



# TOWN OF LEDYARD

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway  
Ledyard, Connecticut 06339

## Community Relations Committee For Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Meeting Minutes

Chairman S. Naomi  
Rodriguez

### Regular Meeting

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Wednesday, April 17, 2024

6:30 PM

Town Hall Annex - Hybrid Format

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In -Person: Council Chambers, Town Hall Annex Building

Remote Participation: Information Noted Below:

**Join Zoom Meeting from your Computer, Smart Phone or Tablet:**

**<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89451665395?pwd=Ea33LCJSgI0SqZ8fSAw6JX71Olf00b.1>**

**Or by Audio Only: Telephone: +1 646 558 8656; +Meeting ID: 894 5166 5395; Passcode: 431825**

#### I CALL TO ORDER

the Meeting was called to order by Councilor Brunelle at 6:31 p.m.  
at the Annex Meeting Room - Town Hall Annex Building.

Councilor Brunelle welcomed all to the Hybrid Meeting. She stated for the Town Council Community Relations Committee and members of the Public who were participating via video conference that the remote meeting information was available on the Agenda that was posted on the Town's Website - Granicus-Insite Meeting Portal.

#### II. ROLL CALL

**Present:** April Brunelle  
Gary Paul  
Gary St. Vil

In addition, the following were present:

S. Naomi Rodriguez Town Council Chairman  
Jessica Buhle Town Councilor  
Carman Garcia-Irizarry Town Councilor  
Jacob Hurt Resident  
Roxanne Maher Administrative Assistant

### III. RESIDENTS & PROPERTY OWNERS COMMENTS

**Mr. Jacob Hurt**, 6 Nugget Hill Drive, Gales Ferry, thanked the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for their work regarding Black History Month and Women’s History Month. He stated that he was not able to attend either event but that he heard a lot of positive comments.

Mr. Hurt continued by stating on March 29, 2024 he attended Vigil for an Oklahoma teenager Nex Benedict. He stated Nex was a non-gender conforming teenager, who died after a physical altercation at school. He stated the altercation occurred in an environment marred by open and repeated hostility toward the non-gender conforming community by the residents, fellow students, and elected officials at all levels of the Oklahoma government. He stated following the Vigil he learned about a *Transgender Day of Visibility* marked for March 30th of every year. He stated acceptance, diversity, and inclusion saves lives. He stated Nex died because they were not accepted by their community sting that Nex was dehumanized to the point that violence against a child who was just trying to be who they were, was not just excepted but encouraged. He stated no charges were filed after Nex died. He stated that we can do something to ensure that what happened to Nex in Oklahoma does not happen here.

Mr. Hurt went on to state that First, he wanted to enter into the record that there were two Members of Ledyard’s Hartford Delegation who have engaged in same hostile acts and the same hostile atmosphere in which Nex died. He stated State Representatives Laneu and Howard have sponsored Bills and made unethical comments that demonize and harm the non-gender conforming community. He stated that he could provide details upon further request. He continued to state that behavior around this issue at the national level and by our own state elected officials makes local action here even more imperative to prevent the kind of conditions they saw in Oklahoma. He stated with this matter in-mind he made the following two requests:

- Mark our calendar for March 30th for the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to help highlight the *Transgender Day of Visibility*.
- The Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion consider a Pride related event to the let the community know that Ledyard was not only a Town for All Seasons, but that it was a Town for All of Us.

Councilor Brunelle thanked Mr. Hurt for his comments.

Mr. Hurt and Councilor Buhle left the meeting at 6:39 p.m.

### IV. PRESENTATIONS / INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

None.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the Community Relations Committee Minutes of March 20, 2024

Moved by Councilor St. Vil, seconded by Councilor Brunelle

**VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared**

**RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED**

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Discuss the 2025 Black History Activity/Contest.

Councilor St. Vil stated the 2024 Black History Month Activity Contest participation was high this year; which was demonstrated by the number of students and residents who attended the Town Council's March 27, 2024 meeting to recognize their efforts and to receive their awards. He noted the Mayor and Chairman Rodriguez visited the Elementary Schools to announce the winners of the Poster Contest and for the children to take pictures with the Mayor.

Councilor St. Vil continued by stating that he would take on the following two actions for the Committee to review at the June 19, 2024 meeting:

- Document the process used for the Black History Activity/Contest.
- Highlight some of the opportunities folks should look for; should they conduct the Black History Month Activity/Contest again in the future.

Chairman Rodriguez stated in addition to receiving their awards at the March 27, 2024 Town Council meeting, that the Middle School Essay Contest Winners would also be publicly recognized at their Awards Ceremony at the School. She stated the students presented with a Black History Month Ceremonial Coin.

**RESULT: CONTINUE**

2. Continued discussion and possible action draft a schedule for Public Information Forums to present to residents the types of services the town offers; how to access services and the authority residents should direct concerns regarding services.

Councilor Paul stated the Public Informational Forums were the outreach events the former Committee held at the Farmers' Markets and at the Council Chambers to present information to residents regarding the services that were available. He stated Item #3 on tonight's Agenda was regarding the Informal Conversations the Committee held at the Christy Hill Park located on East Drive, at which time they engaged with residents and discussed some issues that they were experiencing at the Park.

Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher noted at their March 20, 2024 meeting the Committee selected the following dates to host a Booth at the 2024 Farmers' Market:

- *June 5, 2024 - Earth Day - Feature the Town's Land Use Commissions (Not Available)*
- *August 21, 2024 - Old Folks Day*
- *September 11, 2024 Hometown Heros (Not Available)*

However, Ms. Maher noted that the Farmers Market did not have space available on June 5, 2024 or September 11, 2024. She noted that she provided the List of Farmers Market's Weekly Themes for the Committee to consider other dates this evening.

The Committee agreed on the following Dates; noting that they would also be in-keeping with the services they wanted to highlight:

- *June 5, 2024 - Bee Bubbly - Feature the Town's Land Use Commissions*
- *July 3, 2024 - Red-White & Blue - First Responders and Volunteers*
- *August 21, 2024 - Old Folks Day*

Ms. Maher noted that the Committee would need to submit a Request Form to the Farmers' Market to reserve booth space for the new dates.

Councilor Paul stated he had a number of brochures and pamphlets regarding information about the various services available that he could provide for them to handout at the Booths.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that they have a Town of Ledyard Canopy to use at the Farmers Market. Councilor Paul stated that he also had a table that the Committee could use. Councilor Buhle stated that she also had tables and tablecloths they could use.

**RESULT:** CONTINUE

3. Continued discussion and possible action to identify various town venues to host "Informal Conversations in the Park" to engage residents in discussions regarding their concerns and their ideas for potential solutions.

Councilor Brunelle stated that the Committee previously discussed using the Tri-Town Trail as a potential venue to host an Informal Conversations in the Park, noting that they were waiting for spring to schedule an event. Therefore, she suggested the Committee select a date for the event. Councilor Paul suggested the Committee contact Tri-Town Trail Association President Karen Parkinson to discuss their idea and to ask for available dates, noting that they could visit the Tri-Town Trail anytime from the spring thru the fall. He stated Mrs. Parkinson's knowledge and passion was incredible. Councilor Brunelle stated that she would contact Mrs.

Parkinson.

Councilor St. Vil asked for an example of when the Committee held Informal Conversations in the Park. Councilor Paul explained in hearing residents' concerns about graffiti, lack of lighting, and other illicit behavior that was occurring at the Park on East Drive (Christy Hill) that the Community Relations Committee held an Informal Conversation Gathering at the Park on July 20, 2022 with the residents. He stated Parks & Recreation Director Scott Johnson, Jr. and many Town Councilors also attended the event. He stated because it was an Informal Gathering there was not an agenda, and no minutes were taken. He stated during their conversations with the residents, they learned there was a lot of miscommunication, explaining that the residents did not know who to contact, where the authority lied, or what was already in the works. He went on to explain with the concerted efforts of the Parks & Recreation Department, Public Works Department, and the Police Department that the Park on East Drive was now beautiful. He stated that brush was removed from the entrance, it was now well lit, the parking lot was re-done, a new playscape and woodchips were installed, and residents were enjoying the Park. He stated it was great to engage with the residents to talk about things the community wanted to talk about.

Councilor Paul went on to state the previous Committee also held an Informal Conversation on May 14, 2022 at the Nathan Lester House for residents to meet the members of the Town Council and the Mayor and to learn about the needs of the community. He stated the hope was that it would give residents an opportunity to talk with their elected officials in a setting that was less formal than a public meeting that was being recorded and broadcast. However, he stated despite advertising efforts, with placing something in the Thames River Times, on the town's website, and on Councilor's social media pages the event was not well attended.

Chairman Rodriguez stated the Informal Conversation for Christy Hill Park on East Drive was well attended, noting that letters and flyers were mailed to the residents in the area.

Administrative Assistant stated the reasons the Christy Hill Park on East Drive was successful was because: (1) The Committee was responding to residents' concerns; and (2) It was well advertised, noting that Councilor Paul, as the Chairman of the Community Relations Committee, at that time, sent letters to all the residents who lived within a certain area of the park, which was followed up with a Flyer reminding the residents of the event.

Ms. Maher continued by noting as an example if the Committee was planning to host an Informal Conversation at the new Lantern Hill Waterfront Park (Long Pond), which was the property Mr. and Mrs. Graham donated to the town (leased for \$10 per year) with the following objectives: (1) Showcase the Lantern Hill

Waterfront Park, (2) Provide some history regarding Long Pond; (3) Provide information regarding the importance of preventing invasive plants from being transferred from different bodies of water, and (3) Engage residents. She noted that Mrs. Graham spoke at both the Town Council's February 14, 2024 meeting and the Finance Committees' February 21, 2024 meeting about the danger of the invasive plants and the Lantern Hill's Association interest to develop a *Sustainable Boat Launch Monitoring Program at the Long Pond State Boat Launch*. She stated the Committee could send a letter to the residents in that area to garner interest in attending the Informal Conversation in the Park.

Councilor Paul stated that former Town Councilor Bill Saums stated that you do not have to have a problem to have an Informal Conversation, noting that the idea was to get people engaged. He suggested that they have a topic so that they do not have *free-for-all* per se, and he stated if they wanted to use the Tri-Town Trail as a venue that they should think about a topic that would be relevant to the Trail to bring folks out and to have a live interaction with residents. He went on to state that the Committee should also have some prepared questions to ask residents so they could bring that information back to the Committee, which would help them to understand the community's concerns, and priorities.

Chairman Rodriguez stated while they had good weather coming that the Committee had a number of potential venues where they could host Informal Conversations in the Park and Community Outreach Events noting the following:

- Long Pond on Lantern Hill Road
- Christy Hill Park on East Drive
- Winthrop Park near the Gales Ferry Community Center (Town Council April 10, 2024 meeting Mr. Kelly expressed concerns regarding the tennis courts, pickle ball courts, etc.).
- Tri-Town Trail

Councilor St. Vil stated as mentioned this evening the reasons the Informal Conversation at Christy Hill Park on East Drive was successful was because:

- It was an issue that the community cared about.
- Mailing went to the residents in the immediate area.

Councilor St. Vil noted that what was important to one person may not be important to another person. Therefore, he suggested the Committee be strategic in keeping their finger on the pulse of the community, noting as an example if residents were concerned about the invasive species at the Lantern Hill Waterfront Park, then they could use that as their jumping off point. He suggested the Committee find out what the community was concerned about right now, and that they use that to get folks to come out and attend these events.

Councilor Brunelle stated that she was on-board with both the Lantern Hill Pond Invasive Species and the Winthrop Park because residents have brought their concerns to the Town Council on both of these topics. Councilor Paul suggested

they contact Mrs. Betsy Graham about the Lantern Hill Pond, noting that she was very knowledgeable and he thought that she would be happy to participate in the event.

Councilor Brunelle stated that she would contact Mrs. Graham, and she asked Councilor St. Vil to handle the Winthrop Park. Chairman Rodriguez suggested Councilor St. Vil contact Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Scott Johnson, Jr. noting that the Winthrop Park was under the Parks & Recreation's Administrative oversight.

**RESULT:** CONTINUE

4. Discussion regarding ideas to increase communication/transparency with residents.

Councilor Brunelle stated that the Town Council should always be thinking about the importance of communication with residents.

Councilor Paul questioned the status the LED Digital Message Signs that the town was purchasing with the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding. He noted one sign was installed on Route 12, in-front of the Gales Ferry Fire Department; however, he has not seen the second sign in Ledyard Center yet.

Chairman Rodriguez stated at the April 17, 2024 Finance Committee Meeting that Mayor Allyn, III, provided an update regarding the LED Digital Message Signs noting that it took some time to obtain approval from the State Department of Transportation (DOT) for the Ledyard Center sign because originally the sign would have slightly encroached into the State's right-of-way. However, she stated the issue has been and that the work to install the sign would begin soon, explaining that the town needed to pour concrete footings for the 7-8 foot posts the sign would sit on and to install the electricity to the sign. She stated the 48 X 36 sign would be placed in the curve of the stonewall. She went on to explain that Town would be required to obtain approval from the DOT to trim the trees by the sign, because the trees were planted as part of the Ledyard Center Streetscape Project using Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) Grant Funding . She noted that she asked the Mayor to look into the cost and ability to dig up and relocate the tree.

Councilor Paul questioned whether they could use the new LED Digital Signs to advertise signing up on the town's website "**Notify Me**" to receive the town announcements.

Councilor Brunelle stated that she believed they could use the new LED Digital Signs to advertise signing up on the town's website "**Notify Me**" to receive the town announcements. She stated that she would again post on the on-line Community Forum the instructions to sign up for Notify Me on the town's website.

Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher explained when residents sign up for the

“**Notify Me**” that they also need to select what notifications they would like to receive, noting that they should “**News Flash**”

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she has been including the “**Notify Me**” website sign up in each of the Town Council’s Newsletters that were in the Events Magazine that residents received quarterly.

Councilor Paul suggested the Committee have a “**How to Sign Up for Notify Me**” sign at their Farmers’ Market Booths this summer to encourage residents to sign up on the website. Chairman Rodriguez stated that was a great idea, and she suggested they have laptops at their Booths to help people sign up.

**RESULT:** CONTINUE

5. Discuss starting a relationship with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council to help foster communication and mutual points of interest.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she has been in contact with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council, noting that they were willing to meet with the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. She questioned whether this would need to be posted as a Regular meeting or a Work Session. Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher explained when the 2019-2021 Committee met with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council it was during the Covid Pandemic and that an Agenda was posted, and the meeting was conducted using Zoom. She went on to explain with the following Community Relations Committee (2021-2023), which was when they returned to in-person meetings that she spoke with Freedom of Information Tom Hennick, and that he stated they could have an Informal Gathering such as a Meet & Greet. She went on to note, as Councilor Paul suggested during the 2021-2023 Committee, they could get together for coffee & donuts for the two groups to become acquainted, but that there could be no business conducted. She stated the two groups were not able to coordinate a date, and therefore, they did not get together during the last Community Relations Committee’s term (2019-2021).

**RESULT:** CONTINUE

6. Any other Old Business proper to come before the Committee  
None.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Research Community Organizations that provide Opioid and Substance Abuse Disorder, Recovery, and Prevention Programs relative to the use of the Opioid Settlement Funding.

Councilor Brunelle stated since 2022 Ledyard has been receiving funding through its participation in the National Opioid Settlement; which was coming from the Sackler



Family Trust - Purdue Pharma, and others who were party to the case such as Johnson & Johnson, Teva, Allergan, Walgreens, CVS, and Walmart. The funding received from the National Opioid Settlement was being deposited into Account #20810201-58206-24206 (National Opioid Settlement) and could only be used for opioid abatement purposes, including, but not limited to, expanding access to opioid use disorder prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery options, etc.

As of April 11, 2024 Ledyard received a total of \$106,758; and the current Fund Balance was \$71,258. At their September 27, 2023 meeting the Town Council allocated \$36,100 to Ledyard Prevention Coalition to implement programs to address opioid use disorder, prevention, and to expand access to intervention, treatment, and recovery options.

Councilor Brunelle noted a Report provided that included maps showing that since January, 2023 to February, 2024 there were 40 overdoses and one fatal overdose in Ledyard/Gales Ferry.

Councilor Brunelle noted that currently the Police Department and both of the Fire Departments have Emergency Narcan Kits. She also noted that the Ledyard Prevention Commission would be providing Emergency Narcan Kits to be placed at designated locations in town.

Chairman Rodriguez stated per the *Overdose Map* the Ledyard Prevention Coalition agreed to place Emergency Narcan Overdose Kits which included 12 doses of Narcan, 6- 8 Fentanyl Testing Strips, and Resource Cards to provide contact information at the following two locations: (1) Ledyard Center area; and (3) Gales Ferry. She stated Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Mr. Johnson would have the Narcan Emergency Overdose Kits placed on town-owned property. She stated the Kits would be periodically checked to make sure the supplies were stocked. She also stated that they would begin to work to get the word out regarding the availability of the Narcan & Emergency Overdose Kits and their locations.

Chairman Rodriguez went on to state that the Ledyard Prevention Coalition and the New London County Coordinated Access Resources Engagement and Support Services (CARES) Team would be giving a presentation at the Town Council's April 24, 2024 meeting and that Mayor Allyn, III, stated at the Finance Committee earlier this evening that he would invite Southeastern Regional Action Counsel (SERAC) SERAC to a future Town Council meeting.

Councilor Paul stated that SERAC participated at the Community Relations Committee's Farmers' Market Booth last summer. He stated that they were a wealth of information.

Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher noted that she provided a list of Organizations in the area that the Committee may want to research and possibly invite to a future meeting to talk about what they do and the types of programs they could provide to Ledyard in working to help the Finance Committee determine which

groups the town may want to partner with, by allocating some of the Opioid Settlement Funding to them.

Councilor St. Vil requested clarification stating that the purpose of having this item on the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion was to discuss ways the town could leverage the Opioid Settlement Funding to educate the community about the available resources. Councilor Brunelle stated that educating the community regarding opioid disorder and services available was part of this, however, she explained that the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusions task was to also research and possibly invite area organizations to provide a proposal or to give a presentation on how they could help the community should Ledyard choose to allocate some of the Opioid Settlement funding to their organization to implement programs in our community.

**RESULT:** CONTINUE

2. Any other New Business proper to come before the Committee.

None.

#### IV ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Paul moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor Brunelle.

**VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared.** The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

April Brunelle  
C o m m i t t e e C h a i r m a n  
Community Relations Committee

**DISCLAIMER:** Although we try to be timely and accurate these are not official records of the Town.