



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL

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HYBRID FORMAT
MINUTES
COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING

Chairman Kevin J. Dombrowski

Wednesday, September 20, 2023

6:30 PM

Town Hall Annex-Video Conference

DRAFT

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

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

II. ROLL CALL-

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Location	Arrived	Departed
Gary Paul	Committee Chairman	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
John Marshall	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Bill Saums	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Mary McGrattan	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
S. Naomi Rodriguez	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Charles Duzy	Housing Authority Chairman	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Paula Crocker	Housing Authority Member	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Colleen Lauer	Housing Authority Director	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Sheri Fernandez	Housing Authority Tenant	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Susan Lipinski	Housing Authority Tenant	Present	Remote	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Edward Murray	Resident	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Eleanor Murray	Resident	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Ginina Diaz	Resident	Present	In-Person	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Sheila Vincent	Resident	Present	Remote	6:30 pm	7:54 pm
Tammy Jones	Resident	Present	Remote	6:47 pm	7:54 pm
Roxanne Maher	Administrative Assistant	Present	Remote	6:30 pm	7:54 pm

III. CITIZENS' COMMENTS

Mr. Edward Murray, 16 Chapman Lane, Ledyard, stated this was the fourth time he had the opportunity to speak at a public meeting regarding issues concerning the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. He stated after the Housing Authority's September 5, 2023 that the atmosphere at the Town Council's September 13, 2023 meeting was very different noting Mr. Dombrowski had the entire Ordinance and associated documentation pertaining to the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing

Facility from start to finish. He stated the conversation was not very friendly, and that it was made very clear that the Town Council could not, and would not, do anything about the issues regarding the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility that the residents had presented. Therefore, he questioned the purpose of tonight's meeting.

Mr. Murray went on to state when they opened the Agenda for tonight's Community Relations Committee meeting it looked like there was the history of the Housing Authority. However, he stated he did not understand the purpose of tonight's meeting.

Councilor Paul addressed Mr. Murray's question, explaining in hearing residents comments regarding the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility, at the August 26, 2023 Town Council meeting, that Chairman Dombrowski suggested the Community Relations Committee try to foster some dialogue. He went on to address to Chairman Dombrowski's comments at the September 13, 2023 Town Council meeting in which he tried to explain per the State Statutes that other than appointing members to the Housing Authority that the Town Council did not have any other authority pertaining to the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. However, he stated the idea to refer the matter to the Community Relations Committee was to try to help foster some dialogue between the tenants and the Housing Authority. He stated the matter was on tonight's agenda under New Business, which the Committee would discuss later this evening.

Mr. Murray continued by stating his position, and the most important thing was that they could and should be doing better for the folks at Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. He stated that he understood the Housing Authority had their position, but that he still thought they could do a better job for the tenants.

Ms. Ginina Diaz, 1546 Route 12, Gales Ferry, stated "*The particular state of affairs in an area where there was potentially conflicting ethnic, religious, cultural, political, monolithic group live together. The social engineering, or mediating work between conflicting groups.*" She stated these statements were the definitions of *community relations*. She asked that the Committee keep these definitions at the forefront of their minds during tonight's meeting. She stated as many know, in recent months there has been an increase of residents comments and concerns at public meetings. She stated tonight she would focus on the safety and rights of our community's disabled and senior demographics. While the Ledyard Housing Authority had the right to create a smoke free property, that the State of Connecticut and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) set the standard at 25-50 feet from buildings, entrances, exits, common areas, and windows and it also suggested safe alternative smoking areas. Our disabled residents also have rights. Per the American Disabilities Act (ADA) disabled residents have the right to reasonable accommodations, allowing them to live in, utilize and enjoy housing as much as an able body resident. Recent responses from elected officials make it clear that the Town has nothing to do with the Housing Authority and show a clear annoyance when the topic was brought up by concerned residents at public meetings, to the point of some throwing their hands up as if they were disgusted. This was another missed chance for leaders to lead, for leaders to advocate for our senior's

safety, a chance to show a vulnerable demographic that at a minimum their safety and wellbeing meant something to the people who may have voted for them, a chance to lessen the confusion and frustration with regard to helping our seniors understand their rights. Instead, local leaders abandon them with a gross disregard and demoralizing negligence for their physical safety. She stated helping someone was free, being kind was free, sharing knowledge was free, being a voice for our vulnerable demographics was free. Throwing our hand up and abandoning tax paying residents was not only embarrassing, but it was inappropriate and inhumane. These were not the qualities and or behaviors that foster a positive climate. Thank you.

Councilor Paul thanked Ms. Diaz for her comments.

Mrs. Eleanor Murray, 16 Chapman Lane, Ledyard, stated she was surprised to see the encyclopedia of information that was being shared with the Committee for tonight's meeting, noting that she found it off-putting and slanted, she noted in particular an email dated September 9, 2023 that she sent to the Mayor. She stated that she was going to provide three more emails that she sent to the Mayor, and she asked that they also be included in the minutes. She stated that she had been trying to foster a relationship with the Mayor and that she asked the Mayor for his to help her get an audience at the Housing Authority's meeting, and that she thought that he did. She stated the last email she sent to the Mayor was the one that was included in the packet for tonight's meeting, noting at that point she was angry, she was upset, and she was terrified for the Kings Corner Manor Senior Housing Facility's tenants, particularly for the tenants who were in wheelchairs and needed oxygen. She stated a storm was coming and she stated if they had lost power that they could not share a generator in the middle of the Community Room, noting that they cannot get there, they cannot share it, they cannot carry their oxygenators.

Ms. Murray continued by noting that there was now a ramp at the end of the sidewalk for a double amputee who used a wheelchair that was inadequate. She stated when she addressed the Housing Authority at their meeting that the minutes were blank for a while, until she brought it up on Social Media and then suddenly the minutes appeared. She noted the minutes incorrectly stated that she got her information from one person. She stated at the Housing Authority's September 7, 2023 meeting that she clearly said that she got her information from a number of residents. She stated that she does not lie, noting that the minutes stated that they knew who she had talked to. She stated it was her understanding that punishment was metered out from that meeting. She stated there was punishment to the tenants if they criticized, if they complained, if they talked to authorities, if they called anyone, if they talked to her, or if they talked to Senator Cathy Osten. She stated the tenants were terrified.

Ms. Murray went on to state that the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Law was constantly being broken. She stated to the Community Relations Committee that she did not know if they knew what the HIPPA Law was, noting that if someone went to the doctors and then the nurse told her friend that you were there because you broke your leg, and then her friend told a neighbor, and so on, that it was a

violation of the HIPPA Law. She stated the HIPPA Law protected your personal information. She stated if anyone at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Housing Facility called Emergency 911 that the Dispatch Center then called the Housing Authority's Executive Director and tells her why the tenant called them, noting that was against the federal law to do that. She also noted that the Wage and Hour Law was being broken, as well as the Open Meeting Law, and she commented that we will see if the Housing Authority ever has another open meeting. She stated so far the Housing Authority has only had one open meeting out of every four meetings. She stated the Community Relations Committee knows the law, noting that closed meetings could be held if they needed to have a closed meeting; however, she stated there was no need to have as many closed meetings as they have. She stated that she would be going to every open meeting, commenting that she was sure that she would not be welcome, but that she would be there.

Ms. Murray stated that she was glad to be here this evening and she was glad to see that the Community Relations Committee was extending a hand to the Housing Authority, noting that she could assure the Committee that the tenants at the Kings Corner Senior Citizens Housing Authority were waiting for help. She stated the Lease, which used to be 22-pages was now 11-pages because the type was smaller and the Executive Director added a Handbook at the end, was all the same material. She stated if the Community Relations Committee read the Lease, which was quite a document, was looking for opportunities to punish, terrify, and threaten. She stated that she appreciated the time this evening and she stated that she wanted to politely thank them.

Councilor Marshall asked Ms. Murray to provide more information about the ramp for the tenant who was in the wheelchair. Ms. Murray stated until two weeks ago the ramp went down the driveway where the double amputee tenant could go down to the smoking area, when it was legal, or go to the Community Room, or go to the location where the van would pick her up to transport her to medical appointments, noting that tenant with the wheelchair does not drive and does not have a car. She stated the ramp has been demolished, and what now existed was a piece of blacktop located off the edge of sidewalk, which was not ADA Compliant, not the right grade and not wide enough, noting that the tenant was afraid to use the ramp. Ms. Murray stated that she no longer had anything to do with the handicapped tenant because the tenant was terrified to talk to her; and therefore, Mrs. Murray stated that she has not had anything to do with her. She stated the wheelchair was not designed to be used on the road, stating the wheels were not meant to be used on the road. She stated the tenant had to go over to the Stonington Institute Building to smoke. She stated although she has not talked to the handicapped tenant in weeks, that she was told that the current ramp was not going to be replaced, stating that she has had no email, no text, no nothing, since the tenant has been threatened with eviction.

Councilor Marshall stated there was construction work going on at that the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility, and that they would find out if the handicap ramp was going to be replaced.

Ms. Ginina Diaz stated she had photographs of the handicap ramp.

Councilor Paul stated this portion of the meeting was to receive Residents Comments and that residents could provide photographs and other documentation at the end of the meeting.

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

IV. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS – None.

IV. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of August 16, 2023

Moved by Councilor Marshall, seconded by Councilor Saums.

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared

VI. NEW BUSINESS

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

Councilor Marshall stated in 2016 the State of Connecticut banned smoking in public buildings, noting that the grounds were a different situation. However, he stated per Ordinance #100-101 (rev. 1) “*Ordinance Establishing a Housing Authority for the Town of Ledyard and Payment in Lieu of Taxes Agreement for the Town of Ledyard*” which stated in accordance with CGS 128 Sections 8-40 and 8-41 that the Housing Authority had the authority to make policy. He stated currently the State of Connecticut does not ban smoking on their grounds; but that the Housing Authority had the power to implement a policy to ban smoking on the grounds. Therefore, he stated this was where they needed to find some common ground.

Ms. Diaz stated she went on the Housing Urban & Development (HUD) site which was where she found the information regarding the smoking ban, as she noted during her comments earlier this evening. She stated the carport, which was the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility’s former designated smoking area for many years, was at least 25-feet away from the buildings. She stated the other night that she drove to the abandoned Stonington Institute Building where the tenants were told they could smoke. She stated in turning off the headlights on her car that it was pitch black, noting that it was so dark she could not see her hand in front of her face. She stated that she had concerns that tenants going down the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility driveway and crossing the road to the area where they were told to smoke that someone was going to get hurt.

Councilor Paul stated that he believed the whole Town Council does appreciate their senior citizens. He stated his mother lives in a senior housing facility, and therefore, he knows what she goes through, and how it worked. He stated he believed in communication and that he has listened to what everyone has said. He stated communication and talking was the breadth that made everything work. He stated that he apologized if the residents felt that this Town Council did not care, noting that they really do care. However, he explained there were procedures providing a way to go about getting things done. He stated he was an ex-smoker, noting that he quit smoking seven-years ago; and so he had some sympathy for smokers.

Councilor Paul continued by stating that what was concerning to him regarding this matter was those who have been calling out people on social media sites, who had nothing to do with certain things. He stated he found doing so very disrespectful and it was disgusting. He stated Housing Authority Executive Director Colleen Lauer has been mentioned several times in the social media sites. He stated Ms. Lauer was hired by the Housing Authority to oversee the day-to-day operation of the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. He stated Ms. Lauer does not set the policies, or make the rules, noting that there were procedures in-place. Therefore, he stated in order to create dialogue that they had to straighten a few things out first. He noted as an example if a Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing tenant had an issue with something that they could file a grievance, stating that there was a procedure in-place to do that. He stated if the tenant was not satisfied with the answer Ms. Lauer provided in working within the parameters of the rules or policies that were in place, that the tenant could take their issue to the Housing Authority.

Councilor Paul went on to address some of the issues that were raised at the Town Council's meetings of August 23, 2023; and September 13, 2023 which included cameras at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. He stated everywhere you go today that they have cameras for several reasons which included insurance, liability, safety, etc. He stated the company he worked for had cameras in the oil trucks, noting that his drivers could say that he wanted to spy on them. However, he stated from a business perspective that the cameras would help to protect the driver, and their liability should someone cut-off the driver, etc. He stated everywhere you go they have rules and policies, noting as an example, some stores say, "*No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service*" or in the COVID world "*Masks Required*". He stated if he did not want to wear a mask then he would not go to that business, noting that those business had the right to make their own rules and policies and it was their right to protect their employees. He stated all of this was no different from why they have elections and referendums, noting that although some people may complain about a budget, if it passes the budget was implemented.

Councilor Paul stated the Housing Authority was made up of five residents, with one being a tenant of the housing facility; and that their Job was to run the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. He continued by addressing the *No Smoking Policy* and he questioned whether the residents who have spoken very elegantly at several meetings brought up their concerns or gave a presentation at the Housing Authority meetings when they were discussing the adoption of the *No Smoking Policy*; and whether they have gone through the processes in place.

Ms. Diaz stated that she did not know any of the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility tenants or anything about the No Smoking Policy until she saw the situation on social media. She stated when she attended a Housing Authority Meeting that she was appalled with the note passing between a resident and the Executive Director, laughing at the female tenants comments in which they *“asked if they could do something about how the maintenance man entered their apartment, noting that sometimes they were in their nightgown, and that they felt uncomfortable”*; or when a disabled tenant who had to go across the street in their wheelchair to smoke was *“accused of soliciting and exchanging money for sex because they heard it on the scanner”*.

Councilor Paul noted there were thirty-units at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility; however, he has only seen a few tenants attend meetings and only one tenant has spoken about the *No Smoking Policy*. Ms. Diaz stated that three people spoke about the Smoking issue at the last Housing Authority Meeting; and she noted that during the Housing Authority meeting one tenant verbally attacked them, stared them down for the remainder of the meeting and accused them of taking money. She stated the tenant was screaming so much that her face turned bright red, and that it was allowed. She stated when Mr. Edward Murray stood up and said, *“Don’t talk to me that way”* that the Housing Authority Chairman yelled at him and told him *“to sit down and shut his mouth, that he would speak when he was spoken to”*. Housing Authority Member Paula Crocker stated what Ms. Diaz stated was not true, noting that she had an audio recording of the meeting. Councilor Paul stated that recording the meetings was much better than trying to summarizing.

Councilor Saums stated they need to have one person speak at a time. He stated Councilor Paul was the Chairman of this meeting. He stated that this was a *“Public Meeting, not a Meeting held in Public”* for everyone to yell at each other.

Councilor Rodriguez stated that because she first heard rumblings in July, 2023 that she attended the Housing Authority’s Special meeting on July 6, 2023, noting that Councilor McGrattan also attended. She stated at the meeting they were providing an update regarding the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility renovation project. She stated a number of tenants spoke to her that day complaining about the renovation work, which they could not do anything about. She stated Executive Director Colleen Lauer said the renovation work was scheduled to be completed in November, but that realistically the construction work would most likely not be completed until December, 2023, because of the demand in supplies, which they all understood.

Councilor Rodriguez went on to note at the July 6, 2023 Housing Authority meeting that several tenants also talked to her about their concerns regarding the *Smoking Policy*, which was going into effect in August, 2023; and their concerns. She stated because the July meeting was a special meeting they could only talk about the items that were listed on the agenda. She stated when tenants tried to speak the Housing Authority Chairman reiterated that because it was a special meeting they could only speak about the items listed on the agenda. She stated the Housing Authority did not hold a meeting in June, 2023 and that she did not know what happened at the April or May meetings, but that it was her understanding that the Housing Authority voted on the *No Smoking Policy* at their March 6, 2023, meeting with an implementation date of August 1, 2023. She stated that she knew that there were

procedures in place, noting that tenants could file a grievance, but that she did not know how many people did that. She stated the July 6, 2023 Housing Authority was the first that she caught wind of the *Smoking Policy*.

Councilor Rodriguez stated after the meeting that she drove by the Kings Corner Manor Senior Housing Facility during the rain, at night, and during the day. She stated she saw a tenant who was a double amputee in a wheelchair at the Stonington Institute Building and that she went and spoke to her. She stated while she was there she walked around the Housing Facility, and she stated the distance between the Housing Facility to the street was longer than 300-feet and that it was all downhill. She stated rain and snow was going to be a problem for anyone with ambulatory problems and in a wheelchair. She stated when she walked to the corner that it was all curbing, noting that there was no American Disabilities Act (ADA) approved ramp to get onto the town property that was next to the street, which was all grass. She stated there was no way for a person in a wheelchair to get in, noting the person would have to go down the hill, onto the street, then cross the street to get to the Stonington Institute Building which was overgrown. She stated this was not a good scenario and not safe. She stated she had concerns regarding safety and liability, noting at night she could barely see. She stated that she wished they had a plan set up for the safety of the tenants who cannot stop smoking so that they had a safe place to smoke. She stated she hoped in the future there could be some mediation through the Mayor and the Housing Authority to come up with a compromise or negotiation, with some input from the town. She stated the carport was 25-feet away from the Housing Authority apartment buildings. She stated beyond the carport that there was a fence and she suggested that perhaps they could make an overhang that would meet ADA approval so that a wheelchair could get in, which would cost about \$10,000. She stated that the appearance made them all look like they were cruel, noting that they were not. She stated she did not believe for one-minute that the Housing Authority or the Town Council or the people of Ledyard were cruel, we are not. However, she stated they have a situation in which she wished that all parties had come together to talk about smoking in a civil manner and that they did not have this discussion on social media. She stated the first time she saw the situation it made her cry. She stated this was a safety and liability concern and that she recommended mediation.

Mrs. Eleanor Murray stated there was not just one person at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility that used a wheelchair. She stated that there were 2 tenants who used a wheelchair and 3 tenants who used scooters.

Councilor Marshall stated that they have identified the problems, and he explained to move forward that they need to work out solutions. He asked to hear from the Housing Authority members.

Mr. Edward Murray stated that he appreciated what Councilor Rodriguez stated, noting that there was an appearance here. He stated there was a diagnosis in one of the smoking manuals noting that there was a *Nicotine Use Disorder* that was generally found in all people.

Councilor Paul questioned Mr. Murray's involvement at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility, noting that he did not live at the facility. Mr. Murray stated he and his wife moved to Ledyard about one-year ago. He stated that they like to get

involved in their town. He stated initially they had some difficulty because they did not know anyone in town. Councilor Paul questioned whether the Murray's was a friend with a tenant who lived at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. Mr. Murray stated that he would not call him a friend to the tenants, but that when they found from their standpoint, that there was not the compassion that he thought there should be for the people who were in a position, where they basically had no control, they got involved. He stated that he knows that the smokers were offered the opportunity to quit smoking. He stated in looking at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data it would tell them that about one-third of the people who try to quit smoking were able to do so. Councilor Paul stated that we all synthesize with the smokers to some degree.

Ms. Paula Crocker, Route 12, Gales Ferry, Housing Authority Member, stated her mother lived in the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility for seventeen years, stating at that time the tenants could smoke inside the apartments. She stated her mother was a smoker, and was on oxygen, and continued to smoke. She also stated at that time that she was also a smoker, noting that she quit smoking a week after her mother passed away. She stated her mother passed away at 91 years old and did not pass away from smoking. She stated it her two-weeks to clean her mother's apartment, noting that it was disgusting and that she believed that even after she cleaned the apartment that the Housing Authority had to do more work to clean the apartment. Therefore, she stated that she thought long and hard when the Housing Authority was going to vote on the *Smoking Policy*. She stated her reason for voting to put smoking off the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing property was for the tenants who lived there that did not smoke. She stated you can smell cigarette smoke whether they smoked inside the apartments or not. She stated the smoke gets on everything and that was the reason she voted for no smoking on the property. She stated that she did feel sorry for the people who smoke, noting that it took her a long time to quit smoking. However, she stated the Smoking Policy was for the safety, health, and welfare of the entire Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Community, not just for the five tenants who smoke.

Ms. Colleen Lauer, 19 Nutmeg Drive, Gales Ferry, Housing Authority Executive Director, stated that she runs the day-to-day operations for the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. She stated the facility has 31-tenants, with five tenants that smoke. She stated the Housing Authority has had to clean a couple apartments that were occupied by smokers. She stated the Housing Authority has done a lot of research and checked with other Housing Authorities noting that there were several Housing Authorities in the area that do not allow smoking on the property at all. She stated it has been their intention to put a smoking area down near the street, however, they learned that the area they were considering was actually the Housing Authority's property. She stated they have been talking with the Town to try to have a sidewalk installed to provide a safe area for the smokers to go to. However, she stated it was not something that was required, nor do they have to allow smoking, based on any State or American Disability Act (ADA) Ruling. She stated the Housing Authority did their research and made the decision to go Non-Smoking at their March 6, 2023 meeting. She stated that she walked around the facility to deliver the Notice to all the tenants. She stated that she specifically

spoke with one tenant who was very upset and got very vocal with her. She stated tenants attended the Housing Authority's April 3, 2023 meeting, noting that their meeting were open for tenants to attend, and she stated not one single tenant commented on the Smoking Policy. She stated there was some talk of a petition, that the smokers asked other tenants to sign that stated that they did not mind smoking, noting that she has never seen the petition. She stated the Housing Authority did not receive any documentation or correspondence prior to the August 1, 2023 implementation of the *Smoking Policy*.

Ms. Lauer addressed the comments regarding the sidewalk/ramp explaining that it was initially installed in 1986, and that it was not an American Disability Act (ADA) approved ramp. She stated the ramp that was currently there was a temporary asphalt ramp, explaining as part of the renovation work to the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility that the ramp has been redesigned for engineering and ADA compliance. She continued to explain that the new ramp would be regraded, the parking area would have a Handicap Parking spot painted hashmarks, stating that it would be appropriate.

Councilor Marshall questioned whether it was possible to Grandfather-In the five tenants who smoke for the remainder of their life in a designated area, and then going forward not allow any new tenants moving into the facility to smoke. Executive Assistant Colleen Lauer responded to Councilor Marshall's suggestion stating that would be the Housing Authority's decision, explaining that was not her decision. Councilor Marshall questioned whether this was something the Housing Authority would consider. Ms. Lauer stated the full Housing Authority was not present this evening; and she explained the Smoking Policy was on the Housing Authority's August 7, 2023 and September 5, 2023 Agendas, and that the Authority voted to keep the Smoking Policy as it was discussed and voted on at their March 6, 2023 meeting.

Councilor Marshall questioned the purpose of the cameras at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. Executive Assistant Colleen Lauer stated the cameras were to protect the property. She stated when she took the job that she talked with other Housing Authorities, and she stated that the majority of them have some type of security system. Therefore, the Housing Authority decided to put up cameras for insurance purposes. She stated god-forbid someone has fallen that they would have the security cameras footage. She stated they had an incident in which some children had damaged some items in the area of the path between Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility and the Senior Citizens Facility, noting that they were able to catch the kids from the footage captured on the camera. Councilor Marshall questioned whether any of the cameras were pointing at the residences and if they could see inside the apartments. Ms. Laurer stated that the cameras were pointed toward the buildings but that they could not see inside the apartments. She stated the cameras only cover the area outside of the buildings, noting that they were not sophisticated stating that they only provided video and that they did not have audio. She stated that they also had one camera in the Community Room.

Ms. Susan Lipinski, 60 Kings Corner Manor, Apartment #1, attending remotely by phone, stated that she was sitting at the white building having a cigarette, because she wanted to show everyone how dark and dangerous it was there. The Community Relations Committee stated that they could hear Ms. Lipinski but that there was no video. Ms. Lipinski stated that she has been a resident at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility for 23-years explaining that she moved to the housing facility after she was hit by a drunk driver, and she lost both of her legs. She stated that luckily she had a place to go, stating that she was grateful that there was a place for her to live. She stated that she never smoked in her apartment, and when the facility went non-smoking and provided a designed smoking area that she did not have a problem with that, but that a couple people did; and those people continued to smoke in their apartments. She stated they had Rules which stated if the tenant had three strikes that they would be evicted. She stated because the Housing Authority did not obey the Rule to evict one tenant continued to smoke in their apartment. She stated the Housing Authority spent about \$1,000 to help that person cleanup their apartment, but that the tenant continued to smoke in the apartment. She stated the Housing Authority should punish the one person who was not following the rules, not punish all of them. She stated they kept a clean smoking area, noting that she provided all of the ash trays, noting that not one cigarette but was found and that they were 25-feet away from the buildings. She stated the \$21,000 electric wheelchair she was in was not made for the street or road and it could only be replaced every five-years. She stated because of the constant back and forth on the street that the wear and tear on the wheelchair was a lot quicker than it should be. She stated that she was an outside person, noting that she was outside all the time, she smoked outside with her dog and that she did not bother anybody. She stated that she was the tenant that had the petition signed and that it was in her presence. She stated she spoke with Housing Authority Executive Director Colleen Lauer about her issues regarding the Smoking Policy and the tenant that did not follow the rules and that Ms. Lauer stated that she could not talk about another tenant; but if they could take care of the issue with the tenant that the Housing Authority was not going to make the tenants smoke off the property. Ms. Lipinski stated that she said to Ms. Lauer *that was good that they were going to take care of the one tenant because all of the others have been following the rules.*

Ms. Lipinski continued to state that she filled out the paperwork for “*Special Accommodations*” and that when they had bad weather that she would smoke out her window to make sure no smoke went into the apartment. She stated if it had bothered any of her neighbors that she would have moved. She stated with living at the Kings Corner Housing Facility for 23-years that the history she knew about the place was unbelievable. She stated the cameras did not save people’s lives. She stated because she was outside all the time that she saved six people’s lives, stating that she had the cards to prove it, noting they happened to get hurt outside in the middle of the night and she happened to be outside smoking. She stated the Housing Authority only knows of five-smokers, noting that people say they do not smoke but they do.

Ms. Lipinski addressed the issue regarding the cameras at the Kings Corner Senior Citizens Housing Facility. She stated one tenant met State Senator Cathy Osten at an event and they told her what was going on at the facility. She stated Senator Osten visited

the Housing Facility on a Sunday and the tenant walked her around the facility. She stated the next day (Monday) Executive Director Colleen Lauer knew that Senator Osten had visited the housing facility because their Tenant Commissioner, who was a friend of Ms. Lauer calls Ms. Lauer at her home all the time to report when the tenants were doing any kind of activity that was out of the ordinary, stating that they were not a prison. She stated when Ms. Lauer received the Tenant Member's telephone call stating that someone, who looked important, was walking around the property with another tenant that Ms. Lauer immediately got on her home telephone and looked at the cameras to see who the tenant was walking around with. She stated that was not what these cameras were for; and that she would swear by that to the day she dies. Ms. Lipinski stated the rules state that the tenants were supposed to vote-in the Tenant Member to serve on the Housing Authority, but that their Tenant Board Member was not voted in by the tenants, they were voted in by the Board. She stated she has lived in Ledyard since she was 12-years old and that she remembered when the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility was built. She stated that she knew for a fact that they have never had any break-ins; not even a car break-in at the housing property, noting that nobody bothers with them. She stated it was dark, it was lonely, and nobody came up there. She stated Ms. Lauer did a survey asking 125 Housing Authorities what their position was regarding smoking. She stated that 93% still smoke on housing property, but they do not smoke in their homes. Ms. Lipinski stated that she would provide a copy of the survey to whoever was in-charge there. She stated that she did not smoke in her apartment, and therefore, she questioned why she should be punished. She stated that she has also done some research and she stated that other Housing Authorities have the Board Members, before they join, do some kind of training. She stated the Board Members do not know the American Disabilities Act (ADA) Laws; they do not know the Roberts Rules of Order, noting that she knew them. She stated that she did not think they were trying to hurt the tenants in any way, but that she thinks that sometimes they just do not know. She stated she was glad to be at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility and that she did not want to leave. She stated the renovation work was an inconvenience for all of them, including Ms. Lauer and the Board Members, but that she was glad the work was being done. She stated that she hoped they could come up with a solution so they could all live in harmony, noting there were only 31 tenants.

Councilor Paul thanked Ms. Lipinski for her comments.

Councilor Saums stated he wanted to address the suggestion that the Town Council does not care. He stated that he remembered Ms. Lipinski writing a letter to the Town Council and sending a photograph of a vine growing into her shower. He stated not too long ago the Housing Authority was replacing the windows, three at a time, because they did not have any money for capital improvements. He stated the one reason the Housing Authority did not have any money was because the former Executive Director never raised the rents. He stated while the rents at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility were low they could not be as low as they were because if the Housing Authority cannot set-a-side funding for capital improvements they could not maintain the facility, which was why all this was happening and the reason a vine was growing in Ms. Lipinski's shower.

Councilor Saums continued by stating although the Town Council could not do anything with regard to the vine growing in the shower or for the replacement of windows because they do not have any authority; that what the Town Council was able to do was work with the Housing Authority to secure \$2.8 million of State Grant Funding through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) and the Housing of Urban Development (HUD) for the extensive improvement/renovation work that was currently underway at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility. He stated he realized that the current renovation work was inconvenient, but that it was \$2.8 million dollars of State Grant Funding the Housing Authority was able to get with the support of the Town Council. He stated the Town Council does care, noting that if the Town Council had not paid attention to the condition of the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility and they did not work with the Housing Authority the apartments would still be in the state of disrepair like when Ms. Lipinski sent the Town Council the picture of the vine growing in her shower eight years ago. He stated that he hoped the residents could take this into perspective with regard to whether the Town Council cared or not.

Councilor Saums addressed the comments about all of the information that was provided for tonight's Community Relations Committee meeting. He stated the information was not intended to bore or to intimidate you, it was to provide the background and understanding of why the Town Council Chairman keeps saying that the Town Council cannot do anything, because they do not have any authority.

Councilor Saums questioned whether anyone has filed any grievances with the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) on behalf of the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Tenants. Ms. Diaz stated that she only received the information regarding the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) at last week's meeting. She stated that she has not filed any grievances, noting that she felt her position was to support the tenants, not to do it for them. She stated she had given to the Tenants the following information: (1) CHFA Grievance Process; and (2) Tenants Rights to Reasonable Accommodations. Ms. Lipinski stated that she filed a Grievance with the CHFA. Councilor Saums stated that this was the proper process to file their complaints. He went on to note as Councilor Paul stated this evening, that this Committee was trying to help them establish a dialogue. He stated the Committee understands everything they were saying and they understand there was a lot of disagreement about what was being said; however, he stated were still not going to do anything about it. He stated that they would do what they could to support, but that they do not have the authority.

Councilor Paul stated that it was getting late, and what Councilor Saums said was correct. However, he stated as they wrap-up tonight's discussion regarding the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility, with the Tenants and the Housing Authority that he would like to note the following:

- Importance to follow procedures in order to move forward in the right direction.
 - ✓ Grievance – The Housing Authority had a grievance process. Councilor Paul stated tenants could file a grievance. The Executive Director would try to resolve the issue. He stated if the Director was not able to resolve the matter in fifteen

days, that it would be submitted to the Housing Authority to make a decision regarding the grievance. He stated should the tenant did not agree with the Housing Authority's decision that they had the opportunity to have another hearing.

- Renovation/Improvement Project – Councilor Paul stated they all recognized that the construction work has been inconvenient for everyone. However, he stated the work was almost complete and that it was going to be a great improvement. He stated this was an incredible positive for the tenants and the Kings Corner Manor Housing Facility.
- Executive Director – Councilor Paul stated it was his opinion that the Director has done a great job managing the Renovation/Improvement Project.
- Social Media – Councilor Paul stated whether they liked the Executive Director or the Housing Authority Members that there was a proper way to go about addressing concerns. He stated going on social media or accusing one person was very disrespectful. He stated putting someone a Facebook Blast was absolutely wrong; and that he could not respect anyone who does that. He stated using social media was not the process to address issues at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility.
- Housing Authority Meeting Location – Councilor Paul stated the meetings should be held at a location where the meetings could be video and audio recorded. He stated this would allow the Housing Authority to engage residents in a better format where residents could talk. He stated although he may not agree with what everyone had to say that he liked to listen, and that the tried to put himself in those people shoes.

Councilor Paul stated that he did not think the issues that they were discussing could be resolved this evening. However, he stated that he hoped tonight's discussion would help them start to think about how they could better communicate with the right people. He encouraged tenants to read the agendas, minutes, attend the meetings and speak when they had the opportunity to speak at the meetings.

Mrs. Eleanor Murray stated that she would like to leave the Community Relations Committee with one thought that she learned while she was doing this kind of work in New York, which was *"The rescuer becomes the victim"*. She stated they were only here tonight because she blasted this on Facebook. She stated she listened to what the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing Facility tenants were saying, she blasted it on Facebook, she made everybody angry and that was why they were here this tonight. She stated she went to the Town Council, she made a big deal about it, nothing that she was new here in Ledyard, and everybody told her that. She stated that was the only reason they were here tonight and why this dialogue was happening. She stated that they could scold her, they could be angry about it, but that these people were not being listened to, they just weren't. She stated don't scold her anymore, it was not fair.

Councilor Paul stated he was not scolding, however, he stated that there was a better mechanism to do that. Ms. Murray stated *there wasn't, there wasn't, there wasn't*. Councilor Paul stated by coming to the Town Council meeting that it allowed them to get this matter on the Community Relations Committee's agenda, where they could talk and begin a dialogue. He stated his point was that there were processes in place. He stated that he would make his comments about putting out a blast on social media to anyone. He stated he was not trying to call anyone out. He stated what he was saying was that there were mechanisms in place, and by coming to the Town Council that Chairman Dombrowski stated let's get some dialogue going with the Community Relations Committee, which turned into a positive. Therefore, he stated that they need to start on that note and say "*Going forward, we need to go through the channels that are there for us.*". He stated that he agreed with the comments that information was hard to find. However, he stated the town's Ordinance #100-101 (rev. 1) "*Ordinance Establishing a Housing Authority for the Town of Ledyard and Payment in Lieu of Taxes Agreement for the Town of Ledyard*" which was available on-line, pointed to the Housing Authority's governing State Statutes (CGS 128 Sections 8-40 and 8-41). He went on to state if they looked up the State Statutes that they could find everything pertaining to Housing Authorities.

Councilor Paul concluded by stating that they need to turn their attention from blame to what do they have to do to move forward. He stated ultimately the decisions concerning the Kings Corner Manor Senior Housing Facility were made by the Housing Authority, and that it was not the Executive Director's decision. He stated now that they have had some discussion that they were all aware of the grievance process. He stated they all cared about the senior citizens at the Kings Corner Manor Senior Housing Facility, including the smokers. He stated he did not want to see a smoker get hurt, and as a former smoker he understands that it was hard. He stated that he had friends that smoke and that he did not ostracize them; and that he hoped that this will be taken into consideration by the Housing Authority, because he wanted to see their senior citizens protected whether they were smokers or not smokers. He stated that he hoped everyone would hit the "*reset button*" and work to try to mend those relationships.

Ms. Diaz stated tonight's Community Relations Committee meeting was a much different environment than the Town Council meetings were. She stated we were having a conversation, and they do not all agree, but that they were having a dialogue. She stated they had a room full of people who were willing to listen, which made a big difference in a lot of things.

Councilor Paul addressed Ms. Diaz's comment regarding the difference in the environment between a Town Council meeting and the Community Relations Committee meeting. He explained during the Town Council meeting they had an agenda that they had to follow. He stated at the Town Council meetings that they receive Resident's comments, and that Chairman Dombrowski referred this matter to the Community Relations Committee because we do care.

Councilor Rodriguez stated during the Town Council meetings that they can only hear resident's comments, explaining that they cannot say a word, which was the reason that it sometimes appeared that they did not care. However, she stated that they were all listening.

Councilor Saums stated that the members of the Town Council were not prevented from saying anything at their meetings. However, he stated as Councilor Paul explained, the Town Council had an agenda that they followed, which provided an opportunity for each resident to speak for 3-minutes, noting that they do not have a dialogue, and they do not have a discussion because everyone would like to be heard. He went on to explain that the Community Relations Committee had five more items on their agenda that they had to get to this evening, noting that he has been in meetings since 5:00 p.m. tonight, and that this Committee has not really started their agenda yet.

Ms. Crocker stated the Housing Authority has discussed moving their meeting to the Town Hall Annex Building. However, she stated some of the Kings Corner Manor Senior Citizens Housing tenants cannot get to the Town Hall for various reasons, which included that they do not drive at night. Councilor Paul stated if the Housing Authority used the Town Hall Annex Meeting Room that the meetings could be live streamed using Zoom so those who could not physically attend could attend remotely, like Ms. Lipinski did this evening.

Councilor Paul thanked each and every one who attended tonight's meeting and for their comments. He stated everyone who wanted to be heard was heard tonight. He stated that he hoped that they could continue to mend this relationship.

Ms. Diaz questioned whether the Town Council had a general email address. It was noted that residents could email the entire Town Council at: towncouncil@ledyardct.org.

RESULT: DISCUSSED

Next Meeting: 10/18/2023 6:30 p.m.

2. Any new business proper to come before the Committee. – None.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

1. Black History Month 2024 Activity/Contest.

Councilor Rodriguez stated Councilor McGrattan told her that one of the Ledyard Librarians would like to get involved with the Black History Month program. She stated that she would contact the Librarian to exchange some ideas and would report back to the Committee.

RESULT: NO ACTION

Next Meeting: 10/18/2023 6:30 p.m.

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

Councilor Paul stated the Community Relations Committee had some great success at the Farmers' Markets this summer. He stated unfortunately the September 13, 2023 "Hometown Heros" Farmers' Market was cancelled due to weather. He stated the Community Relations Committee had planned to participate at the event to thank and to bring awareness to the work and dedication of our First Responders (Fire Departments and Police Department) as well as the over 200 community volunteers who serve on the Town's Committees/Commissions/Boards, noting that they were all instrumental in how our town works. He stated that he was thankful for the people who were willing to participate in the event, noting that it was unfortunate that the weather did not cooperate.

Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher stated the Ledyard Beautification Committee was at the Farmers' Market this evening. She stated when Committee Chairman Jennfier Eastbourne picked up the Town of Ledyard tent that she was willing to bring the flyers and other information the Community Relations Committee had prepared to handout at the September 13, 2023 Farmers Market for interested residents to learn how they could volunteer to serve on a town committee. Councilor Paul stated the materials also included a QR Code for residents to scan to bring them to the new portal where they could submit their Appointment Application on-line.

Councilor Paul went on to state the Community Relations Committee participated with Ledyard Libraries at the August 30, 2023 Farmers Market, noting that the theme was "Back to School". He stated it was great to see the Library Staff interact with the kids He stated the Library was also planning to hold a presentation later this Fall. However, he stated because they were short-staffed they decided to postpone the presentation until they were back to being fully staffed.

Councilor Paul noted tonight was the last Farmers Market for the 2023 Summer Season. Councilor Marshall questioned whether there was going to be a Winter Market this year. Councilor Paul stated that there would not be a Winter Farmers' Market.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting:10/18/2023 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 noted that the Committee discussed hosting an Informal Gathering at the new Lantern Hill Waterfront Park, which was the property Mr. and Mrs. Graham donated to the town (leased for \$10 per year) . However, he stated he has not been able to reach out to anyone to try to coordinate an event.

Councilor Rodriguez stated that she thought the Committee also discussed working with Parks & Recreation to schedule a tour to visit all of the town's recreational parks.

Councilor Paul stated that they have been discussing a tour of all the parks in town. However, he stated that he has not heard from the Director of Parks, Recreation, & Senior Citizens Commission, noting that the newly combined Commission held their first regular meeting on September 19, 2023.

Councilor Rodriguez, Liaison to the Parks, Recreation, & Senior Citizens Commission, stated that the Park Tour was on their Agenda last night. However, the Commission received a presentation regarding the State Park from a Boy Scout and that two residents talked about Pickleball. Therefore, she stated there were some items on the agenda that the Commission was not able to get to.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 10/18/2023 6:30 p.m.

4. Joint meetings with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation

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

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 10/18/2023 6:30 p.m.

5. Review status update regarding the progress of improvements at the Park on East Drive.

Councilor Paul stated he has been waiting for the Parks, Recreation, & Senior Citizens Commission to schedule the tour of the town's parks, noting that he had hoped the tour would begin at the Park on East Drive. He stated that he has not heard that there were any recent issues at the Park.

Councilor Rodriguez stated that she spoke with Mrs. Jamison about a month ago, and she noted that Mrs. Jamison stated that they did not have any complaints and that they were happy with the new lights and other work that was done. Councilor Rodriguez stated that the Park on East Drive was a beautiful park.

Councilor Paul expressed his appreciation to Chief Rich and the Police Department for their diligence, to Parks & Recreation, the Public Works Department and the residents in the area for their concerted efforts to make the Park improvements happen, noting that this was a good example of a community-team effort.

RESULT: CONTINUED

Next Meeting: 10/18/2023 6:30 p.m.

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

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

VOTE: Councilor Paul moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor Marshall.
3 – 0 Approved and so declared. The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gary Paul
Committee Chairman
Community Relations Committee