

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – BOARD OF SELECTMEN SPECIAL MEETING

JUNE 15, 2016

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:30 P.M.

REVISED/APPROVED MINUTES

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

In attendance: Rudy Marconi, Bob Hebert, Maureen Kozlark, Barbara Manners, Steve Zemo

Schlumberger Citizens Committee: Dick Larson, Chairman; Andy Behymer; Ellen Burns; Don Daughters; Linda Hanley; Mary Miller; Joan Zawacki

Agenda

1. Acceptance of Schlumberger Citizens Committee Final Report; Possible Vote

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

Richard Larson went over the process by which the committee arrived at its recommendations. Two surveys were conducted and 20 public meetings were held to determine the uses for the Schlumberger property. R. Larson stated that the recommended plan will meet the desires for Ridgefield residents and be an asset for the Town's economy.

M. Kozlark asks about any feedback the committee received.

R. Larson responded that comments from the public received at the April Meeting were mostly positive saying that it will be an amenity for the Town and increase property values, although some expressed concern about increases in automobile traffic on Sunset Lane.

Don Daughters stated he heard many positive reviews from Town residents.

R. Marconi asked how the committee came to its conclusion for recommending an amphitheater.

R. Larson responded that it was the result of the survey from 34 proposed uses.

Joan Zawacki stated that the committee made extensive use of data to drive their recommendations.

Mary Miller stated she was pleased with how the committee used public input to reach their conclusion.

Steve Zemo said the response has been positive and the most common question is how it will be paid for. Asked about a comparison to Grace Farms in New Canaan.

Don Daughters stated it has been very successful as a cultural center but that something of that size is infeasible for Ridgefield due to the cost.

Ellen Burns said the survey showed that traffic increase was a common worry.

Andy Behymar stated that a cultural center is necessary to attract young people to Ridgefield as attracting large corporations to town becomes increasingly infeasible.

The Committee distributed the recommendations to the Board of Selectmen.

Richard Larson presented the first recommendation which is to have the Town maintain control of the property as much as possible. Lease the property as opposed to selling it, stating that leases can be structured so as to offload costs from the Town. The second recommendation is to develop 12 of the 30 acres into a cultural center that includes walking, biking, and picnic areas and to reserve 18 acres as open space under control of the Town of Ridgefield.

R. Marconi asked whether control means under the Board of Selectmen or the Conservation Commission to which R. Larson responded the former—the Board of Selectmen.

R. Larson presented recommendation 2A, an implementation committee. This committee would determine the demand for groups to use the amphitheater and determine the needs of various groups who want to use it. It would also determine how to synergize the project with other businesses in Town.

Mr. Larson went on to present the following:

Recommendation 2B: The committee recommends that the Auditorium be earmarked for use as a music theater venue.

Recommendation 2C: The committee recommends the Philip Johnson building be maintained based on its historical significance. The building requires substantial capital investment. Bassam Fellows, a minimalist lifestyle, personal accessory and furniture company, has proposed using the building as office space and would restore the building at their expense.

Recommendation 2D: The committee recommends construction of walking trails on the property for recreational purposes.

Recommendation 3: The project will cost \$7 million and a survey shows 29% want the money to be recovered. The committee proposes a tax increase to cover it or solicitation of donations.

Recommendation 4: The committee recommends that over the next 60 to 90 days an implementation committee be formed, with the necessary engineers hired for the project, and leases negotiated.

Recommendation 5: Larson was surprised by the high amount of interest in municipal facilities. 55% want agencies to change location. R. Marconi mentions proposals for moving the police department to the same building as the public safety administration location.

Recommendation 6: Housing was an issue that got little interest. Surveys show people think Ridgefield's housing supply is sufficient.

Recommendation 7: The committee decided sports fields and facilities were not appropriate because the current ones have room to grow. Information gathered for sports needs would be handed over to Parks & Recreation as they are soon to be completing a sports facility needs assessment.

B. Manners offered praise for the committee's work.

S. Zemo asked where the committee sees revenue streams for recouping the cost of the project. R. Larson responded that finding out will require more research. Rudy Marconi stated that not much will come from the amphitheater itself but the sale of the other buildings (Sky Dome, Philip Johnson, Auditorium) will help. In addition, revenue will be realized from leasing of the amphitheater. The hope is that it would be revenue-generating, but certainly no less than self-sustaining. Don Daughters stated that soliciting donations will be needed.

R. Marconi asked for public comments.

Allison Greeley, Hunter Lane, asked about the implications of accepting the report. R. Marconi responded that it means holding more meetings and gathering more input.

John Devine, Governor Street, and member of the EDC, noted that the amphitheater offers the opportunity for daytime events that would boost local businesses, as opposed to events at the Playhouse which occur at night when most businesses are closed.

Daniela Sikora, Great Hill Road, spoke on behalf of the Ridgefield Symphony and Ballet Company, noting that despite the report saying arts groups were consulted, they weren't. She's happy that accepting the report isn't final and wishes for more input for an amphitheater project that will cost \$1.5 million and will be used only 3 months per year.

Bob Frank, Lounsbury Road, stated that he's concerned about not doing a full cost-analysis.

Bill Diamond, High Ridge Avenue, spoke on behalf of ACT of Connecticut, and supports rebuilding the facility without public money.

R. Larson stated that they did speak extensively to the Ridgefield Arts Council. Daniela Sikora repeats that many groups weren't contacted. R. Marconi suggests that while the Arts Council was contacted, perhaps individual groups weren't.

Martin Handshy, 46 Casey Lane, and ambassador of Charter Group Inc. stated that future residents support the project but are concerned about noise and traffic.

R. Marconi stated that the proposal is to only use Sunset Lane as an emergency egress, so traffic wouldn't be a problem.

Peter Grierson, Indian Cave Road, asked for a ballpark capital figure. R. Marconi replied the board doesn't know but they will find out soon.

Alison Greeley stated she is concerned about committing to an amphitheater before conducting a feasibility study and suggests they do a feasibility study before going forward; believes there are other cultural options for the property. It might be premature that the amphitheater is the only option for the property.

Jennifer DiLaura, First Lane, and Ridgefield Arts Council member, stated she hopes the implementation committee looks at how the amphitheater fits in with the mission of the Town.

S. Zemo moved and R. Hebert seconded the motion to accept the report and recommendations of the Schlumberger Citizen's Committee. Motion carried 5-0.

Rudy Marconi thanked the committee for their work.

Richard Larson thanked the board for giving them the resources and freedom to do their job.

Maureen Kozlark asked if the committee is dissolved. Rudy Marconi responds in the affirmative. Discussion of next steps will be added to the 6/22/16 BOS meeting agenda.

R. Hebert moved and M. Kozlark seconded the motion to adjourn the Special Meeting at 9:35 pm. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Will Poundstone, Intern to the First Selectman