

Special Town Meeting December 13, 2017

First Selectman, Rudy Marconi, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. in the Ridgefield Library Lower Level program Room.

The First Selectman led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The first order of business was to elect a Moderator. John Katz made a motion to elect Ed Tyrrell, and Rebecca Mucchetti seconded the motion.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and Mr. Tyrrell was elected Moderator.

Mr. Tyrrell asked for a motion to appoint Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk, as secretary of the meeting. John Katz made the motion, Rebecca Mucchetti seconded.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and Barbara Serfilippi was appointed secretary.

The Moderator then read the legal notice of the meeting that appears on page 239, to act upon the following changes in Ridgefield Code under Chapter 120, Animals. He then commented that because the notice had so many changes it would be impossible to read; therefore, he entertained a motion to waive the reading of the entire notice. John Katz made the motion to waive the reading, and Rebecca Mucchetti seconded the motion.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the motion passed.

The Moderator stated that in order to open discussion on the issue, he would need a motion to approve the changes in the ordinance. Steven Cooke, 78 Manor Rd., made the motion, and it was seconded by David Cordisco, 263 Branchville Rd.

Discussion: The First Selectman, Rudy Marconi gave background on the issue. He explained that many months ago, a group of neighbors in the Manor Rd. area came to him concerned about the number of horses kept on a property next door to them on about an acre of land. There were three horses kept in a paddocked area. The Board of Selectmen listened to the many concerns of the neighbors, and since the Board is charged to address the health, safety, and welfare of the people of Ridgefield, they formed an ad hoc committee consisting of 8 to 12 people on both sides of the issue. The committee debated as how to modify the present ordinance and how it should read. The conclusion was to have the Board of Selectmen move forward with the ordinance presented before the meeting tonight. He stated that the ordinance addresses any properties with 1.5 acres or less, and grandfathers any existing properties that have horses with less than 1.5 acres.

The following people in the audience spoke:

Laura Stabell, 44 Lake Rd. felt the ordinance was flawed. The ordinance should make it easier for people to farm.

Whitney Freeman, 673 Ridgebury Rd. felt the ordinance should be just for horses, not hooved animals.

Allison M. Brush, 15 Lewis Dr., expressed that the smell from the manure prevented her from enjoying her property.

Reggie Griffith, Sharp Hill La., said there should be a distinction between hoofed animals and horses in the ordinance.

George Nichols, 4 Lewis Dr. pointed out that under Article III, RESIDENTIAL LOT/PROPERTY was a repetition of Article II under 120-7.

Mr. Marconi agreed that this was a repetition of what is in Article 11 and should not be there.

The Moderator called for a motion to delete from Article III the section "RESIDENTIAL LOT/PROPERTY, For the purpose of this article, "residential property" and residential lot" shall be any property lot situated in the R7.5, R10, R20, and SD R20 Zones, as shown on the Town's Official Zoning Map.

Mr. Nichols made the motion. A member of the audience seconded it.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the motion passed.

Discussion: A woman in the audience asked if it was legal to have a section deleted after published. The Moderator replied "yes."

Mitchell Hubsher, 77 Chestnut Hill Rd., asked if this meant all properties and all property are covered. Mr. Marconi responded that it means 1.5 acres or less in any zone.

The Moderator asked for a vote on just this motion.

Vote: "Aye" vote carried, and the motion was approved.

Steven Cooke, 78 Manor Rd., said that when he moved into the neighborhood, he did not expect horses to be there. He said the ordinance should protect the homeowner.

Reggie Griffith, Sharp Hill La., felt the law was too broad.

Laurie Griffith, 59 North St., felt the ordinance was limiting.

Andi Mead, Rockwell Rd., suggested that the ordinance be more specific to the number of animals.

Jeffrey Hubsher, 239 Ridgebury Rd., encouraged people to vote against the ordinance. He felt it was an attack on people's ability to have livestock.

Laura Stabell, 44 Lake Rd., asked if the appeal process was for only if there was a health issue. Mr. Tyrrell informed her that the Director of Health enforces everything in the ordinance.

Whitney Freeman, 373 Ridgebury Rd., spoke about the differences with farming and recreational horses.

A member of the audience requested changes be made to the ordinance, and Mr. Tyrrell ruled them to be substantive changes and would not allow them to be made tonight. He said that any such changes should have been brought up at the public hearings.

The Moderator closed discussion and called for a voice vote.

Vote: The Moderator asked those in favor of the original motion, as modified by an earlier vote, to say "Yes." Those not in favor would vote "No." The Moderator announced the voice vote was unclear to him. He then asked for a standing vote. The "Yes" vote was two to one over the "No" vote. The ordinance was approved.

David Goldenberg made a motion to adjourn, seconded by a member of the audience.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk