



Minutes for Residents' Advisory Committee (RAC)

June 4, 2019

Community Room of Amherst Police Department, 111 Main Street
10:00 am

Present: Mr. Pistrang (Chair), Ms. Kruger, Ms. Dennis
Minutes: Ms. Mills

Chair, Mr. Pistrang called the meeting to order at 10:02 am

Everyone took a moment and looked at personal calendars to see if they were available for the Residents' Advisory Committee joint meeting with Outreach, Communications, and Appointments Committee of the Town Council meeting on June 10 at 10:00 am in the Town Room of Town Hall. Mr. Pistrang is a 'yes,' Ms. Kruger is a 'yes,' and Ms. Dennis is a 'yes.'

Review of minutes from the last meeting (5/21/2019): Ms. Kruger made a motion to approve, seconded by J. Pistrang, UNANIMOUS VOTE to approve minutes from the RAC meeting on 5/21/2019.

Item added to today's agenda: review of OCA agenda for June 10th

General Check-in: Everyone is doing OK.

UPDATES on RECENT INTERVIEWS:

Public Art Commission – Ms. Dennis stated there were several good applicants. People were very interested in helping the town to include young children and families in art initiatives. There were more candidates than slots available. Everyone shared opinions on interviewees and Town Manager will select. This is an advisory committee. They are trying to get the percent for art initiative through the legislature. That bill will give this committee some capital for grants. Mr. Pistrang asks if the Council will support the percent for art initiative. Ms. Kruger explains that there are some legal snags along the way. The percentage was whittled down from the initial proposal. Performance art was not included in the bill.

Shade Tree – Ms. Kruger noted it is the butt of every appointment joke. There are several members who have been on the Committee for a very long time. The person interviewed yesterday has been attending all of the meetings but they have not been able to vote. It might be time for committees to attend a public meeting, quorum review of participation in an open meeting. If you do not have a quorum then you do not meet.

Ms. Kruger stated that some members have been on the committee for over ten years. How do we do outreach and pump up participation for this committee? How do we signal that this group needs new members? Create a mini campaign for membership.

Does RAC think it is part of the role of RAC for committee chairs to understand the roles of being a Committee Chair? Is that the Town Manager's role? Where does RAC's mission end and Town Manager's purview begin?

Ms. Kruger noted that the Town Council could say that the pool of candidates is not big enough to make the appointments worthwhile.

When do you pull the plug and say, "you have to wait?" Is there an opportunity to recruit more people?

Ms. Kruger suggested that RAC could make a recommendation to highlight the deficiencies in the appointment process.

Mr. Pistrang noted that there would be a settling process after this round of appointments.

Ms. Kruger asked what other kinds of outreach and visibility might bring more people to the table. You hope that the current members of the committee are recruiting. She noted that the Select Board felt the burden as they were doing a large part of the recruitment. Great opportunity to do a different type of outreach.

Consolidation of committees/boards/commissions has come up for OCA. So what could shade tree go under?

Upcoming interview assignments. Ms. Kruger has picked up all interviews.

Ms. Kruger shared news of Margaret Nartowicz's resignation as Town Clerk.

OCA join meeting on June 10th.

Mr. Pistrang will share overview of the process thus far. He will put together an outline of talking points. #1 and #2 from draft agenda. Will not go into detail.

Topic of interviewing incumbents – Ms. Dennis noted that when you are employed as long as you are doing the job – you get your annual review and you move forward. Ms. Kruger noted that the people getting re-appointed have not been through the Town Council procedure. She added that it has been rare that a person does not get reappointed. Usually a staff liaison will report back that the person should perhaps not be reappointed.

Ms. Dennis noted that part of volunteering time for a board or committee, means respecting their good will and their efforts. Retroactively applying a layer of choice over the process, it somehow can create a bias and preference for who is able to participate and who is able to be heard.

Mr. Pistrang noted that RAC wasn't involved before this process of oversight. He noted that all Town Managers took the responsibility seriously. He came from the experience of meeting with the Town Manager and/or Assistant Town Manager for the Puffer's Pond Committee.

Ms. Kruger stated that the new process is rigorous.

Ms. Kruger will take notes at the RAC visit to OCA.

Outline will be written by Mr. Pistrang and then shared with RAC members before the meeting.

Ideas for outreach for select committees: come up with some ideas for how to give certain committees more visibility. Similar to Shade Tree.

Ms. Dennis noted that younger families do not feel like they have a voice. They know that they could get involved but that there isn't a purpose to speak up when nobody is listening anyways.

CPOs trying to get out there at community events – helps bridge the gap between “us” and “them.” Group up idea of CPO interactions – in apartment complexes, schools, and that needs to happen – and start from the bottom up and opens up a larger issue. Starts to instill a way for people to participate and be heard. She understands the anger. “Does anyone like me have a voice here?” The lack of action suggests that “No.” There are reasons why people choose not to trust their local government.

Mr. Pistrang – thinking about the playing fields – there has been a public process. People need to understand that it takes a long time. Mr. Pistrang has been coaching for 26 years. He has been frustrated that the planners have not been listening to the people. He is aware there is a public process with a canned time for public comment at the end. He is in a funny situation because as a coach, he wants to maintain a positive working relationship with the schools. Mr. Pistrang is very aware of the terrible conditions of all the playing fields. It is easy to blame people who are angry. There are institutional problems when you hire outside consultants and they do not listen to the residents.

Ms. Kruger, speaking from the bureaucratic perspective, she often has to explain the slow plodding nature of municipal government.

Ms. Dennis stated that the composition of a certain group of people dictates the priorities. When people all look the same and the group is similar – for twenty years or more, the things that are important to you aren’t given priority, then why get involved? You’ve been brushed to the side for a long time, so why get involved now?

Mr. Pistrang added another layer. The Town Government is complex, the committees of the Town Council can seem insurmountable to a person who is not intimately involved in the process.

Ms. Dennis noted that if you have not been heard. You do not feel like you have a space where your issues are heard, why bother? Why get involved?

Ms. Kruger asked how do you get people involved?

Mr. Pistrang noted that there isn’t a plan for rotation and care of the playing fields. We need more playing fields. Very wet spring and very wet autumn.

Ms. Kruger and Ms. Dennis ask, “How do we get people around the table?”

Public Comment: None

Mr. Pistrang had his “Byline” interview with Stan Rosenberg and he thinks it went well.

Questions included:

- 1.) History of committee appointments?
- 2.) What does RAC do?
- 3.) Different types of committees.
- 4.) Outreach and trying to make committees more diverse?
- 5.) Mr. Pistrang brought up his concern that the influx of CAFs was a great thing but he looks forward to more involvement from the community. Huge part of our town runs on volunteers.

Ms. Kruger stated that the Charter created new committees: RCV, ECAC, PBC ... committee sprawl may settle down more.

It is exciting to see CPOs out in the community – the HRC event at Mill River. Many great kids got awards that day.

Next meeting June 10 (Town Room of Town Hall with OCA) then June 18 (first floor meeting room at Town Hall)
UNANIMOUS VOTE TO ADJOURN

These minutes were approved for final posting on June 25, 2019
by a unanimous vote