



TOWN OF LEDYARD

Community Relations Committee

Meeting Minutes

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway
Ledyard, Connecticut 06339

Chairman S. Naomi
Rodriguez

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, January 17, 2024

6:30 PM

Town Hall Annex - Hybrid Format

I CALL TO ORDER

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

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

II. ROLL CALL

Present: April Brunelle
Gary Paul
Gary St. Vil

In addition, the following were present:

S. Naomi Rodriguez, Town Council Chairman
Colleen Laurer, Housing Authority Director
Roxanne Maher, Administrative Assistant

III. RESIDENTS & PROPERTY OWNERS COMMENTS

None.

IV. PRESENTATIONS / INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

None.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the following:

- Organizational Meeting Minutes of December 20, 2023
- Regular Meeting Minutes of December 20, 2023

Regular Meeting Minutes of December 20, 2023

Moved by Councilor Paul, seconded by Councilor St. Vil.

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Discuss the 2024 Black History Activity/Contest.

Chairman Rodriguez apologized that she was out of State and was not able to attend the Committee's December 20, 2023 meeting. She provided some background noting that the

Community Relations Committee started supporting a Black History Month Activity/Contest two years ago with the Twenty-sixth Town Council. She stated the program consisted of an Essay Contest for the High School and Middle School students and a Poster Contest for the Elementary School students. She stated the Contest was open to Ledyard Students, Magnet School Students, and Homeschooled Students. She stated that the winners of the Poster Contest were recognized among their peers at their schools, and the winners of the Essay Contest were recognized at a Town Council meeting.

Chairman Rodriguez went on to state that this would be the third year they would be holding the Black History Month Activity/Contest. She noted that she provided an example of the email that she sent to the School Principals in years past to Councilor St. Vil, and she noted that Ms. Lisa Hunter was the new Gallup Hill School Principal. She noted that the Contests were voluntary, and that they had to be individual entrees, explaining that entrees could not be submitted by a Group.

Chairman Rodriguez provided an overview of the Contest noting the following:

- Contests would be open February 1 - 23, 2024.
 - February 17 & 18, 2024 - School Winter Break
 - February 28, 2024 - Announce Contest Winners - Town Council Meeting
- Essay Topic: What does Black History Month mean to me? Word limit is 500-700 words.
- Poster Theme: Make a poster about Black History Month.
- Prizes: For LMS (1st place - \$100, 2nd place - \$50, 3rd place - \$25)
- Prizes For LHS (1st place - \$100, 2nd place - \$50, 3rd place - \$25)

All elementary schools combined: Grades K-2 will receive gift cards (1st place - \$50, 2nd place - \$25, 3rd place - \$10). Grades 3-5 will receive gift cards (1st place - \$50, 2nd place - \$25, 3rd place - \$10).

Chairman Rodriguez noted that she received an email from Ledyard's Public Library Assistant Librarian/Youth Services Stacy Burke who was interested in helping with

the Black History Month Activities. She stated that Ms. Burke has included the *Martin Luther King Open Art Studio Event* on the Bill Library Calendar for Tuesday, February 27, 2024. The Event would be held after school from 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m., for kids 6 - 18 years old. She stated that Ms. Burke had hoped to publicize the Program in the February, 2024 Events Magazine, but that the deadline for submitting articles had passed. Chairman Rodriguez stated in her email that Ms. Burke noted that the *Martin Luther King Open Art Studio Event* would be the second program in the Library's *Celebrating Community Series*, noting that the first program was held in November, 2023 and the Community Series featured "*National Native American Heritage Month*". She stated that Ms. Burke has offered to help the Community Relations Committee with the Black History Month Activities.

Chairman Rodriguez noted the following:

- Councilor Brunelle would meet with Assistant Librarian Ms. Burke next week.
- Councilor St. Vil would be the Lead for the Essay and Poster Contest.

Councilor Paul questioned whether they would be including a "*Topic Theme*" for the Essay Contest and Poster Contest such as "*What does Black History Mean in Your Community?*" Chairman Rodriguez stated that the Community Relations Committee could include a Theme. However, she suggested leaving the Contest Topic open noting that she was amazed with the ideas that the Students came up with during the past two years.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that last year no High School Students participated in the Essay Contest. Therefore, she thought that there must have been a miscommunication. She stated that she planned to talk with High School Principal Amanda Fagin about the Black History Month Essay Contest. She also suggested that after Council St. Vil sends the email out announcing the Black History Month Essay Contest to the Middle School and High School Principals that he follow-up to ensure that the information was disseminated to the Students. Councilor St. Vil questioned whether they had High School Students participation in the Essay Contest the first year. Chairman Rodriguez stated that they received a lot of Essays from the High School Students the first year they held the event, which was the reason she believed that there was a disconnect somewhere in getting the information out to the Students.

Chairman Rodriguez continued by noting during the past two-years they called on the following members of the community to serve as Judges: Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council Member Crystal Whipple, Police Sergeant McKinney, Councilor Paul and herself. She suggested for this year's Contest Judges that the Committee once again look to include the following: a member of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council, Police Sergeant McKinney, a Board of Education Member, and Councilor St. Vil. She also stated that she would like to once again serve as a Judge.

Councilor Brunelle stated as Chairman Rodriguez noted that she would be meeting with Assistant Librarian/Youth Services Stacy Burke next week. She stated that she

would contact Lucille's Restaurant about hosting a Poetry Slam.

Councilor St. Vil stated that he appreciated the work that has been in past years and the work that Chairman Rodriguez has done for this year's Black History Activities/Contest. He stated that because the Essay Contest and Poster Contest have worked in the past that he was okay with moving forward with that model again this year. He noted that the most important purpose of Black History Month was to engage the community, and to show an appreciation for diversity.

Councilor Paul stated it was great to see other community organizations get involved with their Black History Activities. He noted Assistant Librarian/Youth Services Stacy Burke was incredible with the kids. He stated during the past two-years he has seen how much it meant to the Students and their Families to see their work displayed at Town Hall and to accept their Awards publicly at Town Council meeting. He stated that it would be great to also see some of the Student's work displayed in the community. He stated that he agreed with Councilor St. Vil that the purpose of Black History Month was to embrace diversity and show who we were as a community.

Chairman Rodriguez noted Councilor Paul's comments regarding displaying the Student's work in Town Hall; and she stated the Parents were so proud of their kids. She went on to state that she attended the Martin Luther King Scholarship Concert on January 15, 2024 at the High School. She stated the two Ledyard Scholarship Recipients read their winning essays before the concert started. She recommended Councilor Brunelle invite the two students MacKenize Hope and Adrian Beltre to a Town Council meeting in February to read their essays.

Councilor Brunelle suggested they display the Posters in a Digital Gallery, noting that it could be shared on social media. Chairman Rodriguez stated putting the Posters in a digital gallery was a great idea and that they would need to look into facilitating that.

Chairman Rodriguez noted in addition to the Essay Contest and Poster Contest that other ideas have been suggested for Black History Month; and she solicited comments from the Committee regarding the following:

- **Hair Braiding Workshop:**
Councilor Brunelle stated that she would be open to discussing this idea.

Councilor St. Vil stated that he struggled to see the correlation of hair braiding to Black History Month. He stated if they could frame it or provide some context or correlation to Black History Month that it could be a good experience for the community. However, without having some context or correlation to Black History Month that he would not support it.

Councilor Brunelle stated that perhaps the Committee could revisit the topic of hair braiding when they begin planning for next year's (2025) Black History

Month Activities.

- **Poetry Slam:**
Councilor Brunelle stated the Poetry Slam was another type of art expression, and that she liked the idea. She stated at this time they did not have a date for the event, noting that they hoped to hold it at Lucille's Restaurant in Ledyard Center. However, she stated if Lucille's could not accommodate the Event that she believed the Library would be willing able to take it on. She stated that she would work with Assistant Librarian Ms. Burke to see if she could also help with the Poetry Slam.

Councilor Paul addressed the importance for the Community Relations Committee to have a presence at the planned events at the Library (February 27, 2024) and at Lucille's Restaurant (date to be determined).

Councilor Brunelle commented on the importance of communicating these programs to the community. Councilor St. Vil suggested that the Committee work as a Team to get the word out regarding the planned Black History Month Activities. He stated as a member of the African-American Community that he could say that this meant something to the Community. He addressed the sources to get the word out noting that they could use social media, digital media, and other platforms which they discussed this evening to get this on the Events Board. He stated that it would also provide the framework going forward, stating that if they had a good model that it would help to engage others and to consider other ideas.

Councilor Brunelle noted that Community Relations Committee would continue to discuss the Black History Month Program at their February 21, 2024 meeting.

RESULT: CONTINUE

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

Councilor Paul stated as he mentioned at their December 20, 2023 meeting, he hoped this Community Relations Committee would continue to facilitate Outreach Programs to highlight services that were available to the community. He stated during the past two-years the former Community Relations Committee chose three subjects/service areas to feature at the Farmers' Markets. He stated the Committee worked to include a variety of subject matters, and that they tried to coordinate their Outreach Event with the Farmers' Market Weekley Themes.

Councilor Paul continued by providing a brief overview of the Outreach Events that Community Relations Committee held during the past two years as follows:

2023- Outreach Events

- ***July 19, 2023 Mental Health Awareness***
Councilor Paul stated this was the second year the Community Relations Committee

helped to facilitate an Outreach Event to bring awareness of the many Organizations and

Programs that were available to residents pertaining to Mental Health. He stated many of the Organizations who participated in 2022 came back again this year (2023), with the new addition of SERAC, who was a non-profit organization located in Norwich that served 41 communities in Eastern Connecticut. He stated SERAC provides programs and services to reduce the impact of substance abuse, problem gambling, and mental health challenges.

- ***August 30, 2023 - Library Services***

Councilor Paul stated the Farmers' Market August 30, 2023 Theme was "***Back to School***". He stated that Ledyard Libraries joined the Community Relations Committee under the Town of Ledyard Tent to sign folks up with Library Cards, to provide information regarding the many resources and diverse programs the Library provides for all age groups; and to hand out clues for folks to participate a Special Scavenger Hunt at the Bill Library that evening. He stated Library Director Jennifer Smith and her Team have been doing an incredible job at the Libraries with engaging the community.

- ***September 20, 2023 First Responders Hometown Heros***

Councilor Paul stated in keeping with the Farmers' Market September 13, 2023 the ***Hometown Hero*** theme that the Community Relations Committee planned an outreach event to recognize the heroic actions of their First Responders; and to provide information to residents who were interested in a career in firefighting or law enforcement; noting that there were opportunities to serve as a volunteer in the field of First Responders. However, he stated the event was rescheduled to September 20, 2023

due to rain. He stated although the Community Relations Committee was not able to attend the September 20, 2023 Farmers Market, because of the Town Council meeting, that the town's First Responders (Firefighters and Police Department) attended the Market to provide information to residents which would have been provided at the September 13, 2023 Market.

2022- Outreach Events

- ***June 29, 2022 First Responders - Hometown Heros***

- ✓ Police Body Worn Cameras & In-Car Camera Equipment - Demonstrations were provided.
- ✓ Blue & Green Envelope Program - Councilor Paul stated this Program was for individuals functioning with Autism (Blue Envelope) or were Hearing Impaired (Green Envelope). He provided some background explaining that "***The Blue & Green Envelope***" was created by the State Legislature and went into effect on January 1, 2020. He stated the *Envelopes* were available at all Police Stations, Department of Motor Vehicle locations, driving schools, and through Autism Advocacy Groups. He

stated the purpose of *The Blue & Green Envelope* was:

- To hold the driver's license, registration, and insurance card so they can hand it to the Police Officer during a traffic stop,
 - The outside of the *Blue & Green Envelopes* included tips and instructions for both the Police Officer and Driver on how to successfully communicate with each other during a traffic stop.
- ***August 31, 2022 - Winter Preparations***
 - ✓ Information to prepare for Winter - Social Services Coordinator, Senior Citizens Municipal Agent, Tax Assessor, Public Works
 - Home Heating Assistance/Propane
 - Renters Assistance/Renters Rebate Program
 - TVCCA Meals for shut-ins (Meals on Wheels)
 - Food Pantry
 - Public Works Snow Plowing/Mailbox Height
 - No Interest Loans for home improvements (replace furnaces/new roof/new septic system)
 - Elderly/Disabled Veterans Tax Relief (Ordinance #200-004; #200-005; #200-006)

Councilor Paul commented on the importance of getting information out to the community regarding Mental Health Awareness and that he hoped that this Committee would designate one of the Outreach Events on this subject. He explained when they held the Mental Health Awareness Outreach Event that they requested space at the Farmers' Market for three tents (Town Tent - SERAC, Brian Dagle Foundation, Police Department).

Chairman Rodriguez, Farmers' Market Committee Liaison, noted that the Committee has not set their 2024 Market Themes yet, but that she would forward that information to the Community Relations Committee when it becomes available.

Chairman Rodriguez went on to state that she was the contact for the Brian Dagle Healing Hearts Foundation located in Niantic. She stated once the Community Relations Committee decided on a date for the Mental Health Awareness Outreach Event that she would contact the Brian Dagle Healing Hearts Foundation to try to coordinate with them.

Councilor Brunelle stated that once the Farmers' Market Committee sets their weekly 2024 Theme Schedule that the Community Relations Committee could work to determine the subjects/services they would like to feature and coordinate their outreach events with the Farmers' Market schedule. She stated that she agreed that she would like to see a Mental Health Awareness Event and a Hometown Heros Event, noting that the Farmers' Market has included Hometown Heros in the weekly themes for a number of years.

Councilor Brunelle noted last summer she volunteered at "Mayor's Day" in

Providence, Rhode Island; and that she would like to see Ledyard do something similar. She explained the event was open to the public, noting that many families attended. She stated that Providence provided bus transportation and a free lunch for the Senior Citizens to attend the event. She stated during the event the Mayor gave a speech regarding all the things that he had been working on during the year, which included programs to help the Seniors such as services, housing, etc. She noted residents had the opportunity to talk with the Mayor, and that everyone left the event happy.

Councilor Paul suggested Councilor Brunelle talk with Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Scott Johnson, Jr. about using the Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Facility, noting that some residents might not know the Facility was there.

Councilor St. Vil questioned whether the intent of the event was to inform the community about things that have been done and services that were available; or was it to celebrate the Mayor. Councilor Brunelle stated the “Mayor’s Day” event was more about the Senior Citizens and making them feel important. Councilor Paul suggested that they could have a “Senior Day”; and invite the Mayor, noting that Seniors could see the facility on Van Tassel Drive, Gales Ferry, and learn about the programs that were available to them. He stated that he would be a proponent of “Senior Day”, noting that they would have more flexibility in selecting a day and to address different topics. Councilor Brunelle stated that they could continue to discuss this as an Event to have later in the year.

Councilor Brunelle suggested the Committee be prepared to talk about having different themes throughout the year for different groups in the community.

Councilor St. Vil questioned the town’s avenues communicate with the public such as digital, in-person, and other sources.

Chairman Rodriguez noted the following media sources the town used to communication with the public:

- Town website
- Ledyard News
- Mayor’s News
- Events Magazine (quarterly)
- Meeting Portal

Chairman Rodriguez stated many other share a lot of the information that was posted on the sites she noted above, on their facebook pages/social media sites. However, she suggested if the Community Relations Committee wanted to promote communication that she would suggest the first step should be to show people how to sign-up to receive notifications from the town when meetings, events, legal notices, announcements (changes in trash collection day, road closures for construction, etc.)

were posted to the town's website. Councilor Brunelle stated that she would tie this discussion in with New Business Item #1 later in tonight's meeting.

RESULT: CONTINUE

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

Councilor Paul noted at the Committee's December 20, 2023 meeting that he mentioned that the previous Committee was hoping to host an Informal Gathering at the new Lantern Hill Waterfront Park (Long Pond), which was the property Mr. and Mrs. Graham donated to the town (leased for \$10 per year). He stated the objective would be to showcase the Lantern Hill Waterfront Park and to provide some history regarding Long Pond and to engage residents. He noted that he attended the Conservation Commission's January 9, 2024 meeting; and that he talked to Mrs. Betsy Graham about the Community Relations Committee's interest in having an "*Informal Conversations in the Park*" to provide some historical background regarding Long Pond. He stated that Mrs. Graham stated that she would be delighted to participate, should the Committee decide that this was something they wanted to do.

Councilor Brunelle stated that they would keep this on their agenda.

RESULT: CONTINUE

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

VII. NEW BUSINESS

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

Councilor Brunelle stated that she was glad that Councilor St. Vil and Chairman Rodriguez brought up town's avenues to communicate with the public during Old Business Item #2 (see above). She stated that she would like to see Members of the Community Relations Committee put out one-minute videos on a regular basis that could be posted on the town's website, YouTube, the Ledyard/Gales Ferry Community Forum, etc. to let the community know what happened last week in Ledyard. She stated as Chairman Rodriguez suggested the first video could be "**How to Sign Up for *Notify Me***".

Chairman Rodriguez suggested that they encourage residents to use the platforms that were already being provided by the town. She noted as she mentioned earlier this evening, a good First Step would be to let residents know how they can receive notifications from the town such as meetings/cancellations, events, legal notices,

announcements (changes in trash collection day, road closures for construction, etc.) regarding the information that was posted on the town's website.

Chairman Rodriguez urged caution in posting videos, noting the following:

- Important to stick to the facts;
- They would not be speaking for the whole Town Council;
- See if they could post without having comments from the public.
- Not to be objective.

Councilor Brunelle stated the *“Notify Me”* was great, but that it would not tell residents about things such as the Library functions, etc.

Councilor Paul stated that he appreciated Councilor Brunelle's comments that it seemed like people were not getting information. He stated as a musician that he has put out videos and they were time consuming to do. He noted that he agreed with Chairman Rodriguez in that they would need to be careful on how they presented the information, noting that they would not be speaking for the full Town Council. He stated the Library does a good job getting their information out to residents, noting that the Library uses the town's website, Ledyard Resource Page., and the Library Facebook page. He went on to state when the Community Relations Committee hosted Outreach Events at the Farmers' Market that Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher has done a wonderful job with putting together flyers and Posters, which were distributed around town and posted on the Ledyard Community Page, noting when people stopped by their tent they mention that they saw the post on-line. Therefore, he suggested that in addition to getting the word out about the *“Notify Me”* option that was available on the town's website that they should continue their efforts to post on the Ledyard/Gales Ferry Community Forum; and other social media pages. He stated they all need to take some responsibility to get the word out by talking with their neighbors; noting that it was a great way to engage with people.

Councilor Paul went on to note at Community Relations Committee's October 18, 2023 meeting that resident Ms. Ginina Diaz talked about the community not knowing who the members of the Town Council were; or when referendums were being held, etc.. He commented that unless it was a topic that was of interest to residents that referendums and town meetings can be boring for some people. However, he stated because the town continuously works try to get information out to residents that they would be installing two digital signs one in Gales Ferry and one in Ledyard Center, which should also help.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that they also need to be careful that they are not stepping on toes or getting into someone else's lane. She noted as an example that Ledyard Music, the Library, and many other Departments do a good job with getting their information out.

Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher shared her screen to provide a demonstration on how residents could sign up to receive email notifications regarding

meetings/cancellations, events, legal notices, announcements (changes in trash collection day, road closures for construction, etc.). She explained residents could visit the town’s website at www.ledyardct.org <<http://www.ledyardct.org>> and click on the “*Notify Me*” tab that was located in the middle of the screen; and then follow the prompts to enter in their information. She stated residents could sign up for email and/or text messages.

Ms. Maher stated if residents had questions or needed assistance with signing up to receive notices that they could call her at telephone (860) 464-3203; or call the Mayor’s Executive Assistant Kristen Chapman at telephone (860) 464-3222, noting that they would both be happy to assist residents.

RESULT: CONTINUE

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

None.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

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

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

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

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