



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL

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

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

Wednesday, November 20, 2024 6:30 PM Town Hall Annex-Video Conference

DRAFT

I. CALL TO ORDER – The Meeting was called to order by Councilor Brunelle at 6:34 p.m. at the Annex Meeting Room - Town Hall Annex Building.

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

II. ROLL CALL-

| Attendee Name | Title | Status | Arrived | Location | Departed |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|----------|
| April Brunelle | Committee Chairman | Present | 6:30 pm | In-Person | 6:48 pm |
| Gary Paul | Town Councilor | Present | 6:30 pm | Remote | 6:48 pm |
| Gary St. Vil | Town Councilor | Present | 6:30 pm | In-Person | 6:48 pm |
| S. Naomi Rodriguez | Town Council Chairman | Present | 6:30 pm | In-Person | 6:48 pm |
| Jennifer Smith | Library Director | Present | 6:30 pm | In-Person | 6:48 pm |
| Roxanne Maher | Administrative Assistant | Present | 6:30 pm | Remote | 6:48 pm |

MOTION to amend the Agenda to remove Items #1 & #3 from the Agenda.
Moved by Councilor Brunelle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil
Discussion: Councilor Brunelle suggested that because Items # 1, #3; & #4 were all similar topics that they only keep Item #4 on the Agenda going forward to eliminate redundancy on the agenda.

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

III. RESIDENTS & PROPERTY OWNERS COMMENTS – None.

IV. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS/PRESENTATION

Library Director Jennifer Smith stated in response to the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion’s October 24, 2024 memo requesting Departments prepare a presentation to provide transparency and governance training for residents that she was present this evening to submit the Library’s presentation.

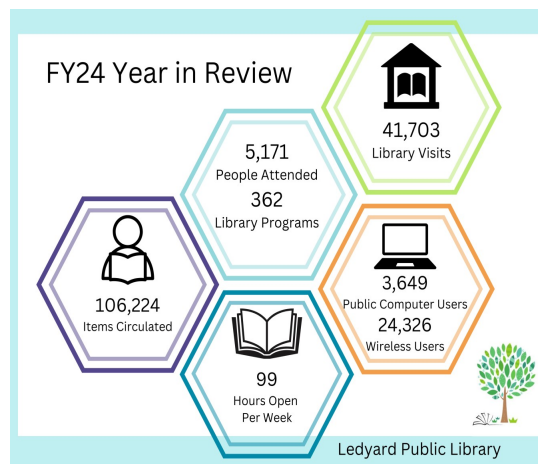
Ms. Smith continued by noting the town had two libraries, the Bill Library which was located in Ledyard Cetner and the Gales Ferry Library which was located in the Gales Ferry District. She proceeded by reviewing the following PowerPoint Presentation:

Ms. Smith stated as champions of lifelong learning, libraries are a place to access technology, indulge curiosities, and explore new ideas, hobbies, and careers.

- **Mission:** Ledyard Public Library provides valuable resources, friendly, knowledgeable service, and free access to a diversity of ideas, information, and experiences. The Library strives to enhance the quality of life in our community by making the Library a welcoming and an accessible place for everyone.



- **Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Snapshot** (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024):
 - ✓ Overall circulation of materials increased over 10% (over 106,000 items); both print and digital between both facilities.
 - ✓ Programming offerings increased 60%. The Library offered 362 Programs, with over 5,000 people attending the programs.
 - ✓ Library visitations increased more than 16% with over 41,000 people physically visited the Library last year. Also Library services can be accessed 24/7.
 - ✓ Service hours open per week remained consistent.
 - ✓ Public computer users remained consistent, while WiFi users increased by 5% .



- **Youth Programming :**

- Staffing:

- Youth Services Librarian Stacey Burt
 - Assistant Jadzia Childs

- Example of Programs Include:

- ✓ Baby Storytime/ Preschool Storytime
 - ✓ Art Studio
 - ✓ Teen Advisory Board – Teens volunteer to assist Ms. Burt and Ms. Childs with programs.
 - ✓ Teen Sweets and Treats Program – Teens learn from a professional chef in the kitchen how to read recipes and measure ingredients, etc.
 - ✓ Read-A-Long Books – Were purchased with funds donated by the Rotary Club. These books were a great way for families to learn how to read together. In addition, there was a literacy mode they could switch over to and it included questions at the end of the book. It was a new options for connecting the audio with the physical print



Youth Programming

- **Adult Services**

- ✓ Staffing:

- Adult Services Librarian Matt Novosad
 - Adult Services Librarian Lindsay Robinson

- Example of Programs Include:

- ✓ Pen turning workshop
 - ✓ Crocheting Basic Course
 - ✓ Garden Lecture and hands on Program regarding sewing seeds



Adult Programming

Ms. Smith noted the Library works to offer diverse and inclusive programs to attract a variety of people and interests.

- **Grant Funding**

- ✓ *Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC): Accessible Small and Rural Communities* through the American Library Association (ALA). Ledyard received two grants for a total of \$40,000 through this grant program. The funding was used to provide the following library enhancements:

- **Automatic Door** opener was installed at Gales Ferry Library.



- **Technology Upgrades** purchased three new iPads and a wireless portable microphone system for programming use.



- **Large Print Section** was added for children and teens, which also expanded the Large Print offerings for adults. The books selected for the children's materials highlighted diverse characters with disabilities, and more than doubled the size of the Library's board book collections in both buildings to include sensory friendly titles and a new way to display this collection.



- **Sensory Storytime Series** were interactive books for children which included the following for both Library facilities: *Learning American Sign Language* series for teens and adults, *Drumming Music Therapy* for teens, and *We Make Music* series for families. The circulation of the sensory series increased by 78% over last year.



- ***New Circulation Desk*** at Bill Library that meets ADA requirements. The height of the desk was lower making it more accessible for everyone, those in wheelchairs or walking devices, and for children. The new desk also included a book return, so the return books had a place to go.



- ✓ ***Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut Grant*** – With the receipt of this grant Ledyard Library collaborated with Traveling Toys Incorporated to add a Toy Library at both Library facilities. This new collection has attracted families, children, and teens, to the library, and would help ease the economic burden by offering equitable resources. Since the Toy Library was unveiled this year all of the toys have gone out over 55 times.

Ms. Smith showed the Committee one of the Toy Kits from the Library, and she explained it was a great way for families to try before you buy; or to borrow them and bring them back to the Library.

- ***On-Line and Digital Resources*** available with a Library Card
 - ✓ EBooks – Libby, Palace Projects, and Hoopla Apps.
 - ✓ Ancestry – Must be physically at a Library location to access this database.
 - ✓ Transparent Language – Is a language learning database that would be available in 2025.
 - ✓ Job Now – Provides help with writing a resume, cover letter, etc. to assist with finding or a job or changing career/jobs.
 - ✓ Research at CT – Is offered by the Connecticut State Library, and provides access to on-line articles and research.

Ms. Smith noted that Library Staff was available to help residents find the information they needed both on-line as well as in person.

- ***Friends of the Library***

Ms. Smith stated they were grateful for the Friends of the Library, who was a volunteer organization that raises money to help support the Library's book budget. She noted this year they also provided \$10,000 toward the Library's Hoopla subscription. She stated without the support of the Friends of the Library they would not be able to offer Hoopla to Library patrons. The Friends of the Library have the following two main fundraisers each year:

- ✓ Bill Library Annual Booksale was held annually in September.
- ✓ Snowflake Festival which was a silent auction, bake sale, and live music. This event would be held on Saturday, November 23, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Bill Library.

Ms. Smith noted that the Friends of the Library were always looking for volunteers, and she encouraged residents to contact the Library if they were interested in volunteering.

- ***Library Commission:***

Ms. Smith stated the Library Commission was comprised of 9 volunteers who were residents from Ledyard and Gales Ferry and were appointed by the Town Council to serve for a two-year term. She stated the Library Commission typically meets on the third Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at alternating library locations. The public was welcome at all meetings. The Commission agendas and minutes were posted on the Town’s webpage at www.ledyardct.org under the “Agendas and Minutes” Tab.

- ***Monthly E-Newsletter***

- Sign up for the Library Monthly E-Newsletter through the Library’s website at: Ledyardlibrary.org. Ms. Smith stated for those who connect with the Library on-line that a newsletter was sent out each month.
- Facebook and Instagram – Ms. Smith encouraged residents to follow the Library on Facebook or Instagram noting that it was a great way to see what was happening at the Library and in the community.

- ***Library Staff***

Ms. Smith stated that she was grateful for the Library Staff, noting that they were hardworking. She stated that the Library could not do all that they do without the collaboration of their Team. She noted the reaction of one of the Library’s 3-year old regular patrons below who opened a new book. She noted that these types of moments were the reasons the Library provides the services they do.

**“Oh·my·gosh!
Mom!·This·is·my·
best·day·ever!”**



Ms. Smith concluded her presentation by showing a short video of some of the Library Programs offered. She thanked the Town Council for their support, stating that the Library was grateful for all the support they received, whether it was from their taxpayers, Friends of the Library, donations, grants, etc. She encouraged residents to contact her if they had any questions at (860) 464-9912 or email jsmith@ledyardlibraries.org.

Councilor St. Vil thanked Library Director Jennifer Smith for her presentation this evening. He stated after he was elected to the Town Council that he received a Welcome Note from the Library and a Library Card, which was how he began using the Library Audio Books (Libby).

Councilor St. Vil continued by stating that he was pleased to see that the Library has increased their utilization; and he asked whether Ms. Smith had the numbers for each of the Libraries. Library Director Jennifer Smith stated although she did not have that data with her this evening that they do track the data; and that she would provide the requested information to Councilor St. Vil after tonight's meeting.

Ms. Smith reviewed the hours of operations for each Library as follows:

| <u>Bill Library</u> | <u>Gales Ferry Library</u> |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Monday – Wednesday 9-8 | Monday – Tuesday 9-8 |
| Thursday Closed | Wednesday, Thursday & Saturday 9-5 |
| Friday – Saturday 9-5 | Friday & Sunday Closed |
| Sunday (seasonal) 1-5 | |

Councilor St. Vil questioned the methods of how the Library communicated with its patrons and obtained feedback to increase the utilization of the Library. Ms. Smith explained that there were a number of things that factored into increasing the usage of the Library, which included the Library Commission's 2020 Strategic Plan which laid out a number of goals they hoped to achieve. She stated as an example one area they wanted to focus on was their branding, which included using the Library Logo, updating their website, reminding residents that they could access Library services 24/7; and the Library hours to visit in-person. She stated that she worked closely with the Library Commission as well as with Mayor Allyn, III, to focus on goals and where the Library was headed. She went on to state that talking with the Library Patrons was a great way to obtain feedback, noting while working at the front desk this morning she had the opportunity to talk with patrons about what they read, what was on the Best Sellers List, if the author had another book coming out, etc. She stated there were a number of things that factor into keeping a pulse on the community and the programs/services needed.

Chairman Rodriguez noted the Library had a soundproof booth that patrons could use for a job interview, or if they received a call while at the Library so they did not want to disturb other patrons. She stated that she used the soundproof both once when she received a call while she was at the Library, noting that it was great. Ms. Smith stated the

soundproof booth Chairman Rodriguez mentioned was at the Bill Library. She stated although the Gales Ferry Library did not have a fully enclosed soundproof booth that they did have a quiet area space that was in the mezzanine. She stated because of the many services and programs the Library offered that her presentation just skimmed the surface. She encouraged residents to contact her; or stop by the Library, if they had any questions.

The Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion thanked Ms. Smith for her presentation.

Ms. Smith thanked the Committee for having her present this evening.

IV. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the Meeting Minutes of October 16, 2024

Moved by Councilor Brunelle, seconded by Councilor St. Vil

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Item #1 was removed from the Agenda. (See above)

Schedule for Public Informational Forums to present to residents the types of services the town offers; how to access services, and the authority residents should direct concerns regarding services.

RESULT: Remove from Agenda

2. Identify various town venues to host “*Informal Conversations in the Park*” to engage residents in discussions regarding their concerns and their ideas for potential solutions.

- ***Winthrop Park near the Gales Ferry Community Center*** – Councilor St. Vil stated an Informal Conversation was held on Thursday, November 7, 2024 at 5:00 p.m., which was hosted by Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Director Scott Johnson, Jr. He noted that Mr. Johnson briefed the community on some on-going projects and plans, as well as some additional funding he has requested from the Town Council to help facilitate the projects.

Councilor St. Vil stated he was impressed with the discussion, noting the community’s desire to understand the Parks & Recreation’s strategic vision, resources that would be relevant to their families, and the financial impact. He stated Mr. Johnson talked about hiring an outside vendor to assess and develop a Master Plan for the town’s parks.

Councilor St. Vil continued by noting that the community expressed a desire to have more Informal Conversations, and that Mr. Johnson agreed to host Conversations in the future. Councilor St. Vil stated for the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion that the community’s desire to have Informal Conversations confirmed what they already knew, that these types of small informal conversation would be beneficial for all involved.

Councilor St. Vil commented on the participation at the November 7, 2024 Informal Conversation, noting that Chairman Rodriguez asked residents how they learned about the event. He stated the residents 50/50 split indicated that they learned about the Informal Conversation from the mailings they received at their home and from Facebook. He stated the mailings to the property owners who lived within a 1,000 foot radius to Winthrop Park resonated especially because there were two mailings: (1) Letter informing the residents about the Informal Conversation and the topic; and (2) Flyer was a good reminder. He suggested the Committee hold more Informal Conversations for the community and that they use the same type of solicitation to engage residents.

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

Councilor Brunelle stated that she had hoped to schedule an Outreach Event/Informal Conversation at the Lantern Hill Waterfront Park this fall. However, she stated with the daylight hours getting shorter that she would work to schedule something in the spring, 2025. She stated that the Parks & Recreation Commission suggested the event be held after they complete their work at the Park.

- ***Visit all of the Parks in Town***

Chairman Rodriguez stated at the Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens Commission on November 19, 2024 Meeting that Commission Chairman Kenneth DiRico stated he was impressed with the Informal Conversation at Winthrop Park, noting that it was well attended, and that some good information came out of the conversation with residents. She also stated during the meeting that Commission Member Paula Crocker suggested they move forward and schedule an Informal Conversation to visit all of the Parks in town, which was an idea that had been discussed over a year or two ago. Chairman Rodriguez stated that perhaps they could visit the Parks in the Spring, 2025.

Councilor Brunelle stated that the Committee would continue their work to schedule the following Informal Conversations for Spring, 2025:

- ✓ Lantern Hill Waterfront Park (Long Pond)
- ✓ Visit all of the Parks in Town

Councilor Paul stated as the Parks, Recreation, & Senior Citizens Liaison he also attended the Commission's November 19, 2024 meeting. He stated the Commission praised the Informal Conversation at Winthrop Park, noting that they all did a great job; and received a lot of good feedback. He suggested that the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion continue to engage the community.

Councilor St. Vil reflected on the past year noting that the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion executed a few programs to engage the community.

Councilor Brunelle noted the following:

- ✓ Hosted booths at the Farmers Market
- ✓ Black History Month Program
- ✓ Woman's History Month – Poetry Slam at Lucille's Restaurant
- ✓ Pride Event
- ✓ Informal Conversation at Winthrop Park.
- ✓ Create videos to help residents navigate the town's website

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 12/18/2024 6:30 p.m.

3. Item #3 was removed from the Agenda. (See above)
Ideas to increase communication/transparency with residents.

RESULT: Remove from Agenda

4. Review the status of Department Heads Government Training Presentations.

- Tax Assessor Office Presentation

Chairman Rodriguez noted that they were receiving a good response to the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion's October 24, 2024 memo asking that Department's prepare presentations to highlight their roles, the work they and their volunteer committees do for our community; and public participation in the decisions that affect our town.

Chairman Rodriguez noted earlier this evening Library Director Jennifer Smith gave a great presentation regarding the Library, and that other Departments were working to prepare their presentations and/or videos. She stated at the Parks, Recreation & Senior Citizens November 19, 2024 meeting that Director Scott Johnson, Jr., talked with the Commission about preparing a video presentation.

Councilor Brunelle stated that the Committee would be working with the MIS Department to provide a central depository of the presentations on the town's website for residents to access on-line at their convenience; and as a resource they can refer back to.

Chairman Rodriguez suggested the title of the link on the website be "*Ledyard Academy*". Councilor Brunelle agreed that *Ledyard Academy* would be a good title.

Councilor St. Vil noted that he saw the Assessor's Office presentation that was attached to tonight's Agenda on the meeting portal. He stated that once residents hear about the information being available on the website that they will search for the information.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 12/18/2024 6:30 p.m.

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

Chairman Rodriguez stated the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council was excited and would like to have a relationship with the Town. She stated she hoped to provide more information to the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion soon.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 12/18/2024 6:30 p.m.

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

Chairman Brunelle stated although this item was on the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion that they were not currently working on it. She stated the town was working with other Organizations to provide opioid and substance abuse and recovery programs.

Chairman Rodriguez noted at their October 23, 2024 meeting Town Council approved an appropriation in the amount of \$10,000 for Community Speaks Out to provide services to Ledyard. She noted the previous year (2023) the Town Council allocated \$36,100 to Ledge Light Health District/Ledyard Prevention Coalition.

Councilor Brunelle stated the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion could keep an eye on the work of Community Speaks Out and help them promote the work they were doing in Ledyard using social media.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 12/18/2024 6:30 p.m.

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

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Preparations for the 2025 Black History Month Program.

Chairman Rodriguez suggested the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion start their work on the Black History Month Contest the first week in December. She stated in past years the information regarding each of the contests (Elementary Schools, Middle School & High School) were all in one letter; which seemed to cause some confusion. Therefore, she suggested that three separate letters be prepared for each of the grade levels, to eliminate any confusion about what the students were being asked to submit for the contests. She also suggested the letters be sent out in December. She stated that she would be happy to work with Councilor St. Vil on the letters.

Councilor Brunelle suggested at their December 18, 2024 meeting that the Committee prepare a schedule of the types of programs they would like to support in the coming year.

Councilor St. Vil stated that he agreed with preparing a schedule for the coming year for planning purposes.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she agreed with preparing a schedule for the coming year so that things do not fall between the cracks. She noted as an example that November was Native American Heritage Month and although Councilor St. Vil had a great plan that the month came up quickly.

Councilor St. Vil noted that he hoped to have more information regarding his plan for Native American Heritage Month for the December 18, 2024 meeting. He explained that they would take some of the work the students were doing for Native American Heritage Month at school and share with them the celebration of Native American Heritage Month.

Councilor Brunelle stated that she talked with a Girl Scout Troop earlier today about community service. She stated the girls were interested in what the Town Council does. She suggested that next year they invite the youth to attend a Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion meeting and perhaps give them some topics to work on and allow them to role-play as Town Councilors.

Councilor Paul stated that he would like to see the schools get more involved with programs such as Black History Month and others because that was where these initiatives lie. He stated that he would also like to see the Library become more involved these types of programs. He also stated that he liked recognizing the winners of the Black History Month Contest at a Town Council Meeting.

Councilor Paul continued by noting Councilor Brunelle's idea about inviting the kids to role-play as Town Councilors. He stated that this was a good example of civic engagement, and that it would get kids interested in local government and how it worked.

Councilor St. Vil noted that their term would come to an end quickly. Therefore, he stated they have to have a plan to address the many ideas the Committee has been discussing, because time flies.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting:12/18/2024 6:30 p.m.

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

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

VOTE: Councilor Brunelle moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor St. Vil
3 – 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting was adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

April Brunelle
Committee Chairman
Community Relations Committee

