



TOWN OF LEDYARD

Community Relations Committee

Meeting Minutes

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway
Ledyard, Connecticut 06339

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, October 18, 2023

6:30 PM

Town Hall Annex - Hybrid Format

REMOTE MEETING INFORMATION

In -Person Location goes here

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

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82468853078?pwd=uSdCb9QONWb1e6wyNOrqsiFBjbJBKV.1>

Or by Audio Only: Telephone: +1 646 558 8656; +Meeting ID: 824 6885 3078; Passcode: 518482

I CALL TO ORDER

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

Councilor Paul welcomed all to the Hybrid Meeting. He 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: Bill Saums
Gary Paul
John Marshall

In addition, the following were present:

Mary McGrattan Town Councilor
S. Naomi Rodriguez Town Councilor
Paula Crocker Housing Authority Member
Colleen Lauer Housing Authority Director
Sheri Fernandez Housing Authority Tenant
Susan Lipinski Housing Authority Tenant
Edward Murray Resident
Eleanor Murray Resident

Ginina Diaz Resident
Nicole Cruz-Glacker Resident
Roxanne Maher Administrative Assistant

III. RESIDENTS & PROPERTY OWNERS COMMENTS

Ms. Ginina Diaz, 1546 Route 12, Gales Ferry, attending remotely, stated that she wanted to provide a recap of the events that have taken place since the Community Relations Committee's September 20, 2023 meeting regarding the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. She stated at the Housing Authority's October 2, 2023 meeting there was no discussion about how to improve safety for the tenants who smoke. However, she stated that she appreciated the Housing Authority's Chairman interest/suggestions to:

- ✓ Record the Board's meetings by both audio and video.
- ✓ Hold an Open Forum type of meeting every couple of months to address the Tenants concerns.

Ms. Diaz stated that she continued to have concerns regarding the safety of the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility Tenants. She stated after the last Housing Authority Board meeting a tenant stated that when one of the Board Members was exiting the property that they nearly ran the tenant over. She stated that this was not the first time this that the tenant was nearly hit because of how dark it was there. She stated last week that she cleared a pathway to the former Stonington Institute Building that was across the street from the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. She noted that the building had a loading area with an awning, where people could stand under if it was raining to smoke. However, she stated it was a scary feeling even during the daytime, noting that you could not see the area from the road and the loading area was quite steep. She stated if someone were to fall from the loading dock that she questioned how long it would be before they would be found because the area could not be seen from the road.

Ms. Diaz went on to note her email dated October 13, 2023 in which she offered the following suggestions:

- Hold an Open Forum to meet the candidates before the November 7, 2023 Municipal Election.

Ms. Diaz stated that this week she learned the chain of command for this type of event. Therefore, she stated she sent an email to the Chairman of both the Republican Town Committee and the Democratic Town Committee to request an Open Forum before the November 7, 2023 Election. She stated Ledyard had a low voter turn-out noting for the last Municipal Election only 31% of the residents voted. She stated that she did not know if this was due to the lack of interest, lack of options, or if residents felt like they were not being represented. Therefore, she stated that she would like to figure out a way to entice the 69% of the residents who did not vote to become more involved this time. She stated

today she saw posts on Social Media about how little advertisement the October 17, 2023 Referendum had regarding the Various School Projects, noting out of 15,000 residents that only 230 people voted. She stated she also saw a complaint from someone who was looking for information on all of the candidates who were running in November. She stated they could only find the Republican Town Committee and the Democratic Town Committee. She stated when residents asked on the Ledyard Resource Page last week where they could find candidate information for the upcoming election that members of the Democratic Town Committee only listed the slate for the Democratic and Republican candidates. She stated the reason she was mentioning this was because both the Democratic and Republican Town Committee Members knew that there was also a Green Party Candidate running for Mayor, noting that they have her sign in their yard. She stated to not give residents all of the information regarding who they could vote for was problematic. She stated the town should focus on how to increase their voter turnout numbers.

- Black History Month - 2024

Ms. Diaz stated Councilor Rodriguez has conducted the Black History Month Essay Contest and Poster Contest the past few years, which was great. However, she stated no High School Students participated in the Contest last year. Therefore, Ms. Diaz stated with having two teenage kids she ran a couple of ideas past her kids that may attract some of the older students to participate; and that she wanted to share the following ideas with the Community Relations Committee.

- ✓ Essay Contest
- ✓ Open Mic Night to allow the students to be creative in talking about Black History Month, which could include things such as a poem, or if they were musical they could sing or team up with other students to do something musical.
- ✓ Braiding Workshop - To learn how to braid and the history about the art of braiding. Ms. Diaz stated that braiding hair was originally designed for uses such as maps or carrying things from one place to another; and not necessarily for fashion.

The Community Relations Committee thanked Ms. Diaz for her comments.

Ms. Gay Sonn, 60 Kings Highway, Apartment #19, Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility, Gales Ferry. Ms. Sonn stated that she has lived at this address for a little over seven years and that she was present this evening to make the Community Relations Committee aware of a letter she sent Mayor Allyn, III, Town Council Chairman Kevin Dombrowski, and Town Councilor Gary Paul dated October 9, 2023 to inform them that she has formally filed with the Department of Justice a claim against the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility, the Housing Authority, and their Executive Director, because she was owed over \$1,100 in damages from BRD that occurred during the repairs to her home (Apartment #19); and \$100 or \$200 from King Corner Manor. She read her letter to the Department of Justice as noted below:

From: Gay Sonn <glsonn@yahoo.com <<mailto:glsonn@yahoo.com>>>
Sent: Monday, October 9, 2023 8:35:19 AM
To: Ledyard Housing Authority <ledyardhousing@att.net <<mailto:ledyardhousing@att.net>>>
Cc: Kevin J. Dombrowski <KJDom@ledyardct.org <<mailto:KJDom@ledyardct.org>>>; Gary Paul <gpaul@ledyardct.org <<mailto:gpaul@ledyardct.org>>>; Fred Allyn, III <mayor@ledyardct.org <<mailto:mayor@ledyardct.org>>>
Subject: Other monies owed

Good morning Colleen,

Damaged items not related to BRD renovations:

**Deductibles for damaged appliances from electrical surges, non-weather related per LHA maintenance.*

**Outdoor patio carpet damaged during mowing, 2022.*

The above have yet to be addressed or resolved. I have over 7 years of emails between LHA, CHFA, and myself regarding repairs and accommodations not done. These fall within a pattern of intimidation/ discrimination/ anti- sematism and/or select favoritism being demonstrated by LHA and you (Executive Director) now it was recurring with BRD, LHA and you.

Trying to converse with the LHA Board or you has resulted in my receiving unasked for/unwanted applications to relocate me to other housing locations including congregant care; or being told, as have others here, the current LHA President will help pack us up so we can "move out."

I find the above threatening, as I do the promise of no more maintenance being performed in response to the recent Accommodation submitted. You willfully ignored and altered ADA requests, as with apartment packing and renovation timing, and tenant Request wording to make it other than what was originally submitted, as with water pressure.

Comments attributed to me at the September LHA Board meeting were publicly published and displayed by you; containing misleading, partial statements and statements I did not make; placing me in an adversarial, dangerous position within the community. The LHA President moved to accept these fraudulent minutes as read, and they continue to be left on display by you (meaning the Executive Director).

Due to the above, I will be filing with the Department of Justice. Ledyard Police Officer Michael McKinney, Kevin Dombrowski and Mary McGrattan - Town Council members, and Ledyard Retired Postmaster Patricia Sargeant, can confirm illegal mail tampering and attempted theft, unapproved entry to my unit and damage to

physical property, and attempted physical/emotional harm by current/past LHA Board members and employees.

LHA needs to stop issuing threats for the duration of my residency at Kings Manor as I daily deal with continued loss of sight.

The refusal by the LHA Board and you (Executive Director) to respond with appropriate, timely action for damages done only exacerbates the trauma and distress of the situation.

Respectfully,

Gay Sonn

60 Kings Hwy #19

Gales Ferry, CT 06335

860-941-0566

glsonn@yahoo.com <<mailto:glsonn@yahoo.com>>

10/7/23”

Ms. Sonn went on to state that she was supposed to move into Kings Corner Manor Apartment #19 on December 1st; seven years ago. She stated once it was found out that she was of the Jewish Religion that suddenly the Apartment was not ready and was not being worked on. She stated they changed her move-in date to December 15th and wrote her a new Lease. She stated when December 15th came and went the Apartment was not ready. On December 31st, she was forced to move from where she was living; and when she arrived at the Kings Corner Manor, assuming that her Apartment would be ready, it was not ready and it still had the items from the previous tenant, who had died on the premises. She stated that she has photographs showing fesses on the toilet and on the wall of the bathroom. She stated she had nowhere to go; and it was New Year's Eve. She stated on that day, she had to try to find where she could store her furniture, her clothing, and her computer. She stated that she finally moved into the Apartment on January 19th with no explanation other than the Executive Director, at that time, telling her that was how they do things. She stated she was never reimbursed for her computer that froze on the moving truck, noting the cost of her move doubled because of storage, at which point the resident who was acting as Treasurer, which was against the Housing Authority Rules; and the Executive Director, took their key and went into her mailbox; and she found out later that they had cut the amount of the Check by half assuming that she did not really need it, because she would have needed to pay half of the amount to move anyway. She stated this was all after she had been displaced for over a month. She stated that she has been physically threatened, she has had half of her deck stolen, hence the Ledyard Police, and she has been assaulted. She stated one of the threats was by the President of the Housing Authority, who literally tried to jump the table when she told him that she had been told by the Executive Director to buy her own ceiling fan, so she bought a ceiling fan, noting that she was an English Teacher, and took the statement at word value. She stated what she did not realize, was that the Executive Director expected her to give the money to the Executive Director to buy

the ceiling fan. She stated Councilor McGrattan was at the meeting and witnessed this, noting that she had witnesses for all of this, and that she did not make this up on the spur of the moment. She stated CHFA told them that they had to fix her back deck and repair the backyard, noting that this goes back from when items were stolen from the deck, including the slate that it was built with. She stated it was finally fixed about a month ago when she told them to shorten the deck, and that she gave an air conditioner to the maintenance man as a *thank you* for doing it; because the Board and the Executive Director had done nothing for seven years. She stated that she was tired of this. She stated that she would not apologize for her religion, she was proud of both parts of it. She stated her father was Italian and her other was an Austrian Jew, noting that her mother lost half her family during World War II. She stated both of her parents fought during World War II, nothing the closest they got was Sioux Falls, South Dakota., but that they tried. She stated that she does not like to be picked-on, she does not like being intimidated, she does not like having to hide who she was, noting that one of the Police Officers said: “*Why do you wear the Star of David, why don’t you hide it.*” Ms. Sonn rhetorically questioned “*why should she have to hide her religion... to appease the other people that were there, who were all Roman Catholic members of Our Lady of Lourds Church*”. She stated her father was a Roman Catholic.

Councilor Saums asked Ms. Sonn to stay on point regarding the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility.

Ms. Sonn continued by stating that she was still being given paperwork to move out of the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Authority; she was still being offered other places to go to get rid of her, she was still getting things done to her property and to herself, noting that she still had Housing Authority Chairman Mr. Duzy threatening her saying that he would come to help her pack to move. She stated that she has asked for an Accommodation, noting that the wording of the Accommodation was changed by the current Executive Director. False statements attributed to her were posted on a board where her neighbors could look at it and think that she was some kind of freak. She stated that this has got to stop, and that she was not the only one that this was happening too.

Councilor Saums stated to Ms. Sonn that her point was that she filed with the Department of Justice, correct? Ms. Sonn stated, as has the person who was sitting next to her this evening. Councilor Saums stated that they would wait to hear from the Department of Justice. Ms. Sonn thanked the Committee for their time.

Councilor Paul asked if there was anyone else who would like to speak. Hearing no further public comments, he thanked the residents for their comments.

IV. PRESENTATIONS / INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Councilor Paul stated earlier this evening during Section III. *Citizens Comments*, that Resident Ms. Diaz reviewed her email. He stated the Agenda included some of the items Ms. Diaz mentioned in her correspondence, and that the Committee would be discussing those items later this evening. However, he stated that he would like to address Ms. Diaz's comments about working to get more people out to vote, noting that she made a valid point, that Ledyard had a low voter turnout. He stated that he applauded her efforts, noting that issue concerning voter turnout has been discussed in the past.

Councilor Saums stated except for the low voter turnout that each of Ms. Diaz's suggestions were on tonight's agenda. He stated the Committee to Review the Budget Process has been discussing the town's low voter turnout for the annual budget and how information was communicated. He stated the most recent problem was that *The Day* Newspaper does not have a reporter assigned to Ledyard, and therefore, there were no articles regarding local issues happening in Ledyard being published in the newspaper. He also noted in years past that *The Day* Newspaper would either have someone talk with each Party and their Candidates and ask questions about their ideas, and what the issues were in Ledyard, etc. and publish an article in the newspaper; or they would host Moderated Forums for local elections. However, he stated because this was no longer happening they were reduced to social media, and the posting of legal ad's in the newspaper every time there would be a town vote. He stated the Committee to Review the Budget Process talked about all the things that town was doing to get information out to the residents and despite all of the work and places information was made available (i.e. all public meetings were posted on the town's meeting portal, information was available on the town's website and social media page, legal ad's were published in the newspaper, residents could sign up to be notified for announcements, information was published in the quarterly Events Magazine that was delivered to every household, etc.).

However, he stated despite all these efforts, that they have a problem, noting as an example that they may have ten people show up the Budget Public Hearing. He stated times change, and that he was not blaming the newspapers, noting that people were getting their information from social media. He stated the date of October 17, 2023 Referendum was posted on the town's website along with a detailed description explaining the reason they were holding the Referendum, and that several Town Councilor's posted the date of October 17, 2023 Referendum on their social media pages, however, he stated not everyone sees those, because of the way facebook worked. He stated although he did not have a solution, that he would agree that Ledyard has a problem with voter turnout, noting for the Annual Budget that only 2 out of 30 people voted.

Councilor Rodriguez stated for the Annual Budget Referendum that 2.5% voted; and for the October 17, 2023 Referendum to increase the funding for the Schools Various Projects to include the redesign of Heating and Ventilation (HVAC) System at the

Juliet W. Long School that 2.3% of the registered voters turned out to vote.

Councilor Paul stated that he agreed with Councilor Saums' comments regarding the efforts being made to provide information to the public. He also noted the importance to provide information regarding the candidates who were seeking election.

Councilor Saums stated to find out about the Annual Budget Referendum and other meetings that residents could sign-up for Website Updates, Calendar Updates, News Alerts, or Tax Department Notifications at: by clicking on the "*Notify Me*" Tab on the front page of the towns website, he stated they could receive text messages on their cell phones or emails or both depending on what type of notification they select.

Councilor Paul suggested this information be shared on the Community Forum, and that Town Councilors share this information on their social media pages with the hope that residents would sign up for the Alerts. He stated they welcomed ideas to increase voter turnout from everyone.

Councilor Paul went on to note that Ms. Diaz's other suggestions were already listed on the Agenda and that the Committee would discuss her ideas during those portions of tonight's meeting.

Councilor Saums noted the following Resident's Comments that were posted in the Zoom Meeting "*Chat*":

- Ms. Nicole Cruz-Glacken noted the Women's League of Voters host moderated events to meet the candidates and to help get the vote out.
- Ms. Ginina Diaz noted that she tried to reach out to *The Day* Newspaper to find out who replaced Reporter Erica Moser; and that she received a response stating there were no local stories out of Ledyard due to the lack of Reporters.

Councilor Rodriguez stated *The Day* Newspaper had a new Publisher and that they have made a lot of changes.

Councilor Paul thanked the Residents for their comments in the Zoom "*Chat*" and he stated that the Committee had some great ideas; and some great dialogue on these topics.

1. Ms. Diaz email dated 10/13/2023 re: Suggestions and Ideas for Community Relations Committee Agenda Items.

Councilor Paul stated earlier this evening during Section III. *Citizens Comments*, that Resident Ms. Diaz reviewed her email. He stated the Agenda included some of the items Ms. Diaz mentioned in her correspondence, and that the Committee would be discussing those items later this evening. However, he stated that he would like to address Ms. Diaz's comments about working to get more people out to vote, noting that she made a valid point, that Ledyard had a low voter turnout. He stated that he

applauded her efforts, noting that issue concerning voter turnout has been discussed in the past.

Councilor Saums stated except for the low voter turnout that each of Ms. Diaz's suggestions were on tonight's agenda. He stated the Committee to Review the Budget Process has been discussing the town's low voter turnout for the annual budget and how information was communicated. He stated the most recent problem was that *The Day* Newspaper does not have a reporter assigned to Ledyard, and therefore, there were no articles regarding local issues happening in Ledyard being published in the newspaper. He also noted in years past that *The Day* Newspaper would either have someone talk with each Party and their Candidates and ask questions about their ideas, and what the issues were in Ledyard, etc. and publish an article in the newspaper; or they would host Moderated Forums for local elections. However, he stated because this was no longer happening they were reduced to social media, and the posting of legal ad's in the newspaper every time there would be a town vote. He stated the Committee to Review the Budget Process talked about all the things that town was doing to get information out to the residents and despite all of the work and places information was made available (i.e. all public meetings were posted on the town's meeting portal, information was available on the town's website and social media page, legal ad's were published in the newspaper, residents could sign up to be notified for announcements, information was published in the quarterly Events Magazine that was delivered to every household, etc.). However, he stated despite all these efforts, that they have a problem, noting as an example that they may have ten people show up the Budget Public Hearing. He stated times change, and that he was not blaming the newspapers, noting that people were getting their information from social media. He stated the date of October 17, 2023 Referendum was posted on the town's website along with a detailed description explaining the reason they were holding the Referendum, and that several Town Councilor's posted the date of October 17, 2023 Referendum on their social media pages, however, he stated not everyone sees those, because of the way facebook worked. He stated although he did not have a solution, that he would agree that Ledyard has a problem with voter turnout, noting for the Annual Budget that only 2 out of 30 people voted.

Councilor Rodriguez stated for the Annual Budget Referendum that 2.5% voted; and for the October 17, 2023 Referendum to increase the funding for the Schools Various Projects to include the redesign of Heating and Ventilation (HVAC) System at the Juliet W. Long School that 2.3% of the registered voters turned out to vote.

Councilor Paul stated that he agreed with Councilor Saums' comments regarding the efforts being made to provide information to the public. He also noted the importance to provide information regarding the candidates who were seeking election.

Councilor Saums stated to find out about the Annual Budget Referendum and other meetings that residents could sign-up for Website Updates, Calendar Updates, News Alerts, or Tax Department Notifications at: by clicking on the "*Notify Me*" Tab on the front page of the towns website, he stated they could receive text messages on their cell phones or emails or

both depending on what type of notification they select.

Councilor Paul suggested this information be shared on the Community Forum, and that Town Councilors share this information on their social media pages with the hope that residents would sign up for the Alerts. He stated they welcomed ideas to increase voter turnout from everyone.

Councilor Paul went on to note that Ms. Diaz's other suggestions were already listed on the Agenda and that the Committee would discuss her ideas during those portions of tonight's meeting.

Councilor Saums noted the following Resident's Comments that were posted in the Zoom Meeting "Chat":

- Ms. Nicole Cruz-Glacken noted the Women's League of Voters host moderated events to meet the candidates and to help get the vote out.
- Ms. Ginina Diaz noted that she tried to reach out to *The Day* Newspaper to find out who replaced Reporter Erica Moser; and that she received a response stating there were no local stories out of Ledyard due to the lack of Reporters.

Councilor Rodriguez stated *The Day* Newspaper had a new Publisher and that they have made a lot of changes.

Councilor Paul thanked he Residents for their comments in the Zoom "Chat" and he stated that the Committee had some great ideas; and some great dialogue on these topics.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the Community Relations Committee Minutes of September 20, 2023

Moved by Councilor Marshall, seconded by Councilor Saums.

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: John Marshall

SECONDER: Bill Saums

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Discuss the 2024 Black History Activity/Contest.

Councilor Rodriguez stated Councilor McGrattan told her that Assistant Librarian Stacy Burk would like to get involved with the Black History Month Program, noting that Ms. Burk worked with Youth Services. She stated that she has been communicating with Ms. Burk via email and that she sent Ms. Burk all the information on what the Community Relations Committee had done during the past two-years for the Black History Month Program. She noted that Ms. Burk

suggested they also include the Adult Librarian if they wanted to include Adults in the Program. Councilor Rodriguez noted that she asked Ms. Burk to share her ideas for the Black History Month Program, however, to-date she had not heard back from Ms. Burk. She stated that she also told Ms. Burk that she was open to new ideas and that they did not have to stay with the format that had been done in previous years. She went on to state that she mentioned to Ms. Burk that the Program ideas they decide to choose would have to be reviewed by the Community Relations Committee.

Councilor Rodriguez continued by noting that she liked Ms. Diaz's suggestions that were provided in her email dated October 13, 2023 and presented under Section III *Citizens Comments* (see above) earlier this evening, to help increase the number of students to participate in the 2024 Black History Contest.

Councilor Rodriguez addressed Ms. Diaz's ideas as follows:

- ✓ Essay Contest - Councilor Rodriguez stated that last year the Community Relations Committee was disappointed that the High School Students did not participate in the 2023 Essay Contest. She stated that she did not know where the disconnect occurred, noting that the previous year (2022) a number of High School Students submitted Essays. She stated that she emailed High School Principal Amanda Fagin a couple of times and that she thought that the disconnect in communication was lost between Ms. Fagin to the Teachers, because she could not see a High School Student turning down the opportunity to win \$100.00. She went on to note that for the Middle School Essay Contest the winners were awarded gift cards that were presented at a School Assembly and the students had their picture taken with Mayor Allyn, III.
- ✓ Open Mic Night - Councilor Rodriguez stated last year a student submitted a poem, and although the poem did not comply with the essays format that the Judges awarded the student a Honorable Mention and asked the student to read her poem at the Town Council's March 8, 2023 meeting; at which time they also recognized the Contest Winners and awarded the prize money and certificates. Councilor Paul stated he liked the idea of music, etc. Councilor Marshall stated an Open Mic Night would be a forum where they could expose the community to the art and music of the culture. Councilor Rodriguez stated that perhaps they could have the Open Mic Night outside at a field.
- ✓ Braiding Workshop - Councilor Rodriguez stated the braiding idea was ingenious. To learn how to braid and the history about the art of braiding.

Councilor Rodriguez continued by stating that she was open to new ideas and that she was looking forward to the 2024 Black History Program. She noted in past years that she heard students say that they were glad that they participated in the Program and she commented that it also made their parents proud. She suggested by offering different types of activities for Black History Month that perhaps they could have something each week during the month of February. Councilor Paul agreed with Councilor Rodriguez's suggestion, noting that it would be a great way to support community involvement and to help people who do not know each other to get to know and learn about each other; and to know our neighbors. He stated it helped the community by meeting new people and learning new

things.

Councilor Paul thanked Councilor Rodriguez for all the work she had done on the Black History Month Program over the last two-years. He noted the ideas, different activities, and working to involve more participation by other groups, as discussed this evening, were all great. He stated as the Community Relations Committee said after the last Black History Contest (2023), that they wanted to encourage and support other groups to take part. He stated any Group could facilitate the Black History Month Program, noting that the Community Relations Committee's role should be to support these types of community events, and to help them to grow, noting that it was not the role of the Community Relations Committee to organize these events.

Councilor Paul stated having the students attend a Town Council meeting to recognize and shine a spotlight on their accomplishments in the community, meant a lot to the students and their families.

RESULT: CONTINUE

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

Councilor Paul stated the Community Relations Committee had some great success at the Farmers' Markets this summer, noting that they held two Outreach/Informational Booths. He explained the third Outreach Event, which was scheduled for September 13, 2023 and planned to feature the Town's Hometown Heros, such as their First Responders, Police Department and Fire Departments and the many of the Volunteers who serve on the Town's committees was cancelled due to rain.

Councilor Paul provided a recap of the following two Outreach Events they held this summer:

- ***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 last year (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.

Councilor Paul thanked the following Organizations for making the 2023 Mental Health Awareness Booth at the Farmers Market a success:

- ✓ SERAC located in Norwich
 - ✓ Brian Dagle Healing Hearts Foundation located in Niantic
 - ✓ Home heating fuel through Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA) and other assistance programs
 - ✓ Utilities - Electric/Water Assistance
 - ✓ Homeowners Assistance program that provided no interest loans to help people replace their furnace, roof or septic system, etc.
 - ✓ Home meal delivery available for those who cannot get out to grocery shop through Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA)
 - ✓ Linda C. Davis Food Pantry located in Ledyard Center;
 - ✓ United Way located in Gales Ferry was a great resource;
 - ✓ Connecticut's Paid Family Medical Leave Program;
 - ✓ Police Department "*Green and/or Blue Envelope*" for drivers with Autism or Hearing Impaired
- ***August 30, 2023 - Library Services***

Councilor Paul stated the Farmers' Market August 30, 2023 Theme was "***Back to School***" and that the Committee felt that the Library services were in-keeping with that

Theme. 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; and he thanked Ms. Smith and her Team for the great work they have been doing.

Councilor Saums addressed the Hometown Hero's Event and 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, the Firefighters and the Police Department attended the Market to provide information to residents that they would have provided at the September 13, 2023 Market, was cancelled because of weather.

Councilor Paul stated volunteers were what made their town run, and he thanked them for their commitment and service to their community. He encouraged residents who were interested in a career in firefighting or law enforcement to contact the Fire Departments

RESULT: CONTINUE

- 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 that the Committee was hoping to host an Informal Gathering at the new Lantern Hill Waterfront Park, which was the property Mr. and Mrs. Graham donated to the town (leased for \$10 per year). However, he stated with the winter months approaching that he was getting into his busy season, and therefore, he may find it difficult to try to coordinate an event.

Councilor Marshall addressed scheduling an Informal Gathering to showcase the Lantern Hill Waterfront Park; and he noted with the colder weather that they may not be able to get people out to attend he event.

Councilor Saums noted Resident Ms. Ginina Diaz's suggestion for a General Forum to discuss ideas for the town. However, he stated that they would need to have a Moderator for that type of event, who may possibly be a Newspaper Reporter, noting they would need someone who was not a Town Council member, Board of Education Member or the Mayor.

Councilor Rodriguez stated they could get a Moderator from the League of Women’s Voters, noting that they have been trained to Moderate events.

The Committee discussed potential venues to hold a General Forum, noting that the High School Auditorium would be an appropriate space. They agreed that the first step would be to find someone to Moderate the Event before reserving the High School. Councilor Saums stated that he would contact Women’s League of Voters Mary Ellen Doblecki.

RESULT: CONTINUE

- Continued discussion regarding the possibility to schedule joint meetings with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation to discuss items of mutual interest.

Councilor Saums stated that he has not had any communication with his Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council contact.

He suggested the Committee remove this item from their Agenda.

RESULT: COMPLETED

- Continued review of status regarding the progress of improvements at the Park on East Drive.

Councilor Paul addressed the Park on East Drive, and he provided some background noting in hearing residents’ concerns about graffiti, lack of lighting and other illicit behavior that was occurring at the Park that the Community Relations Committee

held an Informal Gathering at the Park on July 20, 2022 with the residents in the area. He stated Parks & Recreation Director Scott Johnson, Jr. and many Town Councilors attended the event. He stated during their conversation with the residents that they discovered that there was a lot of miscommunication. He stated the residents did not know who to contact, or what was in the works.

Councilor Paul thanked the concerted efforts of the Parks & Recreation Department, Public Works Department, and the Police Department, noting that the Park on East Drive was now beautiful. He stated it was well lite, the parking lot was done, and residents were enjoying the Park. He stated this was a great example of what the Community Relations Committee was all about, noting that they all came together for a positive outcome. He stated he has spoken to the Police Chief and that they have not had any issues at the Park on East Drive over the past year. He noted the Community Relations Committee has completed their work at the Park on East Drive.

RESULT: COMPLETED

6. Discussion to help foster a dialogue to improve the relationship at the Kings Corner Senior Citizens Housing Facility.

Councilor Paul provided a recap regarding the Community Relations Committee efforts to try to help foster some dialogue between the Housing Authority and the Tenants on issues that were brought to the Town Council at their August 23, and September 13, 2023 meetings.

Councilor Paul noted at their September 20, 2023 meeting the Community Relations Committee discussed with the interested parties of the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility the following:

- ✓ ***Roles and Authority*** - Councilor Paul stated the Committee explained to the Tenants that other than appointing members to the Housing Authority, per Connecticut General Statutes Chapter 128 Sections 8-40 and 8-41 the Town Council had no authority over the Housing Authority.
 - The Housing Authority hires an Executive Director, who worked under the Direction of the Housing Authority to manage the Kings Corner Senior Citizens Housing Facility.
- ✓ ***Procedures*** - Councilor Paul stated there were Procedures in-place, for the Tenants to submit Grievances, and to speak directly to the Housing Authority at their monthly meetings. He stated this discussion prompted the Housing Authority to consider obtaining some recording equipment or to perhaps move their meetings to a location where they could be recorded and/or offer remote participation using a platform such as Zoom to help with transparency.
- ✓ ***Cameras*** - Councilor Paul noted that some Tenants expressed concern about the Housing Authority using cameras to spy on them. He stated during the Community Relations Committee meeting that they explained that the Cameras were used for liability issues, to protect the tenants, staff, and everyone involved.
- ✓ ***Renovations and Safety Issues*** - Councilor Paul stated some Tenants had expressed

concern regarding safety issues, specifically the handicap ramps. He stated the town secured nearly \$3 million in grant funding for the much needed renovations to the Kings Corner Senior Citizens Housing Facility. He stated they all understand that the renovation was not convenient but that it was almost done and that the facility would be beautiful and the handicap ramps would meet the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Regulations.

- ✓ **Recording the Housing Authority Meetings:** Councilor Paul stated that the Housing Authority was considering options to use the Zoom Meeting Platform to provide transparency and allow residents to attend the meetings remotely, noting that they discussed the following options:
 - Move the Meetings to the Council Chambers, Town Hall Annex, where they already had the technology in-place to provide Hybrid Meetings (both in person and remote) noting that the technology was available (Owl Pro - Zoom, recording capability). However, there was concern about some of the Tenants not being able to drive to get to the Town Hall Annex.
 - Obtain equipment to record and Zoom the Meetings from their current location, which was the Community Room at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility.
- ✓ **Smoking Policy** - Councilor Paul stated the Community Relations Committee also discussed with the Tenants the No Smoking Policy, and their concerns regarding safety. He stated this was going to be an on-going discussion between the Tenants and the Housing Authority. He stated the decision lied with the Housing Authority, regardless of the Town Council's position, or how they felt about the Smoking Policy, noting that it was the Housing Authority's decision to make. He stated the hope would be to keep the lines of communication open between the Housing Authority and the Tenants to continue to discuss the Smoking Policy. He encouraged the Tenants to use the opportunity to bring their concerns to the Housing Authority during the monthly meetings, noting that the "*Citizens Comments*" portion of the Agenda was their three minutes to address the Board.

Councilor Saums stated the Town Council had no authority over the Housing Authority, noting that they cannot direct the Housing Authority. However, he questioned whether the Community Relations Committee could ask the Housing Authority whether they were considering the following:

- Holding their meetings at another location.
- A solution for Smoking.

Housing Authority Executive Director Colleen Lauer stated that the Housing Authority was sending a Survey to the Tenants with the following questions:

- Meeting Location:
 - Same Time, Same Location - No Changes
 - Same Time, Same Location- Voice Record
 - Same Time, Same Location-Zoom Video Conference Platform
 - Move the Meetings to Town Hall Annex- Same Day-Same Time
 - Move the Meetings to Town Hall Annex-Different Day-Different Time

Ms. Lauer stated that the Housing Authority should have the Sealed Survey Responses at their November 6, 2023 meeting; at which time they would open the Surveys and would do what the Tenants want to do.

Ms. Lauer noted that it was suggested that perhaps they could use the Senior Citizens Van to transport the Tenants to the Town Hall Annex for the meetings, noting that the Senior Citizens Center was not open in the evening, so the Van would be available.

Councilor Saums questioned whether the Housing Authority could hold their monthly meetings at the Senior Citizens Center. Ms. Lauer stated that the Senior Citizens Center was not set up with recording equipment. Councilor Rodriguez added that they also do not have Zoom at the Senior Citizens Center. Councilor Paul stated holding the meetings in a Hybrid Format (in-person and remotely) was the best way to go, noting that transparency was essential.

Ms. Lauer addressed Councilor Saums' question regarding a solution for Smoking, noting that the Housing Authority was waiting on a confirmation regarding sidewalks. She stated Mayor Allyn, III, has spoken to Public Works Forman Shawn Ruszczyk about getting a quote to install sidewalks.

Councilor Paul questioned whether there have been any discussions to provide better lighting along the driveway. Ms. Lauer stated that there were four poles for lighting, and they have talked with the Construction Company that was doing the renovation work at the Kings Corner Senior Citizens Housing Facility, about installing additional lighting on the four poles that were for lighting; noting that they were waiting for the Change Order.

Councilor Rodriguez expressed concern regarding the sidewalk as a solution for the smokers noting in the winter that sidewalks can be icy here in New England. She stated that she and the Mayor discussed a spot across from the carport, which was about 75 - 100 feet away from buildings, noting that they could put in an ADA cement pad with a covering for about \$10,000.

Councilor Paul stated that they discussed a lot of good ideas this evening. However, he stated they need to present the ideas/options to the Housing Authority, explaining that they were the authority who could make the decisions. He stated the Town Council does not have any authority. Therefore, he stated the hope was that the ideas that they have been talking about make their way back to the Housing Authority, and that they look into the options, noting that a lot of people have concerns.

Councilor Paul concluded his comments by stating that the Committee's work has helped to foster a dialogue between the Housing Authority and the Kings Corner Senior Citizens Housing Facility. Therefore, he stated the Committee completed their task and that they hoped and would encourage them to continue the dialogue. He stated that residents could attend the Community Relations Committee's meeting and speak during the Citizens Comments portion of the meeting, should they feel they had a matter that they would like to bring to the Committee's attention.

RESULT: COMPLETED

7. Any other Old Business proper to come before the Committee

None.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

Review the outstanding action items contained in the memo dated October 26, 2023 as forwarded by Community Relations Committee of the Twenty-sixth Town Council.

The Community Relations Committee agreed by consensus to provide for a seamless transition, to forward the following outstanding items of business to the incoming Community Relations Committee:

- (1) 2024 Black History Activity/Contest.
- (2) Community Outreach Informational Forums at the Ledyard Farmers Market regarding the services the town offers; how to access services, and the authority residents should direct concerns regarding services.
- (3) Host “*Informal Conversations in the Park*” to engage residents in discussions regarding their concerns and their ideas for potential solutions.

RESULT: COMPLETED

2. Any other New Business proper to come before the Committee.
None.

IV ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Marshall moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor Paul.
VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Gary Paul
Committee Chairman
Community Relations Committee

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