

Narragansett - URI Coalition

Steering Committee Minutes

November 18, 2008 Meeting

Coalition Attendees

Town: Jeff Ceasrine; Robert Briar

URI: Leslie Williams; Katrina Dorsey; Dan Graney

NPD: Joseph Little; Desiree Dugan;

Neighborhoods: Gerry McCarthy; Bob Shields; Carol Stuart; Eileen Desforges

Students: Phil Bowers; Josh Feinberg; Kerri Koppenaal; Andy O'Brien

Real Estate: Joe Roberhymmer

Businesses & Liquor vendors: absent

Meeting called to order by McCarthy at 7:05 pm.

1) Opening remarks

Co-chair McCarthy welcomed the public to this semiannual meeting featuring talks by URI and Narragansett officials followed by a Q & A open forum.

2) Guest Speaker

Robert Beagle, VP for University Advancement, URI: "What's A Brand and Does Anyone Care? - Changing The Image of The University from That of A Party School to That of A Small Preeminent University".

Introduced by Co-chair Feinberg, Beagle gave a concise & very informative talk describing the long range goals & strategic plans URI has adopted to guide its future development. This process began several years ago with URI introspectively asking itself: who are we; where are we going; what makes us special? The primary incentive in setting goals was to "think big"; other considerations studied were URI's impact within RI & its reputation nationally & internationally.

Surveys were conducted among students, alumni/ae & various community & state government leaders. Although some headway had been made to decrease URI's image as a party school & as a "2nd choice" among applicants, it was realized that the void thereby created needed to be filled. A new, positive image was needed! Among those identified: world class faculty, research capability & small campus setting.

The devised plan has been officially approved by the University. URI's web site & admissions process were revised to emphasize these attributes. A brochure entitled "The University of Rhode Island - Think Big, We Do" (copies on the table) jointly created by the Admissions Office & his University Advancement Div. describes this new emphasis.

The new marketing plan will utilize these newly defined strengths to 1) expand geographic outreach, 2) enhance fund raising, 3) grow research activities, 4) expand State support (financial & "moral") down the road, 5) reinforce pride of alumni/ae & RI citizens in the University. Beagle mentioned that he actively works with URI's academic colleges, the development & alumni/ae offices & nationwide with alumni/ae chapters to increase awareness & promote joint action implementing these goals.

3) Reports

Jeff Ceasrine, Town Manager: "ACLU Legal Challenge of Nuisance Ordinance - An Update".

The first town ordinance explicitly prohibiting excessive noise, partying, public & underage intoxication, & littering was passed in 2005. In 2007, the penalties stipulated by this ordinance were made more stringent (the misdemeanors themselves were not changed). Subsequently, enforcement was perceived to have increased. Last year, the ACLU, at the strong urging of the URI Student Senate, filed suit against Narragansett primarily on grounds as an invasion of student's right of privacy. As of this date, the case is in discovery phase. Ceasrine said no trial date is set yet.

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Joseph Little, Police Chief: "New Developments in Underage Drinking Laws".

The Police Dept. will continue to enforce all RI's and Narragansett's laws related to drinking & public nuisances, no policy change from last year.

Officer Dugan mentioned that the Police are firmly enforcing the 1 year old state law (RI 3-8-11.1) pertaining to procurement & serving of alcoholic beverages by adults to persons under 21. The 1st offense is a misdemeanor, the 2nd provides for fines. Persons under 21 who transport alcohol will continue to be arrested. They are subject to a fine & driver license suspension. She stated Narragansett Ord. 46-10 applies to tenants (not landlords) if alcohol is served to those under 21. A breathalyzer test is allowed.

Little read the NPD Mission Statement to assure everybody that the Police merely enforce existing laws that are on the books; they do not interpret or selectively enforce them.

4) Open Forum

One resident complained URI favors out of state admissions & wants more dormitories on campus. Beagle agreed that building more dorms would benefit school spirit & provide greater student involvement. Another resident noted the decreasing trend of state aid is not a good sign. URI comment: relief from some State mandates would be helpful.

Resident Stan Wojciechowski asserted student partying is out of control; keg monitoring needs to be enforced & that all violations should be a permanent part of student records. Williams replied every student violation cited by the town is reviewed by URI & appropriate disciplinary action taken. Another resident said there were 23 student rentals in his neighborhood & pleaded for peace & quiet.

Briar, the housing inspector, emphasized his perception that many students do not show a sense of responsibility when living in the community. He asked: what information is provided to students by the University about the obligations of living in a neighborhood off campus? Williams responded that all freshmen are required to take course 101. This was described as inadequate by some in the audience.

Stuart offered several suggestions: She asked that an URI administrative person be assigned to help with & attend neighborhood welcoming parties held each Fall. Also, a much better way should be found to ensure students understand the obligations of living in Narragansett than is provided now - merely taking a 20 minute, on-line exam. Third, the groundwork should be laid now to ensure that the next URI president will take positive steps to implement meaningful, frequent liaison with this Coalition & Town of Narragansett. She posed the rhetorical question: why bother having stickers if they don't result in coordinated action of both Town & University dealing with flagrant abusers? Stuart has a list of many cities that have created joint policies & procedures.

Sue Bush, drawing a distinction between acceptable & disruptive parties, stated that all residents have the right to privacy & to have parties that don't cause a public nuisance.

Palmieri, a resident, expressed the need to work together, to protect lives (noting that 2 students have recently died in town) & the urgent need for a social venue(s) for students.

As the concluding comment in open forum, Tom Ahrens, a student & previous Coalition rep, said that students can & will work with residents to improve situations that students may have caused in the past.

Announcements

McCarthy thanked Robert Beagle for his presentation & those in the audience for their comments & civil decorum during the Q & A open forum.

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Next meeting:

February, 2008 at 4 pm, Narragansett Town Hall.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

For the record, no business was conducted at this meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Bob Shields, Secretary