



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

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

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman
ridgefieldct.com

**Economic & Community Development Commission
Approved Minutes
August 7, 2023, at 6:30 pm
in-person in Town Hall Large Conference Room**

The meeting called to order at 6:34 pm

In attendance: Chair Glori Norwitt, Secretary Geoffrey Morris, Commissioners Jonathan Winn, Mark Riser, Jenn Gioffre, Kay Gelfman, and Bob Knight (by phone)

Announcements

Next meeting: Sept 11, 2023

Winn motioned and Gioffre 2nd that we approve the July 2023 Minutes. All in favor.

General Discussion

Public Comment - No comments

Recap of Recent Events

The Prospector Theatre is hosting a “Do Good Business Conference” on learning how to build a more inclusive and accessible workplace on October 12. A few commissioners expressed an interest in attending.

The Ridgefield Farmers Market has had a successful launch. Executive Director Corrin Arasa says the group may be looking for more volunteers. Its income is from two sponsorships, memberships (members receive a free bag), and vendor fees. Promotional support would help; she will speak with the Arts Council re banners, which are managed in coordination with ECDC. The market is limited to 20 vendors now. Many artists are requesting space. Discussion of possible partnership with Arts Council, Guild of Artists, and RPAC for a possible Artisan Fair.

James Dearth contacted the ECDC about moving his architecture business to town, and issues with permits for light welding and assembly.

Commissioners Riser and Morris attended a meeting headed by the CT Department For the Humanities about how the state will handle the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026. The meeting took place at Keeler Tavern Museum on August 3, and included a tour of the museum as it relates to the Battle of Ridgefield, which will have its 250th annual re-enactment in 2027.

AGENDA

Tiger Shark Tank (Dowd, Riser)

Commissioner Gelfman and Riser produced promotional videos of sharks in various places around town to promote the October 24 Tiger-Shark Tank. Call for submissions was released via email and social media in late June, with an October 1 deadline for submissions of businesses that want to present. The Ridgefield Playhouse will help promote the event on its social-media campaigns. It was posted on Ridgefield CT and the ECDC Facebook pages, and the Press Release was picked up by Hamlet Hub and others. Committed judges to date are Priceline founder Jay Walker, former GE CFO Jeff Bornstein, and Ridgefield Running Co. founder Megan Searfoss.

Cultural District Sculpture (Morris, Gelfman)

The ECDC received four proposals for a sculpture to represent the Cultural District and the honorees of the CD Award. A fundraising plan and a location site will be determined. Still more work to be done, as Commissioner Gelfman is talking with the Aldrich's Richard Klein about some of the details of the submissions and about other ideas.

Cultural District (Norwitt, Morris)

The Cultural District Subcommittee met on July 25. The group finalized Vision and Mission statements for the Cultural District as follows:

*The **vision** of the Cultural District of Ridgefield, Connecticut, is to be a thriving, innovative, collaborative, sustainable, inclusive, and diverse nonprofit and for-profit arts and culture community that serves as a driver of economic and social development for the entire Town.*

*The **mission** of the Cultural District of Ridgefield, Connecticut, is to act as an organizing and amplifying voice for the town's nonprofit and for-profit artistic and cultural organizations. We support, promote, and nurture our community's creativity, resources, and vibrant arts & culture ethos. We steward our district to unify its diverse makeup, attracting people to experience the historic and the contemporary, the visual and the performing, while also supporting and sustaining the overall business community.*

The CD Subcommittee created three workgroups: (1) Budget, headed by Ridgefield Arts Council chair Colleen Cash, (2) Marketing & Communications, headed by Geoffrey Morris, and (3) Data Collection & Assessments, headed by Ridgefield Library executive director Brenda McKinley, with data stored at the Library.

On Tuesday, September 19, the Ridgefield ECDC will host other Cultural Districts in the state, in-person. Details are not yet finalized, but we will give a walking tour of our Cultural District and then have lunch with everyone downtown. All ECDC commissioners are invited.

Business Connections (Gioffre)

The first meeting (over Zoom) was on July 18 at 9 am.

Eight businesses plus Chair Norwitt and Commissioner Gioffre attended the event. The first initiative is to get people to shop local. "The more you shop local, the more you can save" is one strategy. One participant suggested that CT Tax-Free Week is promoted.

The next plan is to put together a meeting to teach retail businesses about search engine optimization and other online management and promotion.

Business Programs (Riser)

Riser met with the commission on aging. He met with the state DECD. And UConn's small business organization. Reached out to open a conversation about working together and promoting the town. Plus he talked with members of the Ridgefield Library about doing business networking lunches.

Plus he reinvigorated a plan to help businesses open in Ridgefield. It is a document that is on ridgefieldct.com and can be shared with interested parties. A work in progress to get more user-friendly, with live links and more.

There are 200 to 300 new business registrations each year in Ridgefield. Should we try to gather contact information and send them a Welcome Letter each year?

Marketing (Gioffre, Howell, Morris)

Ridgefield was named one of the Safest Cities in America.

Sarah Ford has been working on revisions to the ridgefieldct.com website. Norwitt requests that the Commissioners review the site and provide any additional suggestions to her.

Discussion of the different points of contact for people to contact the ECDC...

Phone calls to Town Hall (previously Accurate Answer)

Emails to ridgefieldecdc@gmail.com

Emails to ecdc@ridgefieldct.gov

Facebook

Telephone: 203-431-2700

Gelfman's point... Rotate through Commission to field inquiries as they arise. To make links with business owners and become intimately acquainted with the processes they go through.

Morris will handle communication with designer Ford about changes to the website. He is also working with hired photographer Scott Mullin about creating summertime images.

Updates from Planning & Zoning (Gelfman)

Route 7 and Route 35 development project: how do we continue to be part of the process after we have written and submitted our opinion letter? If this plan moves forward as a closed, gated community, is there anything we can do as a commission to get the developers to consider opening up the community to be more part of the area where it is – becoming walkable to stores and restaurants, welcome outsider to stroll its open space?

Management Assessment by CT Main Street Center (Norwitt, Morris)

Chair Norwitt met with Carl Rosa of CT Main Street Center last month to conduct an assessment of the Town to identify strengths and weaknesses, and a benchmark. The resulting "Management Assessment" has been distributed to the Commissioners. Morris and Norwitt reviewed the findings with Carl. Based on CT Main Street Center's Four Point Approach, the

town received a 73% score overall: 55% for economic vitality; 86% for design; 81% for promotion; 71% for organization. They suggested recommendations in three phases. The report will be shared with the First Selectman.

ECDC Annual Report

Norwitt will share her draft report with the commissioners, in order to finalize it at the next ECDC meeting, so we can report to the Board of Selectmen before October 1.

Strategic Planning

Discussion of priorities and budget for this fiscal year. September will solidify the budget, including marketing & promotion, administrative support, and more. Each commissioner has been encouraged to bring forth a plan on how best to allocate the 2023-2024 budget.

Morris moved and Gioffre 2nd that we adjourn. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.