



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

400 Main Street • Ridgefield, CT 06877 • 203.546.2547

Geoffrey Morris, Chair
Glori Norwitt, Secretary
Dee Dee Colabella
Cameron Cole Carcelén
Susan Gessner
Bob Knight
Steve Spivak

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman
ridgefieldct.com

**Economic & Community Development Commission
Unapproved Minutes
January 4, 2021, 6:30 pm, via ZOOM Video Conference**

In Attendance: Chairman Geoffrey Morris; Secretary Glori Norwitt; Commissioners Cameron Carcelén Cole, Susan Gessner, and Bob Knight.

Geoffrey Morris called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

Announcements

Next meeting: February 1, 2021

Geoffrey made a motion to approve the December 2020 meeting minutes without revisions; seconded by Bob. Motion carries 5-0.

General Discussion

1. **Cultural District Application** (Glori and Geoffrey)

The Cultural District Subcommittee met in mid-December via Zoom and discussed the prospect of doing a “Virtual Tour” of the Cultural District per Lisa Scails’ suggestion. Geoffrey spoke with Noah Manheimer who could film the Virtual Tour via bike and using a GoPro. This video could also serve as a marketing video. Cost is roughly \$300 - \$400 for filming and editing. We believe we could finish the video by late February.

Susan suggested a highlight reel for marketing Ridgefield in general. Geoffrey suggested spring may be a better time for making an overall marketing video.

Bob made a motion to allot \$500 for creation of a Cultural District Virtual Walking Tour video to support the Cultural District Application. Seconded by Glori. Motion carries 5-0.

2. Federal NEA "Our Town" Grant (Glori)

Glori attempted to submit an NEA "Our Town" Grant in August 2020 but was prevented from doing so due to the inability to fully access two federal websites, sam.gov and grants.gov. She is attempting to determine if staff at Town Hall have remedied this situation so that she or others can apply for federal grants in the future.

Joe Collin of the Ridgefield Arts Council contacted Glori to discuss a federal grant that could be applied for in February, and could be united with the mosaic sculptures that were going to be part of the Our Town grant in August. Further, Jennifer DiLaura of the Arts Council contacted Glori regarding the estate of a sculptor which is willing to sell certain sculptures for a reduced price; these sculptures could possibly be placed on outdoor pathways, in conjunction with the mosaic sculptures.

Cameron suggested having an overall plan for artwork along all the pathways, so that we can possibly seek additional grants or funding for various stages.

3. Shop Local Initiative (Geoffrey)

This program encourages Ridgefield shoppers to post photos of themselves shopping in Ridgefield, and thus be entered to win a "Shop Ridgefield" \$50 gift certificate. To date, 32 gift certificates have been granted. Promotion will be continued with remaining funding donations from the Holiday Village. The hashtag will be changed so it will no longer be a holiday-only promotion.

4. Long-Term Economic Recovery Plan (Bob and Geoffrey)

Geoffrey attended the latest P&Z meeting; P&Z is considering rezoning to fill empty storefronts/spaces. Geoffrey will speak with Joe Fossi of P&Z, who was positive about the ECDC's recent efforts to support businesses.

The Governor's office has requested all Towns to create a Long Term (Pandemic) Recovery Committee. Its Business & Jobs Subcommittee is chaired by Bob. Geoffrey serves as Vice Chair and Glori is also a member. The subcommittee has approximately 25 people: Downtown, Branchville & Route 7 Corridor, Copps Hill represented. Hebert represents BOS. Superintendent DaSilva; Boehringer Ingelheim, Chef's Warehouse, Nuvance Health, and smaller businesses. First (non-public) meeting is this Thursday Jan 7, 2021. If issues related to businesses and jobs can't be solved locally, the issues get escalated to the Western CT Council of Governments (WESTCOG), then to CT DEMHS Region 5 Subcommittee on Business and Jobs, in which Bob serves as Ridgefield's liaison.

Bob is drafting the ECDC's Economic Development and Recovery Plan; the first draft will be distributed to Commissioners in the next week or two. The Plan will serve as a compass for ECDC economic development efforts.

Federal Stimulus in Round 2 of the CARES Act - \$600 for eligible individuals, and some business relief. Hopefully this will assist some businesses in our town.

Bob drafted a second survey to follow up on business needs to determine what additional resources are needed. Geoffrey suggested we get information from the state to determine how we could help businesses. If the survey could drive state funding, then it's a good reason to move forward. For the second survey, we need to be careful with our language; we may not have monetary support from the state.
Example: if we know there may be turnover of commercial real estate soon, we can focus on supporting incoming new businesses that may fill this space.

From the first survey, we learned that some small businesses requested non-monetary assistance: Technical assistance and marketing help. Boehringer's responses to the first survey were very helpful and affirmed the work ECDC is doing in building Ridgefield's work/life balance appeal and pursuing appropriate resources for employees (or their trailing spouses) who will be working remotely from home.

Glori noted that Karen Martin, Assistant Planner of P&Z, drafted a very helpful "Guide to Opening a Business in Ridgefield" which has been shared with all the Commissioners, for their review. Commissioners are asked to send their suggested revisions to Glori. This could be part of a digital process to apply for a permit.

5. Website (Bob)

Bob met with DeeDee and are fixing some technical issues. DeeDee is willing to take the prototype site and move it to WordPress, which is the gold standard. Discussion of moving from WIX to WordPress either now or after the website is fully updated. This will give DeeDee time to work on this project. The Town IT has been informed. Town is redoing elements of the Town of Ridgefield website now, which will be helpful for the ECDC links to work well. Not known when Town will launch the new website.

6. Ridgefield Branding Program (Susan)

Susan discussed the goals of this initiative: to attract people to town, promote the town, encourage residents to start a business and motivate people from neighboring towns to spend the day enjoying the cultural attractions, shopping, and eating in our restaurants. Ultimately, this project will yield a consistent brand identity with a series of branded marketing materials.

Scope: develop overall brand strategy including marketing the town as ripe for growth, and incorporating the branding of the Economic Recovery Plan, in 3 phases:

(1) Discovery: information gathering. (2) Design: development brand strategy, messaging platform and graphic identity. (3) Execution: Implementing the experience across multiple channels (print, digital, etc).

Proposed audience demographics: existing and potential business owners (need to define sectors, and geographic areas), residents, people in their 30s and 40s, divorced couples, and regional visitors.

Place marketing: Develop a narrative to reinforce our unique identity as a diverse, vibrant community. Leverage artists and cultural institutions to promote the Ridgefield as a cultural destination. Create a reason for people to visit town; promote "year-round" festivals and activities to attract people to spend the day. Discussed "Ridgefield: the place to be."

SWOT analysis being done. Prepare competitive analysis of Stamford, Westport, New Canaan, Wilton. Develop a survey with the voice of the customer (determine the target audiences). Susan, DeeDee, Cameron and Steve had a 'kick-off' meeting in December. Their next meeting is scheduled for January 11.

7. Update

Glori's one year term on the ECDC has ended; she is up for renewal at the BOS meeting on January 6, 2021.

Susan motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Glori. Motion carries 5-0. The meeting concluded at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:
Glori Norwitt, Secretary