



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

400 Main Street • Ridgefield, CT 06877•203.546.2547

Glori Norwitt - Chair
Geoffrey Morris – Secretary
Sean Dowd
Kay Gelfman
Jennifer Gioffre
Bob Knight
Mark Riser
Jonathan Winn

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman

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**Approved Minutes
January 9, 2023 at 6:30pm
in-person in Town Hall Lower Level Conference Room**

In attendance Chair Glori Norwitt, Commissioners Kay Gelfman, Jennifer Gioffre, Bob Knight (arrived 6:40pm), Mark Riser, and Jonathan Winn.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31pm.

Next meeting is February 6, 2023.

Gelfman motioned to approve December 2022 Minutes without changes; Riser seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Recap of Recent Events (Norwitt)

Jennifer Gioffre was appointed to the Ridgefield ECDC by the Board of Selectmen (BOS) on January 4, 2023; she was sworn in today.

At the January 18, 2023 BOS meeting, on the BOS Agenda will be the appointment of Brittny Howell, and the reappointment of Norwitt and Winn to the ECDC. Additionally, Norwitt will speak with the BOS about the idea of having a videoscreen in the Deborah Ann's Chocolate Shoppe kiosk in order to provide Town information.

Norwitt spoke with Mike Liberta who is the new Event Coordinator of the Downtown Ridgefield Association. The Downtown Assn will continue to organize and promote



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the quarterly Strolls, and seeks more high school and middle school student participation for the Spring Stroll. The Downtown Assn will support the Chamber's activities, and the inRidgefield.com website and its event calendar. They also seek to promote Ballard Park and its events as a destination. Norwitt will reach out to Barry London, the new President of the Association.

Update on Resident Kirk Carr's FOIA Complaint against the ECDC, Norwitt and Morris: the State FOI Commission will be sending a Notice of Hearing and Order to Show Cause, with a date, time and place for the hearing. In the interim, a State FOI employee was assigned to act as an ombudsman/mediator; Norwitt spoke with him and awaits more information.

Gelfman and Morris hung Banners on Main Street to support "shop local." The Arts Council maintains the calendar for the Banners.

In the State Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), David Lehman stepped down; Alexandra Daum (previous Chief Investment Officer of DECD) was named the new CEO.

Norwitt shared details on a program called "Path Forward" which empowers people to restart their career after caregiving with "Return-ships" (as opposed to internships). The website pathforward.org assist individuals with at least 5 years of professional experience who have been out of the paid workforce for 2 or more years for caregiving purposes, with 16 week, mid-career, return-to-work opportunities.



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The draft ECDC Budget for fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023 was submitted to the Town in December. On Monday February 27, 2023, the ECDC will be on the BOS Agenda in order to discuss the Budget request.

ARPA Funds to local Nonprofit Arts & Culture Groups (Winn, Norwitt)

On December 9, 2022, Town checks totaling \$665,000 were distributed to 22 local arts & culture nonprofits from the Town's ARPA funds, at the Arts Council Executive Director Roundtable. Norwitt received many thanks from the nonprofits for the ECDC's year-long assistance in supporting this distribution (along with the Arts Council). Norwitt thanked the Commissioners for their work on this project.

Broadband Feasibility Study (Knight)

As reported last month, the Town entered into a 3-way contract with EntryPoint Networks and WestCOG to create a feasibility study exploring the installation of broadband service throughout the town. Knight provided an update and explained that First Selectman Marconi wanted to pursue a Town-owned infrastructure but lease out services, operations, and restoration to the private sector. The ECDC joins weekly zoom meetings with Marconi, Town Director of Facilities and Purchasing Jake Muller, and Entrypoint. A new website www.ridgefieldfiber.org was created to share information with Town residents about the project.

The new Broadband Survey was sent out to Town residents via Facebook notices and a Ridgefield Alert. At this point more than 800 people have responded to the survey.



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Parking (Norwitt)

Geoffrey Morris has been working to open the 30+ parking spots behind the Post Office that are currently not being used due to the Post Office's sorting being moved to the Danbury office. The landlord is willing to assist, but now unfortunately his new contact at the national USPS indicated that the spots will not be made available. Additional updates soon.

Survey from Welcome Postcard (Riser)

This spring and this fall, the ECDC mailed out "Welcome" postcards to new Town residents who had moved here anytime June 2020 to now. On the postcards was a brief survey that the new residents were asked to complete. Riser reported on data collected from this survey. We have 114 respondents, with 27 moving from CT; 31 from New York state, 5 from the West, 4 international and 15 other. The largest age range of new residents was 45 people in the 35-44 age range; 66% are age 35 to 54. 92% of homes have 1-2 children at home; 44 % have one child. 57% of respondents have elementary school children; 14% have middle school age; 8 % have high schoolers; 14% have adult children in their home.

The top 5 reasons for moving to Ridgefield centered around town character, great place to raise a family, safety & security, schools, and community. Also important was shopping & restaurants, arts & culture, and parks & rec. Discussion amongst Commissioners about how best to use the data, and whether we should seek qualitative conversations with the respondents, and what opportunities arise from this data.



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Marketing in Deborah Ann's Kiosk (Norwitt)

In Deborah Ann's kiosk, the ECDC will have an opportunity to post information in one panel, Winn took detailed measurements and is inquiring with a manufacturer about a video screen panel, if that will be allowed by the Town. Norwitt will speak with the BOS on January 18 about this.

Further, Morris spoke with Marge Maida Heminway of Maida:Design to design a map of the downtown area which would provide people with information about restaurants, retail, and more in the downtown area (similar to the maps you would see in a mall, to locate stores). She has a proposal to design a 2 foot x 6 foot map (ie the area of one panel in the kiosk) for \$875; for an additional \$250 she could revise the map to fit the dimensions of a standard sheet of paper (so it could be printed). Discussion amongst the Commissioners about the map, the cost, and voting.

Planning for 2023

Discussion of the draft ECDC Annual Schedule which lists when to prepare Budget materials, annual Shark Tank, annual Cultural District Award, and more. Discussion of current projects and possible future projects for the Commission including

- Keeping the website ridgefieldct.com up to date
- Marketing of the Town, including in the kiosk
- Promoting Open space (and donations to it) in the town
- Affordable housing so employees can live near work
- Possible Historical Statue project
- Benchmarking/tracking business information in Town



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- Annual Shark Tank
- Possible promotion of available Ridgefield jobs
- How to grow the business portion of the Grand List
- Connecting with local employers on a regular basis; seminars; monthly zoom calls
- Promote EV chargers
- Continue with the Downtown Beautification

General strategic planning questions were raised

- What kind of businesses does Ridgefield need?
- How do we ensure economic diversity?
- What kind of support do Ridgefield businesses need?
- What kinds of services does Ridgefield need?
- What is our economic development benchmark?
- What is our economic development objective?

Update of Planning & Zoning Commission Topics (Gelfman)

Gelfman attends Planning & Zoning Commission meetings and/or reviews Minutes from each meeting. She discussed affordable housing issues and possible inclusionary zoning regulations.

Riser motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:51pm; Knight seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Minutes prepared by Norwitt.