

Town of Chatham
Special Board Meeting
March 25, 2016, 10:30 AM

PRESENT: Supervisor Maria Lull, Councilman Bob Balcom, Councilwoman Landra Haber, Councilman John Wapner, Town Clerk Beth Anne Rippel, Budget Officer Tammy Shaw, Clerk Michayla McMahon

OTHERS PRESENT: Public Relations Specialist Linda Ziskind

CALL TO ORDER: Lull called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM and led the pledge to the flag.

The purpose of the Special Board Meeting was to provide opportunity for additional members of the Board (Lull, Balcom) to hear the discussion of the Communications Committee (Haber, Wapner). Linda Ziskind, chosen as Public Relations Specialist for the Town, talked about certain possibilities for the Town to take in regards to communication, as shown below. Ziskind's main point was that it was absolutely important for the Town to have open communications channels and to avoid problems by disseminating information properly to its constituents.

Email: Ziskind suggested the Board look into Mail Chimp as a way for constituents to stay in touch with the Town that would send a brief email with a link to the website. She listed reasons to consider that email program: The cost depends on the contact list size, regular Town email addresses cannot be used for mass emails, the program does not require bcc-ing but shows the sender as the regular Town email address, it also tracks recipient activity without being overwhelmed with replies because most people do not reply, and it allows users to create separate mailing lists.

Newspapers: Ziskind noted that when reporters attend meetings, their stories do not necessarily show their understanding of Town business but rather what their paper and readers prefer to hear about, essentially making it so that the Board loses control of what is published and what is really conducted in Town business in favor of juicier headlines that the paper likes to report on. She recommended that the Board synthesize the major points of their meeting in press releases so that the public truly understands what happens during Town business. Shaw raised the issue of people becoming confused about "Workshop Meetings" based on what happened in the past and the failure to understand that the current Board conducts actual business during these meetings. Some discussion followed and Ziskind explained that the problem is easy to solve by communicating more clearly about what happens at specific meetings, such as by means of an emailed press release that is linked to an explanatory post on Facebook and also on the website.

Facebook: Ziskind stated that the Town does not have a Facebook page but that people have mentioned that they visit the area. She praised the Highway Department Facebook page for being very helpful and informative and mentioned the Village of Chatham page as an example of what the Town could do to interact with constituents and local businesses. Shaw noted that the Highway Department decided not to reply to comments in order to avoid arguments but encourages all people to call the Town Garage. Ziskind agreed with that policy, adding that

Facebook allows users to see details about tracking, boost posts at a small fee, link an email signup application with subscription options, and more.

Website: Ziskind explained her opinion about the Town's current website and recommended redistributing the information to make it easier to maintain and clearer to find. She mentioned the Village of Chatham and Town of Kinderhook websites for comparison that showed links to Facebook, an email sign-up, calendar, and more, saying that municipality websites should be very user-friendly and clear. There was discussion about options and various methods to take in setting up a new website.

Signs: Lull raised the topic of signs for the Town Hall and Crellin Park. There was some discussion about the Town logo and an offer from Nancy Scans to donate a sign.

Other Mediums: Shaw explained that municipalities are recommended to pick a couple types of social media and focus on making those the best as possible. Ziskind mentioned various other types of communicating, including Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and Tinder, stating that she recommended Instagram and Pinterest after getting Facebook set up. There was more discussion about the website as well and McMahon was recommended to assist with the process.

Priorities: Ziskind suggested that the Board consider an email list and Facebook first and then work on the website. There was discussion about ways to obtain a comprehensive email list and Ziskind emphasized that she was happy to work with the committee to get a list set up and create an email template similar to a kind of newsletter. Wapner believed that the work needed to be done quickly, since he saw it as employee work and not committee work. There was discussion about the current website edits and email server options. Ziskind offered to sit down with McMahon to discuss possibilities and help her with setting up a new Facebook page and eventually a website as well. The Board agreed that it was important to put an email signup sheet at meetings for constituents who hope to stay informed.

Next Meeting: Monday, April 25, 10:00 AM.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: Lull moved, Balcom seconded, and the motion was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 11:45 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Beth Anne Rippel, RMC
Town Clerk/Collector