



TOWN OF LEDYARD

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway
Ledyard, Connecticut 06339

Community Relations Committee For Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Meeting Minutes

Chairman S. Naomi
Rodriguez

Special Meeting

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

6:30 PM

Town Hall Annex - Hybrid Format

WORKING DRAFT

In -Person: Council Chambers, Town Hall Annex Building

Remote Participation: Information Noted Below:

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

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88235970547?pwd=1TIXd7dHOmrLlF4hllbBU1XnBF1p7q.1>

Or by Audio Only: Telephone: +1 646 558 8656; +Meeting ID: 882 3597 0547; Passcode: 239206

I CALL TO ORDER

the Meeting was called to order by Councilor Brunelle at 6:29 p.m. at the Annex Meeting Room - Town Hall Annex Building.

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

II. ROLL CALL

Present: April Brunelle
Gary Paul
Gary St. Vil

In addition, the following were present:

S. Naomi Rodriguez Town Council Chairman
Jessica Buhle Town Councilor
Carman Garcia-Irizarry Town Councilor
Roxanne Maher Administrative Assistant

III. RESIDENTS & PROPERTY OWNERS COMMENTS

Ms. Adrienne Parade, 5 Birtch Street, Ledyard, stated that she submitted a letter dated June 4, 2024 to the Town Council and the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion regarding the Pride Pizza Event. She stated that she would like to begin her remarks by reading her letter and email responses she received as follows:

“June 2, 2024

Dear Town Council,

I am incredibly grateful for the recent interest in supporting the minority communities in our town. It has been a challenge for the children of our schools to express themselves as, in a small rural town, it is easier for them to try to “blend in” instead of proudly displaying their cultural differences. Children learn from the community, and our community has recently shown incredible strides in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Thank you to the (previously named) Community Relations Committee and (recently renamed) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee. Communities are stronger when the minorities are celebrated and treated as equals. It is difficult for the white heterosexual male majority to understand that minorities need to be lifted up to level the playing field. A person in a position of privilege can certainly feel threatened when they are no longer able to hold onto that previously established generational advantage, and I am truly sorry for those councilors who feel threatened by the upcoming pride month celebrations.

I support CRC/DEI organizing a Pride event because Pride month is a celebration of a historically oppressed community, and we should not be threatened by this.

I think it's important that our town government shows support for the LGBTQIA+ community in hosting events and I appreciate that CRC/DEI is taking steps to do so.

Being gay is not a lifestyle choice, and I do not appreciate those in a position of power stating this falsehood in official town correspondence.

I would like town council and CRC/DEI to commemorate Pride Month by making our LGBTQIA+ communities feel welcome, appreciated, and valued.

Those holding positions of power in our community should remember that they represent everyone in our community. There are clearly growing pains regarding the way in which to celebrate our community, but a healthy dialogue is the way forward. I respect that the town is cognizant of the town budget and the cost of pizza for a community event. Perhaps if the cost of the pizza is too high, there may be people in the community willing to donate funds to show support for Pride Month. I am willing to contribute funds to this and I would like the community to know that I

celebrate and honor my LGBTQIA+ neighbors.

*Sincerely,
Adrienne Parad
Ledyard resident*

Ms. Parad stated that she received a couple of responses to her June 2, 2024 letter from a Town Council Member who reiterated a concern that the Pizza Party should not occur because town procedures were violated.

Ms. Parad went on to note that she had questions about what town procedures were violated, but because she did not get a response she submitted a second letter dated June 4, 2024 as follows:

“June 4, 2024

To: Community Relations Committee For Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Town of Ledyard

Re: Special Regular Meeting June 5, 2024, Section VII. New Business

Dear Committee Members,

As expressed in my previous letter and email correspondence, I am highly appreciative of the efforts to make our marginalized populations more visible and celebrated in our community. I am, unfortunately, highly concerned about the lack of transparency from Councilors Ryan and Paul. Counselor Ryan repeatedly stated that he is concerned about a procedural technicality. However, when asked about this multiple times in the e-mail thread, he did not address the question of HOW the procedure was violated.

Per the Mission Statement of the Community Relations committee, signed by Counselor Paul and adopted September 21, 2022:

“The Community Relations Committee is tasked with being both an advocate and a resource for the community by listening, communicating, and engaging with the community, educating ourselves, standing up to discrimination and racism in all forms. We do this by encouraging dialogue, promoting unity and understanding, and learning from one another as we continue to build a strong community together, making sure no-one is left behind.”

Ms. Parade stated I do not see how a consensus agreement between the members of the committee to have a pride day celebration violates this, and when asked specifically about which procedures were violated, I received no response or clarification. I only received a repeated statement that procedures were violated without any additional information.

This is certainly concerning, but I am even more concerned about the lack of respect for our LGBTQIA+ community, as none of my concerns documented in the letter

were addressed by either counselor. Our community needs to show that we honor, respect, and value all our neighbors. We need to make our community a safe place for minorities and LGBTQIA+ community members to call home. I do not feel that sugar-coating bigotry in the disguise of procedural violations is a good look for our Town Council, and I truly would like this to be addressed on the record by the counselors in question. Should I be granted the opportunity to speak at any meeting, I will be reading my statements.

*Sincerely,
Adrienne Parad
Ledyard Resident”*

Councilor Paul thanked Ms. Parad for her comments, noting that he had not seen the email response between Ms. Parad and Councilor Ryan. Chairman Rodriguez stated the email thread was attached to tonight’s agenda New Business Item #1.

Ms. Janis Vajdos, 11 Cranwood Road, Ledyard, stated she was excited to see that there was going to be a Pride Event in Ledyard this year. She stated that she supported the event and that she thought it was something that Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion should be supporting. She stated that she was disappointed to learn that there was no funding to support the event, and that it would require donations from Town Councilors or others who would like to donate to the Event. She stated if there was an opportunity where citizens could donate to a specific Fund, that they make the information available so that citizens could contribute to off-set the costs for Events such like this one and others. She stated that she wanted to show her support for Event and hoped that any controversy that has arisen about how the Event was advertised could be settled so that the Event could move forward to support the *LGBTQIA+* Community in Ledyard.

Mr. Bill Thorne, 3 Adios Lane, Ledyard, attending remotely, stated he understood the Event and that he thought that it was fine that community supported it. However, he questioned whether the Town paid for any other events such as Veterans Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, etc. in terms of using town funds for those types of events. He stated that using town funds for this Event may set a precedent.

Chairman Rodriguez stated for the first two-years of the Black History Month that she paid for the Prizes that were awarded. She stated for this year, which was the third year of the Black History Contest that both she and Councilor St. Vil provided the funds out of their own pockets. She went on to note for the Pride Pizza Event that she was going to pay for the food and drinks and that Councilor Brunelle was going to pay for the rest of the cost. She stated that no town funds would be used at all.

Mr. Thorne stated that he had heard that it was going to be an effort to get the town to pay for the upcoming Event. Chairman Rodriguez stated that was incorrect information. Mr. Thorne stated that he did not see a problem with how the Event was being funded.

Mr. Jacob Hurt, 6 Nugget Hill Drive, Gales Ferry, stated at the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion’s April 17, 2024 meeting he asked the Committee to consider a Pride Event and he thanked them for putting one forward. He stated Pride Celebrations were occurring all over Nation, and across the State of Connecticut Capitol in Hartford, and in Groton and Stonington. He stated the Events have typically included a gathering and flag raising at either a Town Hall or a Library or other Municipal Building, with appearances or sometimes remarks by Elected Officials. He stated that he did not know if they had pizza or not. He encouraged this Committee to follow thru, get through any procedural hurdles, and have a gathering and flag raising that would take place at the Town Hall or Bill Library. He stated they were far from alone from doing this, stating that it was time to move forward, noting that the Navy, Coast Guard, Pfizer and others were supporting Pride Month. He stated that these employers were not all of Ledyard’s residents but it covered a significant portion of them. He stated being recognized and accepted by your own government was lifesaving. He stated there was no room for antiquated views of the Welfare Bureau for the constituents of this State, noting that there was no cost to acknowledge their humanity. He stated this 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. However, he stated that they have denied for a long time, as you and I as gender and heterosexuals have not. He stated if the saying was true that the “*The Government that governs best, was that governs the closest*” than it was incumbent upon us to be different from the Nation-wide rhetoric, and the rhetoric at the State Government Level, which through legislation, fear, and mis-information that this group was being singled out. He stated we have a chance to set a precedent to set ourselves apart as a governing body here tonight. He encouraged the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion to continue to move forward with that. He thanked the Committee for putting the Event, and that he looked forward to having the procedural hurdles being cleared and having the Event.

Ms. Barbara Bouchard, 13 Deer Lane, Ledyard, stated that she fully supported the Event., and that she was excited to attend. She stated that was a teacher and citizen of Ledyard and that she was willing to pitch-in and conduct a fundraiser to help the one or two people who were paying for the Event; and to keep it going in the future.

IV. PRESENTATIONS / INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

None.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the Community Relations Committee Minutes of April 17, 2024

Moved by Councilor Paul, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. 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 Brunelle stated that she has reserved space for the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion at the following Farmers' Markets:

- *July 5, 2024 - Red-White & Blue - Feature First Responders and Volunteers.*
- *July 10, 2024 - Bee Bubbly - Feature the Town's Land Use Commissions.*
- *August 21, 2024 - Old Folks Day - Feature Mental Health Services, Heating Fuel & Utilities Assistance, Meal Delivery Services for homebound, Linda C. Davis Food Pantry, No interest Home Rehabilitation Loan, etc.*

Councilor Paul stated he would pass along the literature and other materials regarding the town services that the Committee handed out at the Farmers' Market in previous years, noting that he may not be available to attend all three of the Farmers' Market dates.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she had information regarding Mental Health Services and that she would invite the Brian Dagle Healing Hearts Foundation to participate with the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at the Farmers' Market on August 21, 2024 (Old Folks Day).

RESULT: CONTINUE

2. 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

· Long Pond on Lantern Hill Road (Showcase the Lantern Hill Waterfront Park, (2) Provide some history regarding Long Pond; (3) Provide information regarding the importance of preventing invasive plants from being transferred from different bodies of water, and (3) Engage residents)

· Winthrop Park near the Gales Ferry Community Center (Town Council April 10, 2024 meeting Mr. Kelly expressed concerns regarding the tennis courts, pickle ball courts, engage residents etc.).

- ***Lantern Hill Waterfront Park (Long Pond)***
Councilor Brunelle stated that she met with Mrs. Betsy Graham at Long Pond to discuss scheduling an Outreach Program in the Fall, 2024. She stated it was a beautiful area, noting that Parks & Recreation would be putting in a pavilion,

picnic tables, and a boat launch at the Park. She stated that Mrs. Graham was excited to: (1) Showcase the Lantern Hill Waterfront Park, (2) Provide some history regarding Long Pond; (3) Provide information regarding the importance of preventing invasive plants from being transferred from different bodies of water.

- ***Christy Hill Park on East Drive*** (see next item below)
- ***Winthrop Park near the Gales Ferry Community Center and or Christy Hill Park*** - Councilor St. Vil noted that the Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Commission were meeting on June 11, 2024 and that he would following up with Director Scott Johnson Jr. about scheduling events at these Parks.

RESULT: CONTINUE

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

- ***LED Digital Message Signs*** (Gales Ferry and Ledyard Center)

Councilor Paul noted that he did not see the May 20th & 21st Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget Referendum publicized on the Message Sign. He stated that he hoped the town could do more with the signs going forward.

Chairman Rodriguez stated the May 20th & 21st Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget Referendum was publicized on the Message Sign, noting that there was also a Budget Vote Banner on the fence at the Gales Ferry School and on the fence at the Town Green in Ledyard Cetner.

- ***Host Booths at the Farmers Market*** (see above Old Business Item #1)

RESULT: CONTINUE

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

Councilor Brunelle suggested this item be set aside for now.

Chairman Rodriguez noted that November was Indigenous People month and she stated that she would not mind organizing something with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council; and she questioned whether the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion would be open to doing that. The Committee agreed. Chairman Rodriguez invited Councilor St. Vil to join her in meeting with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council.

RESULT: CONTINUE

5. Research Community Organizations that provide Opioid and Substance Abuse Disorder,

Recovery, and Prevention Programs relative to the use of the Opioid Settlement Funding.

Councilor Brunelle questioned whether the Committee Members have reached out any local non-profit Organizations to learn about the programs they provide.

Chairman Rodriguez noted at the Finance Committee's June 5, 2024 meeting earlier this evening that Mayor Allyn, III, offered to invite SERAC to give a 10-15 presentation at a Town Council Meeting. She continued by stating the two Emergency Narcan Kits that the Town paid for with the Opioid Settlement money, through the Ledyard Prevention Coalition were installed noting that one Kit was located at the Town Green in Ledyard Center and one Kit was located at the Community Center in Gales Ferry. She stated the Ledyard Prevention Coalition would be periodically checking and restocking the Kits as needed. She went on to state residents were aware and happy that the Emergency Narcan Kits were available. However, she stated that they need to get the word out that the Kits were available, stating that they hoped to have less overdoses in our community.

Councilor Brunelle stated that she would work on the "Notify Me" and Social Media to help get the word out about the Emergency Narcan Kits.

Councilor Buhle stated during tonight's Finance Committee Meeting she suggested the Town purchase Narcan to distribute to the community at perhaps the Farmers Market or that the town hold a separate event to distribute the Narcan such as a Drug Take Back Day. She commented on the importance of educating the community on how to administer Narcan.

Chairman Rodriguez stated two years ago Ledge Light Health District gave demonstrations on how to administer Narcan at the Farmers Market and distributed the medication. She stated that she participated in one of the demonstrations that day, noting at the direction of Ledge Light Health District that she now carries Narcan in her car, because she was out in the community and by having the medication that she would be able to help someone should the need arise.

Ms. Barbara Bouchard, 13 Deer Lane, Ledyard, stated as a former High School teacher that a good way to get information out to the community and to parents was through the High School Health Teachers. She stated with the Teachers having a discussion about Narcan that the kids would then go home and talk about it with their friends and parents, noting that the community would then know. The Committee thanked Ms. Bouchard for her comment, noting that it was a good suggestion.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Discuss Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Pizza Party Event.

The following Correspondence was received regarding the Pride Pizza Party:

1. Councilor Paul - Councilor Ryan email thread dated 5/30/2024 re: Pride Pizza

- Picnic posted on social media
2. Ms. Merando - Councilor Ryan email thread dated 6/3/2024 re: Pride Month -Pizza Picnic
 3. Ms. Parad-Councilor Ryan -email-thread dated 6/3/2024 re: Pride Month -Pizza Picnic
 4. Ms. Parad email dated 6/4/2024 re: Pride Month
 5. Mr. Jelden email dated 6/4/2024 re: Pride Month-Pizza Picnic-- Community Relations Cmt for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Councilor Brunelle stated that she announced the Pride Pizza Party Event on social media without having an official discussion. Therefore, she wanted to have a discussion regarding the Pride Pizza Parth this evening to make it official, and make sure no rules were broken.

Councilor Paul stated the because the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion was a government Committee made up of elected officials, that they had procedures and rules that they had to follow. He went on to state because there were no minutes or discussion regarding a Pride Pizza Party that members of the Town Council such as himself, Councilor Ryan, and others had no idea about the Party. He stated he wanted to make it very clear that no one wanted to discriminate against anybody, noting that he was a believer in supporting everybody.

Councilor Paul went on to state that he did not have a problem with somebody celebrating whatever they believed in. He stated the problem was not a pizza party, a flag or a parade, etc. noting as an elected official of the Town Council that his job was to make sure people were not discriminated against. He stated everybody deserved to live, however, he stated not everybody sees things the same way as others do. He stated there was a line between “*Support*” and “*Host*” , noting that “*Hosting*” meant that they were doing this and that they were representing the entire Town Council. He stated previous Community Relations Committee’s role was “supportive” explaining that their job was to be a resource and to support. He noted as an example for the Black History Month Contest, which the Committee had lengthy discussions on, that the Committee offered support stating that they did not host that event. He stated they offered support by having the students be recognized for their work at a Town Council meeting, which he thought was great.

Councilor Paul continued by stating that he personally did not like government being involved in anyone’s business. He stated in talking to a friend and a family member who were part of the *LGBTQIA+* Community, that they questioned why government had to stand up for them, stating that they just wanted to be treated fairly, and would probably not attend an event such as a Pride Pizza Party, but that they did have friends that would probably attend the Party. Councilor Paul stated there were a lot of minority groups, and he questioned whether they were going to do something like the Pizza Party for others.

Councilor Paul addressed Ms. Parad's statement: "*.....It is difficult for the **white heterosexual male majority** to understand that minorities need to be lifted up to level the playing field. A person in a **position of privilege**....*" and he stated this statement was discriminatory and not a fair statement. He stated that he was not saying that people were not discriminated against; and that he believed there were a lot of minorities that deserve the same thing. However, he questioned whether it was the government's job to host those events, or was it their job to allow groups to come in, support them, and lift them up.

Councilor Paul questioned whether hosting a Pride Pizza Party was setting a precedence and whether they were exposing themselves to liability and legal issues; when another group comes in, that half the town does not support. He questioned whether the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion was going to offer another group the same thing they were doing for *LGBTQIA+* Community. He stated the question he has raised was "*Where do they draw that line, without discriminating another group*", has not been answered.

Councilor Paul stated that he wholeheartedly believed that everyone on the Town Council did not think that *LGBTQIA+* Community should not have an event. However, he stated they were looking at the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion hosting a Pride Pizza Party from the perspective that they were a government sanctioned Committee that did not discuss the initiative. He stated it felt like something was done in the name of a Town Committee that no one knew about until they saw it on a social media post. He stated this was not how town government worked on any event, noting that these things should be discussed at a public meeting, during which time the public would have a chance to comment, noting that he appreciated the comments that were provided this evening. He stated past Community Relations Committee did not fund events, noting that it has all been volunteered. He stated as Chairman Rodriguez stated earlier this evening, that she has done the Black History Month Contest, noting that she has done a great job, noting that the Committee did not host the event, but that they supported it.

Councilor Paul concluded his remarks by stating as a town sanctioned government Committee that their job was to govern and to legislate, not to throw a party for anyone. He expressed concern by hosting a Pride Pizza Party that they were opening the door for other groups and potential liability, if they do not do the same for others. He stated his concerns had nothing to do with how people chose to live.

Councilor Brunelle stated as the Chairman of the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion that it was always her idea that the Committee would be hosting events for the community, noting that part of their Mission Statement was "*engaging the community*". She stated that she was happy to know that they were doing the Black History Month Activities/Contest. She stated the Committee had discussions regarding the Black History Month, however, there was no official vote. She also noted they worked with Lucille's Restaurant in Ledyard Center where they had a Poetry Slam, noting that the Community Relations

Committee did not vote. She stated that they then had the Woman's History Month Poetry Slam at Lucille's Restaurant, which was a co-hosted event. Therefore, she stated when it came time for Pride Month that it was always in her mind, although she did not speak it because it was not time to speak it. She stated unfortunately the Committee's May 15, 2024 meeting was cancelled, noting if it had not been cancelled that they would have had the Pride Event. Just like she previously discussed hosting a Senior Day for the Senior in the community stating that she believed they needed a day to be celebrated. She stated that it has been her hope to steer this Community Relations Committee in the correct direction and not to just sit here and listen to and deal with complaints, but to go with their Mission Statement to engage the community, to be part of the community, lifting up the community, listening to the community, bringing the community together. She stated that it should not be "*What about Me?*" noting that if they had a Childrens Day that the Adults were going to complain that they did not have an Adult Day. She stated that it was not about that, stating that it was about helping the communities that need to be help. She stated Black History Month was very important, Women's History Month was very important, Pride Month was very important, noting that was why cities and towns around them were engaging with it, noting that they were doing it on a government level and on a municipal stage. She stated that there would be other events coming along through the year such as Indigenous People Day. She stated that if there were procedures that she did not follow it was because she just did not want to follow them, she stated she was brand new this year and that she was doing the best that she could. She stated because they did not vote on them in the past that it did not hit her that they had to vote on this one, too.

Councilor Paul addressed the need to vote on proposals, explaining that they had to have the item on the Agenda, they have to discuss it, it has to be made public, and that they had to at least have a consensus. He went on to addressed Hosting Events, stating that when they host something they were taking on that responsibility. He stated that he agreed that they need to lift up the difference diverse groups in their community. However, he suggested they work to get other Organizations involved, and for the Committee to provide a supportive role. He addressed the liability to the town if they allowed one group to raise their flag and then denied another group.

Councilor St. Vil stated he read Councilor Paul's emails and that he respected him as a Town Councilor, and that he took his job seriously. However, he stated that he holistically disagreed with his comments. He stated he disagreed on the premise, that he expressed this evening that being an "*Us versus Them*". He stated that these were people who were in their community, noting that they were our brothers, sisters. He stated what drew him to Ledyard was that he could have a conversation with his neighbor and he did not feel that he was any different. He stated that applied to anyone on this planet, noting that this was about equality. He stated imagine if you had five kids, and did not have enough money to buy a birthday cake for all five kids, do you think that you should not sign Happy Birthday to none of them. Or do you think you should do what you could for the one that could. He stated that this was what this was all about, noting that he was speaking from a passionate perspective,

noting that this one hit close to home because he is a minority. He stated what he has heard people say is that “*I don’t recognize you*”. Councilor Paul questioned the reason they would want the Government to recognize them and not the people to recognize them. Councilor St. Vil stated because it was his Government. He noted as Councilor Brunelle stated that the Committee did talk about it (Pride Pizza Party), noting that they could go back and watch videos. He stated Councilor Brunelle stated that these were some of the things that we want to celebrate, noting that they talked about Indigenous People Month, and they all nodded their heads, stating the Councilor Brunelle took action on it.

Councilor Paul stated that he supported everyone, and that he does that on his own. He stated his concern was the legality, questioning whether they were putting the town at a liability by hosting an event rather than supporting it. He stated that this was the reason he wanted the Committee to have this discussion. He stated it was never about not supporting groups in the community, noting that every person has the right to be lifted up, and not be discriminated against, stating that he would be the first person to go defend someone. He stated they were not discussing whether they were putting the town at-risk by hosting versus supporting. Councilor Brunelle responded stating “*No*”. Councilor Paul asked whether Councilor Brunelle knew that for a fact.

Chairman Rodriguez stated in past years and in the most recent Black History Month Activities/Contest that the letter she sent to the School Superintendent and to the School Principals and Teachers stated: “*The Town Council’s Community Relations Committee*” and “*The Town Council’s Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion*”, noting that they have been hosting and supporting the event and they have not been sued yet. She stated the letter was approved by Councilor Paul and Councilor Saums in the past, and the same words were in the letter that Councilor St. Vil sent to the School Superintendent and to the School Principals and Teachers this year. Therefore, she stated it was the purview of this Committee to do what they like.

Councilor Paul stated if they had this discussion a month ago, that they would not be having all of this controversy, because it would have come down to the fact that it was a legality issue for him; and that he did not believe in the Government getting involved in peoples lives and business. He stated he did not want it to appear that the town was picking and choosing specific groups. He stated that he did not have an issue with a Pride Event or other Events, noting that his concern was that there was no discussion, and procedures were not followed. He stated a blanket statement does not cover the ground of what they were doing.

Mr. Bill Thorne, 3 Adios Lane, Ledyard, attending remotely asked if he could make a comment. Councilor Brunelle apologized stating Public Comment was not allowed at this time in the meeting, noting that this was for the Committee to discuss.

Councilor Brunelle stated her final comment was that part of the Committee’s

Mission Statement was to “*Engage the Community*”, noting that she saw this as doing things with the community, which was hosting events and doing events. She stated if this was taking on some legal risks then they were taking on some legal risks, because that was what they were doing. She stated they were being here for their community. She stated that she doubted that hosting a Pizza Party for their town’s Pride Members would end up in litigation. She stated that she was a member of the *LGBTQIA+* Community, she wanted to make it clear and to let people know that they were here. She stated that she was happily married to a man, but that does not mean that she was not part of the community.

She stated with that, she would call to vote on the Pride Pizza Party.

MOTION for the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion host a Pride Pizza Party, as has been already posted on facebook and other areas, for the date that was provided (June 29, 2024)

Moved by Councilor Brunelle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

Discussion: (see above).

VOTE: 2 - 0 - 1 Approved and so declared (Paul Abstained)

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: April Brunelle

SECONDER: Gary St. Vil

AYE: 2 Brunelle and St. Vil

ABSTAIN: 1 Paul

2. Discuss Pride Flag.

Councilor Brunelle opened a discussion for the Town to raise the Pride Flag for *LGBTQIA+* Community.

Councilor Paul questioned where they were considering raising the Pride Flag, noting that he would again refer legality, stating that he thought the town should obtain a legal opinion before taking such action. He stated the town had a Policy to only fly the American Flag and the State of Connecticut Flag on municipal flag poles. He stated a Massachusetts town was sued because they raised the flag for one group but denied raising the flag for another group. He stated his argument was simply based on the legality.

Chairman Rodriguez stated there was nothing written in the Town Charter about the raising of flags. She questioned the policy Councilor Paul was referring to. Councilor Paul stated he was referring to the Mayor’s Policy. Chairman Rodriguez stated the Mayor had an unwritten Mayoral Policy that he and former Mayor John Rodolico followed. She stated for transparency that she wanted to make that clear.

Councilor Brunelle stated that she looked on-line to find out what towns had a Flag Policy, noting that Ledyard did not have one. She stated that there has been litigation filed because a Mayor did not want to approve a Parade, noting that the suit cost the Mayor \$40,000. She stated if the town has raised a flag for others, such as a flag for officers or anything else,

then they have already set the precedent.

Chairman Rodriguez a flag was raised, however, as soon as the Mayor saw the flag he had it taken down under his personal policy; and the flag was taken down.

Councilor Brunelle stated the Committee could bring the request to raise the Pride Flag to the Town Council. However, she stated it seemed that it would be under the Mayor's privy. Chairman Rodriguez stated the Mayor that he had another idea, stating that they could raise the Pride Flag on the flagpole by the monument behind the Library, where they typically laid the wreath for the Memorial Day Parade. She stated the flagpole was not too far off of Route 117, Colonel Ledyard Highway. She stated the Mayor did not want any flags, other than the American Flag and the State Flag, in front of Town Hall. She stated for transparency, this was the conversation she had with the Mayor.

Mr. Bill Thorne, 3 Adios Lane, Ledyard, attending remotely. Councilor Brunelle apologized stating Public Comment was not allowed at this time in the meeting, noting that this was for the Committee to discuss. Mr. Thorne stated that he liked the democratic process.

Councilor St. Vil stated he was an advocate to raise the Pride Flag on any flagpole that was available. He stated it was a step in the right direction, noting that it was consistent with the Committee's mission and vision. Therefore, he stated they should take advantage of this as quickly as possible. However, he stated the process was not clear to him to ensure it was going to happen after this meeting, questioning whether they would have to wait until after the Town Council's meeting next week.

Chairman Rodriguez if the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion would like her to include a discussion about raising the Pride Flag on next week's Town Council Meeting scheduled on June 12, 2024 that she would. Councilor ST. Vil and Councilor Brunelle stated that they would like the raising of the Pride Flag to be included on the June 12, 2024 Town Council Agenda. Chairman Rodriguez suggested the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion vote to move the raising of the Pride Flag forward to the Town Council. She stated with the Committee's power that she would speak to the Mayor about when to raise the Pride Flag.

Councilor Paul questioned whether Chairman Rodriguez could include the raising of the Pride Flag on the June 12, 2024 Agenda without the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion voting to move it forward. Councilor Brunelle stated the Committee should vote to move it forward to the Town Council.

MOTION to include the raising of the Pride Flag on the June 12, 2024 Town Council Agenda for discussion purposes.

Moved by Councilor Brunelle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

Discussion: (see above).

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

IV ADJOURNMENT

Councilor St. Vil stated although he may have disagreed with Councilor Paul's opinions and perspectives this evening that he does respect this process, he respected how great our Country is and their ability to come into an open forum and agree to disagree. He stated he recognizes that change was hard. However, he stated that this Committee and this Town Council has to try to push change, for what they collectively viewed was for the better. He stated he appreciated the conversation with Councilor Paul and Councilor Brunelle.

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

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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

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