



TOWN OF LEDYARD

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Town Council Meeting Minutes

Chairman S. Naomi
Rodriguez

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

7:00 PM

Town Hall Council Chambers

WORKING DRAFT

In-Person: Council Chambers Town Hall Annex Building

Remote: Information noted below:

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

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84574121812?pwd=vm0o07yIHAInH96ZEsIa1eoHPAGKJp.1>

Audio Only: Telephone: +1 646 558 8656; Meeting ID: 845 7412 1812; Passcode: 830935

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Rodriguez called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. at the Council Chambers, Town Hall Annex Building.

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

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

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

IV. PRESENTATIONS

None.

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

Mr. Stephen Munger, 12 Nutmeg Drive, Gales Ferry, began his comments by thanking Chairman Rodriguez and the members of the Town Council for opportunity to speak tonight. He stated that he along with many others appreciate and respect the dedication of all the members, even if he disagreed with none, some, or all of their decisions. He stated that he has watched the videos of some of the Town Council meetings that were available on-line and he noted that the Town Council has allowed members of the public to speak for more than three minutes. He stated although he was going to try to present his comments within the three-minute limit that he may go a little over the allowed time and that he would appreciate if the Town Council would allow him to finish his comments this evening, noting that he was present to address the following two items: (1) Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget and (2) Raising of the Pride Flag.

Mr. Munger proceeded by noting that tonight was his first time speaking at a Town Council Meeting. He stated that he missed the April 15, 2024 Public Hearing and May 20, 2024 Annual Town Meeting regarding the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. He stated that he was disappointed that he did not attend either of these meetings to voice his opinion on the Annual Budget because some of the information that was presented was not 100% correct. He stated based on the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget presentations that most taxpayers were supposed to see an increase of about \$150.00 a year in their taxes. However, he stated in speaking to a knowledgeable friend that most of them were going to pay more than an additional \$150.00 a year. He stated he did not think the wrong number was put out on purpose, noting perhaps that number should not have been put out at all, because many taxpayers would see a higher increase in their taxes; and he commented that the information provided was disingenuous. He stated that he was also sad to see that only 4% of residents voted on the budget regardless of how they chose to vote. He stated going forward that he planned to get more people involved. He stated in watching the Budget Meeting Video that he got upset because one resident who was in the audience complained because some members of the Town Council were not at a meeting. He thanked Chairman Rodriguez and appreciated her comments in which she stated that people have lives outside of the Town Council; and that those Town Council Members had been excused because they had a reason not to be there.

Mr. Munger went on to note for those who do not know him, that he served in the US Navy for 24.5 years protecting the rights of all Americans regardless of their beliefs, race, creed, religion, as long as they did not infringe on the beliefs; or the rights of others. He stated that he was a firm believer that they have a short life on this planet, and therefore, everyone should live their life the way they want to.

Mr. Munger continued to address the flying the Gay Pride Flag in Ledyard Center. He stated that he did not have a problem with that; but that this would be a major issue if the town breaks the law and does not follow the Supreme Court decision of May, 2022 that simply

stated: "*Fly One; You Must Fly All*".

Mr. Munger presented the following flags that he would like the town to fly as noted below:

- Pine Tree Flag - General George Washington Commissioned the Pine Tree Flag to be put on all Naval Ships when they first went into battle for the Revolutionary War.
- Thin Green Line Flag - First Responders
- Thin Red Line Flag - Firemen.

Mr. Munger stated he did not think anyone would have a problem with any of these three categories. He stated if the town decided to raise one flag that they need to consider every flag that someone wanted to put up. He suggested before people do something, that they should take a step back and consider how many people it would affect, whether it was good or bad.

Mr. Munger thanked the members of the Town Council and Board of Education Member Joanne Kelley, noting that these volunteer commitments take a lot of time out of their personal lives, noting that they do not receive any compensation for their work. He stated that he appreciated the opportunity to speak this evening and that he hoped they would make the correct decisions moving forward.

Ms. Ann Roberts-Pierson, 4 Anderson Drive, Gales Ferry, thanked the volunteers who serve on town commissions, and she thanked the Town Council for the time they give to the town. She went on to thank the Town Council's Administration Committee for their quick action to include a discussion regarding an Ethics Commission on their June 12, 2025 Agenda, as was suggested by herself and Mrs. Edwards at the Town Council's May 22, 2024 meeting. She stated unfortunately she was not able to attend the Administration Committee's meeting earlier this evening and she questioned the status of their work on the proposal. Chairman Rodriguez stated the Administration Committee's first discussion regarding a proposed Ethic Commission went well, noting that they had some work to do. Ms. Roberts-Pierson suggested the Administration Committee review the Town of Norwich's Ethics Code, noting that it was far superior to the 2019 Draft Ordinance that was attached to their Agenda on the Meeting Portal this evening.

Ms. Roberts-Pierson concluded her comments by stating that her suggestion for the Town Council to conduct an investigation regarding the firing of Town Planner Juliet Hodge on April 25, 2024 still stands.

Mr. Daniel Pealer, 48 Highland Drive, Ledyard, stated he had the following two questions:

- (1). Was the Town Council considering flying flags other than the American Flag and the State Flag?

Chairman Rodriguez responded by stating New Business Item #1 on tonight's Agenda was a discussion regarding the Pride Flag.

- (2). Does the Town Council intend to make the use of the Flagpole a Public Forum allowing members of the public to petition the Government to be able to fly flags with different symbology on them.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she did know what would come up during the discussion later this evening.

Mr. Stan Juber, 13 Iron Street, Ledyard, stated that he spent a considerable amount of time in the Council Chambers, noting he has lived in Ledyard for 40-years and has been involved in government in one capacity or another during all these years. He stated in addition to serving four-terms on the Town Council, he served as Chairman of three Charter Revision Commissions, twelve years on the Board of Assessment Appeals, he served on the Housing Authority and was currently serving on the Water Pollution Control Authority. He stated the until about six-months ago it was difficult to tell who was a Republican and who was a Democrat, noting that everyone tried to work together, for the good of the town. He stated they did not intentionally engage in controversial issues, noting that they did things to unite people, not to divide them. He stated for these reasons he was opposed to flying any flag in an official capacity other than the United States of America Flag and the State of Connecticut Flag. He stated as Mr. Munger mentioned that any flag they choose someone would be offended. He stated a Pride Flag was a curious first choice to deviate from the town's tradition that goes back as far as the Mayor could remember. He stated they could have chosen the POW-MIA Flag (Prisoner of War-Missing in Action); the Thin Blue Line Flag or one of the flags that Mr. Munger showed earlier this evening that honored all First Responders. However, he stated they chose a flag that was associated with the left political movement. He stated that it may not be a flag of the Democratic Party, but that may as well be, noting that everyone knows that. He stated if they were going to allow the Pride Flag that they would have to allow all others. He stated there was no reason for this Town Council, who represented everyone, to intentionally choose a symbol of division. He stated nothing good would come of it.

Mr. Eric Treaster, 10 Huntington Way, Ledyard, stated the reason he was speaking tonight was because he heard a rumor yesterday, hopefully untrue, that the Town Council intended to amend the Agenda to deliberate and possibly vote on flying a Gay Pride flag in front of Town Hall. He stated while he understands the importance of promoting inclusivity and equality, but that flying the Pride Flag on town property would be a mistake. He stated there were at least four reasons why flying the Pride Flag, the Black Lives Matter flag, or any other nongovernmental flag on town property would be improper.

First, Mr. Treaster stated that it was important to consider that some residents may hold differing views on the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual) movement, noting that displaying the Pride Flag on town property may ignite conflict, controversy, and anger that would hinder our collective goal of living in unity and harmony.

Second, Mr. Treaster stated if the Town Council allowed the Pride Flag to be flown on Town property, some residents would perceive it as a message that the Town Council was

endorsing a specific ideology. Mr. Treaster stated the Town Council should not take any action that may be interpreted as an endorsement of a particular social, religious, or political movement. He stated the Town Council should limit its proceedings to those prescribed in the Town Charter and the town ordinances. He stated the Town Charter and the town ordinances do not give the Town Council the duty or the authority to determine which flags are permitted on public property.

Third, Mr. Treaster stated as you know, the Town Council was a legislative body that must treat everyone fairly, lawfully, and uniformly. He stated if they allowed the Pride Flag to be flown on town property, that it would establish a precedent that, unless done carefully, would require the town to also allow the Hamas Flag, the Mexican Flag, the MAGA Flag (Make American Great Again), the ANTIFA Flag (Anti-Fascist), the horrific NAMBLA Flag (North American Man/Boy Love Association) which was a pedophilia advocacy organization in the United States, or the Sacred Heart of Jesus flag, to be flown on town property.

And fourth, Mr. Treaster stated the Town Council's job, as their representatives, was to focus on the core mission of governing and serving our town, which meant performing their duties as specified in the Town Charter. He stated adhering to the Town Charter and town ordinances would provide the legal framework that would protect Ledyard from potential costly litigation.

Mr. Treaster concluded his remarks by stating that the Town Charter gives the Town Council the legislative authority to write and adopt ordinances. He stated if they wanted the authority to allow the Pride Flag or any other group flag to be flown on town properties, they must first adopt an ordinance with fair, lawful, and uniform criteria for processing and approving such requests. He urged great caution, noting that he could see legal costs.

Ms. Wendy Hellekson, 14-L Lakeside Drive, Gales Ferry, attending remotely, stated that she has taught High School for almost twenty years. She stated that she sat in a room with students who felt that they did not belong. She stated as Teachers part of their job was to deal with students who were suicidal, noting that they could not leave the students alone. She stated that she sat with students for hours as they worked to organize emergency mental health for them, because they were so distraught by how they felt about themselves versus the way they were being treated by others. She stated that she was not only talking about the LGBTQIA+ community, that she was also talking about the kids that were being bullied, etc. She stated that she supported raising the Pride Flag because it sends a message that everybody belongs in the town; and she stated everybody does. She stated we were all residents of this town.

Mr. Mike Cherry, 5 Whippoorwill Drive, Gales Ferry, thanked Councilor Buhle for once again organizing the Yale-Harvard Regatta Day Festival this past weekend, June 8, 2024. Mr. Cherry continued by addressing the Pride Flag, noting that the Town Council needed to deliberate and to make a decision. He stated during their deliberations that the Town Council would need to consider how many flagpoles were in front of the Town Hall, the law, and practice regarding flying other flags. He stated throughout the year there were many months

that had a symbol or sign, and he suggested that perhaps a reasonable accommodation may be to fly the flag of that month or event.

Chairman Rodriguez thanked all of the residents for their comments this evening.

VI. COMMITTEE COMMISSION AND BOARD REPORTS

None.

VII. COMMENTS OF TOWN COUNCILORS

Councilor Paul, attending remotely, apologized in advance if he was not speaking clearly noting that he had an abscessed tooth. He proceeded by thanking Councilor Buhle, the Parks & Recreation Commission, and everyone that was involved for their work to organize the Yale-Harvard Regatta Day Festival. He stated it was a great event, noting that he participated by livestreaming the races.

Councilor Paul continued by stating at the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion's June 6, 2024 Meeting they voted to approve hosting a Pride Pizza Party on the Town Green on June 29, 2024; which was posted on Social Media. He stated during their discussion other Events were mentioned and the process that was used; and that he would like to address those as follows:

- Black History Month Activities/Contest- Councilor Paul stated the Community Relations Committee had tried to get the Board of Education involved with this initiative because learning about history regardless of whether it was Black History, Native American History, Middle Eastern History, Asian History or Latin American History, should fall to our educators, not a government sanctioned committee whose role was to govern. In addition, the Committee also worked to involve the Library, as another Educational component of our Community.
- Black History Month Poetry Slam - Lucille's Restaurant - Councilor Paul stated when this was occurring that he was confused because during their past discussions the Committee was looking for the community to become involved and to initiate Events. Therefore, he stated he thought the Event was put on by Lucille's Restaurant, and not put on by the Community Relations Committee, because there was no real discussion regarding the Event, noting that it was mentioned like a side bar.
- Women's Month Poetry Slam - Councilor Paul stated that he thought the same was occurring here, as for the Black History Month. He stated that he did not realize these events were Community Relations Committee hosted events.

Councilor Paul stated that the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion brought up a number of things that they wanted to support in town. He stated that he thought supporting people and lifting people up was a good thing, noting that he has said this a number of times. He noted the Committee mentioned the following:

- Senior Citizens Day - Councilor Paul stated the Senior Citizens Facility provided a lot of Services and Programs for our Senior Citizens, noting that they offer rides to medical appointments, grocery shopping, meal delivery to homebound Seniors, reduced priced Breakfasts Lunches at the Senior Center; and many other services/programs.
- Children's Day - Councilor Paul stated that the Parks & Recreation Commission puts on a Children's Day every Fall, along with other children events such as Trunk or Treat, the Easter Egg Hunt and many other Events.

Councilor Paul stated that this was the work of these Departments; therefore, he stated he had to question *Why a Town Council Subcommittee was looking to get into other Department's Business*. He stated as the past Chairman of the Community Relations Committee that their Role was to be a resource to get this type of information to the residents and to ensure that no one was being discriminated, not to host events.

Councilor Paul stated the Community Relations Committee was a subcommittee of the Town Council, who was charged with the Legislative and Financial Responsibilities for the Operations of their Town Government, not to throw parties for special interest groups. He stated the Community Relations Committee's work was to see that all residents of the Community, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, etc., received the services the local government provided, fairly and equally. He stated that he has not heard that any Ledyard Resident that identifies as *LGBTQIA+* (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual) Community who has not received the same services as all other residents, noting they have access to Library Services/Programs, they have their roads plowed and paved according the schedule, they received water services if they are on the public water system, register their dog, record Vital Documents (Birth Marriage, Death Certificates), Record Land Deeds, Register Vehicles, obtain building permits, obtain information from any Town Department when requested, they can be a member of the Senior Citizens Center or any other town committee, use our parks and rent our facilities, and that was just to name a few.

Councilor Paul continued to note as Mr. Hurt stated at the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion June 5, 2024 meeting *"that LGBTQIA+ Community was not a Group of People who were looking for anything special, noting that they were parents, partners, siblings, children who were deserving of the same life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness that unites them*. Councilor Paul stated that his family member, who belonged to the LGBTQIA+ Community, said the same thing; noting that they did not want the town to throw them a Pizza Party, they just don't want to be discriminated against, noting that he would back his family member until the day he died. Councilor Paul questioned: *Aren't we treating them special, if a Town Government sanctioned committee hosts a Pizza Party for their Group or raises their Pride Flag?*. He also questioned: *Don't we all have Pride in our American Flag?*. He stated that he and many others think they are being treated special. He questioned whether the Town was going to throw a Pizza Party for the Greeks in our Community and raise the Greek Flag, or are we going to raise the Patriot Front Flag which was an off-shoot of Vanguard America who participated in the Unite the Right in

Charlottesville, Virginia, and was a White Supremacist Group, just because they asked us to. He explained for those who do not know who this Group was or does not remember, that citizens attended the Town Council's June 28, 2023 meeting to express concerns that this Group had been posting signs on utility poles along Route 12 in Gales Ferry. Councilor Paul questioned whether the town should raise the Flag of Pro-Life Groups because they asked the Town to raise their Flag during their special month.

Councilor Paul stated that his question was *Where do we draw the Line? Why are we pandering to Special Interest Groups?* He stated if we do it for one, then we have to do it for all to ensure that all were treated equally and fairly. He stated that he agreed with wanting to lift up minorities, however, he stated their job was to govern, and to make sure people were not being discriminated against. He asked the Town Council and its Chairman to look at their Policies, and what the Town Council and its Subcommittees Roles were. He questioned how hosting events came about and doing things in the name of the entire Town Council and the Town. He stated his concerns were regarding the legality, noting that their job was to make sure they were governing, and that people were not being discriminated against; not to throw parties and to raise flags. He stated that he was a warrior for minority groups, and he stated if they were going to lift up minorities that he would personally like to lift up the unborn. He stated the unborn was the biggest minority they had, and he questioned how some town residents would feel if they raised the Pro-Life Flag. He asked the Town Council to consider his comments this evening when they discussed New Business Item #1 regarding the Pride Flag.

Councilor Ryan, attending remotely, stated that he would first like to congratulate all the volunteers who were involved in another successful Regatta Day Festival, especially Councilor Buhle for all her organizational efforts, and Councilor Paul for his multimedia contributions. He stated it was truly a great event that was quickly becoming a Ledyard tradition, and he noted that it was especially nice because it was around the corner from where he lived.

Councilor Ryan continued by noting that there were a lot of things to celebrate in the month of June, noting that one was *Men's Health Month*. He stated that he wanted to bring attention to *Men's Health Month*, noting that it was an annual observance, that was established in 1994. He stated in conjunction with Men's Health Week, that June was a time to help educate men and their families about the importance of being proactive about their health, heightening awareness of preventable health problems for males of all ages, supporting men and boys to engage in healthier lifestyle choices, and to encourage the early detection and treatment of diseases and depression.

Councilor Ryan stated on average, men in the United States die nearly 6-years earlier than women and were at higher risk for many serious diseases, including heart disease, HIV, lung cancer, and of course, prostate cancer.

Councilor Ryan noted according to the Anxiety & Depression Association of America, that Men were less likely to openly discuss mental health issues and seek help than women, due to social norms, reluctance, and belittlement from others, stating that these stigmas have a

significant impact on males. He stated that approximately one in ten men experience depression or anxiety. He stated because fewer than half of men receive mental health treatment, that each year four times more men commit suicide than women. He stated a good first step on the path toward improved health was to make a call to establish a primary care provider (PCP) who could recommend age- and risk-appropriate health screenings. However, he stated Men 15-65 years of age were significantly less likely than women to seek preventive care services, and they were more likely to report not having a primary care provider. He stated that he fell into that category, noting that he waited until he was 40-years old, stating that he should have done it earlier. He stated, as such, please take the opportunity this month to support the men and boys in your life, reinforcing the need to get screened early and often.

He stated as always, if you or someone you know was in a crisis, get help immediately, noting that they should call 911 or call or text to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Councilor Ryan stated that he also had comments regarding New Business Item #1 regarding the Pride Flag, and he asked Chairman Rodriguez whether she would like him to provide his comments now or wait. Chairman Rodriguez suggested Councilor Ryan hold his comments until the Town Council discusses New Business Item #1 later this evening.

Councilor Brunelle thanked Councilor Buhle for a beautiful Regatta Event, which she was happy to participate in. She noted it was a gorgeous day, with lots of happy faces and smiles, stating that you could see the amount of work that went into the Event.

Councilor Saccone stated about a week ago there was a horrific, fatal motorcycle accident in town. He stated at no cost to the town the Fire Department called in a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team to provide mental health support to their First Responders. He stated during the meeting their First Responders (Dispatch, Firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT)) were able to have a good discussion about what they saw and experienced. He stated the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team provided some direction, and places where they could go to get additional help. He stated that it was a good meeting for all those involved.

Chairman Rodriguez stated the Police Department had Chaplains to help support the Officers after critical incidents. She questioned whether the Fire Departments also Chaplains had available to provide support. Councilor Saccone stated all the town's First Responders which included the Emergency Dispatch, Police Department, both Ledyard and Gales Ferry Fire Departments and their Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) were all invited to the meeting with the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team.

Councilor Buhle stated that she would like to begin by thanking everyone who attended the 3rd Annual Regatta Day Festival in Gales Ferry, celebrating one of Gales Ferry's oldest traditions; the Harvard-Yale Regatta. She stated that it was great to see a pavilion full of people to watch the races down the Thames River. She thanked Councilor Paul for his support with the live-stream of the races for all of the community who came out to support the event. She also gave a special thanks to the Ledyard Fire Company, Gales Ferry Fire

Police, Ledyard Public Library, Ledyard Lions, Ledyard Rotary, and Ledyard Parks and Recreation for all of their support in making it a successful event. She noted that Harvard won for the first time in ten years.

Councilor Buhle went on to provide an update regarding Ledyard's Application that was submitted to Senator Chris Murphy and Senator Richard Blumenthal for the Congressionally Directed Spending Grant to purchase and updated their CAD/RMS system for their Emergency Dispatch/Police Department noting their Project Application was selected and was moving forward. She stated that Ledyard's Grant Application was now in the hands of the Senate Appropriations Committee and that the town would find out more in the fall.

Councilor Buhle stated on another note, that she wanted to take a moment to share her thoughts and comments after last week's June 5, 2024 Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion meeting. She stated although she was not a member of the Committee, that she attended the meeting and that she would like to share some words.

Councilor Buhle stated, First, that she wanted to express her sincerest appreciation for the Committee and the work they have put in over the years to improve the communication between residents in our town. She stated when she saw that the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (CRC-DEI) had planned a Pride Event for our town that she was thrilled, noting that many surrounding towns have Pride Events, and so she was excited to see one here in Ledyard.

Councilor Buhle stated the Pride Event does not come without controversy. She stated while there was procedural controversy regarding the planning, advertisement, and endorsement of the event, there were also some deeper concerns that she had regarding some of the emails that were sent about the event, and further concerns when considering comments made at the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion June 5, 2024 meeting in opposition to the event.

Councilor Buhle went on to note that the first thing she wanted to address was the concept that Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion should not be hosting the event, but partnering with someone else who was hosting it. She noted in past years, as a resident that she asked the Ledyard Farmer's Market to make one of their June Markets a Pride Month Theme, noting that the Farmers Market promptly shut her idea down and said "No". She stated that this showed that there was no forum for acceptance; stating that the idea was that they would need to wait for someone else to hold a Pride Event and then tag onto it; however, she stated that this was never going to happen, unless they did it.

Councilor Buhle continued by stating when planning the Pride Event, there was a statement that government does not need to host a Pride Event, in general, and should not be involved, especially including the comparisons to "*Should there be a straight Christian event?*" She stated that members of the LGBTQIA+ Community do not feel safe or welcomed in many spaces. She stated the concept of a Pride Pizza Party creates a space where we can hang out with our LGBTQIA+ friends and neighbors and let all of the members of the LGBTQIA+

Community in our town know that they have a space where they can be welcomed and come as they are without fear of judgment or intolerance.

Councilor Buhle stated that Pride had a history going back to 1969, and the first federal recognition of Pride Month came in 1999. She stated in the 25th year of a Federally recognized Pride Month, that it was about time that Ledyard started to recognizing it.

Councilor Buhle went on to state that one of the other concerns she had was with the qualification that a family member of Councilor Paul stated that they felt that there was not a need for a Town Pride Event and that they would not attend. She stated that she was glad that Councilor Paul spoke with those in his life in this community, but that she wanted to stress that the voice of one or two cannot suppress the voices of the many others who have asked for a Pride Event; or were speaking up in-favor of a Pride Event. She stated in no way was this event mandatory for anyone, and like many other things, if you do not feel like a Pride Event was your thing, then don't go to it. However, she stated that disagreement or disinterest by a few does not mean that we should not do it at all. She stated one or two members of a community cannot speak for an entire community; and that there was no harm in hosting a Pride Event with potentially low attendance. However, she stated that there was harm in dismissing our LGBTQIA+ Community because we have decided they do not want it, especially when a member of the LGBTQIA+ Community was on our Town Council and speaks for it as well.

Councilor Buhle stated that she also had friends in the LGBTQ Community and friends who are parents of LGBTQIA+ Children, and while discussing this with them, one of her friends remarked, *"I have to speak up. I am the parent of a trans kid."* She stated this statement struck her, noting that it was not the responsibility of the marginalized to fight for change and recognition. Furthermore, she stated that another friend stated: *"That they would fight for their trans child, but their trans child deserved to be themselves without getting dragged into this and labeled as 'The Trans Kid.'"*

Councilor Buhle went on to note a short but related story stating that she shaved her head twice for childhood cancer research, and that her child has never had cancer. She stated when people have asked her about it, that her response was that *"I hope that if my child had cancer, parents of those whose children didn't have cancer would fight for me."* She stated that this example was the equivalent to her. She stated that her son has not yet expressed if he is gay, trans, or queer, but she knew that by standing up for those who were gay, trans, or queer, that he would always know he has a safe space to be whoever he is.

Councilor Buhle stated Lastly, with the Community Relations Committee's focus on mental health over the last few years, that it was extremely important for us to embrace and support our LGBTQIA+ Community and Youth. She noted that according to *The Trevor Project*, a nonprofit dedicated to LGBTQIA+ Youth Suicide Prevention, 41% of LGBTQIA+ young people ages 13-24 seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including roughly half of transgender and nonbinary youth. Additionally, only one third of LGBTQIA+ young people experience parental acceptance, with one third experiencing rejection and one third not disclosing their identity until they were adults. She stated that LGBTQIA+ young adults

who report high levels of parental rejection were eight times more likely to report attempting suicide. She stated while we cannot control whether our LGBTQIA+ youth was accepted at home by their parents, we can create safe spaces and events that show that our town was welcoming and supportive. Just over 1 in 3 transgender and nonbinary youth found their home to be gender-affirming, with 52% finding their school to be affirming. *The Trevor Project's* Research consistently finds that LGBTQIA+ young people report lower rates of attempting suicide when they have access to LGBTQIA+ affirming spaces.

Councilor Buhle went on to state that she could go on reading statistics about why this was important all night, but people were not statistics. She stated that there were absolutely members of our community who need to know we are an affirming, supportive community. She stated that we must be more than a “*Town for all Seasons*”; but a “*Town for all People*.”

Councilor St. Vil noted that the tonight’s theme was “*All of our Residents; and All of our People*”. He stated with this in mind he wanted to remind residents with the warmer weather there were more people out on the roads. He stated that he lived in the Highlands subdivision and that folks were out walking. He stated that drivers need to be mindful that there were folks on the road, noting that he has seen a lot of young children out, and he recently saw a young child run out into the road after a ball. He stated that the same applied to motorcycles, noting as motorcycle enthusiasts were also out on the road that you may not hear them coming. He stated these were safety precautions that they needed to be mindful of as the weather was warming up.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated that she was excited to announce that Ledyard would be starting a Food Scrap Compost PILOT Program. She explained that the State of Connecticut has been working on a *Removal of Organics from the Waste Stream Bill* which once approved, would be implemented in 2027. She explained with the July, 2022 closing of the East Harford MIRA Facility (Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority) that 30 Municipalities had to find another facility, because all the Incinerator Plants were at capacity. Therefore, she stated the State has been trucking 800,000 tons of Solid Waste out of Connecticut every year to landfills in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York. She stated Food Scraps were the major component of household trash explaining that because of its water content that it made the trash heavy. She stated by removing Food Scraps from the waste stream that they could significantly reduce the tonnage that was sent to landfills and incinerators and reduce costs. She noted the Town of Ledyard pays more than \$1 million every year to haul trash from everyone’s homes.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry went on to note that all residents could participate in the Ledyard’s Food Scrap PILOT Program, but that the starter kits would only be given for free to 100 residents on first-come first-serve basis. She stated the Blue Earth Composting Starter Kits would provide 100 compost bins and compostable bags. In addition, there would be Compost Carts at the Transfer Station where residents would be required to drop off their food scraps. She stated that they would be providing educational materials and that that she hoped the PILOT Program would be successful and would be a good start in preparation for the State’s 2027 implementation of *Removal of Organics from the Waste Stream Bill*.

Chairman Rodriguez announced Ledyard High School's Class of 2024 Graduation would be held on Friday, June 14, 2024. She wished all of the Graduates a great future in whatever endeavors they have planned post-graduation.

VIII. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the following Town Council Minutes

- Special Meeting Minutes of May 22, 2024 6:15 p.m. (Executive Session)
- Regular Meeting Minutes of May 22, 2024

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

VOTE: 9 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOTION to approve the Town Council Special Meeting Minutes of May 22, 2024 6:30 p.m. (Executive Session)

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

VOTE: 8 - 0 - 1 Approved and so declared (Saccone Abstained)

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

IX. COMMUNICATIONS

Communications List - June 12, 2024

Chairman Rodriguez stated a Communications List has been provided on the meeting portal for tonight's meeting, and she noted referrals were listed.

X. REFERRALS

XI. COUNCIL SUB COMMITTEE, LIAISON REPORTS

1. Administration Committee

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated the Administration Committee met earlier this evening and addressed the following: (1) Approved to forward a reappointment to the Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Commission; (2) Proposed amendments to Ordinance #100-015 "*An Ordinance Establishing a Permanent Municipal Building Committee for the Town of Ledyard*"; (3) A proposed "*An Ordinance Providing Tax Relief For Gold Star Families in the Town of Ledyard*"; (4) Proposed amendments to Ordinance #100-0111 "*An Ordinance Establishing Social Services Board For the Town of Ledyard*"; (5) Creating an Ethics Commission for the Town of Ledyard.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED**2. Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion**

Councilor Brunelle stated the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion met on June 5, 2024 and discussed many things including the Pride Pizza Event which was going to be held on June 29, 2024. She stated the Committee's Mission Statement was to "engage" with the community. She stated "engage" was an action verb, noting that that it was not just to deal with complaints or passively talk with people. She stated it was to engage the community and help the community. She stated this year they also added the following words to the Committee's title "*Diversity, Equity & Inclusion*" because they wanted to be more inclusive and have equity and to acknowledge our diversity in their lovely Town of Ledyard. She stated it was a great town, noting that there were many people who live here, and they were all great. She stated as the Chair of the Committee that her plan was to engage with the community in all different sorts of things like Pride Month, Senior Citizens Day , noting that even though they have a Senior Center that she has seen other towns and cities in other states that have a special day for their senior citizens and celebrate them. She stated that she did not see why they should just say "*Oh the Senior Center handles that*". She stated that did not mean that they could not have a special day for them. She stated having a special day for the senior citizens should not make everyone else angry. Just like they could have a special day for the Children on the field to celebrate the children in their town; or Black History Month or Women's History Month. She stated celebrating people in our community had nothing to do with putting down or angering other people, noting that was other peoples' reactions, stating that they cannot control everybody's reactions, and they cannot control everything else, but you could control yourself. She stated that she would like to see this town to be known for being more inclusive, and more welcoming and friendly. She stated right now, to be bluntly honest, Ledyard was not in many eyes, welcoming of our kind, or even a place where people wanted to live. She stated sadly she thought people did not want to know that this was the truth. She stated unfortunately, a lot of people speak badly about Ledyard, and that she wanted to see this change. She stated that she wanted this town to be great, noting that we have a wonderful Farmers Market, noting that it was fantastic, it was one of the best in the state, and she questioned why they could not be the best in everything. She stated they had a fantastic Regatta, noting that we needed more things like that, more things to lift up our community. She stated this Community Relations Committee was for all positive, not for negative. She stated that she was proud of the Committee and what they do.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED**3. Finance Committee**

Councilor Saccone stated the Finance Committee met on June 5, 2024 and they have a number of items on tonight's Agenda.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED**4. Land Use/Planning/Public Works Committee**

Councilor St. Vil stated the LUPPW Committee met on June 3, 2024 and discussed the

process to seek a historic designation for the Spicer Homestead Ruins that was located within the Clark Farm property. He noted the LUPPW Committee would be sending a letter to the Historic District Commission to request they take the following actions: (1) Provide a general description of the area to be included within the historic designation, including the total number of buildings and landmarks according to their known or estimated ages; (2) Create a map showing the exact boundaries of the area to be included within the historic designation; (3) Request that the Administrative Control of the designated area of the Spicer Homestead Ruins be assigned to the Historic District Commission. He stated once they complied this information the LUPPW Committee would come to the Town Council to request the assignment of Administrative Control of the historically designated area to the Historic District Commission

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

5. Liaison Reports

Permanent Municipal Building Committee

Councilor Brunelle stated the PMBC would be meeting on June 17, 2024.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Ledyard Center Fire Department

Councilor Saccone stated the new Fire Truck- Tanker was now in service. He stated because Ledyard did not have a lot of fire hydrants in town that it was important to have a tanker truck stating that the new truck could bring 3,000 gallons of water to a fire.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Gales Ferry Fire Department

Councilor Saccone stated the Gales Ferry Organization President (Forman) met with State Senator Cathy Osten to discuss the \$500,000 Grant Application that the State approved. He stated Senator Osten assisted them with the completion of the necessary forms. He stated that the Gales Ferry Fire Department hoped to receive the funding within a couple of weeks, so that they could move forward with repairing the roof and purchase some needed firefighting equipment.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Retirement Board

Chairman Rodriguez stated the Retirement Board would be meeting on June 18, 2024.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Ledyard Farmers' Committee

Chairman Rodriguez stated the Farmers Market was in full swing, noting that they had their 2024 Season Kick-Off on June 5th stating that the Market would be held each Wednesday from 4:00- 7:00 p.m. thru September 11th at the Lower Town Green. She stated they had a lot of attendance, good food, and good entertainment.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Housing Authority

Councilor Paul stated the Housing Authority met on June 3, 2024 and addressed the following: (1) Election of Officers - Councilor Paul explained that due to a procedural oversight, noting that they did not second the motion to elect officers, that the Board would need to vote on their officers again at their July 1, 2024 meeting; and (2) Renovation-Upgrades Kings Corner Senior Citizens Housing Facility - Councilor Paul stated there were a few areas where the concrete needed to be redone, noting that the work was under warranty.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Ledyard Beautification Committee

Councilor Buhle stated the Beautification Committee met on June 4, 2024 and were working on a rock painting project and other projects.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Economic Development Commission

Councilor Buhle stated the EDC cancelled their June 4, 2024 meeting because they did not have a quorum.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Inland Wetland and Water Courses Commission

Councilor St. Vil stated the IWWC met on June 4, 2024 noting that they primarily discussed the legal jurisdiction regarding the IWWC Applications, prior to the Planning & Zoning Commission's approval. He stated this discussion would continue into the future.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Planning & Zoning Commission

Councilor St. Vil stated the Planning & Zoning Commission held a Special Meeting on May 30, 2024 to address an Application regarding a proposed development on Route 12, Gales Ferry, which was withdrawn. He stated the Planning & Zoning Commission's next Regular Meeting was scheduled for June 13, 2024.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Water Pollution Control Authority

Councilor Dombrowski stated the WPCA met on May 28, 2024 and addressed the following: (1) Ledyard Center Sewer Line Extension - Councilor Dombrowski stated that the WPCA discussed Property Owners' request regarding their ability to hook into the sewer line coming into Ledyard Center; (2) Billing & Collection Reports - Councilor Dombrowski noted at the Town Council's January 24, 2024 meeting he reported that a Budget Consultant who was hired, reported that the WPCA Budget was insolvent and that they would need to increase their rates by 100%. He stated in light of the Consultant's Report the WPCA was continuing to review the data collected. He stated based on their initial review to-date, the WPCA believed that they were not insolvent; however, they needed to continue to collect data to continue their review; (3) Payment of Invoices - Councilor Dombrowski stated the WPCA noted that they were receiving invoices late; and that they would follow up with the Finance Department to inquire about the delay of invoices being forwarded to them.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Library Commission

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated the Library Commission's next meeting was scheduled for June 17, 2024.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

Board of Education

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated the Board of Education met on June 11, 2024 and addressed the following: (1) Capital Non Recurring Account - The Board of Education discussed submitting a request to use their Capital Funds which included: Parts for Maintenance and Equipment, Replacement of the Air Compressor for the HVAC; etc.; (2) Agri-Science (ASTE) Grant Funding - The 2024 Agricultural Science Technology Education (ASTE) 2024 List included: Livestock supplies and equipment; small animals equipment, etc.; (3) Curriculum Revisions; (4) Proposed amendments to Ordinance #100-015 "*An Ordinance Establishing a Permanent Municipal Building Committee for the Town of Ledyard*". The Board of Education would provide suggestions to the Administration Committee.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED**XII. REPORT OF THE MAYOR:**

Chairman Rodriguez noted because Mayor Allyn, III, was not able to attend tonight's meeting he provided a report that she would read as follows: (1) Revaluation Services Bid 2024-04- (Real Estate Five-Year Full Revaluation) - The Bid Opening was held on May 30, 2024, and because only two Bids were received that a request for a Bid Waiver would be submitted to the Finance

Committee. The low bid was \$257,000; however, only \$180,000 had been budgeted for this work; therefore, additional funding would need to be identified; (2) Nuclear Safety FEMA Evaluated Drill was held on June 4, 2024. The FEMA Evaluators provided Ledyard with an Excellent Grade. Mayor Allyn, thanked Emergency Management Director Jim Mann, Ledyard Center Fire Chief Jon Mann, and Gales Ferry Fire Member Ted Day for their outstanding work; (3) School(s) Consolidation/Improvement Project(s) (Middle School & Gallup Hill School) - The Town received an interim payment for school projects in the amount of \$7.8 million, with approximately \$ 2.2 million that would be due as the final disbursement from the State; (4) Yale-Harvard Regatta - Mayor Allyn drew race lanes for the 157th Yale-Harvard Regatta in New London on June 6, 2024. The Regatta was held in Gales Ferry on June 8, 2024 noting that it was the oldest collegiate sporting event; (5) Mayor Allyn attended Chamber Legislative Breakfast on June 11, 2024; (6) Bonding Plan has been delayed to next Spring, 2025. The town would use their own funds to float the needs until Spring. This approach would save the town thousands of dollars in bond issuance costs; (7) EPPI (Emergency Planning and Preparedness Drill) Drill was held today. The simulation was a state-wide cyber-attack on elections with physical attacks on polling places. The Drill was very long but included some excellent issues to be prepared for.

Questions to the Mayor - None.

RESULT: RECEIVED AND FILED

XIII. OLD BUSINESS

None.

XIV. NEW BUSINESS

2. Community Relations Committee

1. Discuss Pride Flag.

Councilor Brunelle stated on June 5, 2024 that the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (CRC-DEI) had a wonderful meeting at which they talked about the Pride Pizza Event. She stated that during their meeting the Committee also discussed raising the Pride Flag to show that the LGBTQIA+ Community was welcome in our town, as many other towns in the State of Connecticut do, their State Capitol does, and many across the country do. She stated the LGBTQIA+ Community were our neighbors, our friends, our colleagues, our children's friends. She stated that she was part of the LGBTQIA+ Community and that she wanted to thank Councilor Buhle for reviewing the statistics earlier this evening (VI. Councilor Comments - see above) because she was one of the one-third who did not disclose until she was an adult, stating it was easy not too; because she was married to lovely husband, and therefore, there was no reason to disclose. However, she stated it was who she was, noting that she loved everybody. She stated that she wanted to read part of the Office of Legislative Research Report #2024-R-0078 "*Unofficial Flags on Town and School Property*" that was provided by the Mayor and was included with the Agenda packet on the Meeting Portal as follows:

“Unofficial Flags Generally Allowed. Other towns, including Easton, New Britain, and South Windsor, among others, have policies or ordinances that generally allow unofficial flags but impose certain restrictions or requirements.”

Councilor Brunelle stated as many mentioned this evening there was risk and she commented that just being alive was risk. She stated they have children, and they want them to experience riding a bike, noting that it was wonderful, thrilling, fantastic. However, she stated that there was risk, because they could get hurt. Therefore, she stated they minimize that risk, we give them a helmet, and teach them how to ride their bike correctly, noting that they were not taking away their enjoyment, and they could still go on with their lives. She stated they cannot live their lives hiding in a box and being afraid of what might be done. She continued to note the Office of Legislative Research Report #2024-R-0078 *“Unofficial Flags on Town and School Property”* as follows:

“Manchester’s policy allows unofficial (i.e., commemorative and organizational) flags on a designated flagpole upon request to and approval by the board of directors. The board will not consider certain categories of flags (e.g., those of a particular religion, political party, business, or those that enable violence, discrimination, prejudice, or racism) and the policy does not apply to board of education-controlled properties. The policy specifies that flagpoles are not intended to serve as a forum for free expression.

***Government Speech and Private Speech**The U.S. Supreme Court established that a government entity is entitled to say what it wishes and to select the views it wants to express*”

Councilor Brunelle stated instead of the flagpole being a form for free expression that it would be our Government Entity to say what the government wished to express. She stated in this case our Government Entity would be expressing that the LGBTQIA+ Community was welcome in our community and celebrated. She stated it was Pride Month and that was what Pride Month was about, noting that it was about celebrating and coming together as a community.

Councilor Brunelle stated after all of the discussion, that she would recommend the Town Council adopt an Ordinance similar to other towns who have already done the work, noting that they already had the words that would minimize and mitigate the risk, and so they would not have to worry about *“If they fly this flag, that they would then have to flag that flag, etc.”* She stated the ordinance would include the caveat that *“no religion, political party, business, or those that enable violence, discrimination, prejudice, or racism flags would be considered”*. She stated the flagpole was not here for free expression, noting that the flagpole was to represent what the government, and what we want to express. She stated our government is our town, we are the government of the people. She stated that she found it funny that everybody acted so scared of the government *“Oh what of the government; what if we get sued, what if we get....”*. She stated we are the government, and we should not be afraid of ourselves, especially if they were trying to do something positive. She stated because she did not start out as a political person, and she came to the Town Council just wanting to help the community, that maybe she was a little naïve. She stated that she chooses to see the good in people, she chooses to want to help people, she chooses to want to lift up others.

Councilor Brunelle noted some comments that were said earlier this evening as follows:

- “*Sexual orientation equaled a political party*”. Councilor Brunelle stated that this statement was prejudice, and that sexual orientation does not prejudice, political party.
- “*Showing our Pride would make other people angry*”. Councilor Brunelle questioned why would showing their pride make others angry. She stated this was not a reason to show a Pride Flag.

Councilor Brunelle stated the goal of their community was for the strong to support the weak to help lift people up. She stated raising the Pride Flag was the right thing to do, noting that it was about time they did it and joined the other towns, cities, and states across the country that do it. She stated that she understands the risks, but that they have things they could put in place to mitigate the risk. She stated that she did not think it was right to discriminate, noting that this was right from her heart.

Councilor Ryan stated that he had some concerns about flying flags, other than the U.S. American Flag and the State of Connecticut Flag, on town-owned property. He stated that his first concern was that we, as a town, have no official policy governing what flags were allowed to be flown on town property and when they can be flown. He stated in the Office of Legislative Research Report #2024-R-0078 “*Unofficial Flags on Town and School Property*” they cited the case of “*Shurtleff Et Al. V. City of Boston*”, noting that the Supreme Court of the United States held that since *Boston, at the time, had no written policies or clear internal guidance about what flags groups could fly and what those flags would communicate, third-party flag raisings would be classified as private, not government, speech*”. Therefore, he stated without a written policy, denial of any third party flag would likely end up being construed as a denial of free speech, a legal quandary we do not want to find ourselves embroiled in.

Councilor Ryan went on to note as they saw just last week in Wethersfield, Connecticut, even when following a written policy approved by their town council, the town could get unnecessarily embroiled in a social controversy that could cast a dark shadow over the town, whether it was merited or un-merited. He stated in the Wethersfield case, even the author of the town’s Flag Policy commented that it seemed like they would need to revisit their policy in light of these recent events. Councilor Ryan stated that interestingly, when the policy was first adopted, some council members in Wethersfield noted the policy may lead down a slippery slope of deciding winners and losers. He questioned whether these were the kinds of attention and issues they needed to attract in Ledyard?; noting that he personally does not think so.

Councilor Ryan continued by noting that their current and past Mayors established and continued a wise, but informal, policy of only flying official U.S. American Flag and State of Connecticut Flag on town property. He stated that he felt that Ledyard should continue this practice, and more than that, they should formalize it in a written policy, especially in light of what Wethersfield was enduring, and in the interest of keeping the town from engaging in wasteful, potentially costly, legal problems. He stated in this case, the conservative path forward was the best path.

Councilor Paul stated he loved everyone too, and that he believed in lifting everyone up, which was the reason he gets involved in social things through his music and other things that were

outside of his role and responsibilities on the Town Council. He stated that he would only reiterate the comments he provided earlier this evening (VI. Council Comments - see above). However, he stated that he would bring up the notion that if he were to come to the Town Council or the Mayor's Office and asked that the town raise the Pro-Life Flag because he would like to represent the minority of all the babies that were being murdered all over the world, that Flag might offend some people. Therefore, he questioned whether his right to fly the Pro-Life Flag would be less likely than the Pride Flag or a flag from any other group; and he questioned who would make that determination. He stated he agreed with Councilor Ryan's comments, noting that it was a slippery slope when the government takes on this type of role. He stated this was not about denying somebody their rights; or telling somebody that they do not like them; or they were not welcome. He stated as individuals, and through the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (CRC-DEI) that there were plenty of things they could do to make sure resources were available. He stated the Town Council's job was to govern and to stand up for those rights, but not necessarily to put the town into a position where they would not like to find themselves in, as Councilor Ryan mentioned. He stated it was unfair to associate the two, stating because they do not want to a fly flag or host something that it meant that they did not care about people, stating that perception was absolutely not true. He concluded his comments by stating that what was good for one was good for others too.

Chairman Rodriguez stated for transparency, that she met with the Mayor last week, and they discussed the Pride Flag. She noted that the Mayor stated there was an unwritten policy not to fly other flags except for the American Flag and the State Flag. She went on to note that the Mayor stated if he were to raise the Pride Flag that it would be on the flagpole behind the Bill Library by the War Memorial Monument. She stated that she thought that this was something the Mayor could bring up to the Town Council. She stated since their meeting, that yesterday the Mayor stated that he misspoke, and he would not fly the Pride Flag by the War Memorial Monument, but that if he had to, that he would fly the Flag on the Town Green. She stated at 3:51 p.m. this afternoon the Town Council received an email from the Mayor that she would read into the record:

"All:

I cannot attend tonight due to a conflicting personal matter. I have attached my report for the last two weeks. Please reach out with any questions or added detail you may need.

In regards to the so-called unofficial flag flying, I have continued a policy that has extended over many mayors which simply says:

"We fly the American flag and the State of CT flag and nothing else".

On a recent occasion, a unofficial flag was raised and when I saw it, I immediately had Public Works remove it. This policy is clear, avoids any perceived conflicts and unintended consequences and does not get the town into situations such as determining what is hateful, objectionable, offensive and otherwise- and in whose opinion is any flag any one of these things to name but a few. I do not support changing this policy that has guided us.

It is also noted that flags must be raised and lowered on a daily basis on an unlit flagpole. Per union contract, the work of raising and lowering the flags is by Public Works only. If the Town Council chooses to override the standing policy, there will be an added labor cost associated with the raising and lowering of said flag on a daily basis- and holidays is automatic 4 hours of overtime to complete said task, per union contract.

Please remember, everything has a cause, and every cause has a flag. A policy change could very well be opening Pandora's box.

I have also attached the Office of Legislative Research white paper on unofficial flags. This report was issued May 7, 2024.”

Councilor Ryan stated Point of Order, noting that the Mayor was not present this evening; and although he understood that Chairman Rodriguez stated that she had conversations with the Mayor, that because the Mayor was not present this evening to either confirm or deny, or talk about what conversations transpired between himself and Chairman Rodriguez, that it was not fair to have those comments in the record. Therefore, he asked that Chairman Rodriguez’s comments prior to reading the Mayor’s email dated June 12, 2024 be struck from the record.

Councilor Brunelle stated that it was not fair to have Chairman Rodriguez statements regarding her conversation with the Mayor struck from the record because, it would be insinuating that she was lying. She stated lying was not allowed per Roberts Rules. Councilor Ryan stated that it doesn’t matter, noting that the Mayor was not present this evening to talk about what he said or did not say, and her statements were hearsay. He stated he would not like it if in his absence someone said he said something when he was not present to confirm or deny it, when it was going on public record.

Chairman Rodriguez called a Point of Order; and thanked Councilor Ryan for his comments, noting that she would take his request into consideration.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated that her comments were not regarding whether they should fly the Pride Flag or not, noting that her comments were more about the June 5, 2024 Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (CRC-DEI). She stated that she was part of a minority group, and she noted one of the statements was that they “*Had to have government out of peoples lives*”. However, she stated the reality was that government was made “*By the People; for the People*”

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated if it was not for the government:

- That she probably would not be here.
- She would not be able to run for elected office.
- Her husband would have to sign a credit card application for her.
- There would still be segregated Schools for Black people and for white people.
- It would be illegal for people from different races to get married.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated when we celebrate something, that it did not mean that the person who was not being celebrated was less. She stated it just meant in that specific moment they were celebrating something. She stated the turn for others to be celebrated would come, noting as Councilor Brunelle mentioned that she wanted to have a day for Senior Citizens, and a day for Children's Day. She stated when she first moved to Ledyard the Parks & Recreation Commission had a Children's Day in September to celebrate the kids. She stated that she did not think anyone would complain about celebrating kids. She stated in the month of June, that maybe they celebrate Pride Month, and she noted that the kids who were not gay should not get mad, noting that they could have a celebration for all kids later on. She noted Councilor Ryan's comments about June being Men's Mental Health Month (VI. Councilor Comments), and she stated that they do not talk a lot about Men's Mental Health, which should be brought to the forefront, because it was a problem. However, she stated because they cared about Men's Mental Health that did not mean that they did not care about Women's Mental Health. She stated just because they speak about a something at a specific moment that did not mean that they did not care about other things. She stated everyone experiences life differently, noting that she was an only child, but that she has three kids. She stated her oldest child experiences life differently from her second and third child; and the same was true for her other two children. She stated we all say: *"We treat all of our children the same, why are they all so different"*. She stated many night's the Town Council meetings were empty, and that she found it sad that there were so many people present this evening to talk against Pride; and they were against a celebration for a community that was discriminated against and had a hard time for many things. She stated that she wished they could all get along and celebrate each other. She stated it was true that they do not have a day to celebrate people who were straight, but that they celebrate their weddings, and many other things. However, she stated up to a few years ago gay people could not celebrate a wedding because they were not allowed to get married, which was a privilege that straight people had. She noted as Councilor Buhle stated (VI. Councilor Comments- see above) that she shaved her head to support Children's Cancer Research; and that she hoped that other people would do the same. Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated that she had a child that had cancer, who was a minority and that she appreciated all that Councilor Buhle did to bring awareness to Childhood Cancer. She concluded her remarks by again stating government was *"By the People; for the People"*. She stated that they were here for the people, noting they could have differences, but as long as they were not discriminating or excluding people, that they should not shut them down just because it was something they did not agree with. She stated if there was something she did not agree with that she just did not participate; however, she stated if it made someone else happy; and they were not hurting anybody, that they should do it. She stated with regard to the Pride Flag that perhaps enacting a policy would resolve some of the issues.

Councilor Dombrowski stated that he was not against any of this, noting that he was good with having a Pride Event in town. However, he stated the question was *"Should it be sponsored by the government?"*. He stated by the government sponsoring a Pride Event would lead to other questions such as:

- What other Organizations, and Special Interest Groups do they sponsor an event for?
- Where do they stop?
- What's next?

Councilor Dombrowski stated that the same questions would apply to flying other unofficial

flags. He stated that this discussion was not against the Pride Flag, noting that the Pride Flag brought this discussion to the forefront. He stated the discussion was about:

- What do they not allow.
- Who makes that determination
- What slippery slope do they go down when someone wanted to fly the Gadsden Flag. Councilor Dombrowski stated the Gadsden Flag was their fight for independence in the American Revolutionary War. However, he stated today, some find the Flag offensive, because it was adopted by a specific organization. He questioned which definition they should go with?

Councilor Dombrowski continued by stating that he would agree with drafting policy, however, he stated the policy would need to be carefully and conservatively crafted. He stated if they limited some that the town could end up in court. He stated that he was not afraid of the town going to court, noting that they have gone to court plenty of times, however, he questioned whether they wanted to incur the costs of going to court because someone did not agree with something this Town Council made. He concluded his comments by stating that this was not against any group, noting that they should not treat any group differently from any other group regardless of race, creed, color, religion, their beliefs in any shape or form. He stated that they should not be more welcoming to one group, and not welcome another group. They should not say *“Your just the average guy we do not care, we do not need to have a special day for you.”* He recommended caution and that they take deliberate steps to whatever path this Town Council decides.

Councilor Buhle stated she wanted to reflect on the Mayor’s June 12, 2024 email that Chairman Rodriguez read earlier this evening. She noted Admiral Grace Hopper’s quote, which the Mayor has on his wall in his office which stated: *“The most dangerous phrase in the language is: We’ve always done it this way.”* She stated the statement *“We have always done it this way”* does not always stand as *“ We should always do it this way”* She stated she agreed that she was not ready to endorse flying a Pride Flag or any other unofficial flag until there was an ordinance in place, because they did not want to end up like Boston or in a similar situation. She stated should they find it necessary to enact an ordinance that they had a great group of Councilors that could work together to make it happen. She went onto state that this was not something they should continue to kick down the road, noting that they were continuously seeing this in other communities and towns, it was a step of acceptance. She stated as she previously mentioned (VI. Councilor Comments- see above) that acceptance was extremely important, showing a space where their community was welcoming and inclusive, and that affirming the LGBTQIA+ Community was important. She stated that this was something that they were going to have research; noting as Councilor Brunelle stated, they could work off of the framework from other towns’ ordinances to see what would make sense for Ledyard so that they were not flying every single flag.

Councilor St. Vil stated Councilor Garcia-Irizarry did a great job at expressing the sentiments of former President Barack Obama which was *“American was a work in progress”*. He stated this required reflection, discussion, and at times, it required them to change; noting that change was difficult. He went to state doing things in a certain way because that was the way they have always done it, was not an adequate response. However, he stated this proposal has forced them to ask the questions: *“Why was it important, Why as a town, Why as a government, would they*

raise the Pride Flag?”.

Councilor St. Vil stated to understand the “*Whys*” that they would have to:

- Understand what it was like to be a marginalized member in the community.
- Understand what it was like to be a minority in a community.
- Understand what it was like to lose a little bit of yourself to fit in with the whole.

Councilor St. Vil stated if they could put their mind in that space for a moment, where they felt the environment did not appear to be accepting of you, or the environment they were in promulgates the way that things have always been, and anything different was wrong; that it would make them feel like they were a sore thumb. He stated if they could put their brain there for a minute that it would make them feel pretty good to see another sore thumb; and a bunch or sore thumbs; or maybe some Tee-Shirts with a bunch of sore thumbs on them. He stated then they could understand how a flag would represent that they were being seen and they were a member of the community; and regardless of how they felt in this community that they were proactively saying that they were cared about. Therefore, he stated this was why he thought raising the Pride Flag was important. He stated a lot of the discussion he heard this evening made him realize that they lived in an imperfect society.

Councilor St. Vil went on to describe a Ruffles Potato Chip commercial that he recalled from his childhood as follows:

There were two Eskimos ice fishing, and one Eskimo had a bag of chips that he was eating one at a time. The second Eskimo asked if he could have a chip; and the first Eskimo responded stating: “*If I give you a chip, then I will have to give a chip to everyone.*” Councilor St. Vil noted that the camera then spanned the tundra showing that there was no one else there.

Councilor St. Vill stated this commercial made him realize that there could be ghosts in the room. He stated they could come up with reasons why they should not change, or why they should not act differently, or they should not do things differently. However, he stated it does not resolve them from the responsibility of putting the framework that would not allow everyone to just come in and say, “*I get a flag, and I get a flag, and you get a flag, and you get a flag...*”. He stated that there should be a process and framework in place, and that they should be expeditious about defining the framework, so they could raise a Pride Flag within this month, noting that he would advocate for that.

Councilor Saccone stated he was very inclusive for all walks of life. He stated his Brother-in-Law passed away from AIDS during the 1980, noting that he was gay. He stated back then they did not have the medicines they have today. He stated his Mother-in-Law, who was an old Polish Lady, and did not approve of her son being gay, stood by her son’s side, sitting by his bedside and holding his hand until he died. He stated the point of him sharing this story was going forward that they need to recognize the right people, the right organizations, and all walks of people, in a way that it does not bring into this town anger and hatred. He stated Ledyard had a vast amount of military people who have lived and retired here, as well as hard working engineers and blue color workers from General Dynamics, Electric Boat, noting that they had a diverse community. Therefore, he stated going forward that they could have a process to develop

an ordinance that would include flying organizations' flags in town, that represented our town.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she read everything that was sent to the Town Council Office, and the Office of Legislative Research Report #2024-R-0078 "*Unofficial Flags on Town and School Property*" that the Mayor provided; and she heard everyone's comments. She stated that she understood both sides and from what she had heard was that they were all passionate, and as Town Councilors they all wanted to do what was best. She stated because it sounded like the Town Council wanted to draft an ordinance to address the flying of flags that she would refer this matter to the Administration Committee. She also suggested the Administration Committee and the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion hold a Joint Meeting to work on the Ordinance.

It was noted that this process would not be completed in one month. Councilor St. Vil stated that he understood, noting that it was good to set smart goals.

RESULT: CONTINUE

3. Finance Committee

2. MOTION to authorize the purchase of a used SCBA Cascade filling station from the Town of Preston in the amount of \$5,000 from Account # 0210-20-2050-20501-57300 (LFD CNR New Equipment).

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Councilor Saccone stated the SCBA Cascade Filling Station was a compressor that produced breathing air for the Firefighters. He stated this was a used piece of equipment the Ledyard Center Fire Department would be purchasing from the Town of Preston, explaining that Preston was selling this unit because they were upgrading their equipment. He stated a new SCBA Cascade Filling Station would cost between \$80,000 - \$100,000. He stated the Ledyard Center Fire Department was looking to purchase this used SCBA Cascade Filling Station for \$5,000 as a stop gap measure until they can obtain grant funding, which Administrator of Emergency Services Steve Holyfield has been working on. He stated this used SCBA Cascade Filling Station was certified, the preventive maintenance has been done on the equipment regularly, and it was still producing certified air for the Firefighters, noting that air was their first line of defense for them in fighting fires. He noted that Administrator of Emergency Services Steve Holyfield was present this evening.

Administrator of Emergency Services Steve Holyfield noted that Ledyard Center Fire Chief Jon Mann was also attending tonight's meeting remotely. Mr. Holyfield explained that Ledyard has written and submitted the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) a couple of times, noting that they were successful at receiving the Grant Funding to purchase radio equipment; however, they have not been successful with receiving Grant Funding to purchase a SCBA Cascade Filling Station. He explained during the Finance Committee's June 5, 2024 that he and Councilor Ryan discussed that part of the reason they have not been able to obtain the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) to purchase a SCBA Cascade Filling Station was because they did not already have the equipment at the Ledyard Center Fire Station; and also, partly because they were competing

with larger Agencies and Fire Departments that had a higher call volume. He stated in the Evaluation of their Grant Application that Ledyard received 100% for the Technical portion, however, the issue they were having was when there was a tie, that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) looked at call volume, noting with Ledyard having between 600-700 calls a year, opposed to larger Fire Departments having over 1,000 calls a year, that it then puts Ledyard behind the curve in terms of qualifying for the grants.

Mr. Holyfield went on to state by purchasing the used SCBA Cascade Filling Station from Preston for a total cost of \$7,000 (\$5,000 equipment and \$2,000 installation) that it would keep the career Firefighters assigned to Ledyard Center and the Rescue Truck in Ledyard Center, so that they would not have to take the SCBA cylinders to Gales Ferry Fire Department and sit there for a couple of hours to fill the cylinders. He stated they have career staff assigned to the different sides of town to minimize response time, and to maximize customer service delivery to the taxpayers. He stated by purchasing the SCBA Cascade Filling Station that the volunteers could fill their air bottles after their trainings at 10:00 p.m., noting that they would not have to leave their air bottles out of service for a couple of days, etc. He stated being able to purchase this used SCBA Cascade Filling Station for a reasonable cost would help them achieve their goals; and would also help them with their next Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Application because they would be looking to replace existing equipment. He stated that he hoped that there would be some resale value for this SCBA Cascade Filling Station when they do receive the Grant to purchase a new SCBA Cascade Filling Station.

Ledyard Center Fire Chief Jon Mann stated that Administrator of Emergency Services Steve Holyfield did a good job covering the background regarding the need to purchase SCBA Cascade Filling Station. He stated having a SCBA Cascade Filling Station in-house would be a big savings in terms of filling the air bottles and having to take the Rescue Truck R-17 to Gales Ferry. He noted that it took upwards of an hour to fill the Rescue Truck's system, noting that the R-17 did not have the full capability of firefighting from a water standpoint.

VOTE: 9 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: Jessica Buhle

SECONDER: Tim Ryan

AYE: 9 Brunelle, Buhle, Dombrowski, Garcia-Irizarry, Paul, Rodriguez, Ryan, Saccone, and St. Vil

3. MOTION to appropriate and transfer \$129,698 from Account #10188210-59300 (Transferred Funds) to Account #2250101-49002 (BOE CNR Transfers In);

In addition, appropriate \$129,698 to Account #22570101-58261 (BOE CNR Ag-Science)..end

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Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Councilor Saccone explained for the Fiscal Year 2023/2024 the town budgeted \$850,000 to be received as revenue in the General Fund from the Agri-Science & Technology Education Grant (ASTE). However, he stated the town received \$979,698 which was \$129,698

more than the budgeted amount. He stated each year the excess funds received were transferred from the General Fund to the Board of Education's ASTE Capital Account to be used to purchase capital items for the Agri-Science Program.

VOTE: 9 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

4. MOTION to transfer tax accounts in the amount of \$68,748.54 listed in the report dated May 1, 2024, to the "Suspense File".

In addition, authorize the transfer of non-refundable over payments in the amount of \$197.41 to the general fund listed in the report dated May 21, 2024.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Councilor Saccone stated both the Suspense File and Overpayments were part of their year-end housekeeping work. He addressed the "*Suspense File*", explaining that each year the Tax Collector presented a list of accounts classified as "*Uncollectable*" to be transferred to the "*Suspense List*". He stated although this action would remove the taxes, for both property and motor vehicle, from an active status to a non-active status, that the Accounts that were being transferred would remain on the tax roll and would be flagged as a "*Suspense Item*". He went on to explain, except for bankruptcy or deceased, that the remaining bills would be sent to a Collection Agency; and would remain on the tax rolls for fifteen years from their due date. He stated by law the Collection Agency could not charge the town, noting that just a few weeks ago the Collection Agency recovered \$17,000 in back taxes for the town. He stated in some cases a State Marshall was used to notify taxpayers of their delinquent taxes and that this was also helpful. He stated this year's Suspense List was in-line with previous years, noting that last year the (FY 22/23) the Suspense File was \$60,136.02.

Councilor Saccone went on to note the *Overpayments* were just that, explaining that overpayments that were under \$5.00 do not have to be refunded, in accordance with CGS Sec.12-129. He also noted in accordance with Ordinance #200-002 "*An Ordinance Authorizing the Tax Collector to Retain Payments in Excess of the Amount Due Provided Excess is Less than Five Dollars*" over payments under \$5.00 shall be transferred to the General Fund. He stated for Fiscal Year 2023/2024 the Overpayments totaled \$197.41. He stated overpayments that were over \$5.00 were refunded.

VOTE: 9 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: Jessica Buhle

SECONDER: Tim Ryan

AYE: 9 Brunelle, Buhle, Dombrowski, Garcia-Irizarry, Paul, Rodriguez, Ryan, Saccone, and St. Vil

5. MOTION to approve Standing Bid Waivers as follows: Vendors included in the Town of Ledyard Standing Bid Waiver List for FY 2025, Capital Region Purchasing Council Bids, State of Connecticut bids, other states' bids, purchasing cooperatives (i.e. Sourcewell), and federal government bids.

Moved by Councilor Saccone, seconded by Councilor Buhle

Discussion: Councilor Buhle stated each year the Town Council approves a “*Standing Bid Waiver List*” for unique vendors, lowest possible prices obtainable, sole vendors, and fewer than three bidder situations, noting that the Town’s Purchasing Ordinance requires them to request competitive bids for items in excess of \$15,000. She noted the following vendors were new additions to the Standing Bid Waiver List for this year:

- AAA Police Supply - Police Ammunition - The State had a contract with AAA Police Supply, which was a favorable contract price.
- Nex-Gen System- Is a proprietary CAD System for the Police Department and Emergency Communications Dispatch.

Councilor Buhle stated Nex-Gen was the leading system in the State. She noted the Connecticut State Police and other Police Departments in their region such as Montville, Waterford, etc., were using this software. She stated by using Nex-Gen that Ledyard would be able to seamlessly collaborate with others in their region.

- MIS Department - MIS Director Justin Dube found a fiber supplier that provided equipment that was the same quality or better, for a lower price.
- Hydroseeding - Parks & Recreation - Because of the time involved to solicit bids and the timing to get the hydroseed down during the growing season that Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Scott Johnson, Jr. has requested this vendor be included on the Standing Bid Waiver List.

Councilor Saccone noted that some of the vendors on the Standing Bid Waiver List were proprietary explaining to maintain some of firefighting equipment that they could only use one vendor in the State because the manufacturer of that product only had one vendor in the State.

Councilor Ryan stated that because a vendor was on the Standing Bid Waiver List that it would not prevent them from going out to bid for those services, supplies, etc.

VOTE: 9 - 0 Approved and so declared

VOTE: 9 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: Jessica Buhle

SECONDER: Tim Ryan

AYE: 9 Brunelle, Buhle, Dombrowski, Garcia-Irizarry, Paul, Rodriguez, Ryan, Saccone, and St. Vil

6. MOTION to set Fiscal Year 2024/2025 a Real Estate and Personal Property Mil Rate of 35.21 and a Motor Vehicle Mil Rate of 32.46.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Saccone

Discussion: Councilor Saccone stated at the May 21, 2024 Referendum the townspeople approved

a Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of: \$67,430,573 (GG \$29,060,750; and BOE \$38,369,823) which represented a 0.65 mil increase or a 35.21 Mil Rate.

Background: The mil rate for motor vehicles was lower than the real estate mil rate because of the State's Car Tax Cap of 32.46 mils which remained the same as the previous year.

In accordance with the Town Charter, Chapter VII; Section 6 "*On or before the first day of July the Town Council shall fix the tax mils fourth Monday in June*".

VOTE: 9 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

XV. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Rodriguez noted the Finance Committee would not be meeting next week, because they had no New Business. Therefore, she asked if there was a consensus to cancel the June 26, 2024 Town Council Meeting.

By consensus the Town Council all agreed to cancel the June 26, 2024 Town Council Meeting.

Councilor Buhle moved to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Dombrowski

VOTE: 9 - 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

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

I, S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman of the Ledyard Town Council,
hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and
correct copy of the minutes of the Regular Town Council
Meeting held on June 12, 2024.

S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman

DISCLAIMER:

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

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

