



Town of Ridgefield

Public Hearing and Board of Selectman Meeting Minutes

APPROVED

August 12, 2020 at 7:30pm via Zoom

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_5hAtc3_SEi48tGJdgWVvw

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi (RM), Bob Hebert (BH), Sean Connelly (SC), Maureen Kozlark (MK), Barbara Manners (BM)

Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 7.41pm, after the Town meeting.

Public Hearing

Discussion: Details pertaining to the application to be submitted by the Ridgefield Economic and Community Development Commission to the State of Connecticut to officially establish a Cultural District in Ridgefield and a request from the ECDC for the BOS to pass a resolution supporting this application.

Mr Marconi explained the requirement of the State statute to establish a Cultural District is the reason for the public hearing being held - giving residents and businesses information, a chance to comment and ask questions. Mr Marconi welcomed ECDC representatives Glori Norwitt and Geoffrey Morris (Chairman of the ECDC) to the hearing.

Mr Morris introduced Glori Norwitt who described the criteria for legal designation as a Cultural District. She offered to answer any questions the public may have and asked the BOS to vote to pass a resolution to support the application by the ECDC to declare Ridgefield a Cultural district.

Ms Norwitt referred to the map of the area proposed to be included. She explained the timeline of the law being passed and the process for the application to be approved as stipulated by the State. She thought Ridgefield would be the first application for this in the state. She added that getting the recognition from the State would increase local and regional tourist traffic.

Part of the criteria for designating a Cultural District was to create a subcommittee of cultural establishments. The ECDC will submit the list of notable activities in the Cultural District with their application, together with summaries of all the organizations, and a map. The ECDC will submit additional documents to ask the State for Ridgefield to qualify for the investment of resources. Currently no funding is offered with the declaration of a Cultural District but in the future financial aid would possibly be available. Once the application is submitted, the State would meet with the First Selectman, the subcommittee members and do a site walk.

Mr Morris explained how the subcommittee were chosen - the State restricted the seats to 8-9 cultural organizations both for profit and non-profit.

Mr Hebert asked what the qualifications are to be included on the list of cultural organizations. Ms Norwitt answered that any artistic establishment or organization that supports the arts could be included.

Mr Marconi asked if there were any questions from the public. There being none, the public hearing ended at 8p.m.

BOS Meeting

Additions to the agenda:

- 1a) Vote on appointment of 2 fire fighters
- 1b) Appoint Susan Gessner as an advisor to the ECDC and then to replace Amanda Duff in October when Amanda resigns from the ECDC.
- 1c) Vote to support an application by the Ridgefield Economic and Community Development Commission to the State of CT to officially establish a Cultural District in Ridgefield

Motion to add the above items to the agenda.

SC made the motion, MK seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

1) Public comment:

There were no public comments.

1a) Appointment of two new fire fighters.

Ms Fernandez, town HR Director, introduced the candidates. Both were interviewed and recommended by the Fire Commission for appointment. Geoffrey Pracella - RFD volunteer, graduate from the academy fire recruit program.

Richard Juan III - paramedic.

Mr Marconi asked if there were questions from the BOS. There were none.

Motion to appoint both candidates as fire fighters with the required HR testing. MK made the motion, BH seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed.

1b) Appoint Susan Gessner as an advisor to the ECDC and for her to replace Amanda Duff when she resigns from the ECDC in October.

Mr Morris introduced Ms Gessner to the BOS. Ms Gessner said she has been attending ECDC meetings. She explained her resume was strong in branding and marketing communications.

Ms Kozlark asked in addition to marketing what Ms Gessner is hoping to accomplish on the ECDC. Ms Gessner said the priority was economic recovery and advising local businesses.

Ms Manners asked how long Ms Gessner had lived in Ridgefield. Ms Gessner answered 35 years.

Mr Connelly asked how Ms Gessner would marry knowledge of a small family owned business with corporate business needs. Ms Gessner answered that listening to their needs and having empathy for what they are going through was necessary.

**Motion to appoint Susan Gessner as an advisor to the ECDC and for her to replace Amanda Duff when she resigns from the ECDC in October
SC made the motion, MK second the motion Vote: 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed unanimously.**

Mr Marconi informed Ms Gessner that she would need to be sworn in by the town clerk in October to take a permanent seat on the board

1c) The Town of Ridgefield Board of Selectmen have reviewed and discussed the establishment of a cultural district in Ridgefield, after conducting a public hearing for comment from the residents and businesses of Ridgefield, as required by current state statute for the establishment of a cultural district. The Board of Selectmen wholeheartedly support this application to the state of Connecticut.

The BOS decided that the resolution and application would be on file with the town Clerk for residents to continue to submit comments after this meeting.

Motion to support an application by the Ridgefield Economic and Community Development Commission to the State of Connecticut to officially establish a Cultural District in Ridgefield.

BH made the motion, BM seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

2.) Storm Isaias Recap.

An additional declaration of a state of emergency was made by the Governor on August 4, 2020, and a declaration of a local state of emergency in accordance with general statute 28-80a, 28-1(8), 28-22 and section 5 of the Town Charter as a result of tropical storm Isaias, that constitutes an emergency situation, was signed by me, Rudy Marconi on August 4, 2020. I hereby declare that a civil preparedness emergency exists in the Town of Ridgefield, I put that forward as a motion for approval of the full board.

A letter was drafted to the Public Utility Regulatory Authority, regarding the authority's investigation into the utility company's response to storm Isaias, requesting Ridgefield's participation in the investigation.

Motion to obtain participant status in the regulatory authority's investigation into the electric distribution companies preparedness and response to tropical storm Isaias. Motion to compel the electrical supply companies to undertake additional and immediate restoration and for the regulatory authority to impose statutory penalties on Eversource.

This letter was submitted on August 12, 2020 in partnership with Newtown. Mr Marconi is now seeking the board's approval to continue. If board does not want to proceed, the request for participation can be withdrawn. Make safe protocols which have been in place for years, were ignored by Eversource management. The mayor of Danbury is looking to take a legal action for damages. The filing by Ridgefield and Newtown will establish standing in the case regarding any further litigation that may be taken.

Mr Hebert asked what other towns were doing. Why only Ridgefield and Newtown were filing?

Mr Marconi said that Mr Rosenthal, first selectman of Newtown had requested filing together. Mr Marconi has discussed filings with the COG. Redding filed at the beginning of the week. Bridgeport has filed. Other towns will file as well.

There was poor response from Eversource after storm Isaias: A failure of their communication system with the liaison program. Mr Marconi said he chairs the committee of 43 towns under the DEMS - all agree that this was a collapse. Ridgefield was impacted the worst. We had no response for the several days. They would not divulge any information as to how many trucks they had dispatched to our area, they did not listen to our priorities. We need to testify in front of PURA how dissatisfied we are.

Mr Hebert asked for more information from PURA regarding Eversource's high salaries and rate increase. The BOS would like to know the formula used for these charges. We need an after action report from now and previous storms: what was done, what we learned, why service has deteriorated rather than improve from one storm to another. Eversource should have an emergency plan for these situations – the BOS wants to see the plan.

Mr Marconi said that by filing it will grant access to all information. Eversource have violated statutes put in place after the last storm. Last time we got a top level report after the investigation was complete. Requesting participation will give us access to details and sooner. We will share legal costs with Newtown.

Mr Hebert asked what the cost would be. Mr Marconi said he did not have a number, but the board agreed that a request for a phase by phase cost analysis from the attorney was prudent. Mr Hebert also requested that updates on this action be given at every BOS meeting until closure is reached.

Motion to accept the above declaration.

MK made the motion, BM seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

4.) Cadence lease – Amendment Approval

Cadence lease amendment with Barlow Mountain Elementary School includes a deferred rent clause, which needs approval. The board decided that interest would be charged for year 2 and three to incentivize quicker repayment of the rent.

Motion to approve the amendment to the Cadence lease with 0% interest for year 1, 1% increase for year 2 and 2% increase for year 3.

BH made the motion, BM seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

5.) WPCA easements agreements.

Ms Kozkark, BOS representative on the WPCA explained that these easements request the owners to grant to the town, temporary access to able to continue work on the RTS 7 pump station

5.1.) Ponds edge

Temporary easement for equipment staging, permanent easement for land from driveway on south edge of RT 7 entrance, P & Z approval has been obtained, BOS needs to approve for work to continue.

5.2.) 871 Ethan Allan Highway

Temporary easement to put up a sound barrier fence to mitigate some of the noise that would be made during construction work on the pump. Tenants in the building will be given white noise equipment. The owner is amenable to the agreement.

Motion to approve easements both temp and permanent at Ponds Edge at 901 Ethan Allan Highway, and easement for 871 Ethan Allan Highway for WPCA to continue work on the Rt 7 pump station.

MK made the motion, BM seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr Marconi thanked Dr Lipton at Ponds Edge and Mr Ryer of 871 Ethan Allan Highway for being willing to assist.

6.) **Selectman's report**

Thank-you notes have come in from Founders Hall, RSO, RVNA for inclusion in grants in FY 2021 budget, as well as from the director of NWCT communications center - they handle calls for ambulance routing to hospital

Town Hall will be opening to the public soon. Ms Fernandez is handling protocols and questions to ask visitors and maintenance are setting up social distancing restriction markings. After questions from both Mr Hebert and Mr Connelly as to roll-back plans, Mr Marconi explained that Ms Fernandez and the Director of Health would watch the Covid-19 statistics in town and roll back immediately, should the need arise.

Ms Kozlark asked about the current Covid-19 statistics. Mr Marconi said that new cases were all people in their high teens/ low 20's, who are not practicing social were distancing properly.

The BOS discussed the influx of teenagers jumping off the rocks at Mamasasco, This is not safe, and a monitor regularly patrols the area to ask these jumpers to leave. Great Pond is open again after the storm recovery was completed so these swimmers could go to Great Pond instead.

Ms Kozlark asked for an update on revenues for next meeting.

Mr Marconi said the town ended the year with over 99% in tax collection. He added that the situation has not improved for anyone and the storm had made

things worse. Mr Marconi asked if the BOS would consider extending the deferral program.

Mr Connelly sits on a subcommittee discussing how to reopen schools. He asked about testing of students when the schools reopen in order to find out if there are asymptomatic students in the population. Schools are set to open on Thursday, August 27, 2020

Mr Marconi answered that a Ridgefield community test was cancelled because the rapid test kits were redirected to nursing homes. Dr Hameedi had suggested using available rapid test kits to test students and teachers returning to school and asked the doctor to contact the Superintendent of Schools directly to arrange this. Mr Marconi had not heard if this was moving forward.

Mr Marconi thanked everyone both town employees and volunteers, who worked during the storm in the OEM and on the roads.

Motion to adjourn at 9:33pm

MK made the motion, SC seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed.