



Chairman S. Naomi Rodriguez

TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway

Ledyard, CT 06339

<http://www.ledyardct.org>

Administrative Assistant

Roxanne M. Maher

860 464-3203

HYBRID FORMAT
MINUTES
COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING

Wednesday, December 20, 2023

6:30 PM

Town Hall Annex-Video Conference

DRAFT

- I. CALL TO ORDER – The Meeting was called to order by Councilor Brunelle at 6:30 p.m. at the Annex Meeting Room - Town Hall Annex Building.

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

II. ROLL CALL-

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived	Location	Departed
April Brunelle	Committee Chairman	Present	6:30 pm	In-Person	6:53 pm
Gary Paul	Town Councilor	Present	6:30 pm	In-Person	6:53 pm
Gary St. Vil	Town Councilor	Present	6:30 pm	Remote	6:53 pm
Kristen Chapman	Executive Assistant to Mayor	Present	6:30 pm	In-Person	6:53 pm

III. CITIZENS' COMMENTS – None

IV. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

1. Ms. Ginina Diaz email dated 11/30/2023 re: Black History Month Suggestions -Article - Braiding Workshop.

Councilor Paul noted that he read Ms. Diaz's email.

Councilor St. Vil stated the proposed Braiding Workshop would be a good component to a Black History Celebration Event. However, he stated in and of itself that he thought that the braiding workshop would need to be supplemented with some other items. He stated the braiding of hair was a technique and tool that may be used widely, not only in

the black community. He noted as an example that he would be visiting Aruba later this month and that there would be a lot of folks who were not of African descent that would have their hair braided.

Councilor St. Vil went on to state if their goal was to have a Black History Month where they were promulgating Black History that there were some additional elements that should go along with the braiding workshop; noting that they would have to think about what those other elements would be.

Councilor Brunelle noted in the past the Community Relations Committee supported a Black History Month Poster Contest. She also noted Ms. Diaz's October 13, 2023 email in which she expressed concerns that no High School Students participated in the 2023 Black History Month Contest.

Councilor Paul stated that he could provide additional information on what has been done in the past to recognize Black History Month when they get to Item #1 on tonight's agenda.

IV. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of October 18, 2023

Moved by Councilor Paul, seconded by Councilor St. Vil.

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

VI. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

1. Black History Month 2024 Activity/Contest.

Councilor Paul provided some background noting that the Community Relations Committee started supporting a Black History Month Activity/Contest two years ago with the Twenty-sixth Town Council. He noted that although Councilor Rodriguez was not a member of the Community Relations Committee that she took on the Project and worked with the Principals of each of the schools in town and also offered the Program to kids that were home schooled in Ledyard through on-line postings. He stated the idea was to unite the community and celebrate Black History Month.

Councilor Paul stated the first year the Black History Month Activity was held it involved an Essay Contest for the High School and Middle School Students and a Poster Contest for the Elementary School Students, that was broken out as follows:

- Poster Contest for Kindergarten – Grade 2; and for Grade 3 – Grade 5.
- Essay Contest for Middle School and High School students.

Councilor Paul stated the Contests were voluntary and he stated the following members of the community served as Judges: Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council Member and

Education Committee Chairwoman Crystal Whipple, Police Sergeant McKinney, Councilor Rodriguez and himself. He stated Mayor Fred Allyn, III, awarded the Elementary School Poster Contest winners their prizes at each of their schools with their peers; and that the Black History Month Posters were displayed in Town Hall. He stated prizes were awarded to Essay Contest Winners at a Town Council Meeting and that the Middle School and High School Students along with their families attended the meeting to receive their prizes and to be recognized by the community for their good work.

Councilor Paul went on to explain in 2023 that there was some miscommunication with getting the Essay Contest out to the High School Students; and therefore, they did not have any High School Students participate in the Essay Contest.

Councilor Paul stated the Community Relations Committee believed that Black History Month was an important Program that should be continued within the community. He stated over the last two years the Community Relations Committee learned that their role should be to support, promote, and encourage other community organizations to facilitate the event, noting that a Town Committee should not be taking on that role. He stated the Community Relations Committee thought that the Schools should take on the Program noting that learning about Black History was a good fit through the education system, and that the Library should be involved as well, but that other community organizations could also take on the initiative. He went on to explain that during the past two years the Committee also found that it was important to recognize the students at a Town Council meeting, noting that the kids loved attending the Town Council meeting, and that he was impressed with their posters, essays, and to learn through the student's eyes about how they viewed black history. He stated that he enjoyed seeing how proud the students and their families were of their accomplishments.

Councilor Paul stated that Ms. Diaz has provided some good ideas for the Black History Month Program. He suggested for this coming year that the Community Relations Committee find other groups who would be willing to take on the Black History Program and facilitate some of the ideas and suggestions provided by residents.

Councilor Paul stated that Councilor Rodriguez took-on the entire Program, noting that she funded things, and that she and put a lot of time, resources, and energy into making the Black History Month Activity happen for Ledyard. He stated the work that she did was amazing. He stated where the Community Relations Committee goes from here was open for discussion. He stated the more exposure the Black History Month Program had that it would encourage and promote more ideas that could be done in the community. He stated that the previous Community Relations Committee also discussed focusing on a different theme each year such as local black history for the essays and posters, etc. He stated when Chairman Rodriguez returns that she could provide more information, noting that she had taken the lead on the Black History Month Activities.

Councilor Brunelle suggested the Community Relations Committee again contact the Schools, the Library, and possibly Art Museums such as the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme. She stated that she would contact the Florence Griswold Museum, and she asked Councilor Paul to contact the Library; and for Councilor St. Vil to contact the Schools.

Councilor St. Vil thanked Councilor Paul for providing the background regarding the Community Relations Committee's work to date regarding the Black History Month Activities. He stated it provided a lot of clarity of what the Community Relations Committee's role is or has been in the past. He stated this work has provided for an opportunity, however, he noted that nationally Black History Month was celebrated in February, commenting that they did not have a lot of time to prepare for a 2024 Event. However, he stated that perhaps they could partner with an organization to help facilitate the program. He concluded his remarks by responding to Councilor Brunelle's request noting that he would contact the Schools to discuss their interest/role in the Black History Month Program.

Councilor Brunelle noted that Community Relations Committee would continue to discuss the Black History Month Program at their January 17, 2024 meeting.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 01/17/2024 6:30 p.m.

2. 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.

Councilor Paul provided some background noting when the Community Relations Committee was reinstated in 2020 their role was to act as a conduit to provide information and to help direct residents to the Department that could best address their concerns/needs. He stated the Community Relations Committee held several Informational Forums at which various Departments gave PowerPoint presentations regarding the services they provided to residents; and to answer residents questions. However, he stated they found that the Informational Forums, which were held in a Hybrid Format, noting that the videos were available on the town's meeting portal, were not well attended by residents. Therefore, he stated the Twenty-sixth Town Council Community Relations Committee (2022) decided to bring the information out to the residents, using the Farmers Market as the venue to host Outreach Events featuring a variety of services that included the following:

2023- Outreach Events

- ***July 19, 2023 Mental Health Awareness***

Councilor Paul stated this was the second year the Community Relations Committee helped to facilitate an Outreach Event to bring awareness of the many Organizations and Programs that were available to residents pertaining to Mental Health. He stated many of the Organizations who participated in 2022 came back again this year (2023), with the new addition of SERAC, who was a non-profit organization located in Norwich that served 41 communities in Eastern Connecticut. He stated SERAC provides programs and services to reduce the impact of substance abuse, problem gambling, and mental health challenges.

- ***August 30, 2023 - Library Services***

Councilor Paul stated the Farmers' Market August 30, 2023 Theme was ***"Back to School"***. He stated that Ledyard Libraries joined the Community Relations Committee under the Town of Ledyard Tent to sign folks up with Library Cards, to provide information regarding the many resources and diverse programs the Library provides for all age groups; and to hand out clues for folks to participate a Special Scavenger Hunt at the Bill Library that evening. He stated Library Director Jennifer Smith and her Team have been doing an incredible job at the Libraries with engaging the community.

- ***September 20, 2023 First Responders Hometown Heros***

Councilor Paul stated in keeping with the Farmers' Market September 13, 2023 the ***Hometown Hero*** theme that the Community Relations Committee planned an outreach event to recognize the heroic actions of their First Responders; and to provide information to residents who were interested in a career in firefighting or law enforcement; noting that there were opportunities to serve as a volunteer in the field of First Responders. However, he stated the event was rescheduled to September 20, 2023 due to rain. He stated although the Community Relations Committee was not able to attend the September 20, 2023 Farmers Market, because of the Town Council meeting, that the town's First Responders (Firefighters and Police Department) attended the Market to provide information to residents which would have been provided at the September 13, 2023 Market.

Councilor Paul went on to note that volunteers were what made their town run, and he stated that the Community Relations Committee put together a handout that listed the town's twenty-three Committee/Commission/Boards and their vacancies that could be found on the town's website at: <http://ledyardct.org>. He also stated the QR Code below would also take residents directly to the to the List of Committee/Commission/ Boards and the vacancies that were available, where they could apply on-line.



2022- Outreach Events

- ***June 29, 2022 First Responders – Hometown Heros***

- ✓ Police Body Worn Cameras & In-Car Camera Equipment – Demonstrations were provided.
- ✓ Blue & Green Envelope Program – Councilor Paul stated this Program was for individuals functioning with Autism (Blue Envelope) or were Hearing Impaired (Green Envelope). He provided some background explaining that *"The Blue & Green Envelope"* was created by the State Legislature and went into effect on January 1, 2020. He stated the *Envelopes* were available at all Police Stations, Department of Motor Vehicle locations, driving schools, and through Autism Advocacy Groups. He stated the purpose of *The Blue & Green Envelope* was:

- To hold the driver's license, registration, and insurance card so they can hand it to the Police Officer during a traffic stop,
- The outside of the *Blue & Green Envelopes* included tips and instructions for both the Police Officer and Driver on how to successfully communicate with each other during a traffic stop.

- ***August 31, 2022 – Winter Preparations***

- ✓ Information to prepare for Winter – Social Services Coordinator, Senior Citizens Municipal Agent, Tax Assessor, Public Works
 - Home Heating Assistance/Propane
 - Renters Assistance/Renters Rebate Program
 - TVCCA Meals for shut-ins (Meals on Wheels)
 - Food Pantry
 - Public Works Snow Plowing/Mailbox Height
 - No Interest Loans for home improvements (replace furnaces/new roof/new septic system)
 - Elderly/Disabled Veterans Tax Relief (Ordinance #200-004; #200-005; #200-006)

Councilor Paul stated the former Community Relations Committee chose three subjects/service areas to feature at the Farmers' Markets and tried to include a variety of subject matters. He noted that the Outreach Events noted above were the subjects the previous Committee chose last year (2023) and the year before (2022). He also explained that the Community Relations Committee would try to coordinate their Outreach Event with the Farmers' Market Weekley Themes.

Councilor Brunelle stated she would like to see the Community Relations Committee continue the Outreach Events, noting that they were great. She stated that she would like to see the Animal Control Officer be included in the Hometown Heros noting that they helped lost dogs be reunited with their families and they respond to other animal issues in town. She stated that the Animal Control Office was also looking for volunteers and that they also held animal adoption events throughout the year.

Councilor Brunelle stated that once the Farmers' Market Committee sets their weekly 2024 Theme Schedule the Community Relations Committee could work to determine the subjects/services they would like to feature and coordinate their outreach events with the Farmers' Market schedule.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 01/16/2023 6:30 p.m.

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

Councilor Paul provided some background noting in hearing residents’ concerns about graffiti, lack of lighting, and other illicit behavior that was occurring at the Park on East Drive (Chrisy Hill) that the Community Relations Committee held an Informal Conversation Gathering at the Park on July 20, 2022 with the residents in the area, noting that the Committee sent a letter inviting the neighbors to the Gathering. He stated Parks & Recreation Director Scott Johnson, Jr. and many Town Councilors also attended the event. He stated because it was an Informal Gathering that no minutes were taken and that during their conversation with the residents that they discovered that there was a lot of miscommunication, explaining that the residents did not know who to contact, where the authority lied, or what was already in the works.

Councilor Paul went on to explain with the concerted efforts of the Parks & Recreation Department, Public Works Department, and the Police Department that the Park on East Drive was now beautiful. He stated that brush was removed, it was now well lite, the parking lot was done, a new playscape and woodchips were installed, and residents were enjoying the Park. He stated the Police Chief indicated that they have not had any issues at the Park on East Drive over the past year. He stated this was a great example of what the Community Relations Committee was all about, noting that they all came together for a positive outcome for the town.

Councilor Paul went on to comment that during regular meetings that residents know they have three minutes to talk on the record. However, he stated they found by having an Informal Gathering that folks spoke more freely, and because they had some back-and-forth conversation that they were better able to get to the bottom of things.

Councilor Paul explained that the idea/intent to host Informal Conversations in the Park was to identify issues that residents were interested in talking about and to obtain feedback to bring back to the Community Relations Committee/Town Council and/or other Town Committees/Commissions to address.

Councilor Paul went on to explain that the previous Committee was hoping to host an Informal Gathering at the new Lantern Hill Waterfront Park (Long Pond), which was the property Mr. and Mrs. Graham donated to the town (leased for \$10 per year). He stated the objective would be to showcase the Lantern Hill Waterfront Park and to provide some history regarding Long Pond and to engage residents. However, he stated that the former Community Relations Committee ran out of time before their term ended to coordinate the event with the Parks & Recreation Commission.

Councilor Brunelle stated that she thought the Lantern Hill Waterfront Park Informal Gathering, as Councilor Paul described, was a good idea that they could perhaps do this Summer, 2024. Councilor Paul stated that he would be happy to contact Mrs. Betsy Graham to participate in the event and to provide some historical background regarding Long Pond.

Councilor Brunelle continued by noting that the Tri-Town Trail was also looking to involve residents, stating that this was another Informal Gathering that could be done in the Spring/Summer 2024.

Councilor Paul stated the Community Relations Committee's goal for the Informal Gathering/Conversations in the Park was to try to get feedback from residents regarding the issues that they could bring back to the Committee and/or the Town Council. He noted that Councilor St. Vil previously mentioned the kids in the community and he suggested they could connect with the kids to obtain some feedback from them as well.

Councilor St. Vil stated that he thought having a mechanism to stay in touch with residents to hear about the topics that were of concern to them was a great idea; and was key to their collective success. He stated although he did not have any ideas at this time, that he would put some thought into this for their next meeting.

Councilor Brunelle stated that "*Informal Conversations*" was something that the Committee could continue to work on at their January 16, 2024 meeting.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 01/16/2024 6:30 p.m.

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

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

VOTE: Councilor Brunelle moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor Paul.
3 – 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

April Brunelle
Committee Chairman
Community Relations Committee