



**Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectman Meeting Minutes
UNAPPROVED
January 19, 2022 at 6.30pm**

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi, Maureen Kozlark, Sean Connelly, Bob Hebert, Barbara Manners

Mr. Marconi asked the Board to approve the addition of an agenda item regarding use of ARPA funds to cover the cost of the test kits purchased by the Town for Ridgefield residents.

Ms. Kozlark moved to approve the request to add to the agenda scheduling a Town Meeting for February 2, 2022 for the approval of the use of ARPA funds to cover the cost of COVID test kits purchased by the Town as item #5a. Mr. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

1. Public Comment

Greg Kabasakalian, 2 Washington street, commented on the tremendous job that Parks & Rec and the Highway Department did with clearing the snow/ice from the storm over the weekend.

Roger Restaino, 19 Prospect Ridge, appeared before the Board to discuss the issue with signage on utility poles and trees around town. Mr. Restaino provided pictures as an example of some of the signs he has seen. Most of the signs are for lost pets and garage & estate sales, however signs promoting ACT shows have also been seen. Mr. Restaino read a section from the Connecticut State Statute regarding the regulations on signage and the penalties for violation. Mr. Restaino asked the Board to please look into not only enforcing the rules, but also educating the community so they are made aware. Mr. Marconi commented that the Zoning Enforcement officer, Richard Baldelli, was previously in charge of enforcement, however he retired in December and the position has since been vacant. The Commission has just hired a temporary replacement who will be starting soon.

Ms. Manners commented that she would hate for people who have lost their pets to not be able to put up signs to help bring them home. Mr. Restaino commented that he has great empathy for people who have lost their pets, however they are in violation of state statute and the amount of signs is often extreme. Mr. Marconi will follow up with the Chair of the Planning & Zoning Commission.

Jim Head, 126 Sleepy Hollow Rd, asked if there is a forum for opposing the upcoming book

reading by the Youth Commission who has partnered with Ridgefield Allies Children for the event. The book they will read is Anti-Racist Baby by Ibram X Kendi.

Meg Oyunbazar, 126 Sleepy Hollow Rd, added that Ibram Kendi is the leader of the Critical Race Theory, which she does not want promoted in this town.

Mr. Marconi will provide Mr. Head with Youth Commission Chair, Denise Qualey's contact information. Mr. Marconi will also reach out to Ms. Qualey to let her know Mr. Head will be contacting her.

Russ Porter, 14 Pilgrim Hill Rd, commented on the uncivil discussion that occurred at the Board of Finance Meeting last night. There were some disrespectful comments made towards the Board members during the meeting. The Department of Finance Head, Kevin Redmond, has been given the new guidelines that the Board of Selectmen now puts on meeting agendas and will consider adding them to the Board of Finance agendas moving forward.

2. Appointments & Reappointments

a. Constables

Mr. Hebert moved to approved the reappointment of Peter Killie, Ted Peatt and Dick Aarons for another 2-year term as Constables. Ms. Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

b. ECDC: Gori Norwitt

Glori Norwitt recently took over the job as Chair on the ECDC and is now up for reappointment to the Commission. Ms. Norwitt commented that all the members on the commission are wonderful and get along very well. Mr. Marconi mentioned that the Chamber of Commerce has been doing active interesting things and that he hopes the Chamber and the ECDC will work hand in hand to make the town even better for the businesses. Ms. Kozlark thanked Ms. Norwitt for her hard work and asked about the plan for outdoor dining. There are many factors that come into play regarding the additional outdoor dining that has been allowed during COVID. The ECDC will need to coordinate with Planning and Zoning, Police, Fire and the WPCA to cover all aspects of this new trend. Parking will also need to be considered since it is already an issue in town. Ms. Norwitt mentioned that Mr. Morris in is contact with a federal representative from the post office regarding the spots behind the post office building that are currently not being used. Mr. Hebert and Ms. Manners both commented on their admiration of Ms. Norwitt and what she has accomplished so far on the Commission.

Ms. Kozlark moved to approve the reappointment of Glori Norwitt for a 1-year term on the ECDC. Mr. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

c. Ridgefield Housing Authority: Vinnie Liscio

Vinnie Liscio is up for reappointment to the Ridgefield Housing Authority. Mr. Marconi asked for an update on the recent heating issue that gained a lot of attention on social media. Mr. Liscio explained that overall there are not many issues regarding

heat, however when an issue does arise there is a dedicated maintenance man who is quick to respond at all hours of the day. There is also now a backup person who can fill in when the regular person takes time off. Some of the recent issues are due to supply chain difficulties, which the Housing Authority have had to work around. There has also been a lack of available contractors.

Mr. Hebert asked if the Housing Authority has looked into replacing all 20 windows at the Carriage Barn at once as a capital item. Mr. Liscio commented that they have to take into consideration the rise in cost for several of their capital items due to COVID, the loss in rent income during the pandemic and the delay in assistance from the State due staffing issues. Mr. Hebert asked if they would consider asking the Ridgefield Thrift shop, who previously provided a grant to the Housing Authority, for another grant to address the heating. Mr. Liscio said he will bring up the idea of asking for a grant at the next meeting.

Mr. Liscio was asked to provide an overview on vacancies and finances. There has been a negative impact financially due to COVID and the negative press the Housing Authority recently received. They plan is to move forward cautiously to be sure they stay financially healthy.

At the moment there are only 2 housing vacancies, which is an improvement from the slow turn around they have previously experienced.

Mr. Connelly asked if the Housing Authority has considered ordering parts ahead to keep on reserve for when issues arise. Mr. Liscio commented that the maintenance man is very on top of keeping on hand the parts that need replacements often.

Mr. Hebert asked how many people are currently on the waiting list. Mr. Liscio answered that there are four different waiting lists and that he would like to get more people on the list. Mr. Liscio will have the waiting lists and list of vacancies sent to the Board for their review.

Ms. Kozlark moved to approve the reappointment of Vinnie Liscio for a 5-year term on the Ridgefield Housing Authority. Mr. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

d. Poet Laureate: Friends of Ridgefield – Barb Jennes requesting 501 status

Barb Jennes briefed the Board on what she has been doing as the Poet Laureate for the past two years. So far all of her accomplishments, with the help of many volunteers, have been free. Ms. Jennes is now at a point where she would like to be able to offer compensation to the poets that help make her events possible. Ms. Jennes commented that she is happy to take on fundraising and has already applied for some grants. One of Ms. Jennes' goals is to connect with other poetry pods in the surrounding towns and launch a Poetry Festival here in Ridgefield, which will cost money. Ms. Jennes is asking the Board to add Poet Laureate to the Friends of Ridgefield as 501 status.

Ms. Kozlark moved to approve the Poet Laureate to the Friends of Ridgefield Programs as 501 status. Mr. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

The Board took a break from the regular BOS meeting for the Special Town Meeting at 7.25pm. The Special Town Meeting began at 7.30 and ended at

3. Pension Commission: OPEB Plan Update

Andrew Okrongly and Chris Christiansen provided the Board with a presentation on the OPEB plan, which included background information, budget planning and a peer comparison. Mr. Christiansen discussed details of the different retirement plans, market returns, historical contributions, annual cost numbers, and the formulas used to determine the budget.

Mr. Okrongly discussed how Ridgefield's pension plan compares to surrounding towns. The Board members asked several questions throughout the presentation which prompted discussion on participant numbers, asset percentages, pension plans for non-teacher school employees, the formulas used for forecasting returns and when different plans are expected to be fully funded.

4. Boards, Committees & Commissions Guidelines

Mr. Marconi asked if there were any questions regarding the changes that have been made to the Boards, Committees & Commission Guidelines Document. Mr. Connelly asked if it needs to be in writing that the Town Charter overrides the Guidelines if there is a conflict. Ms. Kozlark pointed out a section that does clarify that the document is to provide guidance and does not supersede any laws.

Mr. Hebert moved to approve the Boards, Committees and Commission Guidelines.

Ms. Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

5.

- a. Mr. Marconi read an email from David Ulmer confirming that the Board of Finance voted in favor (5-0) of approving the use of \$344,480 of ARPA funds for the purchase of COVID test kits. The BOS needs to vote to approve the funds and also set a Town Meeting for a discussion and vote.

Mr. Marconi gave an update on the distribution of the test kits. Earlier today there was another distribution of about 2100 kits to people who could not be at the Scotts Ridge Saturday distribution. There are only about 1500 test kits left. The remaining test kits will be held at several locations around town and will be given out to people who stop in or call looking for one.

Ms. Kozlark moved to approve the use of \$344,480 of ARPA funds to cover the cost of the COVID test kits that are being distributed to Ridgefield residents.

Ms. Manners second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

Ms. Manners moved to approve setting a Town Meeting for February 2, 2022 at 7.30pm for the approval for use of the ARPA funds to cover the cost of the

COVID test kits purchased by the Town. Mr. Hebert second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

6. Leash Law

The Board has been working on creating a Leash Law for Ridgefield. There is an exception on the proposed law that exempt guide and police dogs. There was a discussion about the definition of a guide dog and how specific the leash law should be in terms of exemptions. It was decided that the only dogs that will be exempt from the leash law will be police dogs. Parks and Rec has their own guidelines that dictate the rules for leashes in parks and open spaces. The leash law being discussed today is for the business area and Main Street only. Roger Restaino, 19 Prospect Ridge, commented that the Ridgefield Walk Book leash “rule” regarding open space should not trump the Town Ordinance.

There was a discussion about implementing a membership fee for the dog park to help with maintenance costs. One suggestion was to install a key fob system. A membership system will also help ensure that the dogs entering the park are up to date with vaccinations. It was decided that the Dog Park regulations should be a separate discussion from the Leash Law and will be addressed at a later date.

Mr. Hebert moved to approve the Leash Law with modifications. Ms. Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

7. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mr. Hebert and Ms. Mannors abstained from voting on the January 2, 2022 minutes because there were not present at the meeting.

Ms. Kozlark moved to approve the January 2, 2022 BOS Meeting Minutes as written.

Mr. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 3-0.

Selectman’s Report

The Town is looking into a Zoom policy for Boards, Committees and Commission meetings. There was a conflict with the most recent Board of Finance and Affordable Housing Committee meetings. They were both scheduled at the same time and both asked for Webinars. Currently the Zoom technology only allows for one Webinar at a time. The Affordable Housing Committee had to reschedule their meeting. The conflict brings up the question regarding agendas and location. According to FOI, when an agenda is submitted without a location, it is not a complete agenda and someone could potentially file an FOI complaint. Mr. Marconi will send out a copy of a proposed Zoom policy for the Board to review and discuss at a future meeting.

The executive order of the Governor allowing for Zoom meetings expires in April 2022. Zoom meetings will still be allowed; however, a location must also be provided for the public.

Meetings held in public will not be required to also provide a Zoom. The Board discussed the idea of a Zoom room which would provide a place for the public to watch meetings.

Collette ??? asked if meetings could be scheduled at different times. There are many Boards, Committees and Commission and only 4 days during the week when people meet which makes it difficult to have each one scheduled at a different time.

HIDTA, an organization that does a lot of investigation into overdoses in Connecticut, put out a special notice regarding fentanyl in marijuana. Mr. Marconi commented that the Board needs to start the process to set up Public Hearings regarding Cannabis in Ridgefield. The Public Hearings will be separated into two meetings, one that will focus on the pros and one that will focus on the cons. The idea is to provide information while avoiding arguments between the two sides.

Jeff Lundberg is resigning from the Graveyard Restoration Committee. Mr. Marconi read his letter of resignation which included reasons why Mr. Lunberg feels the GYC should be disbanded. In his letter, Mr. Lunberg writes that the GYC has outlived its original objectives and the cemeteries should be professionally managed. Mr. Lunberg's vision is to have the cemeteries become a much larger part of Ridgefield as a must see attraction alongside the Keeler Tavern and the Aldrich Museum. Partnering with the Historical Society and providing tours in the summer to generate a larger community interest were two of Mr. Lunberg's suggestions. Mr. Hebert suggested inviting the GYC to attend a BOS meeting and talk to the Board about what the Committee would like to do.

Ms. Manners left the meeting at 9:18pm.

COVID test kit distribution has gone well so far. There have been over 16,000 kits given out to date. The Emergency Management Team along with the CERT volunteers did a great job with distribution on Saturday at Scotts Ridge.

There have been many complaints about Ness Garbage Company, which has been collecting garbage at 5:30am. Town Ordinance prohibits garbage collection before 6am. The driver has been given a warning by the police. The HRRA has also been alerted and will enforce their regulations with the company itself.

COVID Update: The numbers continue to improve. Positivity and hospitalizations are coming down. Omicron appears to be decreasing as quickly as it increased. DOCs will continue to provide rapid testing at Yanity in Ridgefield.

The clock project presented by the Rotary Club stimulated a lot of interest in town. The topic will be put on the meeting agenda for some time in February.

Mr. Hebert asked to discuss implementing stricter consequences for violations of town building codes and ordinances. Mr. Hebert suggested a larger monetary penalty that will make an impact on violators. Mr. Marconi suggested also adding the suspension of the builder's license for one year. The Board will need to draft a bill and submit it to the State legislature. Mr. Marconi will reach out to State Senator Julie Kushner to ask if she would like to get involved.

Mr. Hebert moved to send a request to all of the Representatives and Senators to introduce

language into this year's legislature that stiffens the penalty for a violation of either the building code and/or the demolition delay provision. Mr. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 4-0.

Mr. Marconi talked about some of the budget items that will be discussed in the upcoming budget meetings. There are several items that the Board will need to review and make recommendations on to the Board of Finance. The Town Clerk and Tax Collector are both positions that are paid well below the other department heads. Mr. Marconi would like the Board to look into making an adjustment in the budget for those positions.

Richard's Construction was awarded the project for the landscaping on Main Street. The company is requesting that they be permitted to plant only native species. Jane Didona, who was hired by the Town to help, has been working with the DOT to make this happen. Mr. Marconi will send out a request for the BOS to adopt a policy that will help stop the invasive species that are taking over some places in town.

There was a discussion about the recent Affordable Housing survey that has been posted and who prompted the survey. Ms. Kozlark asked if there is a limit to how many responses one person can give. Mr. Hebert commented that some of the questions don't make sense.

Mr. Hebert moved to adjourn the January 19, 2022 BOS meeting at 9:44pm. Ms. Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 4-0.