

Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectmen Meeting
Wednesday, December 12, 2018 – 7:30 pm
Town Hall Large Conference Room
400 Main Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut
UNREVISED/UNAPPROVED MINUTES

These minutes are a general summary of the meeting and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.

Agenda

In attendance: R. Marconi, B. Manners, M. Kozlark, B. Hebert, S. Zemo

1. Public Comment
2. Appointment: Jenna Hartford – Youth Commission (Teen Advisor)
3. Dept. of Finance – Year End Transfers (Kevin Redmond)
4. ECDC Mid-Year Presentation – Arnold Light & John Devine
5. Assessor Office – Abatement request
6. Tax Collector’s Office – refunds
7. Affordable Housing Charge review
8. Selectman’s Report
9. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 11/28/18

R. Marconi called the **Board of Selectmen meeting** to order at 7:36pm.

1. Public Comment

No Comment

2. Appointment: Jenna Hartford – Youth Commission (Teen Advisor)

Jenna Hartford, a senior from Ridgefield High School, was welcomed to interview with the Board of Selectmen for a position on the Youth Commission. R. Marconi stated that while there are technically no open positions, the BOS recognized the “extreme talent” of J. Hartford and decided to offer her an interview regardless. The position of Teen Advisor was newly created for this type of opportunity.

B. Manners commented on how impressed she is with J. Hartford’s resume and volunteer work history. R. Marconi also pointed out that J. Hartford has a 4.172 weighted average at Ridgefield High School and that she projects to graduate in 2019.

S. Zemo asked J. Hartford if she had any advice for the BOS as to how to influence younger high school students as well as those from different circles to get involved. J. Hartford emphasized the importance of spreading the word about the Youth Commission and the role that they play in the community. She explained the importance of reaching out to the younger students and encouraging them to join. She expressed that social media platforms would be an excellent way to reach the underclassmen. J. Hartford added that the Youth Commission values the opinions

of the underclassmen. She said that if underclassmen knew about the opportunity of the Youth Commission a lot more youth would be interested in being involved. She said she promises to influence and guide these students. In the last five months of her high school career, J. Hartford said she hopes to influence people to join the Youth Commission as well as to encourage them to participate in the events and causes.

J. Hartford recalled her experience as a non-member participant in the Youth Commission and how the development of The Kindness Mural was a big inspiration for her to join. She further commented that the Youth Commission has had discussions about the possibility of making plans to use The Kindness Mural image on key chains, mugs, and postcards as a way of raising money for the Youth Commission.

R. Marconi reminded everyone that there are several groups in town that help people in need like the Prevention Council. He then asked J. Hartford if she has ever thought of getting together for a joint meeting to address a common issue. She recalled the time when she collaborated with the Prevention Council on a project to help raise awareness about opioid addiction. She added the importance of collaborating and promotes this type of effort.

R. Marconi inquired about J. Hartford's experience and opinion of the high school at this point. She responded with an overall satisfaction of the school. She continued by saying that there are things being done to improve the school's culture and to promote working together as a community.

The interview concluded as J. Hartford expressed her anticipation while awaiting news of her possible acceptance from her first-choice college, Northwestern University.

M. Kozlark moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to appoint Jenna Hartford to the Youth Commission as a Teen Advisor. Motion carried 5-0.

3. Dept. of Finance – Year End Transfers (Kevin Redmond)

The BOS opened the annual discussion of the Department of Finance's Year End Transfers. Kevin Redmond, Director of Finance, explained the transfers one by one. He began by saying item 2018-1 had been previously approved.

K. Redmond brought the 2018-2 transfer to the attention of the Board. Item 2018-2 concerned funding for the March and May snow storms, in which, he added, the costs incurred from the May storm would most likely be reimbursed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for an estimated amount of \$100,000. Any amount received from FEMA would go to the general fund.

K. Redmond then discussed Item 2018-3 regarding legal budget transfers. He added that the budget was lowered but exceeded the budget, and that the transfers were needed to prevent going over budget. R. Marconi added that some extra expenses from the Conservation Commission added to the cost.

K. Redmond discussed item 2018-4, which was in regards to a transfer needed for an emergency situation. He explained that a new server had to be purchased in order to replace one that was no longer working. He added that to pay for the new server, the necessary funds would be moved from the health insurance funds, which has been made available because of vacancies in positions. R. Marconi said this means of obtaining funds from the health insurance vacancies must be temporary because it is not affordable.

K. Redmond addressed item 2018-5, a transfer needed to cover the seasonal salaries for maintenance and administrative workers. He said there are a large amount of favorabilities on the maintenance side but the opposite on the administrative end. K. Redmond said there should be a budget transfer going forward.

K. Redmond explained item 2018-6, a transfer in relation to Parks and Recreation. He also mentioned this also includes snow-related costs that can be funded by program costs. He further stated that the weather had impact on this item. He concluded that the transfers would more than offset the costs.

K. Redmond discussed item 2018-7 that pertained to the Police Special Services. He added that any money spent for Police Special Services would require a budget transfer and that this is done every year. B. Hebert asked if the expense is going to be deferred to which K. Redmond answered that it would not.

K. Redmond then addressed item 2018-8, which covers various transfers including roads. B. Hebert asked if these were projects that had been part of the budget but that had not been completed. Drainage and weather issues were considered and discussed. B. Hebert also asked if this is going to be deferred. R. Marconi replied that unless there was a contract, it would go back into the general fund. R. Marconi added that more people are needed to help pave the roads. He also mentioned the need to solicit new means for paving the roads, which includes asking outside of the State means.

The BOS decided to make a motion regarding all items outlined in The Department of Finance's Year End Transfers Memorandum.

S. Zemo moved and B. Hebert seconded a motion to approve the transfers 2018-2 through 2018-8 as presented by the Director of Finance, Kevin Redmond. Motion carried 5-0.

4. ECDC Mid-Year Presentation – Arnold Light & John Devine

John Devine from the Economic and Community Development Commission (ECDC) began speaking about the increasing progress of the committee since its inception 3 years ago. He furthered informed all meeting attendees that the ECDC currently consists of 7 members and recently added "Community" to their name. J. Devine also emphasized the diversity and difference in skill set in the ECDC.

Even though member Arnold Light was absent, he started off the PowerPoint presentation via speaker phone. The presentation regarded updates made by the ECDC during the last 6 fiscal months. Packets for the PowerPoint presentation were provided to the BOS members.

J. Devine continued with the rest of the presentation. He spoke about the revised ECDC website, commenting about its user-friendly navigation and added content.

J. Devine mentioned that recently the ECDC started working as the organizers for most of the non-profit organizations in town. During this effort; The Jazz, Funk, and Blues Festival and The Independent Film Festival were organized. They combined marketing skills and strategies to create events and provide a strong presence for the town, he also added.

J. Devine said The Film Festival brought in 2,000 people from a 15-mile radius, and close to 500 attendees came from much further away. He added that there were also attendees from Manhattan, England, New Mexico, California, and Lebanon. He then commented that they did a survey which found that 63 percent of attendees ate at a restaurant or bar in town and 33 percent shopped.

J. Devine talked about the extensive changes they have made to the ECDC website. He spoke about the additional events listed with live links, their updated calendar, and the addition of links to all town organizations. Organizations provide the content. ECDC has been working closely with the Ridgefield Playhouse. He added that the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC) plugin, a government listing of commercial real estate, was added back to their website, which, he further said, is an expensive purchase.

J. Devine commented on how the ECDC was given a first-time budget of \$3,000 for marketing. To advertise the various restaurants, bars, shops, and events of the town, the ECDC used budget funds to buy Facebook advertising, which, J. Devine added, costs less than 2 cents per person that is reached online. He further said that is a very affordable cost, and that they have also been using Facebook tags to receive data about site traffic and to spread around the highlights of Ridgefield. J. Devine also said that data indicates that their primary audience is between 35-55 years old, both male and female.

There were three short videos shown: including one about the Jazz Festival and another about The Save the Date Holiday Stroll. J. Devine mentioned that the videos are a new tactic to market the events of the town and bring in more consumers.

J. Devine mentioned that the only drawback to their internet ad efforts is an issue of a missing "metric." He explained that the missing metric is that they only know that people are clicking the links on the site, yet they do not know if people are making purchases, like buying event tickets, after clicking the links.

M. Augustus "Gus" Ryer, a member of the ECDC, mentioned the need to quantify commercial space and office vacancy in Ridgefield. He stated the need to obtain more data on the total

amount of vacancy and then use it to determine if it is a high amount and how to use it to help growth. He added that he would like to have an intern help work with the data. He then inquired about the amount of square footage belonging to each company. S. Zemo mentioned that he knows of 5 soon-to-be closings of stores in Ridgefield and asked if the ECDC will make efforts to bring in people outside of town to open businesses and shops. J. Devine responded that ECDC has been working on ways to continue to help.

R. Marconi asked Al Garzi, the Tax Assessor of the Town of Ridgefield, about the total square footage of the town. R. Marconi said it would be beneficial to use the reported square footage submitted by the landlords, which A. Garzi said is available to them.

J. Devine summed up the presentation by saying the ECDC is currently working with the Arts Council to provide arts space and studios for rent. He said it is projected to fully develop in a couple of years. He further commented that The Arts Council issued a survey regarding an interest to rent arts space, indicating a significant demand for it.

5. Assessor Office – Abatement request

The Jesse Lee Memorial United Methodist Church requested an abatement of \$2,043.24. Virginia Konopka from the church was invited to sit at the BOS table to discuss the request. R. Marconi read a letter from V. Konopka to A. Garzi concerning the abatement request that would be used to offset the costs for upkeep of the church parking lot. The church presently leases fifty parking spaces to HARTransit for a fee of \$15,000. A. Garzi said that since the tax exemption was denied to the church, the matter of an abatement was brought to the attention of the BOS, which is the committee responsible for abatement decisions. R. Marconi stated that he would like to see this program promoted because it would help to lessen the commuter numbers. V. Konopka calculated that by leasing the parking spaces, 250 cars are kept off the road.

B. Hebert asked if the number of cars has gone up and if there is an overflow. V. Konopka answered that there is a little bit of overflow.

B. Hebert then asked about the possibility of charging users via parking permits rather than abating the taxes. Konopka responded that if that happened the church would have to pay additional taxes.

V. Konopka mentioned that it costs the church \$130,000 to repave the parking lot, which has to be done every ten years. She added that plowing and snow maintenance has to be done more often now because of the additional use of the parking area by HARTransit. The abatement would further help with the church's maintenance of the parking lot.

B. Manners moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to abate the taxes for the United Methodist Church. Motion carried 5-0.

6. Tax Collector's Office – refunds

B. Manners moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to approve the refunds submitted by the Tax Collector's Office. Motion carried 5-0.

7. Affordable Housing Charge review

R. Marconi mentioned that there are currently 5 candidates requesting interviews for the Affordable Housing charge. M. Kozlark proposed that the BOS should wait for a total of 7 candidates before beginning interviews. S. Zemo agreed with the preference of 7 candidates.

B. Hebert stated he would like to have the candidates specifically define Affordable Housing "in layman's" terms and explain what it means to them for this committee. Secondly, he said he would like to see a quantitative reason for Affordable Housing. He described specific factors that he feels should be included such as: the type of housing, the town growth, and how many apartments are needed to be built. He also mentioned that he would be happy to help guide any candidates who had questions about the specifics he is asking of them.

S. Zemo posed the question of how to you quantify Affordable Housing. He then added that there must be some kind of criteria provided to define Affordable Housing.

Thirdly, B. Hebert would like to see the candidates form a plan and project how this would affect the town in terms of taxes, schools, and other town matters. He would like to see something specific to the needs of Ridgefield.

R. Marconi commented that there is a lot of data provided in the Affordable Housing packet that has been made available to the BOS.

Lastly, B. Hebert stated that he would like to see a more realistic set of numbers and data in regards to the mandate in 8-30g.

M. Kozlark would like to see the BOS work as an advocacy and agreed with B. Hebert's idea about the mandate in 8-30g. She also said that the data about Affordable Housing might have to be updated because it is several years old.

B. Manners left the meeting at 9:28 pm.

S. Zemo asked, if Affordable House was privatized would the residents be given a better product?

R. Marconi mentioned Mark Nolan of Nolan Enterprises and the privatization of Affordable Housing in Ridgefield. He mentioned that M. Nolan had received land from the Town of Ridgefield to build Affordable Housing units. S. Zemo inquired about the possibility of privatization becoming more of a part of the Affordable House efforts in Ridgefield. B. Hebert responded that it would because it is one of the options available to them in regards to Affordable Housing.

B. Hebert decided that he will take another look at the data provided regarding Affordable Housing. He further mentioned that Ridgefield might not need a council but something broader. He added that he would like to see the need for Affordable Housing in Ridgefield.

The BOS agreed to continue the discussion regarding the Affordable Housing charge at the January 9, 2019 meeting.

8. Selectman's Report

A. Garzi mentioned the 3 specific programs available for the elderly. Of the three, the deferment program was discussed. A. Garzi mentioned the BOS's proposed idea to raise the income requirement for the obtainment of a deferment. R. Marconi said the BOS would need to make an ordinance change to raise the deferment requirement from \$55, 000 to 60, 000 or from \$55,000 to 75,000. A. Garzi added that the deferment program has provided services for the same 47 people consistently every year. He stated that the people in this program have a financial need for it. He continued to say that the program has been around for almost 17 years and costs \$2 million per year. R. Marconi then mentioned that the elderly population is growing. He proposed to keep the amount of \$60,000 required for the deferment program and to adjust the program if and when necessary. He would like to make the change to \$65,000, but then there is an issue of affordability at this time.

Sanjay Tripathi, of 78 Canterbury Lane, Ridgefield, CT brought up his concern from the previous meeting regarding solar energy panels placed in close proximity to his property. R. Marconi mentioned he had researched the topic and found that West Hartford and New London are also dealing with the issue of renewable energy structures. He further stated that the town can create an ordinance, but they cannot make it specific to any piece of property. R. Marconi assured that a first draft of an ordinance will be created in January.

R. Marconi mentioned that he received an email from someone claiming the BOS has received some misleading information regarding incorrect height and square footage as well as other factors about the solar panels on Canterbury Lane. He said he will distribute the email later.

S. Zemo asked about a possible plan to come up with the variables and specifics regarding renewable energy structures like setbacks and other related factors. R. Marconi said they will use those of Smithfield, Rhode Island, which is thorough.

R. Marconi said he would send an email about the Ridgefield Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) work efforts.

R. Marconi mentioned that there are several public meetings and listening sessions coming up and asked the members of the BOS if they feel they should collectively attend as a full Board or individually. The BOS agreed to decide the details in January.

R. Marconi shared news of a petition regarding school start and stop times. He continued to say that it was ruled inappropriate for a town meeting because, according to a State ordinance, it is illegal for a town to make change on matters that are out of their jurisdiction.

R. Marconi shared the news of the addition of 35 front-to-back, sharp turn signs on Old Stagecoach Road and Neds Mountain Road in Ridgefield, CT. The signs were added by the State of Connecticut. R. Marconi mentioned that he will be attending a meeting on this matter with the Ridgefield Police Department the next day. He said the signs are subject to be taken down and sent back to the State, but it is unsure as to the cost of labor to remove the signs. They are local roads, so the State of Connecticut has no jurisdiction. The Ridgefield Police Department had previously approved the State-funded addition of these signs, but did not recall this amount of signage.

Additional matters were discussed in the Selectman's Report, including possible parking improvements, monthly revenue meetings, the 5 Ridgefield house sales for over 1.2 million dollars, and the 5 recent foreclosures that were reported by The Town Clerk.

B. Hebert inquired about the price point of the foreclosures. R. Marconi said he would provide that information, but added that they were not consistent.

R. Marconi stated that the Town budget is going well.

R. Marconi touched upon the annual Homeland Security agreement and added that all paperwork must be annually agreed upon and submitted.

M. Kozlark moved and B. Hebert seconded a motion to approve a resolution allowing Rudy Marconi, the First Selectmen of the Board of Selectmen of the Town of Ridgefield, to execute approval of the agreement with the State of Connecticut, the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, and the Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security as well as all documents deemed necessary and appropriate. Motion carried 4-0.

9. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 11/28/18

Slight changes were made to the Meeting Minutes from 11/28/18.

M. Kozlark moved and B. Hebert seconded a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes from 11/28/18 with modifications. Motion carried 3-0.

R. Marconi moved and B. Hebert seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen meeting at 10:45pm. Motion carried 4-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa M. Ackerly