



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

400 Main Street • Ridgefield, CT 06877
203.546.2547

Arnold Light
Chairman

Rudy Marconi,
First Selectman

www.ridgefieldct.org

Ridgefielddevelopment.com

Robert DeFalco
John Devine, Vice Chair, Secretary
Paul Levine
M. Augustus Ryer
Karen Sulzinsky

**Approved RECDC Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2018 at 6:30pm
Small Town Hall Conference Room**

In Attendance: Arnold Light, Paul Levine, M Augustus Ryer, John Devine, Karen Sulzinsky

Absent: Robert DeFalco

Guests: Adam Schnell, Geoff Morris

Meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Next meeting March 5, 2018, 6:30 pm, small conference room in Town Hall

2. Approval of January minutes

Motion: John. Second: Gus. Unanimous approval. Karen Sulzinsky abstains

GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Interview for Commissioner – Geoff Morris

- a. Discussion with Geoff about Commission's mission and goals. Geoff has Commission support. Geoff will meet with Rudy and then to interview with BOS.

2. Guest Speaker – Adam Schnell, Assistant Town Planner

- a. “Mixed Use Overlay Zone”: Adam explains this new regulation. It’s about local affordable housing needs. Town wants to incentivize developers to use a town regulation for affordable housing so we can control land use policy locally. Met with local developers who have already built affordable housing to see what they want as incentives. The new regulation provides developers an alternative to building 50- foot structures. It may promote development but that was not the intent. Has to be mixed use, not just residential. Will keep larger developments out of residential areas. P&Z and Adam are developing a new 10-year plan for the town. This will be a two-year process.
- b. FFR Proposal Results of January 3rd BOS Meeting
Arnold and John, on behalf of the ECDC, requested \$12,000 from the BOS, but BOS agreed to \$6,000 til June 31st with stipulation that the landlord has to add 50% to the incentive to match the Town’s contribution. The ECDC initially rejected that proposal. Subsequently, Arnold met with Rudy and the ECDC reversed its position and decided to accept the \$6,000 and consider it a start. The ECDC took an email vote and it was unanimous (see email from January 21st attached.) Gus suggests carefully writing a protocol for this incentive before it is offered to landlords so the ECDC is clear in its role. John suggests that once the lease that meets the contingency is signed, the ECDC should be responsible following that paper for 3 years. This incentive only applies to spaces up to 1000 square feet. The Commissioners discuss process. Arnold suggests a formal application for landlords. Arnold will ask Rudy to ask Al Garzi to create the first draft of an application for the FFR incentive.

3. PR Campaign Update: The Commissioners discussed the progress of the Addressi PR campaign for Ridgefield. Addressi has commitments for about \$43,000 from local merchants for this independent effort. The ECDC is not involved in an official capacity, though Arnold and Paul are informally advising. Paul suggests the ECDC be available to consult with the committee. The Commissioners agree that because the ECDC is a town entity, we cannot be associated with the Addressi committee in any official capacity. John advised Wayne Addressi that he should request time on the ECDC Agenda(s) to present updates on his initiative. He noted that is the process followed by other organizations. On a related note, the Commissioners discussed the fact that the ECDC is a non-profit, so any contributions to the Commission would be tax deductible for donors. And if ECDC starts our own fund for marketing those donations would also be tax deductible.

- a. Ridgefield Jazz and Funk Fest 2018 Update : John updated the Commission on this upcoming event. It will take place in the second or third week of September 2018. Tentative lineup is Bernie Williams on Saturday night at Playhouse, CHIRP event Thursday, library event on Friday, Aldrich event on Saturday afternoon. The ECDC will support efforts outside those. John will meet with Downtown Ridgefield organization in March about possible Sunday jazz brunch at Lounsbury House. Jessica Ryan, an experienced restaurant marketing professional, will work with local restaurants to help them work together for the event. Allison Stockel will refer musicians for the restaurants to book throughout the weekend. Groups could perform throughout Saturday on the front steps of Town Hall. Need to find out date for Fall in Love with Ridgefield so no conflict. This event is a work in progress, whose goal is to stir excitement in the village. ECDC must assist in managing the monies. John suggests Rudy sets up an account for ECDC to have oversight on. ECDC can look for sponsors, too. We need a document plan and a landing page on ECDC website. Maps for parking can be used. Karen suggests an app for attendees that could feature

Ridgefield Economic Development Commission: February 2018 Minutes

schedules, digital offers, etc. John adds that an app will enable the ECDC to create a database for future use. Geoff suggests there may be a pre-made app that we can customize, and perhaps Jonathan Winn could suggest one. Paul suggests that the Festival feature something so different it will be covered by broader media like the NY Times.

4. Website update and meeting w/Birgitta Stone: Bob DeFalco, the current ECDC website manager, is leaving the ECDC in March. Arnold, John and Bob met with Birgitta, but her services are out of the Commission's budget range. With Bob's departure, website will need: content updates, promotion of events on website to Hamlet Hub or Arts Council, etc, and management of town events posted to our calendar. John and Arnold are pursuing more affordable options. Gus says he outsources overseas for a person to post content, not create content. Here is Bob's website report for January: Website traffic was very low in January. Only 403 sessions and 289 New Users. Low traffic is the result of very little event activity in Ridgefield. Most visitors searched: News, Merchant Directory and tried searching Calendar events but not much to keep them interested. Not much in the way of referral traffic. Within what we had, top referrals came from Facebook & Founders Hall. Only one referral from Hamlet Hub.
5. Protocol for promoting Ridgefield businesses: The Commissioners discussed how ECDC can promote a business. How much support do we give? Arnold suggests that if they give us content, we will publish it on our website. John adds that, historically, businesses have been featured on our home page, but, beyond that, we are not marketers for retailers. We market events in town, but can't promote every retailer's sale. We don't help businesses negotiate with their landlords. Gus will put together a draft document outlining promotion protocol for the Commission to consider. Geoff suggests the ECDC have broad mission statement posted on the website.

NEW BUSINESS

Motion to add discussion of 5-Point Plan and Charter discussion to the meeting agenda.

Motion: John, Second: Gus, Unanimous approval

1. 5-Point Plan: John presented his draft of the ECDC 5-Point Plan, as our overarching document and suggests an OGSM for each ECDC project. John suggests a separate one for office space/vacancy—need a strategy on that. Maybe it's like FFR but a little different. Need to finish the 5-Point Plan first.

5 POINT PLAN

1. Preserve Ridgefield's Image and Personality:

- Safeguard Ridgefield's unique "Norman Rockwell" persona.
- Promote Ridgefield as a leading Cultural and Arts destination.

2. Strive for Sustainable Economic Growth:

- Identify Internal and External Best Practices that can support existing businesses. All Ridgefield businesses can expect ECDC support, regardless of their Ridgefield address.
- Secure new tenants to include regional and / or national occupants that would significantly increase foot traffic and contribute meaningful tax revenue.
- Identify short and long term parking solutions.

3. Geographic Focus:

- Focus **initially** on Main Street, as well as Catoonah, Bailey, Governor, Prospect.
- Promote & Support the Potential Branchville TOD Project.
- Support Implementation of an approved Schlumberger Plan.

4. Innovation & Branding:

- Develop Active Marketing, primarily supported by the imminent re-design of our ECDC & Town websites.

5. Improved Coordination & Communication:

- BOS <> State & Federal EDC <> Chamber of Commerce <> Planning & Zoning <> Parking Authority

NEW BUSINESS (cont'd)

2. Charter Revision: Charter Revision is happening now. Urgent for ECDC to present to the Commission the changes we propose to our Charter. Also urgent is Charter Commission happening now. John told Commissioners desired changes must be presented to the Charter Revision Commission. If they agree, the revisions are presented to voters at the May Town Referendum. The Commissioners discussed possible Charter revisions, including parking commission supervision. Analogy is that Architectural Commission and Conservation Commissions report to P&Z, so Parking Commission could report to the ECDC. Gus will find the part in current Charter referring to these structures to inform the wording of our revision request. Another idea discussed: add request to increase ECDC membership to 9 from 7. John will advise suggested dates for our appearance.
3. Research and Task Force for FFR: The Commission discussed the availability of possible retail prospects to go after in other towns to come here. But not many vacancies for retail right now, so maybe focus on office space instead, as office vacancy rate is much higher than retail at this time.
4. Hospitality and Economic Development: Cathy Savoca, the owner of Front Porch Farm, the newly approved Bed & Breakfast, is concerned about hospitality in town for the many arts events. Her idea is to have a group of hospitality entities to refer to each other.
5. Another idea, a small boutique hotel in town. The Commissioners discussed options. Arnold questions if this is a project for the ECDC. Why doesn't the Town allow Airbnb?

The meeting adjourned at 9:19 pm

Motion to adjourn: John, Second: Arnold, Unanimous approval

Ridgefield Economic Development Commission: February 2018 Minutes

From: **arnold** arnold@lightconsults.com
Subject: Amended FFR Motion

Date: January 21, 2018 at 11:54 AM

To: Paul Levine levassoc@aol.com, John Devine john.b.devine.jr@gmail.com, Bob DeFalco Deflco Rdefalco1@aol.com, Gus Ryer gryer@ryer.com, Karen Sulzinsky jsulz@aol.com, Geoffrey Morris gmmorris@townvibe.com



All:

During our meeting with Rudy Marconi on January 12th, the issue of the motion we passed on Jan 11th rejecting the incentive approved by the BOS at their Jan 3rd meeting on the FFR incentive was discussed.

After putting some clarity on the issue we decided on an alternative strategy that was raised as an option by Karen during our meeting on Jan 11th. Therefore we have decided to go ahead with the incentive approved by the BOS on Jan 3rd and are amending the approved motion by the ECDC on January 11th. Below is the amended motion put forth by John Devine for your approval.

"The Economic and Community Development Commission accepts the \$6K fund allocation by the Board of Selectman for the First Floor Retail Incentive program and the funds will be credited if a landlord also matches the requirements as set forward in the approved program in the execution of a lease."

Please let me have your vote YAY or NAY by email.

Thanks

Arnold