

Communications Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, February 2, 2023, 6:30 pm
Wheelwright Room
Exeter, NH 03833

MINUTES

Present: Martha McEntee (Chair), Lindsay Sonnett, Nina Braun, Bob Glowacky (Communications Coordinator), Andy Swanson (IT), and Molly Cowan (Select Board Rep),, Bob Glowacky arrived at 6:45pm.

The meeting convened at 6:44 pm.

Approval of Minutes. On a motion by Lindsay , seconded by Nina, the January 5, 2023 meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

Town Meeting. Martha noted that we are entering Town Meeting season with the Deliberative Session at the High School this weekend and the Town Election just over a month away and suggested that the Committee discuss this ahead of other items on the agenda.

She suggested that the Committee's goals should include 1) getting more information out to the public about the Town Election, and 2) getting more people to come out to vote and get engaged in town governance. Since its inception, the Committee has prepared plain English summaries of the warrant articles and arranged for them to be published on the local paper and on the Town website. Last year, the Committee worked with the Town Manager to create simple descriptions of the various warrant articles for incorporation directly into his Town Report for the Deliberative Session as well. In addition, Bob started making videos to describe the various warrant articles. Martha wants to encourage the CAC to think about how to get people involved and asks the committee for ideas.

Andy said that the same people tend to come out to various Town meetings that most people are just not motivated to get involved.

Bob suggested that it would be more effective to focus on how to bring people into the town processes and get their feedback earlier on in the timeline before items appear on the ballot. The thinking is that if folks are more engaged with a project they will be more likely to turn out to vote in favor of it. He also noted, though, that holding in-person meetings for this purpose was not very successful and virtual ones were not much better.

Molly said that it's very hard to get people involved, but that literally going door-to-door may be something the Town has to consider for specific projects to get information out and to get people involved.

Lindsay said that as local text alert system managed by a private company in where she used to live seemed to be an effective means of getting people engaged, It's a project of Rappahannock News and Foothills Forum in Virginia.

Bob noted the Exeter TV's Exeter biweekly report and meeting recaps.

Nina said that people are frustrated about being bombarded with content.

Lindsay likes the idea of having a simple texting service with a very basic link to go and watch something.

Martha asked Molly about where Communications falls among the Select Board's priorities. Molly said the CAC should come up with recommendations for the Town's communications needs and a strategy for meeting them. She said it is clear that we need to do better as a Town as items fall through the cracks.

Bob suggested that the Committee review successful projects with a successful communications component such as the Salem Street project, where the consultants were specifically tasked with maintaining communications with the residents in the area, and received excellent feedback as a result ("personal" and "engaging").

Martha said that the two complaints about communications that she hears most often are about the demise of the "old" sources of news such as the local newspaper as a reliable source of information and the fact that despite all the "new" sources of news such as the website and social media, people often find out about things they care about too late.

Molly suggested that the Committee consider meeting with a consultant for a few hours to share their expert thinking about the best ways to communicate. The Committee agreed to pursue this idea and discuss it further at the next meeting.

2023 CAC Goal Setting. The Committee made a preliminary outline of goals for the year.

- Physical Marketing
 - In person
 - Print, etc.
- Evaluate Text alert system
- Make sure the website is the central location for Town information
- Drive people to the website when they are using other platforms and media)
 - Example getting meeting recordings on the Town website
- Help the Town be more proactive and get information out in front of people
- Look at how to solve problems associated with the decline of local media as a news source
- Meeting with communications consultant or expert
- Work on strategic communications plan for the Town

Social Media Policy Update. Martha and Bob are finalizing a draft after having met with meeting with Russ Dean in December.

Communications Coordinator Update. Bob discussed his research into creating a Town MailChimp account to be used by several departments for general communications and alerts. The cost ranges from \$16,20 to \$4,200 annually.

Bob also discussed his work on getting information from the Town Manager's Town Warrant Fact Sheet uploaded to the website and spread on social media.

Bob wrapped up his Communications Coordinator update with information about the status of Exeter TV. There is a warrant article on this year's Town Warrant that would allow for the Town Manager and Select Board to determine how much franchise fees get allocated to the Cable Revolving Fund. This article if passed would help make the department more financially sustainable in the future. Exeter TV is also looking at expanding its coverage to more government committees.

Other Business. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:58pm.
