

**Communications Advisory Committee Meeting  
Thursday, June 1, 2023, 6:30 pm  
Wheelwright Room  
Exeter, NH 03833**

**MINUTES**

Present: Martha McEntee (Chair), Herb Moyer, Chris Zigmont, Bob Glowacky (Communications Coordinator), Andy Swanson (IT), and Nancy Belanger (Select Board Rep).

Absent: Molly Cowan

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 pm.

**Review of Draft Report to Select Board.** Martha suggested that we turn first to our review of the draft report. She noted that since the first iteration, only minor changes had been made. She reviewed them and they were mostly grammatical and typographical.

She then went over the research that she and Bob had done and focused particularly on the helpful Zoom meeting that she and Bob had with the staff of the Town of Lexington, Massachusetts, their approach to communications and the wealth of resources they told us about for municipal communications professionals. The Lexington staff stressed the importance of nurturing a “culture of communications” among all town staff, a process that takes a long time and a determined effort. They said that after some initial resistance, staff realized that working with communications to tell residents what they were doing actually made their jobs easier and got them recognition for the work they did. This is the main message we want to deliver to the Select Board: nurture a culture of communications and get the message to Town staff that to communicating to each other and to residents is an important part of their job.

Nancy said that the Select Board already supports communications and is concerned that the report seems to imply that the Select Board isn’t open to doing so.

Chris drew a distinction and said that cultural shifts are different and that the Town needs to go from passive minimalism to proactive communication.

Martha reiterated the advice we heard from our colleagues in Lexington: that this is going to take time. It’s a long-term process. For example, what this translated into in practical terms was that the Town should be investing in staff, sending them to courses to improve their communications skills, to help them with use those skill do perform that aspect of their jobs more effectively, which would benefit the Town in the long run.

Nancy asked Bob about the staffing implications and if he would be ready to be this central person. Bob said that he is already doing this in some capacity and that he is ready to work with Town Manager and the Select Board as this process moves forward. Bob also mentioned that either way (the report recommendations being adopted or not) Exeter TV will be asking for a full-time Media Technician. Nancy also questioned if this would be a possibility of an on-call person. Martha noted that HR matters were not within the purview of the Committee and

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steered the discussion on to the development of a Communications Plan. The report starts off the process by asking the Select Board reaffirm the priorities and goals of the Master Plan and any new plans.

Chris said that “nurturing a culture of communications” in this context could be stated simply: *Every staff member should ask themselves every day, am I doing something that citizens need to know? If the answer is yes, I should tell my supervisor. Then the supervisor should take steps to make sure it's communicated effectively.*

Martha cited the example of the Siphon Improvement Project, noting anecdotally that several people had expressed frustration to her that they did not understand what was going on and would have liked to have been able to find a single, easy-to-understand explanation of the issue. The question of how the Town can simplify communications about inherently complex matters is a challenging one that needs to be considered further as we work on the newsletters Bob raised his concern about not wanting to become a “gatekeeper” and suggested that we reword the language in the report heading 2 on page 4, “in advance of publication. The heading currently reads in its entirety:

“We must establish a routine practice of sharing all communications content created by Town staff or outside contractors with the Communications Coordinator *in advance of publication* so that the content may be evaluated, and if appropriate, included on the Town website, disseminated on other platforms, and integrated with other Town messaging, as appropriate.”  
*[text under discussion in italics]*

Chris suggested we consider the following alternative language:

“We must establish a routine practice of adherence to guidelines of a communications plan, and as deemed necessary in the plan, sharing communications content created by town staff or outside contractors with the Communications Coordinator in advance of publication so that the content may be evaluated, and if appropriate, included on the town website, disseminated on other platforms, and integrated with other town messaging, as appropriate.”

Martha asked the group to turn to a discussion of the development of a Communications Plan as described in the report. She noted that at this stage, the report basically reviewed the communications aspects of the Town Master Plan as a way of initiating a more in-depth discussion. The reasoning behind this approach was to build on already-identified priorities, and start a process to review and update them as needed.

Chris said the process of formulating a communications plan is determining what is and how the Town will handle its “planned communications” and “unplanned communications” and then establish a set of rules that follow certain rules, essentially a guidebook, or a set of permissions for who can communicate about them to whom and which tools and platforms to use. The plan would include dos and don'ts and the Town would make judgments as to how tightly or loosely it wants to control communications about different topics. The plan would identify what types of communication need to be treated in certain ways depending on their level of importance.

Chris suggested the Committee work actively to prepare a draft communications plan for the Select Board to consider and agreed to assist Bob and Martha in reviewing the models they had assembled. Bob and Martha felt they could have a working draft ready for the full Committee to review sometime in the fall.

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Turning back to the budget recommendations proposed in the draft report, Nancy said she would like to see an entire Communications Plan in place and approved before spending money on communication. Bob and Martha express concerns about waiting on these items. Bob emphasized that these requests for the FY24 budget would provide immediate help to Town staff even without a long-term communications plan in place.

Andy noted that broader organizational changes are already under consideration. Martha asked whether the other Committee members supported the FY24 budget requests and the members said yes.

Herb moved that the Committee approve the Report for submission to the Select Board with the understanding that additional minor modifications to the text of heading two on page 4 may be needed to clarify that preclearance of communications was not an absolute requirement.

Chris seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously approved.

Nancy thanked the Committee members for their work on the Report

### **Other Business.**

Andy said that he had prepared some notes that he would write up that he will forward to the CAC members so they could be discussed at the next meeting.

Bob delivered his Communications Coordinator update.

He spoke with Lexington Director of Communications and Special Projects Sean Dugan

He have a brief update on a recent MailChimp push. Martha contacted the Property Manager of the Mills properties and was able to get them to forward a pre-written message to all of their residents inviting them to watch the Exeter Biweekly Report and sign up for email newsletters from Exeter TV/the Town. With this outreach, we had 101 visits to the landing sign-up page for our email alerts. To put it into perspective, in the life of our MailChimp account we've only had 736 visits. Of the 101 people who visited the page, 71 signed up for email alerts. If we can replicate this with other communities such as Riverwoods, Condominium Associations, the Chamber, houses of worship, etc. we can dramatically increase our reach.

He also gave a brief update on the status of the Social Media Policy which has taken a back seat to work related to the CAC report and the Draft Communications Plan.

Bob gave an update on HR 3557 - a streamlining bill for expanding broadband by eliminating state or local leverage in wireless and cable franchises. The most alarming part of the bill would create a right for companies to veto/revise the contract at will with no recourse to the other parties. It gives the corporations the right to end the contract and still retain all the rights to the contract (use public rights of way without having to give the municipalities anything). Even though the bill is for broadband expansion, there are no provisions that require these services to expand. It passed on a 27 R to 23 D partisan line in the committee. ACM President is confident that local partners and allies will exercise their speech rights to let congress know that this is a harmful bill and it could take away valuable services. He thinks it is important that access centers advocate for themselves. Billed as a pro-broadband bill for digital equity, streamlining, permitting reform, etc – BUT this goes beyond that and takes away people's rights. The ACM is trying to send a few messages over the next few weeks but for now encourages interested

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parties to contact house and senate delegations and have Town Manager reach out to associations to make sure they are opposing the bill – members need to be expressing concerns.

**Approval of Minutes.** On a motion by Chris, seconded by Herb, the April 6, 2023 meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

The members agreed that the next meeting would be held starting at 7pm instead of 6:30pm on Thursday July 6.

The meeting adjourned at 8pm.

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