



Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectpersons Meeting Minutes
UNAPPROVED

March 20, 2024 at 6:30pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi, Sean Connelly, Maureen Kozlark, Barbara Manners, Chris Murray

Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 6:32pm.

1. Public Comment

Arnie Nielsen, 2 Rustic Road, shared he's been a landscaper for over 30 years and his customers are most concerned with receiving a good, efficient, cost-effective job. Mr. Nielsen expressed concern about transitioning to electric leaf blowers, specifically increased costs to his consumers due to increased time to complete a job and retooling fees, and suggested limiting the time during the day leaf blowing work is permitted instead of switching to electric leaf blowers.

Carol Mark, 27 Fairview Avenue, shared she attended a symposium in Greenwich where she met landscapers who switched to electric-powered equipment, resulting in increased demand for their services. Ms. Mark commented on the increased noise and smell from leaf blowers over the past 20 years.

Kirk Carr, 62 Prospect Ridge, shared three documents with the BoS. Mr. Carr expressed concern the Senior Survey overstated seniors' involvement in pickleball, with the survey finding over 90% of senior respondents play pickleball. Mr. Carr commented on Planning & Zoning's 2022 decision about proposed pickleball courts at Martin Park due to noise and traffic concerns. Mr. Carr also expressed disappointment about ECDC absenteeism not being included on this agenda.

Debra Franceschini, 72 Spireview Road, voiced the leaf blower transition would need to be implemented slowly and shared her electric backpack leaf blower is about 20lbs heavier than her gas-powered backpack leaf blower. Ms. Franceschini expressed support for Mr. Carr's absenteeism comments.

2. Vendor Permit Renewal – Chez Lenard

Michael Principi, Sole Proprietor of Chez Lenard, was in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- Rudy Marconi shared Mr. Principi's police background check was received at Town Hall. Mr. Principi shared he's also collecting background checks from his four staff members.
- Mr. Marconi asked about hiring difficulties. Mr. Principi confirmed no difficulties, receives word-of-mouth referrals, and shared he's getting busier with work and family.

- Mr. Marconi asked about increases on the price of hotdogs. Mr. Principi shared the prices of everything has increased.
- Maureen Kozlark asked about feedback on price increases. Mr. Principi confirmed he had received feedback, but most customers are understanding.
- Sean Connelly asked if that had impacted his business. Mr. Principi confirmed it has not, and he makes an effort to keep prices reasonable.
- Mr. Marconi asked about Chez Lenard's participation with CHIRP. Mr. Principi shared he has in the past, but has recently elected to go to the local little league games instead.

Maureen Kozlark motioned to approve the vendor permit renewal for Chez Lenard. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

3. Tax Credit Programs

Al Garzi, Tax Assessor, was in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- Rudy Marconi shared, historically, a committee has been appointed to review the senior tax programs. Mr. Garzi shared there are three programs, two Town and one State:
 - o A tax credit of \$1,048 for residents 65+ with no income requirements. About 2,000 people use this program; the Tax Assessor's office receives 200 applications per year, and about 100 residents leave the program per year. Total annual program cost is approximately \$2,000,000.
 - Sean Connelly asked about who uses this program. Mr. Garzi confirmed they must be listed on the deed (unless a spouse), reside in the home 183 days per year and be 65 or older. The program started in 1976 and increased over time. Mr. Connelly voiced support to increase the tax credit. Mr. Garzi shared residents have expressed they don't need the credit and proposed a means test to offer the tax credit to those in need, but that's been contentious in the past.
 - Maureen Kozlark asked about this relating to Senior Survey results, and Rudy Marconi confirmed taxes were one of the largest issues raised.
 - o A tax deferment program for residents 65+ with annual household income less than \$65,000, which allows qualifying residents to defer property taxes, and are required to pay back the principal amount with non-compounded interest. 60 people use this program, total annual program cost is roughly \$2,000,000.
 - Chris Murray asked about issues collecting. Mr. Garzi shared that has never been an issue.
 - Ms. Kozlark asked about hardship to the Town to carry \$2,000,000. Mr. Garzi confirmed it's not a hardship and is accounted for with the uncollectable taxes. Mr. Garzi shared he monitors the outstanding balance to ensure it doesn't exceed the value of the house.
 - Mr. Murray asked about protections to stop granting the tax deferment. Mr. Garzi shared residents are required to re-file every two years to be reapproved and there are no set parameters to no longer allow the deferment. An ordinance would need to be amended to allow for that. Ms. Kozlark shared it could be a good idea to codify the specific threshold, and Mr. Garzi confirmed that would give the Tax Assessor's office some leverage, if needed.

- Mr. Murray asked about the interest rate. Mr. Garzi confirmed it's currently 3% non-compounded interest, with the rate set by the Board of Finance.
 - A third program is a State program, but operated by the Town, for residents 65+ or totally disabled with annual household income less than \$53,400 if married or \$43,800 if single, 60 people use this program. Total annual program cost is roughly \$100,000.
- Mr. Marconi asked about needing to form a committee to research raising limits for both Town programs and providing a recommendation to the BoS, given it was a request from the Senior Survey.
 - Mr. Murray voiced support.
 - Ms. Kozlark expressed concern forming another committee at this time, given the other current committee formations.
 - Mr. Connelly shared they have time to explore the issue, and asked whether it was a project the BoS could take on instead of forming a committee.
 - Mr. Marconi shared they would ask a committee to research other communities to see how Ridgefield compares and present findings and recommendations.
 - Ms. Kozlark and Barbara Manners requested time to consider further.
- Mr. Marconi shared the tax deferment program encourages people to remain in their homes and stay in Town. Ms. Manners expressed its positive impact on residents.

4. Pickleball Discussion (Mr. Steve Zemo)

Steve Zemo was in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- Mr. Zemo read a statement to the BoS, sharing:
 - He completed a site walk in February with Dennis DiPinto, Parks & Recreation Director, to see the proposed location, discuss proposed sound barrier, etc.
 - Then completed further research into pickleball and noise abatement and had a follow-up meeting with Mr. DiPinto in March where he expressed concerns about the proposed courts' impact on adjacent neighborhoods, residents, and 23 trees along the Rail Trail that would need to be removed.
 - He proposed moving the pickleball courts to an existing Parks & Recreation area, near existing infrastructure, requesting they explore an option with less impact to open space, referencing points from Planning & Zoning's 2022 Martin Park pickleball court denial for being incompatible with property value, public health, and conservation.
- Mr. Zemo expressed concerns the proposed courts could have on the Bark Park and combat veterans residing in the neighborhood, and concerns about the efficacy of sound curtains. Rudy Marconi shared Parks & Recreation has hired a sound attenuation consultant, at the request of Planning & Zoning.
- Barbara Manners expressed support for Mr. Zemo's argument. Mr. Marconi expressed the formal Planning & Zoning process must be allowed to take place. Chris Murray expressed he shared similar feelings with Mr. Zemo.
- Maureen Kozlark expressed the BoS may have made an error or omission during budget discussions about the proposed location of the pickleball courts, that Parks & Recreation's existing Danbury Road location could be more appropriate. Ms. Kozlark asked whether the BoS could indicate to Planning & Zoning that putting courts at Parks & Rec could be more appropriate. Sean Connelly expressed it would be fair to ask Planning & Zoning to explore that.

- Ms. Kozlark shared the BoS should strongly encourage the Parks & Recreation Commission consider their existing site on Danbury Road. Mr. Marconi shared he would send a letter of concern, with their approval.
- Andrea Beebe, 378 Main Street, thanked Mr. Zemo for his presentation and expressed support. Ms. Beebe voiced frustration that residents who donated \$14,000 to build the Martin Park courts were not refunded after Planning & Zoning found them to be illegal.
- Debra Franceschini, 72 Spireview Road, asked about noise-related mental health concerns and expressed concern about the Parks & Recreation Commission spending on consultants and plans if Planning & Zoning has a right to reject a proposal based on health and safety concerns.

Barbara Manners motioned the First Selectman send a letter of concern to the Parks & Recreation Commission to put a hold on proposed Prospect Ridge site until they have completed an in-depth exploration of feasibility to use the existing Parks & Recreation site on Danbury Road. Chris Murray seconded. Motion carried 4-1.

5. Forms of Government Comparison Task Force – Review of Formation

Rudy Marconi shared 21 people applied, and there were some applications submitted after the deadline which were not accepted.

Mr. Marconi read an initial draft charge for the Forms of Government Comparison Task Force.

Sean Connelly largely expressed support, but felt the charge should also specifically involve public hearings and input, and interviewing chairs and representatives from Town Boards, Committees, and Commissions for their input. Barbara Manners and Maureen Kozlark voiced it would also be beneficial to receive input from government departments.

Chris Murray asked about interviewing applicants and the selection process. Mr. Marconi suggested 10-minute interviews per applicant over two days.

Mr. Murray asked about applicants submitting a writing sample. Ms. Manners shared it would be helpful for applicants to share why they would be a good fit. Ms. Kozlark expressed most had submitted that information and/or resumes with their applications, which Mr. Marconi said he'd share with the BoS. Mr. Connelly said a paragraph highlighting their relevant experience would be beneficial.

Vincent Giordano, 28 Fairview Avenue, suggested specifying population size to consider in the charge.

6. Leaf Blower/Noise Ordinance Task Force – Review of Formation

Rudy Marconi read an initial draft charge for the Leaf Blower/Noise Ordinance Task Force.

Chris Murray largely expressed support. Sean Connelly and Maureen Kozlark suggested adapting the language to specifically indicate the potential to change or do nothing to this charge.

Mr. Marconi shared 30 people applied for this task force, and the BoS must keep in mind the minority representation rule for both task forces.

Mr. Marconi shared some of the applicants are elected officials, and asked about elected officials serving on either committee. Mr. Connelly, Chris Murray, and Ms. Kozlark expressed support.

The BoS discussed scheduling interviews for both task forces, Mr. Marconi will send out dates to BoS excluding school break and upcoming religious holidays. The BoS will schedule 8-10 interviews per evening. Ms. Kozlark suggested starting with the Leaf Blower/Noise Ordinance Task Force interviews.

7. Approval of Meeting Minutes

a. February 26, 2024

Sean Connelly suggested updating the Minutes to indicate he was present through 8:40pm, participating through the phone. Rudy Marconi will look into whether that counts as being present or absent.

Maureen Kozlark suggested indicating Barbara Manners was present via Zoom, and Chris Murray motioned to adjourn the meeting, not Mr. Connelly.

Barbara Manners clarified the indicated discussion about CHIRP was about the Holiday Trust Fund, not CHIRP.

Ms. Kozlark clarified the indicated discussion about the WPCA and the Vactor truck was about the purchasing and maintenance cost of the Vactor truck, based on usage.

Maureen Kozlark motioned to approve the minutes from the February 26, 2024 Board of Selectpersons meeting, as modified. Barbara Manners seconded. Motion carried 4-0-1.

b. February 27, 2024

Sean Connelly noted Rayda Krell, 39 Wooster Street, is the resident who spoke.

Mr. Connelly clarified the Board of Education discussed their focused intervention was on math, which is where they saw improvement.

Sean Connelly motioned to approve the minutes from the February 27, 2024 Board of Selectpersons meeting, as modified. Maureen Kozlark seconded. Motion carried 4-0-1.

c. February 28, 2024

Maureen Kozlark motioned to approve the minutes from the February 28, 2024 Board of Selectpersons meeting. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 4-0-1.

d. March 6, 2024 – Special Meeting

Maureen Kozlark noted an employment contract was discussed, not an agreement.

Sean Connelly motioned to approve the minutes from the March 6, 2024 Board of Selectpersons Special Meeting, as amended. Maureen Kozlark seconded. Motion carried 4-0-1.

e. **March 6, 2024**

Rudy Marconi corrected the discussion of recent “legislation” to “legislative proposals.”

Maureen motioned to approve the minutes from the March 6, 2024 Board of Selectpersons meeting, as amended. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 4-0-1.

8. Selectperson’s Report

Rudy Marconi shared he received a 2023 report from the Affordable Housing Committee. Debra Franceschini shared she would like to discuss the Housing Trust Fund and would reach out to schedule a time to meet with the BoS.

Mr. Marconi read a letter from the State of Connecticut, shared by Kevin Redmond, Controller, that Ridgefield will receive \$633,000 in municipal revenue sharing separate from the \$562,000 bonus sharing pool the Town expected to receive in 2024. This is the second year in a row receiving these funds, and they’re not included in the FY23 or FY24 budget. Maureen Kozlark asked where those funds come from. Mr. Marconi shared it’s municipal revenue sharing, so getting funds back. And this could increase forecast revenue favorably to \$1,374,000 in FY24.

Mr. Marconi shared he was at Danbury Superior Court for the 29 Lakeview Drive blight case, meeting with the judge, and indicated both the owner and their attorney were also present.

Mr. Marconi expressed if he sends a letter to the Parks & Recreation Commission about the pickleball courts, he may also want to send a letter to the Board of Finance.

Ms. Kozlark asked about committee attendance. Mr. Marconi shared he’d ask Wendy Gannon Lionetti, Town Clerk, for a report indicating who did and didn’t submit their attendance reports, and who had members with less than 2/3 attendance that needs to be notified. Ms. Kozlark expressed gratitude to volunteers, and an understanding to follow the rules, but doesn’t want volunteers to feel unappreciated. Barbara Manners shared some volunteers are highly active outside of meetings. Sean Connelly voiced agreement, but also that the Charter is very clear. Mr. Marconi shared the Charter is very specific and should be followed.

Ms. Kozlark asked about the Senior Survey and whether the Commission on Aging will have a discussion with the BoS about their findings. Mr. Marconi shared Joe Ternullo, CoA Chair, will reach out to schedule.

Chris Murray asked about school space needs for the upcoming academic year. Mr. Marconi shared he’s spoken with Dr. Susie DaSilva, Superintendent, they’re working on a plan, and it’s a top priority along with the PD/FD.

Sean Connelly motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:09pm. Maureen Kozlark seconded. Motion carried 5-0.