



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL

Chairman S. Naomi Rodriguez

MINUTES
LEDYARD TOWN COUNCIL – REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024; 7:00 PM
HYBRID FORMAT
VIDEO CONFERENCE VIA ZOOM

DRAFT

- I. CALL TO ORDER – Chairman Rodriguez called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Council Chambers, Town Hall Annex Building.

Chairman Rodriguez welcomed all to the Hybrid Meeting. She stated for the members of the Town Council and 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-Legistar Meeting Portal.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

- III. ROLL CALL –

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Location
April Brunelle	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person
Jessica Buhle	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person
Carmen Garcia-Irizarry	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person
Kevin Dombrowski	Town Councilor	Excused	
Gary Paul	Town Councilor	Excused	
S. Naomi Rodriguez	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person
Tim Ryan	Town Councilor	Excused	
Tony Saccone	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person
Gary St. Vil	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person

- IV. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS/PRESENTATIONS

• 2024 Black History Month Essay and Poster Contest Awards

Chairman Rodriguez introduced herself and welcomed all to tonight’s Town Council meeting. She provided some background noting that the 2024 Black History Month Activities was the third year Ledyard hosted the Program, which involved an Essay Contest for the High School and Middle School Students, along with a Poster Contest for the Elementary School Students. She stated the Contest was open to all students in Ledyard including Magnet School Students and Home School Students. She stated the Contests were voluntary and was held from February 1 – February 23, 2024.

Chairman Rodriguez continued by thanking the following Contest Judges for participating in the process: Library Commission Member Mr. Ralph Hightower, Police Sergeant Michael McKinney, who was being represented this evening by Sergeant Matthew Andrade, Board of Education Chairman Alex Rode, Town Councilor Gary St. Vil, and herself. She noted that some of the Judges were present this evening to award the prizes.

Chairman Rodriguez proceeded by thanking all who participated in the Contest and for attending tonight’s Town Council meeting. She stated since the Town Council’s Community Relations Committee began hosting the Black History Month Poster and Essay Contest that they looked forward to the Program because of the learning experience. She stated that Black History is American History, and that she was humbled and grateful for the work the students did in writing their essays, noting that they were inspirational, educational, and sincere. She stated the Judges were impressed by the essays and it was hard to find just one winner, noting that this year they had a couple of ties. She stated the students, and their parents should be proud of their accomplishments.

Chairman Rodriguez asked Councilor Brunelle, Councilor St. Vil, and Sergent Andrade to join her in presenting the prizes this evening:

Essay Contest:

Ledyard Middle School (Essay Contest)

- ✓ First Place (Tie) \$100.00 – Annabella Miner and Elianys Zoe Vazquez Malave.
- ✓ Second Place (Tie) \$50.00 – Anaya Chumpitazi and Madeline Litwin-Gaccione.
- ✓ Third Place \$25.00 – Zixuan Lin.

High School (Essay Contest)

- ✓ First Place (Tie) \$100.00 - Ephraim Medic, Adrian Beltre, and Mackenzie Hope.
- ✓ Second Place (Tie) \$50.00 - Sophia Holloway and Teagan Caviness.
- ✓ Third Place (Tie) \$25.00 - Aleecia Helme and Roan Fothergill.

Poster Contest:

Chairman Rodriguez noted that in addition to tonight’s recognition amongst the students’ family, friends, and the community, that the following Poster Contest Winners would also be announced at their respective Schools on April 3, 2024 among their peers and teachers:

Grades K-2 - Poster Contest

- ✓ First Place (Tie) – Nora Veara & Kaylee West both 2nd Grade - Gallup Hill School– Teacher Ms. Florez.
- ✓ Second Place – Nyarie Torres– 2nd Grade – Gallup Hill School – Teacher Ms. Florez.
- ✓ Third Place – Marcy Gallagher– 2nd Grade – Gallup Hill School – Teacher Ms. Florez.

Grades 3-5 - Poster Contest

- ✓ First Place – Mason Mitsko – 3rd Grade – Gallup Hill School – Teacher Mrs. Gennells.
- ✓ First Place – Renaja McLeod– 5th Grade – Juliet W. Long School – Teacher Mrs. Hills.
- ✓ Second Place – Olivia Wardell – 3rd Grade – Gallup Hill School – Teacher Mrs. Thomas.
- ✓ Second Place - Lesley Jean – 5th Grade – Juliet W. Long School – Teacher Mrs. McVeigh.
- ✓ Third Place - Emilia King – 5th Grade – Juliet W. Long School – Teacher Mrs. Hills.

Chairman Rodriguez noted that this concluded the 2024 Black History Month Activities. She thanked all the students who participated in the contests, the Town Council, the Community Relations Committee, and the Judges for their involvement in the 2024 Black History Month Contest.

Chairman Rodriguez again Congratulated all the winners, stating that it was wonderful to see all the talented young people that Ledyard has. She encouraged all of the students to keep-up their good work. She went on to state that she would also like to again thank the Community Relations Committee and Councilor St. Vil for their work and time involved in planning and hosting the 2024 Black History Month Essay and Poster Contest.

V. RESIDENTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS

Ms. Wendy Hellekson, 14-L Lakeside Drive, Ledyard, stated that she wanted to comment on the Black History Month Contest, noting that it made her proud to see how hard the students worked on their posters and essays, noting that they did a Great Job!

IV. COMMITTEE COMMISSION AND BOARD REPORTS – None.

VI. COMMENTS OF TOWN COUNCILORS

Councilor Brunelle noted the tragic accident that occurred yesterday with DALI Cargo Ship that collided with the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland, causing the bridge to collapse. She stated that her heart goes out to all those who were affected by the accident.

Councilor Saccone stated the Town provided a great response to a structure fire that occurred this week at the Mystic Paper Beast/Dragon’s Egg Studio on Shewville Road. He stated Ledyard was fortunate that they could call in their paid firefighters; and he thanked the Fire Chief and the town’s volunteer firefighters, who respond to emergency calls after they have come home from work. He explained because there were no fire hydrants in that area they had to call in multiple Mutal Aide fire units to assist, noting that they all did a good job.

Councilor Buhle stated she attended Ledyard High School's production of *Clue the Musical*. She stated she was impressed with everything the High School's Music Department has done and she encouraged folks to make time to attend their productions, noting that they were amazing.

Chairman Rodriguez announced that April was *National Volunteer Appreciation Month*. She provided each Town Councilor with Appreciation Message Flyers; and she asked them to attend their assigned Liaison Committees in April to thank all of Ledyard's Volunteers for the service they provide to the Town. She also encouraged Councilors in addition to giving each volunteer a flyer that they also do something special to show they were appreciated, noting that it could be a simple gesture such as baking them cookies. She stated Ledyard would not be able to run without their dedicated volunteers. She continued by thanking each of the members of the Town Council, who were also volunteers, noting that none of the town's volunteers were paid a stipend or paid a salary. She stated that she appreciated everyone who dedicated their time to volunteer to serve the Town of Ledyard.

VII. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

MOTION to approve the following:
Public Hearing Minutes of March 13, 2024
Regular Meeting Minutes of March 13, 2024
Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

VOTE: 6 – 0 Approved and so declared

IX. COMMUNICATIONS

Chairman Rodriguez stated a Communications List has been provided on the meeting portal for tonight's meeting; and she noted there were no referrals listed. She stated in their absence that Councilor Paul and Councilor Ryan submitted written comments this afternoon for tonight's meeting. She asked that the Councilors written comments be included on the Correspondence List, as Councilor Ryan requested that his letter be submitted; and that Councilor Paul asked that his comments regarding Item #5 on tonight's agenda be read during the meeting. She asked Councilor Brunelle to read Councilor Paul's comments at the appropriate time this evening.

X. COUNCIL SUB COMMITTEE, LIAISON REPORTS

Administration Committee

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated although the Administration Committee has not met since the last Town Council meeting they have a couple of items on tonight's Agenda.

Community Relations Committee

Councilor Brunelle stated the Community Relations Committee met on March 20, 2024 and she noted the following: (1) 2024 Black History Month – Councilor Brunelle stated earlier this evening they saw the great results of this year's Poster and Essay Contest; (2) March was Women's History Month – Councilor Brunelle stated their second Poetry Slam was held at Lucille's Restaurant in Ledyard Center, noting that it was well attended; (3) National Volunteer Appreciation Month – Councilor Brunelle stated as Chairman Rodriguez stated earlier this evening, April was National Volunteer Appreciation Month, and that she looked forward to getting out to thank all of Ledyard's Volunteers to let them know that they were appreciated.

Finance Committee

Councilor Saccone stated the Finance Committee met on March 20, 2024 and also held a Special Meeting on March 25, 2024. He noted the Committee had a number of items on tonight's agenda which included the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget.

Land Use/Planning/Public Works Committee

Councilor St. Vil stated the LUPPW Committee's next meeting was scheduled for April 1, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

Ledyard Fire Department

Councilor Saccone stated the Ledyard Fire Department would be meeting next week.

Gales Ferry Fire Department

Councilor Saccone stated at their last meeting the Gales Ferry Fire Department elected Jeff Erhart as their new Fire Chief, effective April 1, 2024. He stated Mr. Erhart was a twenty-year member of the Gales Ferry Fire Company and lifelong resident of the Town of Ledyard.

Public Safety Commission

Councilor Saccone stated the Public Safety Commission were continuing to work to transition the town's emergency communications radio system over to the State-wide frequency system. He stated this project was funded by a \$284,000 Grant.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that Councilor Dombrowski, Councilor Paul, Councilor Ryan and Mayor Allyn, III, were not present this evening; and that she wished them all well.

Water Pollution Control Authority

Chairman Rodriguez read Councilor Dombrowski's WPCA Liaison Report as follows: The WPCA met on March 26, 2024 and addressed the following: (1) Water Rate Increase: The WPCA approved to set a Public Hearing date for April 23, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. to receive comments regarding a proposed 5% Water Rate Increase that would become effective July 1, 2024; (2) Approved payment of the Cortex Invoice dated February 29, 2024 in the amount of \$3,386.00 for ROV Inspection-Holmberg Orchard-Concrete Reservoir; (3) Approved to request the Town Council grant a Bid Waiver to Groton Utilities in an amount not to exceed \$25,000 for work to supervise the moving of one fire hydrant for the Multi-Use Pathway (along Colonel Ledyard Highway from the Bill Library to Ledyard High School) and the associated work required during the Pathway Construction, as Groton Utilities was the Water Pollution Control Authority's water services provider; (4) Approved the payment of Groton Utilities Invoice dated February 27, 2024 in the amount of \$82.08 for Lead Inventory.

Economic Development Commission

Councilor Buhle stated the EDC's next meeting was scheduled for April 2, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

Library Commission

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated the Library Commission met on March 18, 2024 and addressed the following: (1) Libraries Consortium – Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated the Commission established an Ad Hoc Committee to evaluate/compare the services provided by both their current on-line consortium membership *Libraries On Line* (LION) which cost about \$50,000 and the *Library Connection Inc.* (LCI) which cost about \$25,000 (LCI); (2) Working to update the Community Room Usage Rules; (3) Libraries Transforming Communities Grant – Councilor Garcia-Irizarry noted that the Library applied for and received Grant funding from both Round I & Round II of the Libraries Transforming Communities Grant for a total of \$40,000. She stated the Commission discussed the use of the grant funding noting that they planned to expand programs for those with disabilities and to replace the circulation desk, which would also be handicap accessible.

XI. MAYOR'S REPORT

Chairman Rodriguez stated in Mayor Allyn's, III, absence that he provided the following report: (1) Structure Fires – Ledyard had two structure fires in one week as follows: A house fire on Inchcliffe Drive, and a fire at the Mystic Paper Beast/Dragon's Egg Studio on Shewville Road. Chairman Rodriguez noted that Mayor Allyn wished to thank both the Ledyard Center Fire Department and the Gales Ferry Fire Department, as well as the Mutual Aide that provided regional assistance with the tanker brigade; (2) Blight Enforcement Update: Zoning Enforcement Officer Alex Samalot has been working with residents to bring blighted properties into compliance. Recently the Christy Hill residence has come into compliance; however, a property on Colonel Ledyard Highway was proceeding through the Court System; (3) School(s) Consolidation/Improvement Projects (Middle School & Gallup Hill School) – The School(s) Project Reimbursement Package prepared by Colliers Project Leaders was submitted to the State's Department of Administrative Services (DAS) for the disbursement of funding to the Town; and for the State to conduct the Final Project Audit; (4) School Roof Projects Bonding Package - Preparations were underway for the Town to borrow/bond up-to \$10 million for the replacement of the School Roof Projects that

were approved by the townspeople at a February 22, 2022 Referendum; and later increased the dollar at the October 17, 2023 Referendum. Bond Anticipation Notes (BAN) would come due again; if the State does not release the Grant Funding soon; (5) Ledyard Police Department Promotions and Awards – Chairman Rodriguez noted that Mayor Allyn congratulated Matthew Andrade for his promotion to Sergeant; (6) Early Voting for presidential Primary - Early voting began on March 26, 2024 for the Presidential Primary. The Early Voting was being held at the Registrar’s Office located in the Lower Level of the Town Hall and would run for four- days, including Saturday March 30, 2024. They had a very light turnout on the first day with 22 voters; (7) Local Transportation Capital Improvement (LOTICIP) Grant Funding – Mayor Allyn attended a meeting on March 26, 2024 to learn about upcoming LOTICIP Grant Funding opportunities; (8) Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) Legislative Update – Mayor Allyn participated in a CCM Conference Call in which they received an updates on several proposed Bills and their possible impacts; (9) Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer) Board Meeting – March 27, 2024 – The following Grant Programs were available: (a) Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) was offering \$10,000 – \$25,000 that businesses could be for equipment, etc.; (b) BOOST Loans were offering up-to \$500,000 at 4.5% interest rate – The Connecticut Small Business Boost Fund provides small business owners access to flexible funding for capital expenditures and working capital, and would connect business with support services; (c) Connecticut Port Authority provides Grant Funding in the amount of up-to \$5 million to assist municipalities improve small ports, harbors and marinas. Currently Ledyard businesses only have two loans through SeCTer. These grant programs were a Great Opportunity!

Chairman Rodriguez noted the Ledyard Police Department’s Promotion and Award Ceremony that was held earlier today at the Senior Citizens/Parks & Recreation Facility. She stated that she was honored to attend Sergeant Matthew Andrade’s promotion, noting that many other Ledyard Police Officers were also recognized for their outstanding work and received Awards as well.

Questions to the Mayor - None.

XII. OLD BUSINESS – None.

XI. NEW BUSINESS

CONSENT CALENDAR

*1. MOTION to appoint the following as the Town of Ledyard’s Representatives to serve on Southeastern Connecticut Regional Resource Recovery Authority (SCRRA) for a three (3) year term as follows:

- Public Works Director Mr. Steve Masalin as a Regular Member to complete a term ending January 31, 2027.
- Mr. Joseph Lozier (R) 198 Gallup Hill Road, Ledyard, as an Alternate Member to complete a term ending January 31, 2025.

*2. MOTION to reappoint the following members to the Water Pollution Control Authority for a three (3) year term ending April 11, 2027:

- Mr. Monir Tewfik (U) 33 Seabury Avenue, Ledyard (Regular Member)
- Ms. Sharon Wadecki (D) 44 Fanning Road, Ledyard (Regular Member)
- Mr. Edmond Lynch (D) 11 Red Brook Lane, Ledyard (Regular Member)
- Mr. J.A. Capon (D) 37 Silas Dean Road (Alternate Member)
- Mr. James Ball (D) 674R Shewville Road, Ledyard (Alternate Member)

*3. MOTION to approve appropriations from the receipt of sales of vehicles through GovDeals in the total amount of \$8,185.00 to the Pooled Vehicles CNR Account #21040101-57315.

*4. MOTION to recommend the Town Council approve two tax refunds in the combined total amount of \$5,892.30 with each exceeding \$2,400.00 in accordance with tax collector departmental procedures.

- Attorney Ellin Grenger \$2,438.56
- Wayne Korteweg \$3,453.74

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

VOTE: 6 – 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED 6 - 0
 MOVER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor
 SECONDER Gary St. Vil, Town Councilor
 AYES: Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Rodriguez, Saccone, St. Vil
 EXCUSED: Dombrowski, Paul, Ryan

Community Relations Committee

5. MOTION to approve an Addendum – 2024 to the “*Resolution Establishing the Rules of Procedure for the Twenty-seventh Town Council*”: Paragraph 12 pertaining to Town Council Standing Committees to the revise the name of the Community Relations Committee to the “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*” as presented in the draft dated March 20, 2024.

Res: 001–2023/Dec 4
Addendum: 2024/Mar 27

ADDENDUM – 2024

RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING THE
RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE TWENTY-SEVENTH TOWN COUNCIL

WHEREAS: The Ledyard Town Council would like the title of the Community Relations Committee to more accurately reflect the Committee’s *Mission Statement* that was adopted on September 21, 2022;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: Effective April 1, 2024: “*Resolution Establishing the Rules of Procedure for the Twenty-Seventh Town Council*”; Paragraph12 “*Standing Committees of the Town Council*” is hereby amended to rename the Community Relations Committee to be as follows: “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*”.

Addendum Adopted by the Town Council on: _____

S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman

Moved by Councilor Brunelle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

Discussion: Councilor Brunelle read Councilor Paul’s written comments as follows:

“Respectfully Subitted for Town Council Meeting 03/27/2024 by Councilor Gary Paul Remarks with respect to Agenda Item #5:

I would like to first apologize that I was absent from the Community Relations Committee’s March 20, 2024 meeting due to illness. However, I am both confused and a bit disappointed about why the Committee would choose to make a motion to rename the Committee. When I became Chair of the Committee for the last Town Council, we discussed at great length the role of the committee originally created due to some social and racial issues that many surrounding communities were dealing with at the

time. Before my term there were discussions about disbanding the committee due to lack of interest or involvement. My committee looked at ways that we could actively engage with the community by being a true resource for ALL of the community. We believed there were many areas in our committee we could help and be a resource.

Our committee believed in not only standing up to racism and discrimination, but in also helping the community connect to services such as financial help, the food pantry, heating assistance, and mental health information while also helping to educate the community about how the town operates by holding public informational forums with various departments in town. I don't feel or believe that changing the name to the "Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)" promotes what the previous committee worked so hard to accomplish or aligns with our current mission statement. In fact, I would say it excludes some. I do not want anyone to feel excluded by putting a label on the name that some may feel has been "Politicalized". I personally want all people to feel welcome, and as government officials be the resource we were voted-in to be and uphold our mission statement.

Community Relations Committee Mission Statement

"The Community Relations Committee is tasked with being both an advocate and a resource for the community by listening, communicating, and engaging with the community, educating ourselves, standing up to discrimination and racism in all forms.

We do this by encouraging dialogue, promoting unity and understanding, and learning from one another as we continue to build a strong community together, making sure no-one is left behind."

I personally believe, as I know we all do, that there is no place for racism or hate in anyway shape or form in our community, but I would encourage more dialogue before changing the name and continuing to ask the right questions before doing so, such as "what is this committee's role?" "Does the name change really reflect our mission statement?" "How does a name change encourage and engage our community?" If the intent were to change the mission statement, then I would recommend the committee discuss formulating a new mission statement to reflect a name change, this name change in my opinion does not."

Councilor Brunelle responded to Councilor Paul's questions as follows:

- ***What is this Committee's Role*** – Councilor Brunelle noted as Councilor Paul stated in his written comments, the Committee's role was to promote dialogue, promote unity, and promote understanding, and that she agreed with Councilor Paul's words.
- ***Does the name change really reflect our mission statement*** - Councilor Brunelle stated that she believed in the Community Relations Committee's Mission Statement, and that she believed renaming the Committee to "*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*" reflected their Mission Statement, for the reasons Councilor Paul stated in his written comments (see above).

Councilor Brunelle stated renaming the Committee reflected the Mission Statement for the reasons that they saw this evening, noting that the Council Chambers was full of so many Diverse people who were all Equally Included in the Black History Month Activities and were all present to celebrate the winners of the Black History Month Poster and Essay Contest. She noted what they saw this evening was ***Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI)***. She stated there was nothing wrong with these words; and that it was not a political statement.

Councilor Brunelle went on to state that she was proud to serve as the Committee's Chairman; and she was proud of what the Committee has accomplished this year, thus far. She noted the following sentence of the Mission Statement: "*...and learning from one another as we continue to build a strong community together, making sure no-one is left behind."*

- ***How does a name change encourage and engage our community*** – Councilor Brunelle stated it engages our community because we want everyone to feel included and feel that they had an equal opportunity to come and participate, speak their minds, and be heard, and volunteer to serve their community, and to acknowledge our diversity, and to embrace it. She stated Ledyard was a diverse community, we should be treating everyone equally, and we should be inclusive in everything that we do. She stated getting different perspectives was how a community grows and allowed them to move forward together.

Councilor Brunelle concluded her comments by stating that she supported renaming the Committee to “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*”. She stated the proposed Committee name would give Ledyard greater opportunities, not only within our community, but with help from the State as well. She stated that she has been attending the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) Program to become a Certified Connecticut Elected Official noting that one of the courses was on *Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI)*. She went on to explain the State offered a matching Grant Program for DEI Initiatives. Therefore, she stated the next program/event Ledyard has that they would be eligible to apply to the State to obtain some matching grant funding to help support initiatives that would give back to their community. She stated that she saw updating the Committee’s name to “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*” as a good thing.

Councilor St. Vil stated that Councilor Brunelle’s comments hit the nail on the head in addressing what was at the heart of changing the Committee’s name to “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*”. He stated the name of the Committee was to ensure that everyone was aware that the Community Relations Committee was here for the Community in every aspect of their town. He stated as an engineer that he was very literal and so he looked up the definition of the specific words: “*Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*”, noting that he did not find anything that would exclude a member of their community. He noted Councilor Brunelle’s comments: “*look at what we saw this evening*” as an example of what we can accomplish together. He stated renaming the Committee to “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*” was a furtherance of that goal.

Councilor Saccone stated he was in-favor of renaming the Committee to “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*”. He stated the proposed name was not political, and he noted that Ledyard was a diverse and inclusive community. He stated the name of “*Community Relations Committee*” was outdated terminology. He stated by renaming the Committee it was telling everyone both in our community and outside of our community that Ledyard was *Diverse, Equitable, & Inclusive* and that it would bring Ledyard into the 21st Century.

Councilor Buhle stated renaming the Committee to “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*” was not a political statement. She stated there were benefactors that wanted us to think that Diversity and Equity were political terms. She stated that these were not political terms; and were the way we should all be treating our neighbors in our community.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry thanked Councilor Brunelle, Councilor St. Vil, and Councilor Paul for their work on the Black History Month Activities which included the time involved to judge all of the Posters and Essays. She noted as Councilor Brunelle stated in presenting the Black History Month Contest Awards to the winners this evening, they saw a diverse crowd. She stated that it was wonderful to see all the kids who submitted contest entries noting that they were from all different backgrounds. She stated that she wished they could have more events like the Black History Month Program, because it encouraged people from all different backgrounds to feel welcome and participate in their community. She concluded by stating renaming the Committee to “*Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*” reflected the goals of the Mission Statement.

VOTE:

6 – 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT:	APPROVED 6 - 0
MOVER:	April Brunelle, Town Councilor
SECONDER	Gary St. Vil, Town Councilor
AYES:	Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Rodriguez, Saccone, St. Vil
EXCUSED:	Dombrowski, Paul, Ryan

Finance Committee

6. MOTION to adopt a proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$67,430,573 comprised of:
- General Government: \$29,060,750
 - Board of Education: \$38,369,823.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

Discussion: Councilor Saccone provided some background explaining that the Finance Committee held three Budget Work Sessions on March 7, 11, & 14, 2024 noting they spent many hours meeting with the Mayor and the Department Heads to discuss their proposed budgets. He stated the Annual Budget was a reflection of the community's values relative to what they needed and what they wanted. He stated many of the proposed budget increases were to allow the Town to continue to be progressive, and to address things that needed to be done.

Councilor Saccone continued by noting there were a number of expenses that were competing for funding; and therefore, some items were not included in the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget because of funding constraints such as: (1) Replacing the High School Fire Alarm System - Councilor Saccone stated that he wanted to be clear that the Fire Alarm was 100% in-service and was safe. However, he explained the system was nearing the end of its operational life and so they were beginning to plan for its replacement by allocating funding over the next three-years; (2) High School Elevator – Councilor Saccone stated the town would begin allocating funding over a three-year period to update the elevator. He noted that these were just a couple of items that they did not fund in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. However, he stated that there were a number of projects that have been funded such as: (1) Contractual obligations for services and operating expenses such as utilities, which included labor contracts for both the General Government and Board of Education Employees; and (2) Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which allocated funding on an incremental annual basis for facility projects and large expenses such as Road Improvements; Replacement of Public Works Heavy Equipment, Replacement of Emergency Services Apparatus, Upgrades to town buildings and schools facilities to rebuild their infrastructure, and to ensure their kids were getting a good education; as well as maintain and expand their community spaces such as the Town Green and the construction of Pickleball Courts. Councilor Saccone stated the Pickleball Courts would be built using Parks & Recreation funding, not tax dollars.

Councilor Saccone went on to explain that Ledyard was working to continue to share services, noting that inflation has hurt our residents, and it has hurt the town. He stated the Grant List for October 1, 2023 increased by 4.5%. He also noted that Finance Director Matthew Bonin approached the bank and was able to obtain a higher interest earning rate on the town's funds. He stated to date the town has earned nearly \$400,000 in interest on those funds, noting that these were the types of things Ledyard's employees were doing for our town.

Councilor Saccone concluded his remarks by thanking Finance Committee Members Councilor Buhle and Councilor Ryan for their work to consider, prioritize, and to try to meet all of the competing needs to ensure they were continuing to move the town forward. He noted they did a fantastic job in trying to control the massive inflation we have seen over the past few years. He noted the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$67,430,573 would be an increase of \$2,889,633 or 4.48%; over the current year's budget. He stated this would require an estimated .65 mil increase for a new projected mil rate of 35.21. He stated a house with an assessed value of \$250,000 would see an approximate increase of \$162.00 in their yearly taxes; and a house with an assessed value of \$425,000 would see an approximate increase of \$242.00 in their yearly taxes.

Councilor Buhle noted Councilor Saccone's comments explaining what residents could expect for an increase in their taxes was based on the *assessed value* of their homes. Therefore, she stated a home with an *assessed value* of \$250,000 was worth about \$360,000; and a house with an *assessed value* of \$425,000 was worth about \$600,000, noting that she wanted to provide clarification for folks watching or reading the minutes of this meeting.

Councilor Buhle proceeded to state that as most of you know, this was her first term as a Town Councilor. She stated while she was running to serve on the Town Council, that she, along with her colleagues on the Town Council and the Board of Education, spoke to hundreds, if not thousands of voters, and residents between door knocking, social media, and events. She stated that consistently residents asked for improvements in our schools, especially with regard to the need for more substitute teachers and higher pay for the substitute teachers, to bring Ledyard into a comparable market with neighboring school districts. She stated that it was important to note that the voters in the last election overwhelmingly supported change in our town government, and elected a Board of Education they believed would facilitate the improvements they were looking for. She stated to follow the Superintendent's proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget instead of the elected Board of Education's proposed budget would be a disservice to all of our residents who voted to support a new Board of Education.

Councilor Buhle went on to state that while our town had the third highest mil rate in the county, behind only New London and Norwich; that Ledyard was consistently in the bottom 10% for our per pupil expenditures. She stated the cuts to the Board of Education Budget that Councilor Ryan proposed at the Finance Committee's March 25, 2024 meeting would have reduce our mil rate increase by approximately .15 mils; but would cost our students greatly by reducing some of the improvements that were brought forward by the Board of Education. She stated this reduction would have further worsened our ranking in how much we spend per student, especially as school districts all around the state were significantly increasing their Board of Education Budgets, while Ledyard has been nearly stagnant for years.

Councilor Buhle continued by stating that increasing the mil rate was never a goal for any elected official, but that she believed the proposed increase for the upcoming fiscal year was modest and the delta between the current Finance Committee's approved budget and Councilor Ryan's suggested amount was reasonable and worth the additional investment in our students. She stated based on Councilor Ryan's proposed Board of Education Budget versus the Budget the Finance Committee approved to forward to the Town Council, that depending on the assessed value for a homeowner living in the Highlands, the savings would amount to approximately a \$15-\$20 per year. She went onto state for a homeowner in Birdland, the savings would be approximately a \$25-\$35 a year. She stated as a parent who lived in Birdland, and would have saved \$31 per year, if they enacted Councilor Ryan's suggestions, that she would personally rather pay the \$2.60 per month for her son and other students in our town to receive better educational services. She commented that the \$2.60 per month increase in her taxes would be about the same amount that Netflix went up last year. Therefore, she stated that she believed that she would see much more value for her money by paying the additional \$2.60 per month to invest in her community, than the value she would see in paying the increased cost for Netflix.

Councilor Buhle addressed inflation, noting that we all know that we have seen increases in our own utility costs, food costs, fuel costs, and everything else. Similarly to our own homes, the town and schools were seeing increased costs in fuel, utilities, and other expenses, aside from contractual increases that we cannot change. She stated because we know that so many of our budget increases were inflationary, it was even harder to go back and suggest further reductions, because many of these increases were not something we could control. She stated during this budget preparation process the Finance Committee chose to include funding for the Ledyard Middle School Recommissioning, which at a cost of \$24,000, was projected to save taxpayers up to \$21,000 per year for years to come. She stated that we all know our personal costs were increasing due to inflation, and it was unrealistic to expect that the town would not see inflationary increases as well.

Councilor Buhle stated lastly that she wanted to acknowledge the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget as a whole. She stated when the *Committee to Review the Budget Process* met and worked together, with Councilor Ryan as their Chairman, comments were made that there was nearly nowhere to cut in our budget. She stated Ledyard has been running very lean budgets, with very lean increases for years. She stated Ledyard does not have a spending problem; we have an income problem. We know that Ledyard's Grand List had 10% less of commercial and industrial properties than Montville and Colchester have. She stated that we

were also very aware that the burden of paying for town services and our schools falls on our residents, as it has for decades. She stated with the suggested reductions to the Board of Education budget, it was clear that our mil rate would still be in the top 3 highest mil rates in New London County. She stated our residents deserve investments in our schools for the amount of taxes they were paying.

Councilor Buhle concluded her remarks by noting as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, once said, “*Budgets are moral documents.*” She stated when we write a budget for our town government, we are making statements of our values and priorities. She stated that she believed the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget would show that our children and students were worth the investment.

Chairman Rodriguez thanked Mayor Allyn, III, the Town Council, Superintendent Hartling, and the members of the Board of Education for their hard work in putting the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 budget together. She stated that no one wanted to see increases, however, they have to recognize that Ledyard has been holding the line for many years with \$0 increases, or extremely minimal increases in past years. Therefore, she stated that they knew at some point the town was going to see a bigger increase. She stated that she believed they all have worked diligently to put together a responsible budget for the upcoming year. She thanked everyone for their time and hard work.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry addressed the Board of Education’s proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. She explained when Superintendent Hartling submitted his proposed Budget that he highlighted some savings he was trying to accomplish by eliminating and/or consolidating Bus Routes, and some other general adjustments that amounted to \$168,212. She stated most of the Education Budget was comprised of Transportation; Utilities; Services, and Special Education, etc. She stated some of the increases were due to the addition of positions, and materials that were necessary for the students, such as a new Social Worker position, a full-time Unified Art Teacher; Classroom Equipment; Curriculum, increases in the Substitute Teachers salary, noting that these were a few of the items that were added to the upcoming budget. She stated although the proposed Board of Education’s Budget included an increase of \$2,461,455 or 6.85% over the current year’s budget that there were a number of expenses that were not included such as: a Special Education Teacher, a full-time Math Coach, Transition Kindergarten Teachers, General Interventionists; English Language (ELA) Interventionists; a full-time English Teacher; a Literacy Paraprofessional; Director of Curriculum, Late Buses, a full-time Mathematics Teacher; a full-time Family Consumer Science Teacher; etc. She stated that she could continue to add to the list of things that were not funded in the upcoming budget, because they were trying to be responsible with their taxpayers’ dollars. Therefore, she stated the proposed Education Budget was lean, while still trying to meet a certain level to provide for the kid’s needs. She stated the Board of Education spent a lot of time and work to develop the proposed budget. She thanked the Board of Education for thinking about the students needs.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry continued by addressing the General Government’s proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$29,060,750; an increase of \$428,178 over the current year’s budget was also very lean. She stated that she hears residents question what the town was doing with their taxes; and therefore, she believed they needed to do a better job at educating the residents about what they were doing with their money. She stated Ledyard was running a very tight ship, noting that because they have kicked things down the road to the next year, and then to the next year to try to save money, and to keep the mil rate low; that it was going to end up costing the town and its taxpayers more money than if they had addressed things when they needed to be done.

Councilor St. Vil stated he has taken the time to review the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, to understand the decisions that were made in working to prepare a proposed budget. He noted the decisions that he was referring to were the line items that had to be reduced and the line items that had to be left behind. He stated the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 in the amount of \$67,430,573 would require a .65 mil increase. He stated he did not think anyone of them wanted to implement an increase to the mil rate. However, he stated it was the minimum that was required to do what was

right for this town and what was right for their community. He stated that he wanted to advocate for the town noting that the proposed budget increase was not a wish list fulfilled, however, he stated that it represented the minimum that was required to successfully run the town; and successfully fund their education system, which was our future.

The proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$67,430,573 as approved by the Town Council this evening would be presented to the townspeople at a Public Hearing in April, to obtain residents input. After the Public Hearing the Town Council would review the public comments received prior to forwarding a proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 to the townspeople to vote on in May.

VOTE: 6 – 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT:	APPROVED 6 - 0
MOVER:	Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor
SECONDER	Gary St. Vil, Town Councilor
AYES:	Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Rodriguez, Saccone, St. Vil
EXCUSED:	Dombrowski, Paul, Ryan

- 7. MOTION to set a Hybrid Format (Video Conference and In-Person) Public Hearing date to be held on April 15, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. to be held in the Council Chambers, 741 Colonel Ledyard Highway, to receive comments and recommendations regarding a proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil
Discussion: None.

VOTE: 6 – 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT:	APPROVED 6 - 0
MOVER:	Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor
SECONDER	Gary St. Vil, Town Councilor
AYES:	Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Rodriguez, Saccone, St. Vil
EXCUSED:	Dombrowski, Paul, Ryan

- 8. MOTION to set the Annual Town Meeting to be a Hybrid Format (Video Conference & In-Person) regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget on May 20, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. to be held in the Council Chambers, 741 Colonel Ledyard Highway; and to adjourn to a Referendum to be held on May 21, 2024 between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

In addition, should the referendum fail, the subsequent Referenda will be held between the hours of 12:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.; in accordance with Chapter VII, Section 6 of the Town Charter.

Moved by Councilor Saccone, seconded by Councilor Buhle
Discussion: None.

VOTE: 6 – 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT:	APPROVED 6 - 0
MOVER:	Tony Saccone, Town Councilor
SECONDER	Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor
AYES:	Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Rodriguez, Saccone, St. Vil
EXCUSED:	Dombrowski, Paul, Ryan

- 9. MOTION to adopt a proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Water Operations Budget in the amount \$1,517,183.62.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil
Discussion: None.

VOTE: 6 – 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT:	APPROVED 6 - 0
MOVER:	Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor
SECONDER	Gary St. Vil, Town Councilor
AYES:	Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Rodriguez, Saccone, St. Vil
EXCUSED:	Dombrowski, Paul, Ryan

XV. ADJOURNMENT

VOTE: Councilor Buhle moved to adjourn, seconded by Councilor St. Vil
6 - 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Transcribed by Roxanne M. Maher
Administrative Assistant to the Town Council

I, S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman of the Ledyard Town Council,
hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and
correct copy of the minutes of the Regular Town Council
Meeting held on March 27, 2024.

S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman