

Residents Advisory Committee (RAC)
June 10, 2019
10 a.m.
Town Room, Town Hall

Present: RAC members Jim Pistrang, Chair, Keisha Dennis, Connie Kruger. Outreach, Communication and Outreach (OCA) subcommittee of Town Council members Sarah Swartz, Chair, Alisa Brewer, Evan Ross, George Ryan, Darcy Dumont. Staff present: Paul Bockelman, Town Manager. Member of the public: Art Keene.

RAC Chair Jim Pistrang called the meeting to order at 10:14 a.m.. The RAC was participating in a joint meeting with OCA which had been previously been called to order by OCA Chair Sarah Swartz.

Jim Pistrang reviewed the RAC agenda, which had been sent to all members in attendance. He reviewed the role of the RAC and gave a summary of the activities of the RAC since its inception.

The RAC has been meeting every two weeks and has been sharing member experiences participating in interviews for town boards and committees. Best practices have been discussed. Names are not shared at the RAC meetings or with each other at any time. Scheduling is done so that one member of the RAC can participate in interviews, with members choosing which interviews to participate in based on schedule availability and interest. Sometimes Community Participation Officers (CPO) attend RAC meetings and their input has been valuable. The topics that have been discussed at RAC meetings have included: the Community Activity Form (CAF), term limits for committee appointments, collection and reporting of demographic data, and outreach strategies.

Connie Kruger said that the RAC and the OCA have each discussed many similar topics and she thought meeting together was an opportunity to share the thinking of each group and, when possible, develop consistency in practices. Some additional RAC discussion topics she mentioned were: size of the applicant pool, how and/or when to activate outreach efforts when needed to enlarge the pool, and privacy versus transparency. She hoped this was the start not the end of dialogue between the two committees.

Sarah Swartz explained the role of OCA and some differences with the RAC role. OCA recruits for Town Council appointments and provides guidance to individual councilors who will be participating in interviews.

Jim Pistrang said that RAC is not ordinarily involved in outreach but we share OCA's concern about reaching members of the Amherst community who have not been traditionally involved. He said a good approach was to let everyone know what we've all been doing and avoid duplication.

George Ryan commented that recruitment happens when Councilors are in the community at events or at District meetings.

Alisa Brewer said that while we're all on the same side we are coming from different perspectives. She explained that RAC's interview schedule and other logistical details is totally managed by town staff and the RAC's job is to advise the Town Manager and the RAC is less publically visible than OCA. She thought the issue of having a sufficient pool needed more discussion.

Jim Pistrang said that after the initial surge of 134 applications as reported by Paul Bockelman, some committees would still have vacancies that may be hard to fill.

Evan Ross said he thought there were two areas that were valuable to meet together to discuss: 1) shared challenges such as the small pool issue; and 2) areas of shared interest such as how to improve the CAF to get better demographic data.

Sarah Swartz agreed with Evan that we should have a future discussion about outreach and about ways to improve the CAF. She went on to say that the OCA process was really different regarding transparency and there had been a major push from Councilors and others to have total transparency in the appointment process. However, she did not really want to reopen that discussion at this time.

Ms. Dumont added that in her participation in interviews for the non-voting resident members of the Finance Committee she extended the interview time to 20-30 minutes because she felt that 15-minute interviews were too short.

Connie Kruger responded that in her experience 15 minutes was often enough time but it was not unusual to have interviews for committee appointments go over that when it was appropriate.

Darcy said she would like a check off box on the CAF that gave permission to make the application public. She said that the information provided on the CAF was often really thin. She would like to require resumes be submitted as well.

Sarah responded that resumes are not requested because they would be considered public documents. She suggested that the two committees meet together after the summer break to discuss the CAF.

Jim Pistrang agreed that that was a good idea.

Art Keene, resident of District 5 and a representative of the group AmherstINDY, said he was making a plea for transparency because it was a good idea in general and for 2 reasons: 1) it's practical to forward the basis for recommendation to the Town Council, and 2) there is a political and cultural value in being more rather than less transparent because the more people can see what's going on the more they will be encouraged to participate. He said a public records request was made to the town for CAFs, which was

denied and is now at the state level for a decision. His opinion is that having this barrier around this information made it appear that the town had something to hide.

Alisa Brewer asked why a committee chair would be included in an interview if it was a reappointment, especially since the chair may also be up for reappointment.

Paul Bockelman said it was his responsibility to deliver names he was recommending to OCA. He said that he does not just rely on the CAF and the interview but talks to people who know the work of the committee and that would most likely involve the chair of that committee. He said he found OCA's comments helpful he had responsibility for deciding whom to recommend.

The RAC meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m..

Respectfully submitted,
Connie Kruger

DRAFT