

Communications Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday August 3, 2023 7:00 pm
Town Offices, Wheelwright Room
Exeter, NH 03833

MINUTES

Present: Martha McEntee (Chairperson), Herb Moyer, Bob Glowacky, Andy Swanson, Nancy Belanger (Select Board Rep standing in for Molly Cowan), and Russ Dean (Town Manager).

Absent: Chris Zigmont

The meeting convened at 7pm.

Approval of Minutes. Upon a motion by Nancy, seconded by Herb, the minutes of the June 1, 2023 meeting were unanimously approved.

Communications Coordinator Update. Bob reported that we've upgraded MailChimp service and begun further research to merge the Town's email-marketing accounts so that residents can select which newsletters they want to receive at a single sign-up sheet. He noted that the Police and Fire Departments use a separate service called Smart 911, and the Library uses a separate service called Library Aware. He's reached out to various Town staff and various departments to get their input on the design of the town-wide newsletter and their input for plans to do further research and preparation for implementation.

Communications about Special Election for Sewer Siphon Project. Bob noted that he's continued to work on sewer siphons project outreach, especially by including video updates on the website and in the bi-weekly report. He also included it on social media and Exeter TV. There were also several newsletter blog posts in the last few months.

Martha wanted to be sure that the information about the sewer siphon project and the special election on the website was presented as clearly and effectively as possible. In particular, she noted that at one point the homepage of the website highlighted only the election calendar event and sample ballot. Bob said he replaced this with the page for the entire special town election which includes clear links to the full range of information about the project.

Martha reported an upcoming event at the Exeter Mill on August 9 at 5pm where Select Board Chair Niko Papakonstantis and Town staff have been invited to present information about the project to Mill residents.

Russ is going to look into getting a sign about the election at the transfer station. He also mentioned that Bob Kelly wrote a letter to the editor about the project and the vote in his official capacity on the Water/Sewer Advisory Committee.

Communications Plan and Update on Report to the Select Board. Martha thanked Russ attending the meeting and noted that the support of the Town Manger's Office has been very helpful for our work. She noted that Melissa Roy has attended a CAC meeting in the past and supported our work as well. Martha said that the CAC will be looking for feedback from Town staff and the Select Board on various aspects of the both the long-term strategic and practical day-to-day parts of the draft communications

plan contemplated by the report to the Select Board. The CAC will be looking for feedback from the Town Manager's office on how the plan would work for the Town at large and in individual departments. Martha phrased it as finding a good framework and then filling in the blanks.

Russ wanted to step back and address a central point. He had the impression that the report might be suggesting that we approach Town communications as though it were a "newsroom" where we'd be looking to produce stories on a regular basis. He said that we don't operate like that, it's not what our goals are, and this doesn't fit the definition of a "town government."

Bob said he thought this was not the intention of the report. Rather, the idea was that there needs to be more awareness of what needs to be communicated about, what residents want and need to know, how they want to hear about it, and when they get to hear about it.

Nancy noted that a lot of this comes up at the Department head level and it wouldn't be an everyday thing. We would not be actively looking to produce news just for the sake of producing news, although we might from time to time want to highlight certain successes or spotlight specific employees.

Russ said that it's a great thing to have Bob and his staff as a resource for the items that come up randomly in a day and need to get out more.

A brief discussion followed about physical signs and areas of Town facilities where we can use physical advertising.

Update on Report to the Select Board. Martha asked for feedback from Nancy and Russ. Nancy is not anticipating any feedback for the CAC until they see the first draft of the Communications Plan. Russ said that the reclassification is proceeding and that progress is being made on several items from the report.

Martha noted that her research showed that it takes a long time to build an effective culture of communication and that our job was to gradually demonstrate to Town staff that the new communications tools we're providing will actually make their jobs easier and serve as useful tools. Russ noted that it's Bob's responsibility to check in with staff asking if there is anything they have for Town communications.

Martha asked if the Town would pay the \$160 membership fee for the "Government Communications Association" so that we can start to take advantage of the various programs and services it offers and Russ said he thought we could find the funds for that now.

Other Business. Martha asked if anyone had any other business to raise. There being none, the meeting was adjourned at 8:13pm.
