



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

400 Main Street • Ridgefield, CT 06877
203.546.2547

Arnold Light
Chairman

Robert DeFalco
John Devine, Secretary
Paul Levine
M. Augustus Ryer
Stephany Sanderson
Karen Sulzinsky

Rudy Marconi,
First Selectman
Ridgefielddevelopment.com

**Approved RECDC Meeting Minutes
June 5th, 2017 at 6:30 pm.
Small Town Hall Conference Room**

Attending: Arnold Light, Chairperson Robert DeFalco, John Devine, Paul Levine, Gus Ryer, Stephany Sanderson, Karen Sulzinsky

Arnold Light called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. He is the designated minute taker for June 5th ECEDC meeting.

A motion was requested to approve the minutes of the May 8th, 2017 meeting. A motion for approval was made by Arnold Light and seconded by Bob DeFalco. Minutes were approved.

Announcements

1. Chairman's Report on May 10th meeting with Rudy Marconi:
 - a. CBD lamp post banners were discussed and Alison Greely of the Arts Council and John Devine discussed procedures and responsibility. Rudy was in favor of the RECDC and Arts Council managing the use of Lamp post signage going forward
 - b. First Floor Retail, discussed the issues and agenda that was held on May 11th.
 - c. Bob DeFalco reviewed the Google analytics with Rudy. He was very impressed and felt that the ECDC has made great progress and is making a difference in Town activity.
 - d. Arnold Light brought up the fact that the June 13th Seminar on Economic Development presented by CERC was a go and we would have about 20 attendees.
 - e. We discussed and reviewed the CHIRP parking situation.

General Discussion

1. Alison Greeley of The Arts Council attended to seek support from the ECDC on the fact that the performing arts groups in town such as the Symphony and Chorale groups are having a difficult time securing rehearsal and performance dates from the Towns Public Schools which have auditoriums large enough for its concerts. The High School has enriched its music and performance arts programs to the extent that there are very few dates available and the Middle School has an issue with the sound because of fans that cool the electronic system. As a result the groups have sought to move their concerts out of town which is something that either the Arts Council or ECDC do not want to see happen. Alison suggested that the Arts Council and ECDC form a cohesive effort to meet with the principal stakeholders to resolve the issue. She felt that if we can get all the responsible people together we can hopefully come to a resolution that will keep the concert in Town. Arnold Light said he would put it on the agenda for the June monthly meeting with Rudy Marconi.
2. Wayne Addressi one of the Town's merchants presented the ECDC with a memo to raise \$25,000 to strategically define a publicity effort to promote the Town and hopefully create more opportunities to attract retailers to set up shop in Ridgefield. We discussed the memo and it was suggested by several commissioners that we should be careful as to the responsibility and financial issues associated with collecting outside funds and using them to promote the Town. It was suggested that we first get proposals from likely firms as to what they would propose for the \$25,000, even before we raise the funds. Wayne Addressi already has pledges of \$5,000. Arnold Light said he would put this matter on the agenda for the June meeting with Rudy Marconi. A copy of Wayne's memo is attached.
3. Senior Gold Book status report by Bob DeFalco said as of this date there were only about 34 merchants who have signed up for the new edition. He mentioned he was meeting with several Town interns on Tuesday, June 6th to give them some input and training and then turn them loose to visit merchants who have participated in the past plus new merchants since the last publication to secure commitments for the new book. The goal is secure at least 120 merchants who would offer discounts to seniors. Bob also reported that Squash's was the most inexpensive source for the production and printing.
4. The next meeting of the First Floor Retail contingent is scheduled for June 19th at 4 PM in Town Hall, large conference room. Karen Sulzinsky will prepare a document to be proposed at this meeting entailing the IPS plan (Identify, Package and Support) that would advocate action going forward. The document will be prepared in two parts. Part One: advocacy for an ordinance to require landlords to only rent to bona-fide retailers within a 12-month period of the vacancy. In return landlords as an incentive will receive a real estate tax abatement. Part Two: would be a package that will be presented to potential retailers. One of the elements of the Package is the Personal Property Tax abatement that would require a vote from the BOS. Arnold Light did the research and found that the average annual PPT for the CBD retailers was \$234. Given the few vacancies on Main Street the abatement would cost the Town very little and be a big selling factor to potential retailers. A copy of the PPT breakdown is attached to these minutes as well as the initial FFR retail package.
5. The June 13th Economic Development Seminar to be presented by CERC and CEDAS has about 21 folks registered. John Devine suggested that John Frey our Ridgefield State Representative be invited. Arnold Light sent Mr. Frey an invite on Tuesday June 6th.

6. As far as the Library Business Series is concerned John reported that he was not sure right now what the curriculum would be going forward but suggested that we should put together what we think will benefit business owners including a series on Wordpress and present to SCORE.
7. A discussion on the use of signage lead by Stephany Sanderson in retail storefronts was presented as well as Wayfair signage that would help tourists and residents alike find their way around Ridgefield easier. It was concluded that this is a work in progress and that Stephany should gather as much information as possible to build a case and then present to Rudy and then to the BOS for correction and enforcement.
8. Website update by Bob DeFalco. Bob reported that the numbers based on HostGator C Panel and Google Analytics continue to look favorable and are inching up each month. In search performance we continue to remain in top page and position numbers. Bob is still in need of content from our Commissioners. He is looking for success stories about retailers as well as placement of our URL on retailers and other websites.

Meeting adjourned at 8:49. Motion by Paul Levine, second by Karen Sulzinsky. Motion approved.

Attachments

1. Wayne Addressi Memo

We will need to have the support of the EDC members to raise \$25,000 to help to strategically define a publicity effort to promote:

1. A focus here in the points below are to publicize and NOT advertise the shop/business owner experiences, endorsements of business owners showing how powerful we are as unique customer/client driven businesses. Differentiating Ridgefield's unique offerings creates a unique and compelling reason shoppers, diners and people considering doing business here and moving here.
2. The above efforts will be via stories told of unique shop owners, their success and featuring their businesses and assets.
3. Many results can be to help others to see the benefits of owning a retail shop or other business here and relocating or opening here/
4. REVOLUTIONARY RIDGEFIELD! Perhaps create a new identity for Ridgefield? There are plenty of good imagery but more video is needed along with drone footage.
5. Raise \$25,000. target 10 stakeholders to support the above first time effort.
6. Benefits of the above is to uniquely brand and to tell the story of the additional assets of Ridgefield.
7. Lost opportunity example versus a newer approach: Take the most recent Battle of Ridgefield reenactment, if that event was publicized with a spin towards commerce, activities, families of the Town for the future the event could have been even a bigger WIN for us all.
8. Hire a publicist to do all that is being considered here. Publicizing Ridgefield by bringing many of the assets of Town into one focused PR effort. This can be very powerful and has never been done before.

9. One volunteer coordinator to be named to help focus the ideas and effort of the above.
10. Once we set up the agenda, we do see benefit in coordinating and sharing this focus others.

2. First Floor Retail Package including Rudy's Response

Folks:

I sent the original list (below) to Rudy for his thoughts and he pretty much agreed. This is what he answered back:

Hi Arnold,

My thoughts:

1. yes
2. yes
3. BOS approval (we should follow up)
4. Building fees (correct?)
5. Landlord allowance
6. Downtown Association (Bill Craig)
7. Landlord allowance
8. ??

Rudy

Below is what we had originally proposed, I will give you the info on the PPT abatements and John will discuss the start-up fee waivers.

While researching the PPT issue I learned from Al Garzi that there is no tax on retailer inventory that is a good selling point for the package.

FFR Package:

1. Low Rents
2. Business Incentive Program
3. No tax on inventory
4. PPT abatements
5. Start-up fee waivers
6. Renovation allowance (5K?)
7. Free 6th months membership in downtown Association
8. Savings on services such as snow plowing, garbage pick-up, etc.
9. Help and advice with location selection, etc.

Once again, this is really a three-pronged approach: 1. Identify potential retailers, 2. Package and 3. Support. This new initiative will be called the IPS.

3. Personal Property Tax for 30 Central Business District Stores

FY June 30 2017-July 1st 2018.

PPT TAX \$ July 2017-June 2018

Total PPT of 30 Retail store fronts \$258,025

Mil Rate X .02721

Equals \$70,209

Divided by 30 stores equals \$234 Average PPT

Prepared 6/5/17