the members of the council could change, and it could create a more welcoming, open environment in Halifax politics.

DUXBURY: Lowering the Voting Age

Bridging the generational divide is the main goal of our participation initiative. While increasing participation in local government means reaching younger Duxbury citizens, the last thing our group wants to do is alienate the older generations whose active participation in government should be a model. Duxbury's open town meeting form of local government is one of the most direct avenues of political participation in our democracy. Our participation intervention policy is to expand suffrage in Duxbury by lowering the municipal voting age to 16.

The easiest and most cost-effective way to get more young people to vote and participate in local politics is to let them. By lowering the voting age in Duxbury older generations send a message to young people that their voices are valued. The legality of this intervention lies in *Oregon v. Mitchell* along with the 26th amendment to the US Constitution. *Oregon v. Mitchell* was decided 5-4 by the US Supreme Court and effectively gave states the power to adjust the

voting age in state and local elections (at the time seeking to lower the voting age from 21 to 18). Although the 26th amendment effectively gaslit the issue of the case making the voting age 18, the precedent for states to lower voting ages in local elections remains.^[1] The Commonwealth of Massachusetts currently requires municipalities to send petitions to the state government to get permission to lower the voting age. Unfortunately, no such petitions have been acted upon, which does create a potential legal barrier to lowering the voting age.^[2] However, allowing 16 & 17-year-olds to vote in town meetings is a potential loophole that could be utilized to increase participation. In addition, the “Empower Act” is in the state legislature and if passed would remove the barrier of seeking permission to change the local voting age.^[3]

Contested legality aside, in the end, the biggest barrier to this intervention becoming a reality could be older members of the community. To that end, we would advise Duxbury citizens that it is in their best interests and the best interests of the town to include more citizens in the democratic process. It is a widely accepted notion that voting is a habit-formed activity, essentially getting someone to vote once increases the chances they’ll vote again, and each time after feeds into the habit increasing the frequency people vote.^[4] By lowering the voting age Duxbury would effectively start habit-forming earlier and hopefully create a lasting trend of participation in government. Another argument for younger participation is the principle of “no taxation without representation”. In Duxbury, there are citizens paying taxes under 18 with no say in how that money is spent.^[5]

Our group also wishes to highlight the good this intervention could do specifically for Duxbury. Should Duxbury adopt this intervention they would place themselves in a historic and groundbreaking position in the state and garner media attention from local and potentially national press. It is our group's position that this attention could in turn help promote Duxbury as a popular summer attraction and a harbor (literally) for the future of American democracy. This intervention also makes sense when examining some of Duxbury’s most pressing priorities: climate change, entrepreneurship, and schooling are all areas that directly affect young citizens and their future—all of which would benefit from younger generations' perspectives.

We believe that even in the event of a potential challenge this intervention would have long-lasting impacts and that the benefits to democratic participation in Duxbury would far outweigh potential suit.

^[1] *The Twenty-Sixth amendment*. Interpretation

^[2] Sorensen, M. (2020, February 5).

^[3] Generation Citizen. (n.d.). *Massachusetts*.

^[4] Coppock, A., & Green, D. P. (2016).

^[5] Mandal, S. (n.d.). *Top ten reasons*

PEMBROKE: High School Assembly

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee of the town of Pembroke includes a position for a student of Pembroke High School. This shows that the town is putting forth an effort to engage with its younger community. However, the spot is currently vacant. This signifies that members of Pembroke High School are either unaware of the position, or otherwise have no interest in being involved in local government processes. We believe that a student liaison representing the interests of Pembroke youth would boost their participation in the community. Simply by having their interests represented in local meetings, Pembroke High Schools students will be made to feel that their input in local government proceedings can actually make a difference in their community. The aim is to increase the confidence of emerging young adults that their perspective matters to their local community, which will stick with them as they get older.

We recommend that Pembroke High School organizes assemblies to inform the students about what they can do to participate locally. The assembly should openly discuss local issues and encourage the students to think about solutions. Most importantly, the student liaison position should be advertised. In the situation that a student liaison is picked before the assembly, it would be ideal to let the liaison share their excitement about local government to the students. Seeing that someone close to their age is excited about local government, we expect that students will be more engaged with the presentation. Our intervention idea encourages the organization of at least one student-engagement assembly every school year.

KINGSTON: Outreach via Recreation

According to World Population Review and Kingston's 2019 Census, the median age of Kingston residents is 41 years old^[1]. Youth participation, therefore, has fallen behind in the town's list of priorities. The majority of town meetings consist of middle-aged officials. While the majority of

the population are married couples^[2], youth engagement continues to decline. Kingston has been discussing expanding on one of their main sources of revenue: recreation. The town's Master Plan document features recreation as a centerpiece for their developments. Additions like bike lanes and kayak rentals are among the most popular requests by the town's residents. Getting into contact with residents using these recreational activities can boost family involvement, and create a more youth-friendly Kingston community. Many recreational areas are run by the town of Kingston, meaning that using their events and email lists to advertise relevant town meetings would come at little cost.

Kingston also appears to utilize little to no social media outreach. While there is a community Facebook page^[3], it is mainly dominated by the older population that is already decently involved with local politics and activities. Creating social media that is more targeted towards the younger generation, such as a Town Updates Instagram page, would be a helpful strategy to facilitate a streamline of information from the town officials to the youth community. This Instagram page would also be a helpful place to spread information about the recreational increase we hope to inspire. By raising youth engagement, Kingston sets itself up for a successful future generation of town leaders and officials. Especially as the families in Kingston continue to grow, it is imperative to ensure that the younger demographic is getting the same attention and outreach that is currently supplied to the 40+ aged residents.

^[1] <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/kingston-ma-population>

^[2] <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1201&g=1600000US2533185>

^[3] <https://www.facebook.com/groups/242146015879111>

WHITMAN: Public Forum Platform & Online Voting

One of the main reasons why many younger residents of a town do not participate in local government is due mainly because of the requirement of in-person participation at council meetings. Due to restrictions such as educational responsibilities and/or work schedules, younger residents (<40) cannot possibly attend local town hall meetings that can run for hours on end. However, younger residents actually are more politically inclined than older residents especially because younger residents want to be involved with determining the future of how their home turns out to be. To allow younger residents to be involved in local policy decisions

while still accommodating their busier schedules, online voting should be instituted for local residents.

To combat the lack of younger political participation within policy meetings themselves, an anonymous, online, public forum platform can be created in tandem to the online voting system. Another reason why a lot of younger residents are not attending town hall meetings is due to the many barriers that are in place for those who are not homeowners or tax paying residents themselves. There is a certain dismissiveness in place towards those who are not considered “real” members of the community and that ends up discouraging many younger people from using their voice in these meetings. An anonymous public forum that can be verified by asking residents for their proof of residence and ID would give them the platform they need to voice their concerns and not be dismissed due to other extraneous factors.

Online voting already exists in certain countries but as of right now it is only available to specific groups of people. In France only citizens living abroad could vote online, in Armenia only diplomatic or military staff abroad could vote, and certain municipalities in Canada have instituted online voting since 2008. Online voting already has been in use in certain countries and municipalities throughout the world and has been proven to increase voter turnout. By allowing younger residents of Whitman to not only vote online but to also be able to participate online, they would now be given an equal opportunity to participate in the community and to help improve their communities one vote at a time.

DUXBURY: Teen Board

The town of Duxbury would greatly benefit from the creation of a teen board/youth council. We believe that children who are on the board will be able to influence and educate their peers who also live in Duxbury, in a way that adults cannot. Duxbury’s size allows for an easy, co-beneficial partnership between the local government and high school. By including the local school system, the teens who are on the board would have a platform to access and influence their peers.

Additionally, this program would elevate the status of the public school. School rankings and college acceptances are important to the local community. Establishing a strong, politically active youth group can only have positive effects on the school’s prestige. A few ways this idea could be implemented is through educational meetings and school wide community engagement projects. This will also create positive externalities because as they educate other teens, interest in local politics will spiral. Since we are suggesting to engage younger people in

politics, we hope that as they age, they will continue to show interest in their community and thus increase the amount of their peers that are as well. It also should be noted that this program could potentially result in an increase in adult political participation as well due to potential peer effects between parents and children

It is also necessary to note that the youth board would be working alongside town officials and town council. The point of the youth board is not just to get young adults more politically active in Duxbury, but also to allow the town council to see issues from the point of view of younger generations. The overall goal of the board is to promote education and awareness surrounding issues that are prevalent in the town of Duxbury. In order to include as many teens as possible, and to ensure the board is covering a wide variety of issues, the teens will be able to apply to different committees that fall under the youth board's bandwidth. Some of these committees may include a climate change and action committee and an affordable housing committee.

Teens on the board will be required to attend town council meetings when possible as well as attend teen board meetings to discuss current city politics and hear other teens' thoughts on them. When necessary, they should also present possible policy, changes, opinions and ideas at city council meetings. These ideas and opinions should be formal, well thought out, researched and well documented, which will prove the legitimacy of the board and make the board members feel as though they are truly making a difference. Teens should additionally educate their peers on Duxbury's current events, partially via an active social media account that will give brief updates on what is going on in the city. Posts should be short and catchy. If they present something long, like a newsletter, the odds that their peers will read it significantly decreases. Additionally, the local high school could be used as a resource to educate and talk to peers.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they should work with the local government to plan and execute events that other teens and youth can attend. The subject and point of the events may vary depending on what is happening at the time in Duxbury. Either way, encouraging teens and youth to come together in an organized, productive fashion will benefit teen engagement.

The Duxbury Youth Board will consist of several roles; The President will set the meeting agenda and conduct meetings. The secretary will take notes at meetings and compile them online for the rest of the board and future reference. The **City Council Liaison is responsible for attending city council meetings. This person will be the main point of contact when contacting city officials.** The Social Media Chair creates graphics and potential posts for social media in order to

increase the board's outreach. The Committee Chairs will run individual committee meetings on the specific town issues listed above.

STOUGHTON: Local Government Branch for Engagement

Purpose of this proposal:

- To allow the Stoughton government an opportunity to increase engagement and collaboration with the general public, specifically those under the age of 40.

Findings:

The town of Stoughton, MA is home to over 29,000 residents. Through our research we discovered that there is a lack of transparent communication between the town officials and the community. This lack of transparency we specifically saw reflected in the town meetings.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most town meetings in Stoughton happen to take place remotely. The issues with these remote meetings range from a lack of standards for audio and visual components, inaccessibility to meetings, and lack of public discourse. Further inaccessibility was found because many meetings are not recorded and/or the meeting minutes are very difficult and confusing to find on the town's website.

Proposal:

The overall themes of the issues in Stoughton are rooted in a lack of engagement, accessibility, and transparency. Our suggestion is for a new branch of the town's government which would serve to increase engagement, which would be achieved through a dual track. This branch could take the form of a committee, or a separate entity. On one hand, the branch would be tasked with maximizing the efficiency of communication between the government and citizens, specifically through online media. This would be done by firstly reviewing the website and updating it accordingly to remove any dead links, replace old information, and create a system that is easier to navigate and engage with. Further, updating social media would be vital, specifically the Facebook and Instagram pages as these are the social medias where most of the town currently engages with the government. This side of the branch would also set the standard for town meetings, righting inconsistencies and correcting issues with technology such as recording and ensuring an audio and visual component. This focus on modernizing the online

media targets the generations under 40, who are more likely to feel more comfortable and encouraged to engage when the websites and social media are up to date, accurate, and more appealing. The second track of this branch would canvas the local schools and establish an engagement system where students are encouraged to participate through internships with the town leadership. This would include having town officials hold annual town halls with students to foster a connection with the youth population and encourage them to feel that their voices are important to the development of their community. The internships can be short (a single trimester) or long (full year), depending on the constraints of the town, but would serve to immerse students in the local government.

Costs/Resource Requirements

Our proposal for the changes made to Stoughton online media would have a minimal cost as the persons who are already maintaining the social medias would be able to address the issues acknowledged in the previous sections. In regard to the new branch as a whole, this could be a town committee which would not add any additional cost. To increase the incentive for students to participate in the engagement program, there could be a reallocation of funds from the scholarship fund the town is facing difficulty to distribute. The reallocation could be used to provide students with stipends or other forms of compensation.

EAST BRIDGEWATER: Timing & Accessibility of Town Meetings

1. Background & Reason for Proposed Policy

The purpose of this proposal is to better accommodate the schedules and logistical needs of the community of East Bridgewater to create more opportunity for public involvement in community meetings. Currently, the community meetings are held throughout weekdays at varying times. For example, on Wednesday April 13, 2022, the Board of Selectmen meeting was held at 3PM EST and had no person that was not employed by the town present. A good portion of the community cannot be involved in community meetings if the meetings are held during the normal workday.

Research conducted by Boston University Professors Katherine Einstein, David Glick, and Maxwell Palmer, explores public engagement in local meetings and how to improve it. In their book, "Neighborhood defenders: participatory politics and America's housing crisis," they discussed how meeting times can greatly impact accessibility.^[1] Katherine Einstein explained,

“Not holding your meetings at noon on Tuesday, [and] providing childcare” are ways to increase diversity of attendees and engagement.^[2]

2. Overview of Proposed Policy

This policy would enact and enforce that all community meetings for East Bridgewater would commence at 6PM EST or later, after the end of the typical 9AM-5PM workday. There would be no public community meetings that would happen earlier in the day. This allows for greater community engagement in meetings. To accommodate for this change, this policy would enact a later start time for town employees and create a free childcare option at the community during meetings, for use by meeting attendees.

To make the meetings even more accessible, we propose coordination with the Council on Aging to extend the use of their buses to include and provide transportation to and from community meetings. This will enable people who are not able to drive themselves to be able to attend meetings.

Finally, we propose coordination with the School Committee, to create extra credit opportunities for high school students in select Social Studies and English courses if they attend a community meeting. This would both increase classroom participation as well as public engagement in the town.

3. Stakeholders

This new policy would most affect the employees of the town, Board Members, and citizens of East Bridgewater. Town employees would have work hours potentially extended. Board members and town citizens would have extended time after work to arrive at the meetings.

4. Costs Analysis

The first potential cost would be a longer workday for town employees. If the proposed policy was passed, meetings would begin later and therefore end later, requiring the town employees to remain at work longer. To counter this, the policy sponsors propose a schedule adjustment, in which town employees would have a later work beginning time. Schedules could alternate so that there are always a few employees at town hall by 8:30 AM EST – the current opening hours, but that most employees could begin at 10:30 AM EST, to accommodate for later end times.

The second cost is childcare. As East Bridgewater has many families, one of the consequences of later meetings is that school has ended, and work has ended, so parents would need to bring children to the meetings or leave them at home, which can be logistically challenging. The policy sponsor's proposed solution is to provide free childcare at the Town Hall during the nighttime meetings. Beginning with one caretaker, the number of childcare providers can increase according to need after the policy is enacted.

^[1] Einstein, K., Glick, D., & Palmer, M, "*Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis*", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2019), doi:10.1017/9781108769495.

^[2] Sisson, Patrick, "Public meetings are broken. Here's how to fix them" *Curbed*, February 12, 2020.

PLYMOUTH: Town Meeting Accessibility & Polling

As we watched our town meetings, we noticed that the language used in the meetings was difficult to understand and attending the meetings themselves often seemed difficult for people who worked to attend. Therefore, our idea for improving community engagement centers around making the ideas in town meetings, as well as the town meetings themselves, more accessible to Plymouth citizens.

The Facebook group All Things Plymouth has extensive engagement with over 64,000 members; thus, we would like to have members of the city council post agendas and summaries of town meetings in more everyday language so that members of the Plymouth community can actually understand what is being discussed at town meetings. While the age range of members of this Facebook group is large and may include many members that are over 40, it is a very large group and includes many individuals who are younger than those who typically participate in town meetings. By having council members post in this social media group in language that is accessible to the average younger citizen of the town, people will better understand the issues that are being brought up in town meetings.

We would also like to have the city council post polls on the Facebook group about what policies are important to them and when they would like to have these policies discussed. We have noticed that there are issues with timings of community meetings, as some of them take place

early on weekday mornings when many younger people have to work. By making these policy and timing polls, the council can better understand what issues are important to citizens and when people are able to attend meetings in order to discuss them, allowing people to better participate in discussions about topics that are important to them.

Plymouth, Massachusetts has numerous city government committees and political organizations that span a variety of personal interests. That being said, Plymouth has struggled to achieve high levels of engagement from younger populations. Reflecting on the public meetings our group attended, it is apparent the average age of attendance is much higher than the town's median age of 44.3 years old. This problem is prevalent across city-level committees, political organizations, and community organizers. In this proposal, we lay out a potential solution to strengthen membership rates amongst younger populations in Plymouth and increase information sharing across generations residing in the town.

Although Plymouth is home to much of our nation's history, our team uncovered a severe lack of formalized information sharing between the city officials, community organizations, and residents. Our proposal advises Town of Plymouth city officials to host an annual event to bolster community engagement in politics, specifically for people ages 18-35. The format of the event was inspired by Boston University's bi-annual club fair, SPLASH. Community leaders would be invited to set up tables and speak with residents about the work that they do and answer questions about their committees, organizations, and experience in politics. The goal is to foster dialogue between engaged community members and prospective leaders.

We have two suggestions for implementation. First, there are many advantages to adding this event to a pre-existing community event such as the County Fair. Our team acknowledges the potential concerns regarding political engagements at community-wide functions, so the second potential venue would be to host at a local school or town meeting space. To target turnout to those in the 18-35 age range, we recommend flyering popular community spaces for young parents such as schools. A sample pamphlet has been designed by our team and attached.