



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway
Ledyard, CT 06339
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Administrative Assistant
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Chairman S. Naomi Rodriguez

HYBRID FORMAT
MINUTES
COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE
FOR DIVERSTIY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION
REGULAR MEETING

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

6:30 PM

Town Hall Annex-Video Conference

DRAFT

- I. CALL TO ORDER – The Meeting was called to order by Councilor Brunelle at 6:30 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-

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived	Location	Departed
April Brunelle	Committee Chairman	Present	6:30 pm	In-Person	7:28 pm
Gary Paul	Town Councilor	Present	6:30 pm	Remote	7:28 pm
Gary St. Vil	Town Councilor	Present	6:30 pm	In-Person	7:28 pm
S. Naomi Rodriguez	Town Council Chairman	Present	6:30 pm	In-Person	7:28 pm
Scott Johnson, Jr.	Director Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens	Present	6:30 pm	Remote	7:28 pm
Beth Ribe	Resident	Present	6:30 pm	Remote	7:28 pm
Roxanne Maher	Administrative Assistant	Present	6:30 pm	Remote	7:28 pm

- III. RESIDENTS & PROPERTY OWNERS COMMENTS – None.

- IV. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS/PRESENTATION – None.

IV. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the Special Meeting Minutes of August 21, 2024
Moved by Councilor St. Vil, seconded by Councilor Paul

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

VI. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

1. Schedule for Public Informational 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.

Chairman Rodriguez asked how the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion’s outreach programs at the Farmers’ Market went this summer. She noted that she was away for the August 28, 2024 Market, when the Community Relations Committee was scheduled to present information regarding mental health featuring organizations such as Brian’s Healing Hearts Foundation, and other programs that were available to assist residents.

Councilor Brunelle stated she shared her time between the Brian Dagle Foundation tent and the Town of Ledyard tent, noting that she assisted residents to sign up for the “**Notify Me**” on the town’s website to receive town announcements and meeting notices, etc. She also noted that Councilor Garcia-Irizarry was at the Farmers’ Market passing out the Compost pails and biodegradable bags for the Food Waste Compost PILOT Program.

Councilor Brunelle stated that it would be great if the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion could have a greater presence at the Farmers Market next summer, noting that she would try to get the Market Themes earlier so the Committee could reserve space.

Councilor Paul suggested the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work to develop their Outreach Schedule in January/February, 2025 so that they do not miss out on reserving space at the 2025 Farmers’ Market and to line-up programs and services that were available to residents.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 10/16/2023 6:30 p.m.

2. 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.

- ***Lantern Hill Waterfront Park (Long Pond)***

Councilor Brunelle stated Mrs. Betsy Graham has been busy planning a Water Fest Day 2024, that would be held at her personal beachfront property on Long Pond on Saturday, September 21, 2024 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. She stated the Event was being co-hosted by the Lantern Hill Valley Alliance (LHVA) and the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed.

Councilor Brunelle stated that once they get past the Water Fest Day, that she would try to connect with Mrs. Graham to discuss scheduling an Outreach Program in the Fall, 2024. She stated she was hoping that Mrs. Graham would provide some history regarding Long Pond; and information regarding the importance of preventing invasive plants from being transferred from different bodies of water. Councilor Brunelle stated that she hoped to have more information for the Committee’s October 16, 2024 meeting. to the Fall.

- ***Christy Hill Park on East Drive*** – No Discussion.

- ***Winthrop Park near the Gales Ferry Community Center*** – Councilor St. Vil stated he had a couple of conversation with Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Scott Johnson, Jr. to host an Informal Conversation to provide information to the community regarding the existing Tennis Courts and the possible construction of Pickleball Courts.

Councilor St. Vil stated that Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Mr. Johnson proposed some great ideas to present some ideas regarding the construction of Pickleball Courts and to engage the community to solicit their ideas obtain feedback. He deferred to Mr. Johnson to share some of his ideas.

Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Scott Johnson, Jr., attending remotely, stated there has been a lot of interest in the Pickleball Courts noting that he has been invited to attend several meetings, stating it was a hot topic in town. He stated that one of the Parks & Recreation's approved Capital Projects was to construct a Pickleball Court at the Gales Feery Community Center/Donahue Property. He stated the Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Commission were working determine where to put the Pickleball Court on the property, noting that they were considering the following two locations:

- (1) Construct the Pickleball Court in the open space between the Tennis Court and the new Playscape. Mr. Johnson noted that residents expressed concern about losing the open space area.
- (2) Remove the trees along the cemetery side of the property and install the Pickleball Courts in that area. Mr. Johnson noted the cost for the tree removal, explaining that it may be cost prohibitive to install the Pickleball Courts in that location.

Mr. Johnson stated the Commission was interested in hearing residents' concerns, noting that there have been comments about noise and drainage issues, etc. He also stated that he would need to talk with the Planning & Zoning Department about property boundary lines between the Community Center Property and the Donahue Property.

Councilor St. Vil suggested they identify a date and time to host the Informal Conversation at the Winthrop Park to talk with residents about the Pickleball Courts. He also suggested that Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion facilitate the Informal Conversation between the town and the residents for Mr. Johnson. He stated that Mr. Johnson has offered to put together the information to present to the residents and to field questions, noting that he understands that adjacent property owners may also have some concerns. He stated it would be beneficial for the Parks & Recreation Department and the community to hold an Informal Conversation regarding this topic within the next six-weeks.

Councilor Brunelle and Council Paul stated holding an Informal Conversation at Winthrop Park within the next six-weeks to discuss the Pickleball Courts and to obtain feedback from residents was a good idea. Councilor Paul suggested a flyer be made to publicize the Informal Conversation; and that they send letters to the residents in the area of Winthrop Park.

Mr. Johnson stated he would review his schedule and provide a couple of dates for the Informal Conversation regarding the Pickleball Courts.

The Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion thanked Mr. Johnson for attending tonight's meeting.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 10/16/2024 6:30 p.m.

3. Ideas to increase communication/transparency with residents.

Councilor Brunelle stated resident Ms. Beth Ribe suggested the Town Council appoint a new Governance Training Committee to provide training to residents regarding the structure and operation of local government. She noted that Ms. Ribe provided a PowerPoint outlining her ideas. She deferred to Ms. Ribe to present her proposal.

Ms. Beth Ribe, 129 Rose Hill Road, Ledyard, began by explaining what sparked her interest and started the wheels turning to provide Town Governance Training was prompted by comments Mr. Mike Cherry made at a Planning & Zoning Commission meeting; and some contentious meetings, noting that there was a lack of understanding and a lack of communication. She stated by providing information to their residents about the town's meetings, committees, chairman, the Town Council, the Town Charter, Ordinances, Connecticut General State Statutes, etc., in a formal atmosphere that they would empower their residents to understand how their voices could be heard when they attend meetings.

Ms. Ribe stated in volunteering and serving on a couple of town committees that she sees that residents become frustrated when they attend a meeting to only find that the agenda item they were there to address could not be talked about at that meeting. She stated that the residents' frustrations were justified because they do not understand how the town's committees were regulated; and how they do business for the Town of Ledyard, noting that it was complicated and not intuitive. She noted the number of vacancies on the town's committees, and she stated that they needed residents to step up and feel confident in filling these roles and to help the town move forward.

Ms. Ribe continued by noting that she met New London Neighborhood Coordinator, Ms. Yamilla Mateo on August 28, 2024 to talk about the New London Academy Program; and that she wanted to share her subsequent thoughts from the time spent with Ms. Mateo with the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

Ms. Ribe began by noting the passion and enthusiasm Ms. Mateo exuded, stating that she had a positive attitude filled with hope, excitement, and passion for the work that she does. She stated her meeting Ms. Mateo was one of the most inspiring memories that she took away from sitting with her. She stated that Ms. Mateo's goal was "*shaping the culture of leaders*" in New London and that she had a formal training program which included PowerPoints, slides, and handouts. She stated that she would like to take this model to Ledyard's Departments to develop their own presentations and to run the

classrooms. However, she stated the difference between New London was that Ms. Yamilla Mateo was a paid position, and that Ledyard did not have a paid position to coordinate all this work. Therefore, she suggested that Ledyard establish a new Committee to take on this task for the Town; and that the availability of this information would become part of Ledyard's culture.

Ms. Ribe went on to explain that most of the material that Ms. Mateo presented was in line with her vision for Ledyard's Governance Community Outreach Program. She stated New London has been providing this program for about 20-years, noting that the classes were 3-hours long and the Program ran for 5-weeks. She stated that residents were required to register for the Program.

Ms. Ribe continued by reviewing the following outline:

The Classes:

There are several pieces of the town governance pie that New London addresses in their Academy program:

- Town Departments (Fire, Police, Public Works, etc.)
- The Mayor's vision
- Housing (Seniors, HUD)
- Commissions
- State Reps - guest speakers

The Nitty Gritty

Each Department Head/Chairperson creates and presents for up to one hour. These presentations can be recycled from class to class as much of the information is fairly standard. There are PowerPoint presentations presented by each department head or commission chairperson (or designate) in addition to handouts. Residents can discuss how to get a new curbside recycling bin, where to pay taxes, why their mailbox in the winter always takes a beating from plow trucks and what to do about it, etc. provided requirements to each department head/chairperson for what should be covered, but the department head was responsible for putting together the actual content/presentation. Their business cards and/or contact info is included in the handout material.

Each class per week is 3-hours The class runs 5-weeks, Registration was free but was required. Residents only. Since Ms. Mateo took over the position, the Academy classes were expected to be held only once each year; and that Ms. Mateo was planning to increase this.

Presentations typically include who does what when and why. Commissions discuss processes and regulations but steer clear of any specific applications, obviously.

Obstacles:

The biggest obstacle in New London Ms. Mateo noted was space. Ms. Ribe stated in addition to space that Ledyard's biggest challenges were going to be time and resources.

Initial Suggestions/Feedback:

These suggestions are severely limited but in no way should it be contrived as a complete list:

- 1 . Develop a Commission on Education to provide a vision and mission statement, and then to organize and execute the goals and objectives of providing much needed information to our residents, new and existing, as declared in the vision and mission statement. This commission would be tasked with: determining what information is required (content); developing a community outreach plan (dissemination of info, social media communications, promotions at local events, etc.); working with local constituents and stakeholders to coordinate classes (secure time and location; technology - online access; and scheduling, etc.) respond to feedback from class "graduates"; other.
2. Hire a planning consultant (one time) to coordinate with our current Land Use Department to develop a relevant presentation on Town Planning and Land Use functions in CT. This presentation should include the legal framework surrounding the roles and functions of the dept. I make this suggestion for a consultant knowing how busy our Planning and Land Use dept is currently. Ultimate content would come from our own Planner and Land Use Department staff.
3. Coordinate involvement with our State Reps
4. Others?

Conclusion

There is so much more we could offer by means of education and town government outreach, but Rome was not built in a day. If the foundation laid is secure and strong, we can continue to build on it. The key is sustainability and access. To that end we must pursue!

Chairman Rodriguez thanked Ms. Ribe for all of her hard work, noting that it was appreciated. She questioned the following:

- ***Salary for the New London Neighborhood Coordinator***, Ms. Yamilla Mateo. Ms. Ribe stated that she did not ask Ms. Mateo about her salary. Chairman Rodriguez asked Ms. Ribe to forward Ms. Mateo's contact information to her.
- Previous Community Relations Committees had a number of Department Heads provide presentations regarding their departments. She noted as an example that Public Works Director/Town Engineer Steve Masalin gave a great presentation. However, she stated no one from the public attended except for his wife. She stated it was disappointing that no one attended because it was very informative. She suggested they video the program so that residents could watch them at a later time.

It was noted that Public Works Director/Town Engineer Steve Masalin's presentation and others were videoed and that they were available on the town's website. Ms. Ribe stated that no one knows that this information was available or where to find it.

Chairman Rodriguez noted that she previously served on the Planning & Zoning Commission, and she stated that the volunteers were required to attend a number of trainings and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Seminars, etc. Therefore, she stated that it would be difficult to put all of that information into a 3-hour class.

- ***Number of residents that registered for the New London Academy.*** Ms. Ribe stated the Program was capped at 25-residents, noting that the classes were full. She stated that Ms. Mateo also worked with a number of non-profit organizations to get people to attend the program. She stated that Ledyard could do the same.
- ***Does the New London Academy video their classes.*** Mr. Ribe stated that Ms. Mateo sends out binders of the educational materials, noting that she did not know if they videoed the classes.

Ms. Ribe stated that it would take some time to develop the Program, noting that it was a significant undertaking. She went on to note that others in town told her that they tried it in the past and that it never works; and so they have given up. However, she stated that they should not give up.

Chairman Rodriguez thanked Ms. Ribe for all her work, noting that it has provided them with an outline. She suggested Ms. Ribe present her proposal at a Town Council meeting, to help determine how to move forward.

Councilor St. Vil stated that Ms. Ribe provided an awesome vision and that he appreciated her codifying the proposal and he thanked her for the work she has done. He stated that he was aligned with her vision, noting that he continuously asks questions on where to find information, etc. He questioned the following:

- ***What would be a bite size step the town could take to begin moving them closer to the vision Ms. Ribe laid out.*** Ms. Ribe responded stating that it would be to establish a Governance Training Committee.
- ***Why would a separate Committee be needed*** - Ms. Ribe stated a separate committee comprised of different backgrounds would be able to figure out what the town needed. She stated a separate committee would have its own agenda and minutes focusing solely on the on this assignment.

Councilor Brunelle noted the work of the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; which included to improve communication and provide information to their residents. Therefore, she stated that she did not see the need for a separate committee, noting that this was work that the Community Relations Committee has been and could continue to do.

Councilor Paul stated that he shared Ms. Ribe's vision and what she was trying to do. He stated as a newer Town Councilor, noting that this was only his second term, that there was a lot that he did not know; and that he continued to learn along the way. Therefore,

he stated he understood the residents' frustrations in trying to figure out how things work, noting that it was great to see residents interested in the town and asking questions. He stated as Councilor Brunelle noted the Community Relations Committee was a resource to bring information together, noting that Ms. Ribe's vision was a major undertaking. Therefore, he stated that he did not know whether they should establish a new committee or not, stating that he understood both points, which was for the Community Relations Committee to continue their work to bring information to residents; or to establish a new committee. He stated he has read Ms. Ribe's emails and he appreciated what she was trying to do in sparking an educational program for the town.

Councilor Brunelle pointed out that the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion's Agenda included Section IV. (Informational Items/Presentations). She suggested the Committee make a schedule of the Departments that they would like to give presentations and ask that they give a 20-minute presentation during their meetings. She stated their meetings were recorded and that residents could attend in-person, remotely, or watch the video at a later time. She also stated that they could snip the Presentation Portion from the videos and post them on-line.

Councilor Paul suggested that the Presentations be advertised and that they include a Question & Answer portion to engage with residents; and that he agreed the presentations could video and made available for residents to view at a later time. He stated the biggest challenge was going to be to get residents to attend the Presentations or watch the videos.

Councilor Brunelle stated that the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion would keep this item on their agenda for more discussion. She also suggested, as Chairman Rodriguez stated, that she would also like to see Ms. Ribe give her presentation to the full Town Council.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 10/16/2024 6:30 p.m.

4. Start a relationship with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council to help foster communication and mutual points of interest.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she would work to have an update at the October 16, 2024 meeting.

Councilor St. Vil noted that November was Native American Heritage Month.

Chairman Rodriguez stated the Ledyard Center Fire Department was holding a fundraiser at the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Lake of Isle Golf Course . She stated that she thought the Mashantucket Tribal Nation helping out the Fire Department was a good step and that she planned to attend the event.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 10/16/2024 6:30 p.m.

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

Councilor Brunelle stated the Finance Committee was working with the Non-Profit *Community Speaks Out* Organization.

Councilor Paul asked the Committee if he could reach out the *SERAC* and the *Brian Dagle Healing Hearts Foundation* to see if they would be willing to give a presentation at a Town Council meeting.

Chairman Rodriguez noted because she has a relationship with *Brian Dagle Healing Hearts Foundation*; that she would contact them. She went on to note that Mayor Allyn, III, has a relationship with the *Ledyard Prevention Coalition*, and that in addition to their presentation at the Town Council's September 11, 2024 meeting that *Community Speaks Out* gave a presentation to the Finance Committee at their meeting earlier this evening. She stated *Community Speaks Out* would be coming forward with a proposal soon. Therefore, she stated that it would be helpful for Councilor Paul to contact *SERAC*.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting:10/16/2024 6:30 p.m.

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

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Any New Business proper to come before the Committee

Councilor Brunelle noted the following:

- October – Councilor Brunelle noted that she did not plan anything for October. Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Scott Johnson, Jr., noted the Ledyard Rotary Club is holding this Annual Socktober Event through the month of October. He stated that they were collecting new socks that would be delivered to the Homeless Hospitality Center, MALTA and Safe Futures. He stated that sock bins were available throughout the town for folks to drop off new socks.
- November – Councilor Brunelle stated November was Native American Heritage Month. She asked whether the Committee wanted to reach out to the Linda C. Davis Food Pantry to provide help with the Holiday Food Drives.
- December – Councilor Brunelle questioned whether the Committee wanted to reach out to Parks & Recreation to see if they needed any help with their community events. Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Scott Johnson, Jr., stated that Parks & Recreation would be organizing the Light Parade. He stated because this was their first time putting on this Annual Event that he anticipated that they would need some help.

Chairman Rodriguez stated the Senior Prom that was held at the Ledyard Senior Center on Friday, September 13, 2024 was a huge success. She thanked Director Scott Johnson, Jr. and his staff, Matt Cicchese and Courtney Sizer, for all their hard work. She stated that she previously served on the Senior Citizens Commission and that she has continued to attend their meetings. She stated the Senior Prom was the best event they have had at the Senior Citizens Center in years. She gave a *Special Thank You* to the Navy servicemen, noting they were the life of the party. She stated that it was a great event, and she again gave kudos to Director Scott Johnson and his Team. The Community Relations Committee thanked Mr. Johnson for all his work. Mr. Johnson thanked Chairman Rodriguez for her all her work on the event as well.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

VOTE: Councilor Brunelle moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor Paul.
3 – 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

April Brunelle
Committee Chairman
Community Relations Committee