

## **Ogunquit Residents Alliance: 2016 Review**

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January 8, 2017: ORA Steering Committee

- The Ogunquit Residents Alliance (ORA), an independent group, was formed as a grassroots effort by 46 Ogunquit residents in March 2016 with the mission to “advocate for residents’ needs and quality of life in Ogunquit.” Today, we have nearly 200 members, both seasonal and year round residents. We have brought another voice to the Town of Ogunquit with the formation of a caring group of citizens working to improve the quality of life in Ogunquit.
- Basics have been put in place for the nascent organization including bylaws, a web site, email software, minimal annual dues, and an all-volunteer Steering Committee. Seven ORA meetings were held, and ongoing emails and the web site keep members informed.
- By virtue of its involvement and communication on current issues, ORA has increased citizens’ interest and strengthened their role in governance. The significant increase in the number of residents at Town Board Meetings is a great example of this. ORA has five working member teams and a 13-person Steering Committee which meet at least monthly.
- Officers and Steering Committee members research and stay abreast of happenings and issues in Town, and continually speak on behalf of ORA at Town meetings and other venues.
- Frequent use of ORA online surveys provide a snapshot of residents’ views on Town issues, which gives a voice to taxpayers and allows information to be quickly communicated to the community, Select Board and others.
- Sponsored and conducted Candidates Night for Select Board prior to the June election.
- Developed a 30-page voters’ guide to the Nov 2017 Warrant Articles containing neutral analysis, financial impact, and pros and cons. This was discussed at an ORA meeting and posted on our web site. A mailing was sent to all post office addresses referencing this document and the polling of ORA members’ views on the Warrant Articles. ORA promoted a well-thought out position on several articles, most prominently helicopter landings and the use of the Ogunquit Village School.
- The ORA Steering Committee participated in a workshop with the Select Board in August to discuss some of our 2016 Priorities which had been presented at a July Select Board meeting. The discussion focused on the business parking program, communication and governance:
  - Suggested that no member should serve on more than one required Town Committee. This was on the November ballot and passed.
  - Asked Select Board members to give feedback on topics raised during public input. Board members’ practice now is to comment right after citizens speak at the podium.
  - ORA asked the Select Board to give the required mid-year report.
  - The Select Board liked the idea of proactive email communications from the Town to the community, but does not currently have the necessary resources.

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- After hearing a Town lawyer speak about ethics policies in other towns, we agreed and suggested adding a section on ethics to the Town Charter. The Select Board recently adopted an Ethics Policy and ORA gave input at various meetings.
- Highlighted the Business Employee Parking Pass program which allows an unlimited number of \$100 season parking passes for employees of local businesses, of which approximately 280 were sold in 2016. ORA significantly overestimated the impact on lost parking lot revenue and resulting cost to the Town before gaining information from Visitor Services on actual usage and parking lot occupancy by day. The Town's analysis showed that these passes for businesses were subsidized by taxpayers at about \$25,000 last year, and ORA recommended that the business pass program be made revenue neutral.
- Analyzed sales tax collections from Ogunquit that show revenue has grown by 18% nominally from 2008 through 2015 and 8% in real terms. (This money goes to the State.) Summer and shoulder months have grown by the same rate. Currently compiling monthly spending by the Town with the aim of building a model that will assess the "cost of tourism". This data, along with the revenue brought in by tourists, will foster management of this main segment of the Town's business as a tourist economy.
- The Planning Board held three Workshops with the ORA Character/Quality of Life team concerning our suggestions for design review.
  - The Historic Preservation Commission now has its recommendations read into the minutes of the planning board meetings.
  - The dialogue encouraged a sharing of ideas and gave ORA a better understanding of how the planning board conducts its business, and we feel comfortable that our suggestions or questions during the public input section of meetings will be given thoughtful consideration by the Board.
  - Scott Heyland, Town Code Enforcement Officer, is researching the feasibility of putting plans and CAD drawings for future builds or remodels on the town website so that the public can be better informed about new projects that may impact their area.
- Enforcement of regulations and communication to renters and neighbors about home rentals is a priority for ORA and will be a focus of the Planning Board early 2017.
- Met with the Chamber of Commerce to discuss branding Ogunquit as a walker's paradise as an effort to ease congestion. The Chamber's web site reflects their creative emphasis on this.
- Building a senior living community in Ogunquit was identified as one of our top priorities. The ORA team focusing on this has expanded with professional members in addition to residents, spun off, and has requested the Select Board establish this as a Town Committee or another model to continue their work.