

# *Narragansett - URI Coalition Steering Committee*

**Tuesday – October 3, 2006**

**4:00PM**

**Narragansett Town Hall**

Members present: Kim Churas, Nancy Devaney, Tom Dougan, Krista Garrett, Paul Haas, Joe Meister for Carol Stuart, Ryan Mitchell/Ben Matone, Toni O'Neil, Chief J. David Smith, Doug Wardwell, Leslie Williams, Coalition Coordinator, Paula Santos

Absent: Maury Loontjens, Jim Hurton, George Tracy

Guest: Lieutenant Michael Gamma

Tom Dougan began the meeting at 4:00pm.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

- **Review of September 5 SC minutes**  
All approved the September minutes.
- **Approval of past SC minutes**  
All approved February through May, 2006.
- **Approval of September 19 Coalition Minutes**  
All approved the September Coalition minutes.
- **Review “ombuds” team proposal**  
Tom presented the proposal on behalf of him and Paul Haas. The chief asked Paul about continuity of service on the part of the team members. The PD and university can provide staff continuity but what about the other members? Paul acknowledged that it was an excellent point but as this team is in its infancy stage, we just have to try it. Nancy suggested that given it may be difficult to get the team to visit each individual caller, could this team be available to meet with the aggrieved prior to the regular 7:00pm Coalition meeting. All agreed that it is essential to go to the individual's home and have the team available prior to the Coalition meeting. Regarding Doug's concern about 4 team members possibly overwhelming the aggrieved, it was agreed that this would be discussed during the preliminary phone call and the team would respond to the wishes of the caller. Nancy also suggested that the SC consider appointing the members of the team. Tom asked that the SC grant him and Paul to use their judgment in forming the team, being sensitive to the credibility of the members. All agreed to support this program and for Tom and Paul to update the SC at the next meeting. If all goes well, the team could be in place prior to the November Coalition meeting whereby the team would be available to address concerns before the 7:00pm meeting. Paul clarified that this team is open to all residents. Some students made very cogent points about their relationship with their neighbors. Joe reinforced that this is a living document and a dynamic process.
- **Presentation at Bonnet Shores**  
Paul reported that with input from Board members of the Bonnet Shores District Council, the presentation will be held at the Community Center on Wednesday, October 11 at 7:00pm. Most forum participants have been confirmed. Ben Matone, chair of the student senate external affairs committee, said he will attempt to send a senate representative as the forum is the same time as the weekly student senate meeting. Fran, Leslie and Tom will represent the university and the police department will have a rep. Krista will speak with Annemarie about town council representation but someone will be there. Others to be confirmed. Paul described that the key Coalition leaders will introduce themselves and Paul will moderate the meeting. Paula will record questions/comments on a flip chart and like concerns will be matched. The appropriate Coalition

representative(s) will address the concern. Attendees will have the opportunity to ask their questions on index cards and Paul will ensure that the questions, if not answered at the meeting, will be submitted to the appropriate party(ies.)

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- **October Coalition Meeting**

All agreed to follow the standard agenda.

- **Update on community liaisons**

Leslie gave everyone a description of the liaison's duties and responsibilities. The names of the current liaisons are on the back with assigned neighborhoods as there is not a liaison living in every neighborhood.. She stated that she is trying to create a group of students who, although may live in different neighborhoods, represent all of Narragansett. If a neighborhood is scheduling an event, just call the commuter housing office, 874-2828, and liaisons will be assigned to help. We will contact the neighborhood associations through our list of Coalition of Neighborhood Associations an/or go through chairs, Carol Stuart and Eileen Desforges. Doug stated that when he visits student residents in his neighborhood (Village of Point Judith) at the beginning of the school year, it would be nice to be accompanied by a student liaison who lives in his neighborhood as well. She will check to determine if one of the current liaisons lives there.. Tom asked Ben if he could find someone from Bonnet Shores.

- **Fall orientation for commuter students**

Leslie distributed a flyer going to all students regarding the upcoming commuter orientation and off-campus housing fair on Thursday, October 26 from 11:00am-2:00pm (with free food.) This fair is open to all students and to businesses or interested parties who would like to set up a table. All agreed the Coalition should have an informational table. Doug inquired about neighborhood association representation. Leslie pointed out that there will be no formal speakers. This was tried last year with representative from the police department and neighborhood associations and it did not work. This is not the best way to get their message to the students. The neighborhood associations are welcome to have a table. Tom stated that the fair is modeled after the way career services presents its job fairs and other groups like study abroad programs. This format draws a substantial number of students. Paula shared that the university is working on a seminar to prepare freshmen and sophomores who are planning to move off-campus on how to be a responsible neighbor. This seminar is in the planning stages but the neighborhood associations will be asked for their input as well as students who have experience living in Narragansett. The plan is to offer this seminar in the dormitories around spring break as well as a follow-up with the students and their parents in the summer. The university is also looking to offer a web-based course on appropriate behavior of students living off-campus. Joe asked how else the word gets out to parents. Leslie shared that there is an informational session offered during family weekend. Tom added that about 1000 parents attend but maybe between 50 and 70 parents attend the break-out sessions. The university is also looking into establishing renter's credentials. Possibly, in cooperation with real estate agencies, if a student meets all the criteria, there could be a discount on rent or a rental application. This is still in the talking stage. As these concepts are further developed, the Steering Committee will be informed.

- **SAMSHA report related to alcohol and substance abuse in Washington County**

Nancy stated that as the reports are just forthcoming it is premature to bring this to the Coalition. When more information is available, she offered to make a presentation at a Coalition meeting. She does not anticipate receiving the report much before January.

## **Other**

- Joe shared that he had seen a special on NBC news featuring 30 cities that are home to universities. 80% of college student deaths were caused by fires due to the lack of safety measures in off-campus rental properties. Nancy recalled that when the fire marshal met with the

Common Ground and Realtors/Neighborhood Associations subcommittees earlier this spring, he reported that he cannot enter private properties to do inspections. Joe seemed to remember that the only time they can go in is during the sale of a home. Since the primary cause of these inadequate measures is landlord driven, Joe asked whether or not the university screens landlords and their properties that are listed with the university commuter housing service to ensure that it is a safe house. Leslie said the university is looking into this and Tom informed members that this is being discussed with the university attorney. As this is a serious issue, Tom suggested that this be placed on the agenda of a future Steering Committee meeting. In addition, since the tape is available from NBC news, it was suggested that this be presented at a future Coalition meeting. All agreed.

- Joe shared that he recently attended the ring ceremony at Boss Arena for the URI men's hockey team and was impressed at the quality of the student body. He also commented positively about the recent editorials in the Cigar about student responsibility that was sent to the Coalition listserv. Tom thanked him for his positive feedback.
- Doug stated that he believed the neighborhood associations should be represented in the upcoming meeting with Common Ground and the Town Council. Nancy explained that this idea arose in the Common Ground subcommittee where the Town Council and neighborhood associations were represented. It was proposed as an alternative way for those key stakeholders who can implement change - university and town officials including the police department - to discuss different approaches for better responding to off-campus student behavior in Narragansett. This would be an opportunity for the university and town leaders who are keenly aware of the residents concerns to discuss possible ways to improve ordinances and/or explore a different allocation of Common Ground grant monies. She is not sure what will happen as the idea has been presented to the town council and it is up to them to take the next step.
- The chief stated that his department is very pleased with the participation of landlords in curbing some of the issues in problem houses. He shared a recent incident where an out-of-state property owner from California was recently in RI and met with the renters and police officials. They brought their son who is a senior in the Coast Guard Academy. He stated that his presence had an impact on the renters. Overall, he has found property owners to be very cooperative and is encouraged with the results of his department's outreach efforts.

The next Steering committee is scheduled for Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup>.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula Santos  
Coalition Coordinator