

DRAFT March 8, 2023

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

**MINUTES**

Present: Martha McEntee (Chair), Lindsay Sonnett, Herb Moyer, Bob Glowacky (Communications Coordinator), Andy Swanson (IT), and Molly Cowan (Select Board Rep).

Absent: Nina Braun, Chris Zigmont

The meeting convened at 6:35 pm.

**Approval of Minutes.** On a motion by Lindsay seconded by Herb, the February 2, 2023 meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

**2023 CAC Goal Settings.** Martha opened the discussion by raising the idea introduced at the last meeting of having the Committee meet with a communications expert to get outside advice on how the Town could best approach improving communications strategically. She thought this could be part of the Committee's work in preparing a second formal report by the Committee to the Select Board.

Andy mentioned that any recommendations with a budget implications would need to be given by June. Herb noted that we might want to focus on someone with a lot of social media savvy as opposed to just general communications.

Molly said that we needed to step back and ask how we as a Town decide what our communications priorities are, that is: (1) what do we spend our communication dollars on; and (2) how do we make those decisions. In the last year, the Police and Fire Departments on their own contracted with a communications consultant and that led to a discussion at the Select Board about possibly extending that contractual arrangement more broadly to the Town at large. This has engendered interest in a more in-depth review of the Town's communications priorities, processes, and needs, which this Committee should undertake.

Molly suggested a preliminary list of some basic questions:

- What is the best use of our communications dollars?
- How do we figure out how to allocate them? Strategic thinking vs emotional/political reactions. Do we need a consultant to help us or not?
- Where do we need the most help? DPW because they oversee so many services? Parks & Rec because families need help? Housing because successes don't get enough positive coverage?

Martha noted the importance of gaining an understanding of how to use metrics to measure public engagement.

Andy asked whether we know where we want to be in four years?

Martha said that she hears two major and somewhat divergent types of complaints: (1) "We miss the "old local newspaper," which will not be coming back"; and (2) "We want better use of

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the immediacy of the new methods of communication, such as text alerts, so we know about things on a more timely basis.” Perhaps some combination of the two would be ideal.

Andy thinks that people should simply be directed to the website.

Molly said that a worthwhile goal would be to aim for increased engagement by residents in the life of the Town. She thinks that smart, thoughtful communication that conveys the kind of information that people care about will get them engaged and make them more likely to participate in Town government.

Bob noted that it would be important to have someone who would take into account the restrictions on municipal communications imposed by New Hampshire law, such as the prohibition on electioneering by public employees in NH RSA 659:44-a.

Bob suggested we start polling meeting attendees about how they heard about the meeting. He also suggested conducting surveys of some kind. Molly said it could be as simple as having the committee chairs regularly ask attendees why they are at various meetings.

Martha recalled the success of communications in connections with the Salem Street Project and asked what we can we learn from that. Bob suggested that we invite someone from DPW to come in and talk about how they approached that project and what was successful about it, that is, what did the town do or what did the consultants do and how could we use these techniques on other projects. He said he would reach out to Trisha in DPW about the Salem Street Project.

Molly said she will talk to New Deal Leaders, which includes several larger municipalities, to see how they approach communications.

Andy once again stressed the importance of speeding up any budget requests to be ready for the June meeting. Bob said he will look into grants for communications.

**Communications Coordinator Update.** Bob reported that he contacted the NHMA legal staff to clarify some questions about the applicability of the recordkeeping statutes to social media as outlined in the draft social media policy that was posted on the NHMA website among other things. The legal counsel disavowed that draft policy and said it was not one of their official documents. He also said that the NHMA would advise only that a town “disable comments” on social media. Bob noted that other postings on NHMA’s website explicitly noted the value in two-way communication offered by social media, so this advice seemed peculiar. Bob and Martha remain confident that the draft sent to Russ was sound and addressed the issues raised by the Select Board and they would report the NHMA counsel’s comments to him and suggest he consult with town counsel as he sees fit.

Bob said he is still waiting to hear back the Town Manager to see if we can find funding to consolidate the Town’s MailChimp accounts.

Bob suggested that He and Herb start to review the Exeter TV media policy. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:35pm.

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