

GLA Communications Committee 4-8-2015

GLA Communication Committee Meetings

GLFPC Summary and Interpretation

Your input, observations, questions are welcome

Communication Committee Meetings:

We are a bit stymied on how to report on the GLA Communications Committee meetings because, while we believe there have been at least four meetings since last November when Robert Branson and Alyssa Allen were named as Co-Chairs of this committee, we got notice of only one meeting. The first two were called “internal meetings” and held without member notice. Individuals noticed a third meeting (found on the GLA website calendar) that was held on April 8, 2015, with details to listen to the phone conference meeting (see below). Notice for the fourth meeting shows on the GLA calendar, but a tech-savvy landowner believes the notice was posted after the meeting occurred. We first observed the notice at 5:48 AM, on the following morning. Thus, the only Communications Committee Meeting we can summarize is the one held on April 8, 2015, which was a phone conference meeting.

Background Notes:

- 1) Over a year ago, when Alyssa Allen had been the GLA President, her idea that GLA needed a Communications Committee was unanimously endorsed by the board. As we recall, there was virtually no discussion on the scope or focus of this committee or any mention of a Mission Statement.
- 2) Alyssa Allen, (former board member at that time), sat with the board at its December 2014 meeting at St. John’s Church, until a landowner questioned why she was seated at the board table. Per that discussion, Alyssa Allen then took a front row seat in the landowner section.
- 3) Next, as the board voted to select its officers, it became clear that no one was willing to be Secretary. With little discussion, Alyssa Allen’s offer to serve as a volunteer secretary “for a season,” was accepted unanimously, and she subsequently returned to her seat at the board table. (Another landowner’s previous offer to do secretarial work for free, dating back to the annual GLA Membership Meeting in November 2014, was never mentioned at this December GLA Board Meeting.)
- 4) A subsequent item on the agenda was how to answer a pending Interrogatory from an ongoing lawsuit, which resulted in the immediate hiring of Alyssa Allen to assist in the GLA’s legal affairs. (She is paid \$20/hour to handle legal matters for GLA). This was

done in spite of landowners who claimed, that since Alyssa Allen is named in the lawsuit, it is a clear conflict of interest for her to answer interrogatories for GLA.

5) Later on at that same December 2014 board meeting, Alyssa Allen was appointed as Co-Chair of the Communications Committee, again in spite of a landowner's assertion, that per GLA governing documents, board Committee Chairs must be board members. To this date, GLA's website shows Alyssa as Co-Chair of the Communications Committee, although the most recent April 2015, GLA Newsletter makes no mention of same.

6) A landowner's subsequent Agenda Item Request to learn about how the board defines an internal meeting and the criteria used to hold such a meeting, was only responded to with an automated message. To date, no person(s) has given this landowner any answer whatsoever.

April 8 phone conference meeting summary:

Attendees:

Non-board member/ volunteer secretary/GLA employee Alyssa Allen – Co-Chair of the Communications Committee

Board member Robert Branson – Co-Chair of the Communications Committee

Board member Ross Brunson committee member

Board member Rudy Parker – unofficial committee member

Paid administrator Karleen McSherry

Note: Contrary to Ross Brunson's claim that listening landowners had not been muted, we found no way to be able to speak throughout this telephone meeting. Faulty audio technology made listening difficult for a good portion of the meeting.

Opening discussion focused on whether to respond to landowner calls and emails with automated software (called Ticketing software) or with personal responses. Ross Brunson and Rudy Parker favored automation, but Karleen, the administrative assistant, countered this, pointing out that the GLA is a community that needs a front door presence answered by a person. "We are people responding to people. We need to be personal with all landowners," according to Karleen.

Karleen also brought to everyone's attention, that until there is a written or concrete Communications Committee policy and procedure in place to use the ticketing software, it is premature to purchase and implement it. In her view, it is frustrating to see how landowner's issues are delayed due to the lack of a clear job description for her position as administrative assistant.

Ross disagreed with her statement, contending that in his job experience, it is business logic that automation works well and saves time. Rudy stated, "That automation works well in doctor's offices, and thus, it is fine for GLA." (Please note that Rudy had assumed that he was already a member of the Communications Committee; however, it had to be

explained to him that he must be officially voted onto this committee at the next monthly GLA Board meeting.)

Alyssa pointed out that Site Plan Review calls need custom responses, as do those about assessment balances and landowner complaints. Alyssa said that by listening to the voice of the caller, it is easier to customize the response than with automation. Alyssa estimated that there may be three or four complaint calls a month.

Alyssa further stated, "There is a need to appoint a person to respond to landowner calls, and that without that person in place, issues bog down and fall through the cracks." There was no consensus on the suggestion that Karleen should be the one to respond to calls and complaints, other than to suggest that things should be run past Alyssa (a non-board member, but officer, not director/GLA employee).

Karleen, once again pointed out, that because there is no concrete job description for the administrator, there is no timely response plan in place to communicate with landowners. Alyssa reviewed how in the past, landowner concerns were usually answered after there was a discussion with the entire 12 members of the board of directors, and how that takes a lot of time.

It was discussed once more, that without a Mission Statement for the Communications Committee, there is no guidance or reference point for whether the committee should personally answer landowner queries or appoint someone to that position, OR just defer landowner queries to automated technology.

Note # 1: The current automated response is: "Thank you for your e-mail to the Official GLA Info Account. Your email has been immediately forwarded to ALL members of the GLA Board, and will be handled as soon as possible by the appropriate officer, committee or the entire board, depending on the issue. Please be aware that complex or multi-part questions, formal complaints, and anything requiring consultation with legal or financial staff may take longer for final resolution. The Glastonbury Landowners Association Board of Directors."

Note #2: A common complaint among landowners, many of whom contacted the board with their concerns, is that automated responses are the extent of what the board communicates to them and there is no further communication from the board or anyone.

Given the poor audio quality combined with committee members speaking rapidly and at times, all at once, made it challenging to discern what was stated. It sounded as though the responsibility for writing the Communications Committee's Mission Statement and its policy and procedure was handed over to administrative assistant, Karleen McSherry.

The one hour meeting ended with virtually no consensus or action plan other than to agree to meet the 3rd Thursday of each month for an hour from 6 PM to 7 PM.
Subsequent developments and observations:

1) Per Communication Committee Co-Chair Robert Branson's report at the April 13, 2015 board meeting, Karleen McSherry is now the "hub" of the Communications Committee. In this role, she has the discretion to either use automation or personal responses to landowner inquiries. However, answers to landowner inquiries as recent as the first week of May, are still being signed by Alyssa Allen, and not Karleen McSherry

2) It was also reported at the April Board meeting, that Karleen is now ready to handle the job as Secretary. (She is paid \$13/hour plus a mileage allowance). Treasurer Janice McCann's question of how this added work will affect the budget was not answered. To date we have not seen any due process used to expand the administrative position or consider the impact on the GLA budget.

3) Per (what we believe is recent) board policy, "The Communications Committee is the sole entity authorized to respond to queries that come in to the GLA, as we are currently in litigation with the O'Connell's and under heavy scrutiny. To remind everyone, individual (extra GLA accounts) email exchanges or replies to official emails that you might make, will very likely cause your personal and possibly professional email inbox to be subpoenaed as a source of lawsuit discovery, as the litigants have stated this to be the case, several times in the past. The current policies are in place to reduce the liability of the organization as a whole, and board members as individuals."

Our questions to date:

What does it actually mean that the Communications Committee is the sole entity authorized to respond to queries that come into the GLA? Who is/will be the actual person behind the sole entity? Who has authorized the Communications Committee to be the sole entity? Is this action legal? Is it discretionary or discriminatory that some landowners receive a mere automated response to their inquiries and others receive a personal response and some receive none? One landowner asked why we even need a Communications Committee, after all isn't the job of our elected officials to respond to us directly? And aren't there way too many board committees already? Can a non-board member or paid employee of the GLA, who is not a landowner either, be the voice of the board?