



TOWN OF LEDYARD

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Town Council Meeting Minutes

Chairman S. Naomi
Rodriguez

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, April 24, 2024

7:00 PM

Town Hall Council Chambers

In-Person: Council Chambers Town Hall Annex

Remote: Information noted below:

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

**[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84364038480?
pwd=nC8FCJV53o66lQ1bAmVEBMWLFaUyOE.1](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84364038480?pwd=nC8FCJV53o66lQ1bAmVEBMWLFaUyOE.1)**

Audio Only: Telephone: +1 646 558 8656; Meeting ID: 843 6403 8480; Passcode: 462972

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

Present: Councilor April Brunelle
Councilor Jessica Buhle
Councilor Carmen Garcia-Irizarry
Councilor Gary Paul
Chairman S. Naomi Rodriguez
Councilor Tim Ryan
Councilor Tony Saccone
Councilor Gary St. Vil

Excused: Councilor Kevin Dombrowski

IV. PRESENTATIONS

Chairman Rodriguez wished Roxanne Maher a Happy Administrative Assistant's Day!, and presented her with a bouquet of flowers from the Town Council. Chairman Rodriguez thanked Ms. Maher for HER support to the Town Council. Ms. Maher thanked the Town Council for their thoughtfulness, noting that she appreciated their kind gesture.

Ledyard Prevention Coalition Senior Health Coordinator Kerenza Mansfield - Opioid use disorder and prevention, and to expand access to intervention, treatment, and recovery options.

Ledyard Prevention Coalition Senior Health Coordinator Kerenza Mansfield - Opioid use disorder, prevention, access to intervention, treatment, and recovery options.

Ms. Mansfield thanked the Town Council for inviting her to tonight's meeting, noting that both Mayor Allyn, III, and Chairman Rodriguez sit on the Ledyard Prevention Coalition Board. She stated that she was joined by her Ledge Light Health District colleagues Senior Health Program Coordinator Margaret Lancaster and Alliance for Living Ruben Santiago. She provided some background explaining when the Town of Ledyard began to receive National Opioid Settlement Funding 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, that Ledyard reached out to Ledge Light Health District and invited them to provide a proposal on how the Ledyard Prevention Coalition could partner with the Town to use the National Opioid Settlement Funds to make a positive difference in their community. She stated after presenting a proposal to the Finance Committee, that the Town Council, at their September 27, 2023 meeting, approved to appropriate \$36,100 from the National Opioid Settlement Funds to Ledge Light Health District/ Ledyard Prevention Coalition to implement programs to address opioid use disorder, prevention, to expand access to intervention, treatment, and recovery options.

Ms. Mansfield continued by stating some of the funding they received from Ledyard was being used to give Emergency Overdose Response Trainings in town, noting that Ledge Light Health District's New London CARES Program has been presenting the trainings, noting that they provided a training at the Gales Ferry Library last night, which was open to the community. She stated during the Emergency Overdose Response Trainings, they explain how to recognize an overdose, what to do, and they talk about having no judgement, and the stigma associated with opioid addiction. She stated during the trainings that free Narcan was provided for people to take home and use should they need to. She stated between January, 2023 to February, 2024 there were 40 overdoses and one fatal overdose in Ledyard/Gales Ferry. She deferred to New London CARES Emergency Overdose Response Team Senior Health Program Coordinator Margaret Lancaster and Alliance for Living Ruben Santiago to continue with the presentation, stating that the presentation this evening was timely, noting that Ledyard had a fatal overdose on Monday morning, April 22, 2024.

Ledge Light Health District Senior Health Program Coordinator Margaret Lancaster stated she was present this evening with her colleague Ruben Santiago to discuss the signs of an opioid overdose and what to do. She went on to explain that New London County

Coordinated Access Resources Engagement and Support Services (CARES) Team was affiliated and collaborated with two agencies those being Ledge Light Health District and Alliance for Living. She stated the Team was comprised of eight members who were actively engaged with area towns noting that they do Outreach Work and Narcan Training. She stated they provide trainings at schools, restaurants, bars, etc. She stated tonight that she and Mr. Santiago would provide information regarding an opioid overdose and how to administer Narcan.

Ms. Lancaster and Mr. Santiago reviewed the following:

- ***Call Emergency 9-1-1***
For any circumstance (overdose, heart attack, stroke, etc.)
- ***Signs and Symptoms of an Overdose:***
 - ✓ Not responsive to shaking, touch, or calling their name out.
 - ✓ Slow-shallow breathing.
 - ✓ Choking or gargling, rattle breathing.
 - ✓ Tiny pupils if eyes were open.
 - ✓ Cold, clammy skin.
 - ✓ Blue lips or blue finger tips.
- ***Administer Narcan (Nasal spray - two per box)***
 - ✓ Make sure person's head is tilted back
 - ✓ Plunge one spray in one nostril of nose (wait 2- 3 minutes)
 - ✓ If the person was laying on the floor try to get them on their side, so they do not choke as they come to.
 - ✓ If the person was sitting in a chair, leave them in the chair, tilt their head back.
 - ✓ If no response after first dose, administer the second dose in the other nose nostril.
 - ✓ If the Emergency Personnel has not yet arrived, use a CPR mask and perform rescue breaths.
 - ✓ Pinch nose and give one rescue breath every six-seconds, look for chest to rise when doing breaths.

Mr. Santiago explained how Narcan worked, stating that the nasal spray would only go to the receptors. He stated that the Narcan was not harmful to a child or someone who did not have opioids in their system, noting that the Narcan would have no effect at all.

Mr. Santiago addressed the Good Samaritan Law, explaining that the person who called Emergency 9-1-1 would be covered by the Good Samaritan Law should there be drug paraphernalia in the area.

Ms. Lancaster stated that opioids slows the breathing down, explaining that an overdose was respiratory suppression. Therefore, she stated you need to get breath back into the person's lungs, so they could breath on their own again. She also noted that the lack of air could lead to the heart stopping.

Ms. Lancaster went on to state that should you find someone in a bathroom at a restaurant or

another place that appears to have overdosed, that you should administer Narcan, noting that the person may have Narcan in their things, or the restaurant may have Narcan. She stated the Good Samaritan Law would cover those helping the person. She stated as the person comes-to that they may be a little agitated, noting that they were not trying to fight or hurt the person helping them, that they were just confused, because they do not know that they overdosed.

Ms. Lancaster reviewed the Narcan Emergency Kits as follows:

- ***Fentanyl Test Strips*** - Fentanyl was the number one opioid being adulated into other drugs such as heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine, increasing the likelihood of a fatal interaction and was causing overdoses in our area.

Mr. Santiago demonstrated how to use the Fentanyl Test Strip noting that one line was positive, and two lines were negative. He stated the Test Strip would only test for fentanyl.

Mr. Santiago stated unfortunately people were going to use substances, explaining CARES' Mission was to work to reduce harm and reduction. He stated a lot of people do not know what they were putting in their body. He stated they have been getting these tools out into the community and that their data has shown that they have been having less fatal overdoses. He recommended that if you have Narcan in your home to make sure that it was accessible, noting that it should not be in the medicine cabinet or under the bed.

- ***Narcan:***

Ms. Lancaster stated the Narcan Box has instructions on how to store it. She suggested during very cold winter days or very hot summer days that Narcan not be left in the car. Ms. Santiago stated when in doubt use the Narcan anyway, even if it has expired, noting that time was of the essence, in saving a life. Ms. Lancaster suggested people call Ledge Light Health District to replace expired Narcan supplies.

Ms. Lancaster and Mr. Santiago answered the following questions:

- ***Difference in identifying someone who may be having a heart attack or an overdose relative to using Narcan or administering CPR*** - Signs and symptoms of an overdose were similar to a heart attack. There may be things laying around in the area that would indicate that an opioid substance was used. Using Narcan for someone who had a heart attack, and did not have opioids in their system, would not hurt them. Always call Emergency 9-1-1- first.
- ***How can members of their Community get Narcan and Fentanyl Test Strips-*** Ledyard Prevention Coalition recently purchased two Narcan Emergency Kits for Ledyard, and they were working with the Police Department and Parks & Recreation to determine the best locations, noting one Kit would be in Ledyard at the Town Green; and one Kit in would be in Gales Ferry by the Library. The two Kits would be stocked regularly, and based on use, additional Emergency Kits would be purchased and installed. In addition,

the Ledyard Prevention Coalition would be launching a Marketing Campaign to make the community aware of the Emergency Narcan Kits and their locations. With the two Emergency Kits in Ledyard there would be fifteen Kits in New London County. In addition to the Emergency Kits, that Fire Departments, Libraries, and other community buildings have Kits. Also, the Ledge Light Health District website listed the locations of all the Kits.

- ***Number of residents that attended the Narcan Training at the Library last night*** about seven.
- ***Ledyard Prevention Coalition - Farmers Market Narcan Demonstration*** - The Farmers Market was a good venue to provide Narcan Demonstrations/Trainings because of the number of people who attend the Market each week.
- ***Stigma of Opioid Use Disorder and Mental Health*** - Family members were also affected by opioid use disorder and mental health issues. Often times people were self-medicating, which was where the opioid use disorder started; and family members do not know who to reach out to for help.
- ***Mental Health Navigators -Alliance for Living*** - If you or a loved one was struggling from opioid use disorder and/or mental health call the telephone (860) 333-3494. The Alliance for Living provides support for the whole family.

Councilor Paul thanked Ledge Light Health District, Ledyard Prevention Coalition, the Alliance for Living and their Staff for all the work they do for the community. He stated as someone who lost someone to an overdose and knows people who were still struggling, that knowing that services and help was available was important. He addressed the judgmental aspect of what people picture a drug addict looks like, noting that sometimes you do not know what they look like. He stated as Ms. Lancaster mentioned some people self-medicate, noting that it affects all people, all races, from all walks of life, noting that some people come from money, and some people don't. He stated that he appreciated all that they do.

Ms. Lancaster stated that people need help to find their way, to learn there were other ways to manage what they may have, and to learn not to use substances to self-medicate as a fall back. She stated their approach was to meet people where they were at, and not leaving them there alone.

Mr. Santago thanked Councilor Paul for his comments, stating that you don't know what opioid use disorder looks like, noting that he lost a family member earlier this year. He stated the loss made him want to work harder, noting that he loved his job, and he loved to help people, so they could get by one more day, and live one more day. He stated people with substance abuse were looked upon like Lepers, noting that a simple "*Hello - How are you doing today*" can take a person suffering from mental illness or addiction a long way. He stated if someone reaches out to you and tells you that they were going thru something that it may be the one chance that you have to give them hope, you can tell them that you know someone who could help them, give them a card with the Ledge Light Health District telephone number (860) 333-3494 and encourage them to call. He stated that he and Ms.

Lancaster would definitely give them the help that they need.

Chairman Rodriguez and the Town Council thanked Ms. Mansfield, Ms. Lancaster, and Mr. Santiago for the work they do and for their presentation this evening.

V. RESIDENT & PROPERTY OWNERS (COMMENTS LIMITED TO THREE (3) MINUTES)

Mr. Dave Holdridge, 29 Church Hill Road, Ledyard, requested the Town Council appropriate money; or earmark some of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money, to administer the sewer line through Ledyard Center. He stated the sewer line was currently being built in Ledyard Center, however, the construction contract would only bring the sewer line to the Bill Library. He stated that he was requesting that the sewer line run all the way through Ledyard Center to Stoddards Wharf Road by the Post Office. He stated the reason for constructing the sewer line was to create a Village Center in Ledyard, noting that this has been in the Town's Plan for decades dating back to the 1960's. He stated the reason he knew this was because he served on the Planning Commission during the 1970's stating that they were all excited about creating the Village Center, etc. However, he stated it did not happen for the following reasons: (1) High water table in Ledyard Center made it difficult to develop in the area because the on-site septic systems had to leave so much space for the leaching fields that they could not have buildings close together or to create a Village; and (2) Most of Ledyard Center was in the Reservoir Drainage Area, which discouraged on-site septic systems. He stated the sewer line has been in the Town Plan for decades noting that the landowners have been waiting and willing to cooperate; and the taxpayers have been hoping to expand the taxbase; however, he stated because the sewer line has not been constructed all this has not happened.

Mr. Holdridge continued by stating for full disclosure that he was one of the landowners in Ledyard Center. He noted that he was part owner of 34 acres located behind the Town Hall Annex Building which stretched from Stoddards Wharf Road, behind the Garden Nursery, behind the Town Buildings and behind the Village Market. He stated that they have been working with Eastern Connecticut Housing Organization (ECHO) to develop a Plan that they could present; however, he stated that they needed to be able to hook into a sewer line to support the Plan. He stated the Plan could include 40- 50 units of mixed housing, which would include workforce housing, and market value houses, that could be tied together seamlessly with one general architect type building. He stated the plan would create starter homes for young people, as well as retired couples who were trying to downsize. He stated in addition to the housing units they would have space for 250,000 square feet for commercial businesses. He stated ECHO Julie Savin has told them that the new trend in housing was to have a 15-minute community, where you could walk from your home to access all your necessities, such as the grocery store, bank, post office, government buildings, church, and library, farmers market. He stated all this could be done if they could build in the areas he described. Therefore, he requested that they build the sewer line closer so that they could tap into it from Route 117. He explained if they do not finish the sewer line that the Town would be forfeiting millions of dollars in new tax revenues; and the new sewer line that they already paid for would go largely unused.

Mr. Whit Irwin, 2 Winfield Way, Ledyard, stated it was different being on this side of the aisle as opposed to the Town Council's side of the aisle. He stated that his comments this evening may take longer than the allowed three-minutes and he asked for their indulgence, noting that he believed that they would like to hear what he had to say. He began by reading his letter dated April 22, 2024 into the record as follows:

"To the Town Council of Ledyard:

I have nearly four years of experience publicly serving the Town of Ledyard on both the Board of Education and the Town Council. During this time, and in the 19 years I have lived here, I have neither heard of nor seen a Chair gavel another board or Council member to silence them prior to April 15th, where I saw it happen twice in one evening for no other reason than the Council Chair did not want another Councilor to be heard. Relatively early in the Town Hall meeting on the FY25 budget, Councilor Ryan attempted to ensure a misrepresentation was expressed in context, and Chairwoman Rodriguez pounded the gavel declaring Point of Order!!" until Councilor Ryan stopped talking. And later in the meeting, Councilor Ryan attempted to make another point in which Chairwoman Rodriguez both talked over him and pounded the gavel, again to silence Councilor Ryan.

Firstly, Point of Order is a statement to address a procedural misapplication or a breach of rules. It is not intended to silence another Councilor, and Councilor Ryan broke no town meeting rules in the meeting when he attempted to provide further context to statements being made. There is nothing in either the Town Charter or the meeting's Agenda which prevents a Councilor from speaking during the meeting. Councilor Rodriguez had no reason to gavel Councilor Ryan down other than she did not want to hear his statements. This is a dictatorial action, a model of authoritarianism, and a direct deprivation of the townspeople's duly elected representative, an action more associated with Nikita Khrushchev and the Soviet Union than any western democracy.

Secondly, the gavel's repetitive use against Councilor Ryan last Monday was chilling. It gives the townspeople little assurance that the Chair can effectively listen to and consider different viewpoints proffered by the various Councilors, much less incorporate their opinions into the management of town business. I laud Councilor Ryan in his actions to bring further clarity to ambiguous statements and apparent misrepresentations, and implore him and the other Councilors to ensure the fullest of information is presented to the public. And I hereby publicly admonish the Council Chair, to ensure the presentation of information more completely and more fully understandable, without partisan shading. It is early in this Council's tenure, which already appears to be riddled with fractious dissension and garbled communication, not present in the previous two years. I hope this is not the legacy you wish to leave. This town deserves better.

*Get well soon,
Whit Irwin*

Mr. Irwin continued by stating over this last week he spoke with someone in our town who was odious. He stated the person was particularly odious because they make personal attacks, had no intention of listening to anyone else, has a strident statement; and had a holier than thou attitude about everything they say, and does not let a fact get into the way of an argument. Mr. Irwin stated during the April 15, 2024 Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Public Hearing that he may have come across strident; noting that he had a dissension with between a half-percent and one-percent of the budget, where the Board of Education and the Town Council each seemed to have added \$300,000 to the proposed budget. He stated it was not clear where that money was being spent. He stated he was an experienced analyst noting in looking over both the Board of Education's budget and the Town Council's budget that he thought the \$300,000 must be buried somewhere in the 50- pages of small print. He stated that he hoped they could make it more apparent to the townspeople.

Mr. Irwin concluded by stating that he did not want to come across as a person that reels against what the Town Council was doing. He stated this was his third time speaking in-front of the Town Council and that he has yet to issue kudos. He stated he knows putting together a \$67,430,573 budget was a lot of effort, and he appreciated all the work that everyone has done. He stated that the only issue he had was the \$300,000 - \$600,000 that he could not make out. He thanked them all for spending the time and doing for all that work. He asked that they please let the town know what that extra money was for.

Chairman Rodriguez thanked Mr. Irwin for his comments.

Zoom Chat Question: Ms. Wendy Hellekson, 14-L Lakeside Drive, Ledyard, How many overdoses has Ledyard had per month. Police Chief John Rich attending remotely, stated the Ledge Light Health District website included a New London County Overdose Map that showed the updated statistics. He stated as the Ledge Light Health District speakers explained earlier this evening during their presentation that with the adulterated supplies that were out in the field that there were times when overdoses in our region were higher than other times. He stated although they were fortunate that they have not had too many overdoses in our area, that even one overdose was one too many. He stated the fatal overdose that occurred on April 22, 2024 was under investigation.

Ms. Joanne Kelley, 12 Thamesview Pentway, Gales Ferry, Board of Education Finance Committee Chairman, attending remotely, addressed Mr. Irwin's question regarding the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. She stated the Town Council approved the Board of Education's adopted Budget as it was submitted to them. She went on to state that she provided a presentation at the Town Council's February 28, 2024 meeting during which she spoke in detail about the items the Board of Education added to the Superintendent's proposed budget. She stated that Mr. Irwin could review her February 28, 2024 presentation or she would be happy to provide him with a copy which addressed the additions in detail, noting that reviewing her presentation may be easier than reviewing the 136 page Education

Budget.

VI. COMMITTEE COMMISSION AND BOARD REPORTS

None

VII. COMMENTS OF TOWN COUNCILORS

Councilor Paul stated every so often he can be little winded during Councilor Comments and he asked that the Town Council allow him that opportunity this evening, noting that he would not do this at every meeting.

Councilor Paul stated that he wanted to take a few minutes to make some comments about the April 15, 2024 Public Hearing regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. However, he stated that First, he would like to thank Roxanne Maher for all her hard work and dedication. He stated that she sets up everything, makes sure everyone has what they need, and that he was grateful to her for her dedication, expertise, and integrity to the Town of Ledyard. He stated Ledyard has been blessed to have her and he thanked her.

Councilor Paul continued by noting that during the April 15, 2024 Public Hearing a question was asked about why none of the Republican Councilors voted for the budget during the March 27, 2024 Town Council meeting; and it was noted that the three Republicans were not in attendance during that meeting. He stated that Chairman Rodriguez responded by stating that elected officials also had personal lives which may sometimes prevent them from attending a meeting; and that she would not go into details, noting that it was not for her to tell. Councilor Paul stated that he appreciated Chairman Rodriguez's response, because unfortunately sometimes things do happen in our personal lives that does get in the way. He stated that he would like to take a few minutes this evening to answer for his absences, noting that Councilor Ryan addressed the reason he was not in attendance at the March 27, 2024 Town Council Meeting. Councilor Paul stated that would like to apologize to his fellow Councilors and to the residents because he has missed a few meetings including his liaison assignments due to multiple illnesses in his family, including himself unfortunately.

Councilor Paul continued by stating in listening to all the comments and in reading the correspondence about the proposed budget that it really challenged him. He stated there was so much to think about and to take in, noting that he believed the Finance Committee was the hardest Committee to serve on. He stated that he believed it gets harder each year to try to meet the needs of everyone while keeping taxes reasonable, noting that it was a fine balance. He stated after serving one term and now being into his second term that he sees all the work that the Mayor, Staff, Department Heads, Town Councilors, and everyone does. He stated that he truly believed that Ledyard has been blessed with a Mayor, Department Heads and Officials that truly care about their town and that they all work to do their very best, and to do what was right. He thanked everyone, and he thanked Mayor Allyn, III, noting that he appreciate him.

Councilor Paul went on to state that he was reminded that we represent everyone here, the old, the young, everyone. He stated that they had a school budget and a town side budget;

that Ledyard had people who wholeheartedly support the proposed budget and some who do not. He stated during the April 15, 2024 Public Hearing a resident spoke about how she wanted to retire but that she could not because her taxes keep going up; and that even \$130 more in taxes could mean what meals she eats; or what medicine to buy. He stated that it was scary out there, and he gets it; especially when he finds himself suddenly faced with the possibility of becoming disabled and having to retire early. He stated that he had to ask himself: *Would he be able to afford where he was;... And If taxes keep going up, how would he afford it?*

Councilor Paul also noted that he hears those who say our kids are worth it and we need to invest in our kids. He stated that that he knows that Ledyard was funding their education at a cost that was far below any other school district in Southeastern Connecticut, and that Ledyard's Per Pupil Expenditure was among the lowest 10% in the State of Connecticut.

Councilor Paul stated this was all real and a reason to be concerned. He stated that he would like to applaud that they were recognizing mental health concerns in the budget. He stated as someone who believes in less government, fiscal responsibility, and that government should never set or advocate for social policy, or tell people how to think or feel, that mental health simply put was a legitimate health issue affecting our communities and our schools. He stated that this was not a social policy, it was a health crisis. He stated the answers to the questions are not the same as when he was a kid, and the solutions to the problems have changed since the 1960s; 1970s; and the 1980s. He stated that he truly believed in the building of a Mental Health Team at the schools and that the addition of a Clinical Supervisor for Mental Health Services was must. He stated addressing these issues now could be the difference between failure or success for these kids and in some cases it could mean life or death.

Councilor Paul stated May was Mental Health Awareness Month; and in light of transparency, he stated he suffered from Mental Illness, and that he has spent many times in the darkness of depression and was held hostage by his severe social anxiety. He stated that he would be lying if he did not admit that it unfortunately contributed to his recent absences from his obligations of late. He stated that it took a brave young kid who unfortunately inherited some of what he suffered from for him to finally start to be honest about his condition. He stated ironically, it was money and logistics that brought this to light, explaining that unfortunately, after COVID his daughter lost her bus stop when the kids returned to in-person learning at school. He stated the combination of a bad road to walk to school on, and her own severe anxiety caused her to withdraw from school and to be home schooled. He stated that she did not want people to know, including her own father, about her mental health issues; and therefore, the mental health issue was left out of their argument. However, he stated that his brave kid went and got help; and that the situation brought them closer together. He stated although his daughter was now an adult, that he has made it his personal mission to help champion mental illness and shed light; and let others know they were not alone. He stated that he hoped that he could inspire someone to receive help and rise above their illness to succeed in whatever they wanted to do. He stated that he applauded and supported that investment in our schools, stating that maybe one of those kids would be sitting in a chair on the Town Council; or

maybe the Mayor's chair.

Councilor Paul concluded by stating that he did not want to take anything away from all the hard exhausting work that the Finance Committee did. He stated while he was home sick he watched the videos from the Budget Work Sessions and the meetings that followed, noting that he appreciated all the questions Councilor Ryan, Councilor Saccone and Councilor Buhle asked. However, he stated that he questioned the additional \$300,000 that was over the budgets that were originally proposed. He stated that he was not sure if he was satisfied with the due diligence of why; and that he questioned whether further discussion and whether another look might be needed. He stated that this was his only concern, stating that he felt that they owed that to the public. He rhetorically questioned whether it would make a difference; stating that he did not know, but that he felt it was warranted to ask that question. He thanked everyone for their hard work.

Councilor Brunelle thanked Councilor Paul for his comments this evening regarding mental health. She stated that she also suffered from depression and anxiety, noting that it was not easy, but that it was important to let others know that people have it and that it was okay. She stated depression and anxiety were health issues, noting that it was no different than treating someone with a bad cold.

Councilor Brunelle continued by thanking the Beautification Committee for the wonderful fill the dumpster event. She stated it was great to see so many people in the community pitching in to help clean up Ledyard. She stated that she was happy that she participated, noting it was a lot of fun.

Councilor Ryan stated he had some general comments and some comments regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. He stated he planned to deliver his general comments now and his budget comments later in the meeting during New Business Item #1; unless Chairman Rodriguez would like for him to give all his comments at this time. Chairman Rodriguez stated Councilor Ryan could provide his budget comments later this evening when the Town Council addressed the Budget.

Councilor Ryan stated that First, he would like to note that it is Administrative Professionals Day today, and recognize their very own Roxanne Maher; stating without her, we would truly be lost, noting that he thought this was the greatest comment anyone could receive; and he thanked Ms. Maher.

Councilor Ryan stated Second, he would like to address comments made by Mr. Jacob Hurt at the Finance Committee's April 17, 2024 in which he expressed his concern with what he called a "*lack of decorum*" at the April 15, 2024 Public Hearing regarding the budget. Councilor Ryan stated that he reached out to this resident after the Finance Committee meeting and offered to have a civil, frank, and open dialogue on the subject in order to better understand and discuss his concerns. He stated that his offer was not accepted, but that he hoped that the resident may reconsider as he personally believed that, in a world where we are confronted with bias-riddled news and dialogue every day, we - as Town Councilors - should make every effort to ensure we are doing business without reproach and

communicating in a transparent, and accurate fashion, with all commentary presented in context and not misrepresenting events or votes - especially legislatively important ones. He said that this has been, and would always remain, his priority as a duly elected representative of our town.

Councilor Ryan went on to state Finally, on April 17, 2024 the Town Council received a concerned email communication from Ms. Wendy Hellekson, the Ledyard DTC Chairperson, claiming that there was three- minutes missing from the video recording of the April 15, 2024 Public Hearing. Shortly after receiving this email, our ever diligent and efficient Administrative Assistant responded to the email, not only with a full and transparent accounting of the timeline and process by which the recordings were uploaded to the meeting portal, but even offering Ms. Hellekson the opportunity to stop by the Town Hall and watch the video recorded locally by the Zoom system. Councilor Ryan stated that he would have expected nothing less. Which was why he was disheartened to hear that, not only was she not taken up on her offer, but shortly after sending her response, this very same assistant was served with a Freedom of Information Complaint from Councilor April Brunelle (see correspondence list), requesting an “*unedited*” version of the recording, with the word “*unedited*” underlined, no less, insinuating that some nefarious action had taken place.

Councilor Ryan went on to state for those not familiar, that the long-established state and local FOIA policies^{3,4} state that a complaint form was only to be used when there is a denial of access to a public record, or that a record was not made readily accessible; neither was the case here. He stated not only did this action question our Administrative Assistant’s integrity without cause, but this was certainly not the way to build an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, and he failed to see why a state law was inappropriately weaponized to procure something that was offered freely and readily. Councilor Ryan stated to her credit, that very same Administrative Assistant, ever ardent, immediately responded to the request the same day, despite having 4 days per statute to do so. He stated that he remained, however, disappointed at the lack of respect and consideration offered to our hard working public employees; and he personally thanked them for all that they do. Thank you.

Councilor Saccone stated that he wanted to add to the comments regarding Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher. He stated as a member of the Gales Ferry Fire Company Ms. Maher has always gone out of her way to help the volunteer fire companies, noting that she does more than she really should, and that they appreciate that.

Councilor Saccone continued by noting the Ledge Light Health District presentation earlier this evening (see above - Informational Items/Presentations) which included a demonstration regarding how to administer Narcan to someone who may have overdosed on a narcotic. He stated being a Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) in town for many years that it was important to get this information out to residents. He stated putting up some Emergency Narcan Kits Stations in town was a great opportunity because of the stigma attached to what these people were going through. He stated the Emergency Narcan Kits would allow them to discreetly, at their choice, to try to get help. He stated the Ledge Light Health District Staff gave a great presentation, and he thanked Chairman Rodriguez for inviting them to tonight’s meeting.

Councilor Buhle stated that she also wanted to thank Ms. Maher, noting that she has spent countless hours in the Town Council Office, noting that Ms. Maher has helped her to learn the ropes of serving as a member of the Town Council, and has helped her in making sure she had the information she needed before she moved forward with an initiative.

Councilor Buhle continued by stating that this was National Infertility Awareness Week and that she wanted to share her heart with Ledyard families who may be struggling with infertility. She stated 48.5 million couples experience some form of infertility.

Councilor St. Vil stated he wanted to thank Ms. Maher not for the great job that she does, because that was obvious, but for going above and beyond with answering the telephones during the day to help talk thru the issues and problems. He noted that he appreciated what she does for the Town Council and he thanked her.

Councilor St. Vil continued by thanking the community, noting that Monday, April 22, 2024 was Earth Day. He stated as he was driving down Pumpkin Hill and Cow Hill Road on Sunday (April 21, 2024) he saw cars parked on the side of the road and people picking up roadside trash. He thanked their wonderful community and the residents who take time out of their Sunday afternoon to help care for our environment.

Councilor St. Vil went on to note that he was compelled to say that at one of his previous employers they had a concept that was promulgated called "*Assume Positive Intent*". He stated sometimes when we hear words that we may tag an assumption to those words, such as "*I like your shoes*". He stated that there were two ways he could take those words: (1) As a Compliment; or (2) As someone was making fun of his shoes. He stated as elected officials that they have the difficult job of discussing and voting on some difficult topics. He stated to be successful for their community, for their kids, and for their grandkids, was to assume positive intent, to hear each other, and then ultimately vote the way they felt was the best for their community.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry thanked Ms. Maher for all that she does for the Town Council, noting that she writes the best minutes. She stated that she also wanted to thank Councilor Paul for his comments regarding Mental Health and the importance to support building a Mental Health Team and the addition of a Clinical Supervisor for Mental Health Services in their schools. She stated that her family has suffered with mental health issues for over twenty years. She addressed the stigma associated with mental health, noting that her son had cancer when he was one-years old and received chemotherapy, and in elementary school he received special education specifically for speech therapy, noting he was still working through the effects of the chemotherapy. She stated that she appreciated the High School Psychologist and the Counselor noting that they were the best. She stated because of the special education program and the services provided by the School Psychologist and the Counselor, her son has good grades, noting the importance of having the personnel in their schools.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry continued by addressing Mr. Irwin's questions regarding the

additional \$315,750 (see above V. Residents Comments) that the Board of Education added to the Superintendent's proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget noting the following:

- \$60,000 Human Resources/ Finance positions
- \$31,250 Substitute Teachers to cover for additional teacher absences
- \$125,000 Clinical Supervision
- \$85,999 Intervention
- \$14,500 Substitute Teachers wage increase
- Total BOE Budget Adjustments \$315,750 or an increase of 0.88%

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated that the Board of Education also worked to offset increases by decreasing other expenses which included the following:

- \$75,000 Eliminated buses for students who attend Magnet Schools
- \$105,000 from Teacher Retirements

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget was available on-line and it included a spreadsheet regarding the Board of Education's adjustments to the Superintendent's proposed budget. She noted that she would send Mr. Irwin the spreadsheet. She thanked everyone for all the work they did to prepare the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, noting as Councilor Paul mentioned earlier this evening, the Finance Committee had the hardest job; and that she appreciated all the work that they did.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry concluded by stating that she drove through Sandy Hollow Road, noting that the new guiderails looked awesome. She commented on how quickly the guiderails were replaced, and she stated the road would be much safer with the new guiderails in place.

Councilor Paul stated the new Sandy Hollow Guiderails looked great. Mayor Allyn, III stated as the Guiderails weathered, that they would look better.

Chairman Rodriguez thanked Ms. Maher for all the work she does, noting that she sees or talks to her ever day. She stated Ms. Maher's mind was like a long file cabinet, noting that she remembered all that has been done throughout the decades. She stated Ledyard was lucky to have Ms. Maher, and this Town Council and past Town Council's have been lucky to have her.

Chairman Rodriguez went on to address the April 15, 2024 Public Hearing regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. She explained that the OWL (360 degree video and audio recorder) has a noise cancellation feature, which would mute the audio when there was a loud noise, such as the gavel, or there were a number of people talking at the same time, because the OWL cannot quickly go from one person. Therefore, she stated that it appears that the video was edited, when it was not edited. She stated that the Town Council needed to hold themselves to a higher standard, which included herself, to not talk over each other, not to cut people off and allow them to speak, to remember that the residents may be

listening to meeting video; and that those who are doing the minutes may not be able to hear everything.

VIII. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the following Town Council Minutes:

- Regular Meeting Minutes of April 10, 2024
- Public Hearing Minutes of April 15, 2024

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Councilor Ryan noted an amendment that was made to the April 15, 2024 Public Hearing Minutes regarding a comment that he made. However, he stated where his comment was added to the Minutes was incorrect. He stated he reviewed the video noting that his comment was made at approximately 55.26 minutes into the video. Therefore, he stated he would like to modify the same paragraph that was amended to read as follows:

“Councilor Ryan stated that he did not care (regarding the Point of Order) and that he was not going to let Mr. Graber be misrepresented”.

The Town Council accepted the modification to the amendment.

VOTE: 8 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: Jessica Buhle

SECONDER: Tim Ryan

AYE: 8 Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Paul, Rodriguez, Ryan, Saccone, and St. Vil

EXCUSED: 1 Dombrowski

IX. COMMUNICATIONS

Chairman Rodriguez stated a Communications List has been provided on the meeting portal for tonight’s meeting; and she noted there no referrals listed.

Communications List - April 24, 2024

X. REFERRALS

XI. COUNCIL SUB COMMITTEE, LIAISON REPORTS

1. Administration Committee

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry noted the Administration Committee’s next meeting was scheduled for May 8, 2024.

RESULT: .

2. Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Councilor Brunelle stated the Community Relations Committee met on April 17, 2024 and chose the following dates to host Booths at the Farmers' Market: (1) July 3, 2024 - Red-White & Blue to feature First Responders/Emergency Services - Police and Fire Departments; (2) July 10, 2024 - Bee Bubbly to feature Land Use Commissions; and (3) August 21, 2024 - Old Folks Day to feature Mental Health, Home Heating Assistance, and the Linda C. Davis Food Pantry. She stated that they would need to contact the Farmers Market to reserve the space.

RESULT: .

3. Finance Committee

Councilor Saccone stated the Finance Committee met on April 17, 2024 and they have a few items on tonight's Agenda. He stated their May 3, 2024 meeting would be cancelled.

RESULT: .

4. Land Use/Planning/Public Works Committee

Councilor St. Vil stated the Committee's next meeting was scheduled for May 6, 2024.

RESULT: .

Liaison Reports

This was ..to the Town Council due back on 5/8/2024

RESULT: .

5. Permanent Municipal Building Committee

Councilor Brunelle stated the PMBC next meeting was scheduled for May 6, 2024.

Chairman Rodriguez stated a resident who watches the PMBC meeting videos has indicated that audio was not consistent, noting that they cannot hear the Committee Members who were sitting at the far end of the table, but that residents who were near the microphone were very loud. She questioned whether the Board of Education's Conference Room had an OWL to record the meetings; and she asked Councilor Brunelle to ask about the audio.

6. Historic District Commission

Councilor Ryan stated because the Historic District Commission was scheduled on April 15, 2024, which was the same time as the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget Public Hearing that he was not able to attend their meeting.

7. Ledyard Beautification Committee

Councilor Ryan reported that Ms. Jennifer Eastbourne was stepping down as the Committee's Chairman. He stated that she would continue to serve on the Committee.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she was aware of a couple of residents who were interested in serving on the Beautification Committee.

8. Public Safety Report

Councilor Saccone stated the Commission has not met since the last Town Council meeting.

9. Ledyard Center Fire Department

Councilor Saccone stated the Ledyard Fire Department met and addressed the following: (1) Nominated Officers for Administrative Responsibilities and for Operational Responsibilities; (2) \$600,000 New Tanker Truck Inspection - The Ledyard Fire Department went to Colorado to inspect the new Tanker Truck, and identified about a dozen minor problems, that the factory corrected on-site. He stated new Tanker should arrive in town within the next two-weeks.

Councilor Saccone went on to explain for both the Ledyard Center Fire Department and the Gales Ferry Fire Departments that there were the following two sides to the Fire House: (1) Fire Chiefs and Officers who run the emergencies; and (2) Administration side of the Fire Department.

10. Gales Ferry Fire Department

Councilor Saccone reported on the following: (1) Gales Ferry Fire Department's Annual Banquet was held on April 25, 2024 at which a number of community awards were given out; (2) Pumper Truck was out of service for a couple of weeks due to a transmission issue. The issues were repaired and the apparatus was now back in service.

11. Retirement Board

Chairman Rodriguez stated the Board met on April 16, 2024 and approved Payment of Fiduciary Advisory Invoice #609-03312024 in the amount of \$12,475.39 for consulting services.

12. Water Pollution Control Authority

Chairman Rodriguez stated in Councilor Dombrowski's absence that she attended the WPCA's April 23, 2024 meeting at which Groton Utilities Representative talked about conducting a Lead Sampling throughout town that would cost between \$300,000 - \$400,000. The WPCA discussed applying for a Grant which was due on April 26, 2024

to pay for the Lead Samples. Should they not be able to meet the Grant Application deadline, they plan to reapply again next year. They have between 3 - 7 years to conduct the Lead Samples, if they were a distressed community, which Ledyard was not. Chairman Rodriguez asked Mayor Allyn, III, to look into this matter. Mayor Allyn stated that there has been some emails regarding the Lead Samples.

13. Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Commission Fiscal Year 2023/2024

Councilor Buhle stated in Councilor Paul's absence she attended the Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Commission's April 16, 2024 meeting noting they discussed the following: (1) Work-out Room - The Commission was moving forward to acquire the equipment for the exercise room; and (2) Chair Replacements - The Commission received Grant funding to replace all of the chairs in the Senior Citizens Facility.

14. Planning & Zoning Commission

Councilor St. Vil stated the Planning & Zoning Commission has not met since the last Town Council meeting.

15. Inland Wetland and Water Courses Commission

Councilor St. Vil stated the IWWC has not met since the last Town Council meeting.

16. Library Commission

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry noted after seventeen years of service that Ms. Carol Gantz resigned from the Commission. She noted that there were three qualified candidates interested in serving on the Commission.

17. Board of Education

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated the Board of Education met on April 23, 2024 and addressed the following: (1) Human Resources Director began working full-time; (2) Interviews have begun to fill positions for the next school year; (3) Selected the Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS) Coordinator, which would be contingent upon the taxpayers adoption of the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget; (3) School Lunch Program had a debit of \$12,000; (4) Student Liaisons - The Board of Education has two High School Students that were serving as liaison; as well as a liaison from the Middle School. She stated during the Board of Education Meeting the Liaisons gave a report, noting that they did a great job; (5) Board of Education Chairman Alex Rode has temporarily stepped down due to illness. Vice-Chairman Mary Harris would be acting as Chairman during Mr. Rode's absence; (6) Transportation Agreement was approved for the period of 2025 thru 2028; (7) Approved Tuition Rates for the 2024/2025 School year; (7) Approved the Facilities Rates for 2024/2025 school year; (8) Reviewed and approved the Math Curriculum for Kindergarten thru Grade 2; (9) Approved a new Neuroscience and

Society Course for the High School; (10) Approved the Family Consumer Science PILOT Program for the Middle School.

XII. REPORT OF THE MAYOR:

Mayor Allyn, III, reported on the following: (1) \$10 Million - Bond Anticipation Note Issuance School(s) Consolidation/Improvement Projects (Middle School & Gallup Hill School) - Mayor Allyn stated the town received three bids to purchase the Town's Bonds. He stated the net was 3.96% interest. He stated at this interest rate the town would be paying about \$404,000 - \$410,000 a year for interest expenses. He noted the Town has submitted everything that was required to receive State Grant Reimbursement. He stated State Senator Cathy Osten and Ledyard's Representatives were prodding the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to release the interim payment, noting that the town had hoped this payment would be \$8 million, however, he stated that they would be receiving \$6.5 million; (2) Earth Day Trash to Treasures Clean-up - Mayor Allyn thanked Beautification Committee Chairman Jennifer Eastbourne, noting that they did a nice job on Sunday, April 21, 2024. He stated that he and Chairman Rodriguez judged the creations the kids made turning trash into art, noting that they did a great job; (3) Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) Legislative Meeting - Mayor Allyn reported the following: (a) Early Voting - The State did not include money in next year's (24/25) budget to assist town's with early voting expenses. Mayor Allyn stated the state did provide towns funding for Early Voting in the current year. However, going forward the Early Voting would be an unfunded mandate; (b) Car Tax Sunset Bill failed; (c) House Bill #5173 Publication of Legal Notices in the Newspaper - Mayor Allyn stated this Bill was still being considered. He stated of the 50 pieces of written testimony, only five were opposed to the Bill which were all from Publishers (The Day Newspaper, Hartford Courant, etc.); (c) House Bill #5413 - Illegal Street Take Over - Mayor Allyn stated the Bill was approved *Joint Favorable* and was now before the Senate; (d) Senate Bill #356 - Increase in Mashantucket Pequot Fund passed *Joint Favorable* coming out of Committee by a vote of 44-1. Last year Governor Lamont vetoed the Bill. Mayor Allyn stated, the Bill appeared to be nice, however, there was a partner Bill that would remove the town's taxing authority. He stated although the town would gain a little funding from the Mashantucket Pequot Fund Bill that they would lose a lot should the Bill pass. He stated the State Legislative Session had eleven days remaining, noting that they were moving rapidly; (4) Habitat for Humanity Meeting - Colby Drive Project - Mayor Allyn stated the development would construct 40 deed restricted Affordable Housing units providing 28-three bedroom units; 8-two bedroom units; and 4-four bedroom units. He stated that the Applications would be submitted to Planning & Zoning; (5) Ledyard Prevention Coalition April 16, 2024 meeting - Mayor Allyn stated they were in the last year of a ten year Grant, which funded their operations. He stated Ledge Light Health District was working to determine how they could make the Ledyard Prevention Coalition sustainable beyond the grant term; (6) Southeastern (SERAC) Annual Prevention Conference May 17, 2024 - Mayor Allyn stated the Conference would be via

Zoom video conference only. He stated the event was from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. and that he would forward the Flyer to the Town Council tomorrow; (7) Emergency Narcan Kits - Mayor Allyn noted the Ledyard Prevention Coalition's presentation earlier this evening (see above Section III Informational Items/Presentations) regarding the demonstration on how to

administer Narcan. He stated after hearing about how excessive cold or heat could affect the Narcan that he now had some concerns regarding the locations of Ledyard's the Kits being outside. He stated that the temperature issue was not mentioned during their previous discussions, therefore, he would need ask more questions; (8) Norwich Chamber of Commerce Round Table Discussion - April 23, 2024 - Mayor Allyn stated the Town Officials met with the following: (a) Non-profit Connecticut Main Street to talk about their role in assisting towns to create "*Downtowns*". He stated he reached out to them to see if they would be interested in working with Ledyard Center or Gales Ferry; and (b) Eastern Regional Tourism District to talk about providing data for the CTVisit.com website. He stated that he would forward the information to the Economic Development Commission, noting events such as the Yale-Harvard Regatta, the Rotary Car Show, and the Farmers Market, noting that it would be great to get these and other idea on the CTVisit.com website; (9) Solar Charging Stations - American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding - Mayor Allyn stated he was disappointed to learn that the Solar Charging Station that was installed at the Town Green was destroyed, noting that someone used a rock to smash the unit. He stated they were checking to see whether the solar panel that powered the unit could be replaced. He went on to note that Solar Charging Stations were also installed at other locations in town for residents to charge their devices. He stated that perhaps something could be done to protect the units. He stated it was disheartening to see that someone destroyed the unit just because they could; (10) Sewer Line Contract - Phase III - Mayor Allyn stated at their April 23, 2024 meeting the Water Pollution Control Authority approved the Sewer Line Contract - Phase III. He explained that Phase I would be installed from the Bill Library to High School; Phase III would be installed from the High School to Pennywise Lane (Highlands); and Phase II would be from the Bill Library to the Post Office. He stated that Mr. Holdridge (see above Section V. Residents Comments) was referring to Phase II earlier this evening, which the town has not funded. He stated with the WPCA's approval that the design and engineering work would be done for Phase II before working with the contractor; (11) Sandy Hollow Guiderail Replacement Project - Mayor Allyn stated as mentioned earlier this evening the Sandy Hollow Guiderail project has been completed; (12) Drug Take Back Day would be held on Saturday, May 4, 2024 at the Ledyard Senior Citizens Center on Van Tassel Drive, Gales Ferry, from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Mayor Allyn stated it would be drive thru, explaining that residents would not have to get out of their car; (13) Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request regarding the video from the April 15, 2024 Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Public Hearing - Mayor Allyn stated as elected officials that they have a duty to communicate effectively with people; not with just with residents, but with staff as well. He stated that his advice and suggestion to all the members of the Town Council was that if they had any questions that they please call any of us, including himself, and Ms. Maher as the Town Council's staff, or any of the Department Heads at the Town Hall. He asked if they had questions to please communicate with people first; and not use the FOIA Request as their first stop, noting that a FOIA Requests should be used as their last stop. He stated Ledyard has received many FOIA Requests, as all towns do, and that Town Hall Staff fulfills the requests instantly. He went on to explain when residents ask for information that staff does not typically ask them fill out FOIA Request Forms noting they just give them the information. He asked that the Town Council keep this in mind going forward, stating that it was important that they work together, because this was how the town moves forward in a positive direction. He stated that he liked Councilor St. Vil's comments, and that he

appreciated everyone working together for the betterment of the town.

Questions to the Mayor

Chairman Rodriguez asked Mayor Allyn to repeat the numbers of the House Bills being considered in this Legislative Session. Mayor Allyn noted the following House Bills:

- HB #5113 - Illegal Street Takeover
- HB #5172 - Publication of Legal Notices in the Newspaper
- Senate Bill #356 - Increase in the Mashantucket Pequot Fund
- Early Voting - No Funding - Mayor Allyn stated the Early Voting did not have a Bill Number associated with it.
- Car Tax Sunset Bill - Mayor Allyn stated he did not have the House Bill number because it failed to come out of Committee. However, he stated there was still a Mil Rate Car Tax Cap, explaining that the State would continue to provide municipalities the delta between their local Mil Rate and the State's Mil Rate Cap. He noted that the State was flushed with money, stating that their Rainy Day Fund was maxed-out \$3.3 Billion. He also noted that the State has paid down \$7 Billion on their Pension Fund Liability.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry questioned should the Car Tax Sunset Bill be considered again next year and it does pass, how would the town make up the loss in revenue that they would no longer be receiving from the car taxes? Mayor Allyn stated collectively Connecticut's Municipalities receive about \$1Billion from car taxes. Therefore, they asked the State the same question, which was: *Where would the money come from to make up that loss in collectable revenues.* He stated that Municipalities would need to increase their real estate property taxes. He stated the Car Tax Sunset Bill was helpful for renters; however, he stated for property owners or homeowners the Car Tax Sunset Bill was not good news. He explained the State's biggest issue was how do they replace a billion dollars a year and not increase taxes.

Councilor Buhle addressed the replacement of the Sandy Hollow Road Guiderails, stating that they needed to be replaced for a long time. She suggested they have a Ribbon Cutting and that Councilor Saccone should be the one to cut the Ribbon. Mayor Allyn stated they replaced 7,100 linear feet of Guiderails in two and half weeks.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she has already been receiving positive remarks from residents about the new Sandy Hollow Road Guiderails, noting that the residents were happy.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry suggested they include something in the Events Quarterly Magazine about the Sandy Hollow Road Guiderails. Mayor Allyn stated Ledyard did very well with the use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding, noting that the Town Council did an awesome job in putting together a list of things that would mean a lot to the town for many years, noting that a number of capital project "needs" and other non-operational expenses were addressed. He stated other towns did not take the same

approach as Ledyard, noting that many used their ARPA funding for operational costs and now they were left with budgetary issues.

RESULT:

XIII. OLD BUSINESS

None.

XIV. NEW BUSINESS

Finance Committee

1. 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 Saccone

Discussion: Councilor Ryan stated that it has always been his opinion that we need to take a consolidated, Ledyard-centric approach to address the real needs of our community, balanced against what the community can afford. He stated their community, who were also our taxpayers, fund 70% of the town's revenue; and while inflation was often cited as a reason for increased budget demands, we cannot forget that these very same taxpayers were facing the same inflation in other areas of their lives, and many were without the benefit of mandated contractual salary increases. He stated residents were being forced to choose priorities and make hard decisions in how their finite resources were spent - and the town and school district should be expected to do the same.

Councilor Ryan continued by stating that it was against this backdrop that they should consider the town budgets put before them. He stated that he would again reiterate some high level data points and observations for public awareness as follows:

- The Town's general government budget, which included Capital investments and health care costs for both the town and schools, represents a 1.5% increase over the current year's (fy 23/24) expenditures.
- The adopted Board of Education budget represented a 6.85% increase over the current year's (fy 23/24) expenditures; much like every other municipality, the education budget was the largest driver of overall town expenses - nearly 70% in Ledyard's case.
- The proposed budgets would represent a .65 Mill increase in our Mill Rate, or roughly another \$162 a year for a single family home assessed at \$250,000.
- For Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Ledyard currently had the 3rd highest Mill Rate in New London County, behind only Norwich and New London. However, that would change in Fiscal Year 2024/2025; as we would now be the 2nd highest, with New London's Fiscal Year 2025 mill rate dropping to 27.5 due to their recent revaluation.
- Ledyard's total Grand List Value was in the bottom half in the same referenced region. even

when taking into account 4.5% growth from last year. The town simply does not have the taxable Commercial or Industrial Real Property that would help bring in the much needed revenue. Focused development was needed in these areas in order to reduce the tax burden on homeowners.

Councilor Ryan stated that he continued to believe the General Government Budget, at a 1.5% increase, represented the leanest the operational budget could be, with savings taken in many places that helped to offset contractual increases in wages and other areas.

Councilor Ryan went on to state with regard to the proposed Board of Education operations budget, after careful consideration and discussion with key stakeholders within the Town, Board of Education, and School Administration, that he still believed that there was an opportunity to obtain some efficiencies *without affecting current student facing services*, which included the Interventionists Coordinator. To that end, at the March 25, 2024 Special Finance Committee's Meeting, before the budget went to April 15, 2024 Public Hearing, that he moved to revise the top line of the Education Budget figure to \$38,170,595 for a 6.3% increase over the current year's (fy 23/24) budget.

Councilor Ryan stated while his Motion was not seconded at that meeting, that he presented the same motion at the Finance Committee's April 17, 2024 meeting, and was able explain that his proposed amended budget figure, which included funding for many of the desired improvements and additional positions - such as the Interventionist Coordinator, that the Board of Education requested. He noted that while less than the Board of Education's adopted increase of 6.85%, that his proposed increase of 6.3% was still greater than the baseline budget increase of 5.98% that was originally proposed by the Superintendent of Schools to the Board of Education. He stated that the Superintendent's proposed budget was further evidence that his proposed increase of 6.3% would have indeed covered basic needs for the District, as well as some value-added additions.

Councilor Ryan stated that unfortunately, his motion failed; and he went on to comment that he was taken aback by a concern that was presented by another Councilor that, should they cut the proposed school budget at all, that there was no guarantee that the Board of Education would fund certain items that the Town Council deemed valuable - in other words, student facing services, which was what he deemed valuable. He stated to him that this was akin to saying that we do not trust the Board of Education to do the right thing with a reduced figure, should the Town Council present them with that. He stated that while he personally did not believe that to be the case, the specter of that occurring was most certainly not a reason for the Town Council to be held hostage; noting that accountability was a wonderful thing.

Councilor Ryan continued by stating that since some have made a point of comparing Ledyard's spending to other school districts, specifically Montville and Stonington, that he wanted to note that his proposed increase of 6.3% was significantly greater than budget the increases being proposed for those very same districts, with both at 4.5% over the current (fy 24/25) year, noting that Stonington recently reduced their budget. He stated in fact, *Ledyard has enjoyed a greater cumulative percentage increase than either of those school districts over the last three budget cycles*. He noted the education budget cumulative increases were as follows: 12.7% for Montville, 14% for Stonington and 15.5% for Ledyard2.

Councilor Ryan went on to state that some may dismiss his proposed budget figure as being a negligible reduction compared to the current 6.85% increase, with the inference being that it was not worth considering. However, he stated that he had the following two rebuttals to that sentiment: The First being that it dismisses the optics of the situation, as he personally could not say that they challenged and scrutinized the School Budget the same way they challenged the General Government Budget. The Second being that the argument cuts both ways; another words; if it was truly believed that his amended figure was a negligible decrease, then why would it *not* be acceptable?

Councilor Ryan stated that there was no doubt that they were in interesting and challenging economic times and, that he believed as a town, they should further prioritize expenses to reflect the financial reality our taxpayers were facing; and also start to implement some of the recommendations from the *Committee to Review the Budget Process Final Report* to ensure that they were making the most out of every dollar sacrificed by the taxpayer. He noted the following websites as the sources for the data he presented this evening:

1<https://data.ct.gov/Local-Government/Mill-Rates-for-FY-2014-2025/emyx-j53e>
2Metric developed from data obtained from <<https://public-edsight.ct.gov/>>
3<https://www.ledyardct.org/DocumentCenter/View/5544/FOIA-Policies-Procedures>
4<https://portal.ct.gov/foi/misc/online-filing-complaints>

Councilor Saccone stated that he wanted to thank residents such as Mr. Irwin and Mr. Cherry who watch over the Town Council; specifically, the finances, to make sure their tax dollars were being spent where they should be spent. He stated that they were going to have disagreements, noting that the Finance Committee had disagreements during their budget discussions. He also noted that they have disagreements with their spouses, but that they work through them. He stated he believed the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget came out in-favor of their children. He stated that he was also a taxpayer in town and that he believed that it was a fair budget. He stated he understood residents comments regarding the increases in taxes noting that his first tax bill was \$1,800 in 1988. However, he stated that he was in-favor of the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget noting that it was in the best interest of the town to move forward.

Councilor Paul noted that he agreed with Councilor Ryan's point. He stated as he mentioned earlier this evening (Councilor Comments) that his concerns were regarding the importance to conduct their due diligence. He stated when they were looking at a 6.85% budget increase that everything needed to be scrutinized, because they were accountable to everybody.

Councilor Buhle stated as a follow-up to Councilor Garcia-Irizarry's response (VI. Councilor Comments) to Mr. Irwin's question regarding how the additional \$315,750 was going to be used in the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, that she wanted to provide further information as follows:

- \$125,000 Clinical Supervision

- \$85,999 Interventionists
- \$35,000 Substitute Teachers to cover for additional teacher absences
- \$14,500 Substitute Teachers wage increase (\$100.00 to \$125.00 per day)
TOTAL: \$255,750 (*Student Facing Services*)
- \$60,000 Human Resources/ Finance positions
- Total BOE Budget Adjustments \$315,750 or an increase of 0.88%

Councilor Buhle went on to explain that other than the \$60,000 for Human Resources/Finance Positions; that \$225,750 of the additional funding, over the Superintendent of School's proposed 5.98% Budget increase was for *Student Facing Services*. She stated if the funding was scaled back, as Councilor Ryan suggested, that her concern was not that she did not think that the Board of Education would make the right decisions, noting that there was no right decision. She stated there was not \$200,000 of *Non-Student Facing Services* to cut. She stated after attending multiple Board of Education Meetings and watching them scrutinize each line, noting that the Superintendent of School's proposed 5.98% Budget increase was almost entirely to provide for the status quo based on inflation and contractual increases. She stated the 5.98% increase would not include the Interventionists, Clinical Supervisor, or the additional Substitute Teachers to cover during teachers absences. She stated when they do not have adequate funding to pay for substitute teachers to cover teacher absences, that the paraprofessionals oversee the class; or teachers do not take the time they need if they were sick; or to take care of a family member, because they know that there would not be a substitute teacher to cover for that day.

Councilor Buhle continued by stating that the Finance Committee diligently worked to make sure the General Government Budget was fair and reasonable; and that she believed the Board of Education did the same. She stated although she appreciated the effort to push the Board of Education to make sure they were getting the best for the taxpayers money, that she did not believe the Board of Education was being overzealous; or irresponsible. She stated as she stated at previous meetings (Town Council 3/27/2024) the reduction that Councilor Ryan proposed would equate to .15 mils, which would be a savings of \$31 per year for her and for other residents who live in a home in similar size. She stated that she would gladly pay an additional \$31.00 per year to make sure her son and other children have a substitute teacher in their classrooms, and they were not spending the day in the cafeteria with sixty kids.

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 with the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget that she believed that they were showing that our children and students were worth the investment.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry noted Councilor Ryan's comments that some area towns have reduced their education budgets for the upcoming year. She stated that Groton reduced their education budget because they had used the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding to hire and pay for teachers and personnel. Therefore, she noted some school districts such as Groton and others were planning to lay-off sixty or more teachers/personnel. However, she stated Ledyard's School District did not use their ARPA Funding for those types of expenses.

She stated that she agreed that they had to scrutinize all expenses, noting that she reviewed all of the Munis Budget printouts, noting that it took her some time to figure out what all the budget lines meant, noting that she wished the Munis Reports were easier to read. She stated that she knew that they all cared about Ledyard's students, and although she also wished they could go with the lower education budget, that she did not know where they could make cuts. She stated there were a lot of things such as teacher positions that the Board of Education needed but did not include in their budget request for next year. She stated Ledyard has done a wonderful job with the taxpayers money, noting they try not to spend money on things that was not necessary.

Councilor Ryan stated that he wanted to clarify some things, noting that he agreed with Councilor Garcia-Irizarry, in that there were a lot of things in the Education Budget that were not funded. However, he noted that there were also a lot of things that went unfunded on the General Government' side of the Budget as well, stating that they had to make some tough decisions on what their priorities were. He stated even with carrying the Board of Education's expenses for health care, and Capital Projects, that they were able to keep the General Government's proposed Fiscal Year Budget to a 1.5% increase.

Councilor Ryan went on to state, therefore, he thought that there was room in the Education Budget for some additional adjustments. He stated when he proposed the 6.3% increase for the Education Budget, he did not just look at the additions that were over the Superintendent of Schools proposed budget increase of 5.98%. He explained because he believed in Zero Based Budgeting that he began from the ground-up looking at every single budget line. He stated if he saw a healthy increase over the current year's (fy 23/24) budget that he flagged it and discussed it with the stakeholders which he mentioned earlier this evening. He stated he did not look at whole lines as to cut or to include, noting as an example the Substitute Teachers line. He stated that he agreed that Ledyard does not pay their substitute teachers enough. Therefore, he stated that he called area school districts as well as private schools, to ask what they paid their substitute teachers, noting the average was \$120.00 per day for comparable school districts. He stated he then reduced Ledyard's substitute teachers pay from the proposed \$125.00 per day to \$120.00 per day. He stated by making some adjustments, a little here and a little there, was how he arrived at the proposed increase of 6.3% for the education budget. He stated this was the type of scrutiny that he was talking about, when he stated that they needed to demonstrate that they had done that. He stated that he cared about the children, noting that he has two kids who do not attend Ledyard Public Schools, stating that he would love them to attend Ledyard's Public Schools.

Councilor Ryan continued by explaining that the Town Council must consider Ledyard's children, just like the Board of Education does. However, he stated the difference between the Board of Education's responsibilities and the Town Council's responsibilities was that the Town Council has to consider the impact to the residents (families and children), but also the same people who were our taxpayers. He stated they have to work to find a balance and to choose priorities, noting that they all have opinions on what those priorities should be; and that was okay. He went on to explain when he stated that his proposed increase of 6.3% for the education budget was a negatable reduction, what he was saying was that it was a small change. However, he stated the *optics* would show that the Town Council was not just passing

a proposed Board of Education that they did not really take a good look at; or did not ask tough questions.

Councilor Bulhle responded to the comment that *the optics was that the Town Council did not take a good look at the Board of Education's proposed Budget*, noting that she thoroughly reviewed the Education Budget, stating that she understood that they may have found \$35,000 to cut here, or \$50,000 to cut there. However, she stated that she did not think that the Board of Education would make irresponsible choices if the Town Council forced them into that situation. She continued to state that it was not fair to state that the Board of Education was not burdened with the knowledge of what their budget does, noting that she watched them carefully choose what they were and were not going to fund, working off the budget framework that the Superintendent submitted to them, that started with a 5.98% budget increase. She also commented that it was not fair to state that because she wholeheartedly supported the education budget that she did not look at the budget, or that she did not scrutinize it with the same level of intensity, noting that she did, and that she supported the education budget from the start.

Councilor St. Vil thanked the Finance Committee for all the work they did on the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. He stated he was a degreed Engineer noting that he spent more than half his career managing budgets in the tens to hundreds of millions of dollars, noting that he was familiar with the process and work that goes into scrutinizing a budget. Therefore, he stated he would like to affirm that this Committee has scrutinized the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, noting that he has been part of those discussions where they went line by line and questioned whether something was a need or a desire; and that this was also applicable to the Board of Education Budget. He stated what they had to leverage was the expertise of the folks who were responsible for owning and executing the budget; those being the Board of Education, the School Superintendent, and that they also have to leverage that with the Town Council's experience of fiscal responsibility. He stated that he had no doubt that the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, as presented this evening, represented the bare minimum that was necessary for the town to be successful going forward, not only for the town infrastructure but also for their schools.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated that she agreed with Councilor Ryan in that there were always efficiencies, noting as an example they could always save money by using less office supplies, etc. She suggested Town Councilors attend the Board of Education's Meetings to ask all the questions that were presented during the budget process, as well as during the year to understand the aspect of all the things the Schools had to address. She stated that sometimes they may think that things were a certain way, commenting that they were really not aware. She stated as the Town Council Liaison to the Board of Education that she attended all of their meetings and that she still had questions regarding the many things they have to address. She stated when the Town Council invited the Board of Education to present their proposed Budget at their February 28, 2024 meeting that it was difficult to gain an understanding of all that was involved during a short presentation. Therefore, she commented on the difficulty of trying to tell the Board of Education what they need and what they did not need, because they do not know the whole picture.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry concluded by stating that she understands that they were faced with tough times, and that they were all working to do the best that they could. She stated in reviewing the Education Budget that she believed everything in their budget was needed. She stated hopefully the Auditor would be able to conduct a more thorough review to the Board of Education's financial records next year, as the Town Council discussed at their April 10, 2024 meeting.

VOTE: 6 - 2 Approved and so declared (Paul, Ryan not in favor)

2. MOTION to appropriate \$12,872.00 to Account #21020101-57300 (Police New Equipment) and authorize the expenditure of up-to \$12,872.00 to purchase equipment to support the High Risk Rural Road Speed Enforcement Program.

Moved by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Buhle

Discussion: Police Chief John Rich, attending remotely via Zoom, provided some background stating at their January 24, 2024 meeting the Town Council authorized the Mayor to submit the 2024 High Risk Rural Road Speed Enforcement Program Grant for the Police Department. He stated the Grant Program was aimed at reducing the amount of speed related fatalities and injuries on Connecticut's High Risk Rural Roads. He stated the town was notified that Ledyard's Grant Application was approved explaining that the *High Risk Rural Road Speed Enforcement Funding* was a 100% reimbursable Grant Program to support personnel costs for speed enforcement and to purchase equipment such as speed measuring devices. Therefore, he stated the Police Department was requesting the appropriation of funds to pay for speed measuring equipment as reflected in the two quotes provided as follows:

- Stalker Radar Equipment \$6,500 (two units)
- Source Well Solar Radar Signs \$6,372 (two signs)

Chief Rich concluded by stating that after the equipment was purchased they would submit the invoices to the State and would receive 100% reimbursement for the expenses related to the *High Risk Rural Road Speed Enforcement Program*.

~~VOTE~~ Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: Tim Ryan

SECONDER: Jessica Buhle

AYE: 8 Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Paul, Rodriguez, Ryan, Saccone, and St. Vil

EXCUSED: 1 Dombrowski

3. MOTION to authorize overspending Account #10110101-5310 (Legal Fee) thru June 30, 2024. Funding to be transferred to Account #10110101-5310 (Legal Fee) at year end.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Mayor Allyn, III, stated that currently there were some Indian issues that were at the forefront, noting that this would be the subject as an Executive Session later in May, 2024. He went

on to explain that Attorney Langhammer was the town’s tax attorney, noting that next year all of the legal fees would be budgeted separately.

VOTE: 8 - 0 Approved and so declared

MOVER: Jessica Buhle

SECONDER: Tim Ryan

General Business

- 4. MOTION to adopt a “Fair Housing Resolution - Town of Ledyard” as contained in the draft dated April 15, 2024.

DRAFT: 4/15/2024

Res : 004-2024/Apr 24

**FAIR HOUSING RESOLUTION
TOWN OF LEDYARD**

WHEREAS, All persons are afforded a right to full and equal housing opportunities in the neighborhood of their choice; and

WHEREAS, Federal Fair Housing laws require that all individuals, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, veteran status, or national origin, be given equal access to all housing-related opportunities, including rental and homeownership opportunities, and be allowed to make free choices regarding housing location; and

WHEREAS, Connecticut fair housing laws require that all individuals, regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, marital status, age, lawful source of income, familial status, veteran status, learning disability, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression be given equal access to all housing-related opportunities, including rental and home ownership opportunities, and be allowed to make free choices regarding housing location; and

WHEREAS, The Town of Ledyard is committed to upholding these laws, and realizes that these laws must be supplemented by an Affirmative Statement publicly endorsing the right of all people to full and equal housing opportunities in the neighborhood of their choice.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Town of Ledyard hereby endorses a Fair Housing Policy to ensure equal opportunity for all persons to rent, purchase, obtain financing and enjoy all other housing-related services of their choice on a non-discriminatory basis as provided by state and federal law; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the chief executive officer of the Town of Ledyard or his/her designated representative is responsible for responding to and assisting any person who alleges to be the victim of an illegal discriminatory housing practice in the Town of Ledyard and for advising such person of the right to file a complaint with the State of Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or to seek assistance from the CT Fair Housing Center, legal services, or other fair housing organizations to protect his or her right to equal housing opportunities.

Adopted by the Ledyard Town Council on April 24, 2024

S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman

 I Patricia A. Riley, Town Clerk of the Town of Ledyard, do hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of a resolution duly adopted at a meeting of the Town Council held on April 24, 2024, and that such resolution has not been modified, rescinded, or revoked, and is at present in full force and effect:

IN WITNESS WHEREOF: The undersigned has affixed his signature and corporate seal on this _____ day of _____ 2024.

(Town Seal)

 Patricia A. Riley, Town Clerk

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Ryan
 Discussion: Mayor Allyn, III, stated that the draft Resolution was a “housekeeping” type of item that the Town Council was required to adopt each year. He explained for the Town to be eligible to apply for and receive certain Grant Funds such as the Small Cities CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) from the Department of Housing to support fair housing; that the town was required to annually adopt a "Fair Housing Resolution" to be in compliance with state regulations. He stated the draft Resolution was the same as previous years, noting that each municipality who was a current or former recipient of Small Cities CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funding was required to re-adopt a “*Fair Housing Resolution*”.

Mayor Allyn went on to note as an example that the last CDBG Grant that Ledyard received was for the renovation work that was done for the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility.

Mayor Allyn stated to be eligible for these grant monies the town was required to do a number of things which, in addition to the adoption of the Resolution, also included the following:

- Displaying posters regarding Fair Housing at the Libraries, Town Hall and Senior Citizens Center.
- Mayor’s Office issuing a letter to state that the Town supported Fair Housing Opportunities.
- Send letters to Real Estate Offices in the Town of Ledyard speaking about the importance of Fair Housing.

VOTE: 8 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: Jessica Buhle

SECONDER: Tim Ryan

AYE: 8 Brunelle, Buhle, Garcia-Irizarry, Paul, Rodriguez, Ryan, Saccone, and St. Vil

EXCUSED: 1 Dombrowski

XV. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Buhle moved to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Paul

VOTE: 8 - 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting adjourned at 9:02 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 April 24, 2024.

S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman

DISCLAIMER:

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

The Town Council's Official Agenda and final Minutes will be on file in the Town Clerk's Office.