



**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
September 11, 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 Sean Dowd, Jenn Gioffre, Kay Gelfman, and Bob Knight (by phone)

Announcements

Next meeting: October 2, 2023

Gioffre motioned and Gelfman 2nd that we approve the August 2023 Minutes. All in favor.

General Discussion

Public Comment - No comments

Recap of Recent Events

Geoffrey Morris talked with BluDot, a company that offers a service that provides a rewards program for communities to support small businesses that cannot establish their own rewards programs. If ECDC or the town seeds the program, those funds are used to fund rewards for

repeat customers to Ridgefield stores. Retailers do not need to pay or even register to participate. Jenn Gioffre to explore.

Morris talked to a couple of businesses looking to move into town. One is Prism Academy, a school for children with autism that is looking to purchase a building with 15,000 square feet of space for the school. He shared a few ideas and is in ongoing communication. Another is a gentleman who has a business that refits Jeep Wranglers from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles. He had hoped to use the abandoned gas station on Wilton Road West, but that was purchased recently and a market might open there. Morris also told him about Mitchell Oil purchasing the property where Marty Motors operates on Danbury Road across from Stop & Shop but Mitchell currently has plans to open a gas station.

The Prospector is holding a “Do Good Business” Conference on Thursday, October 12, from 9 am to 5:30 pm. The event is hybrid. Participants learn strategies for creating competitive and inclusive employment and universally-designed customer experiences, with opportunities to network with like-minded changemakers. The Conference will be a collaborative space for mission-driven businesses to learn from accessibility experts, game-changing entrepreneurs, non-profit startups, industry leaders, and Hollywood hitmakers. In-person registration is \$100; virtual registration is \$50.

Fairfield County Community Foundation commissions a study every three years to better understand the opportunity gaps in Fairfield County. Their “2023 Community Wellbeing Index” will be presented on Tuesday, September 19 from 8:30 to 10 am at the Meetinghouse.

Please note that Ridgefield Pride recently presented to the BOS, requesting that a Pride crosswalk is installed at the corner of East Ridge and Governor Streets. They hope to paint in rainbow colors in between the white crosswalk that is already there.

Resident Kirk Carr recently sent an email about the state of the cannabis business in Connecticut, sharing data about businesses not succeeding in the field. Carr, who was a vocal opponent of allowing anyone to get into the cannabis business in Ridgefield, sent the info as proof that he was right to prohibit the cultivation, distribution, or sale of it in town.

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum announced a renovation of the Museum’s three-acre campus and Sculpture Garden to create an accessible, native landscape for art and the public. Groundbreaking is scheduled for this fall, with an anticipated opening next fall. A public fundraising campaign is being launched to raise \$3.25 million.

At the request of the First Selectman, and on behalf of the Town, the ECDC applied to the CEDAS Best Practices in Economic Development & Land Use Certification Program, with the assistance of the Town Planning & Zoning Department. CEDAS is the nonprofit CT Economic Development Association. Our application included information on the Town’s municipal policies and partnerships regarding the Town’s implementation of efficient and effective land use planning and economic development strategies. As a result, CEDAS is recognizing the Town

with a “Silver Certified Community” award. The ECDC is invited to the awards ceremony and networking event on Tuesday, October 17 at the Glastonbury Boathouse.

Agenda

Tiger Shark Tank (Dowd, Riser)

Five businesses submitted thus far. We need to put out more promotional information to attract more entries. Judges announcement will be the next press release. Looking to confirm Jay Walker, Jeff Bornstein, Megan Searfoss, and possibly Chris Bishop. Dowd will facilitate with judges prior to the event to be sure they are all prepared to question certain entries. We are also talking to Ridgefield High School to get an entry from the entrepreneurship class. Since the Playhouse is hosting the event on Tuesday, October 24, and since we have purchased gift cards in our 2023 budget, we do not believe funds will be needed.

Cultural District (Norwitt, Morris)

20 people from other Cultural Districts are coming to Ridgefield on September 19 for a walking tour of town and then lunch. Lounsbury, Aldrich, and Prospector are among the stops: attendees include the Head of Marketing from the State of CT and representatives from five towns / cities.

ECDC nominated RPAC gallery owner Dee Dee Colabella for the “Business Supports the Arts” awards given by the Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut. Dee Dee was chosen as the winner of the “Arts in the Community” Award for a funder of the arts in their local community, who encourages and finds innovative ways to leverage the arts to build and sustain a vibrant, healthy, and creative community that fosters economic development. The event is on Thursday, October 12, at the Amber Room in Danbury. Tickets are \$50 each, and a “Supporting Partner” sponsorship is \$600 for 10 seats and a Cultural Alliance membership, includes logo on materials.

Norwitt moved that we purchase tickets for ECDC commissioners plus two tickets for DeeDee at \$50. Morris 2nd. All in favor.

The CD working group is made up of a grant/funding group headed by Colleen Cash, Geoffrey Morris heads up marketing with Megan Searfoss and Allison Stockel, and the data and information storage is headed up by Brenda McKinley from the Ridgefield Library.

Cultural District Sculpture (Morris, Gelfman)

Still working through proposals and funding. Advisor Richard Klein has proposed a digitally carved computer-carved acorn. Gelfman talked to possible fund-raisers to help support the sculpture effort.

Business Connections (Gioffre)

Working with the Chamber to put together information sessions to get local businesses sharing ideas about business improvement. Queen B has offered to be a place where events can be

hosted and the owner has offered to share resources with other businesses. She also discussed getting all businesses to share each others' Google information and backend keywords.

Commissioner Riser drafted a revised "Guidelines to Open a Business" in Ridgefield, which the Planning & Zoning Commission is commenting on. It should be finalized soon and put on the ECDC website, with links to local and state resources.

Riser is working with the Library on business outreach programming. Tomorrow night the Library begins a five-part series with SCORE entitled "Simple Steps for Starting Your Business," in person on Tuesdays from 6-8:30 pm. ECDC will distribute info on Tiger-Shark Tank at this event. Additionally, the attendees will be given a short feedback survey to gauge interest in future topics for business programming, and gather input for planning informal gatherings for remote workers.

Film Commission (Gelfman, Knight)

Knight and Gelfman are working on copy for the ECDC website and the processes for working with film companies. Gelfman is updating the permit application from previous film head Allison Stockel, who suggests adding fees to the permitting. We discussed including Jared Shahid from Ridgefield Playhouse and Daniel C. Levine from ACT to be part of the film effort.

Marketing (Howell, Gioffre, Morris)

Small business Saturday is November 25 and we plan to support those marketing efforts.

The ECDC Website at ridgefieldct.com has been updated, and a few more changes will occur in the coming weeks. There is now a page for the Cultural District.

Updates from Planning & Zoning (Gelfman)

The Inland Wetlands Board turned down the development and re-zoning effort at Route 35 and Route 7 by a vote of 5-0. So the owners have to either appeal or resubmit the plan. Commissioners discussed offering an opinion suggesting that the property be developed under different plans.

ECDC Annual Report

Chair Norwitt drafted an annual report that was shared with the commission. Norwitt moved that we submit to the board of selectmen in October and Morris 2nd. All in favor.

Strategic Planning

Town comptroller Kevin Redmond says ECDC budget was \$1,253 over for the previous fiscal year. Town policy is not to transfer charges from one fiscal year to another. The town has other accounts that have gone over budget and will include this as part of the proposed year-end transfers that get approved by the BOS and BOF.

Morris proposed the following for the 2024 budget:

- that we allocate \$5,000 toward marketing Ridgefield, specifically the Cultural District activities from October through June 30, 2024.
- that we allocate \$2,500 to have Sarah Ford provide upkeep, upgrades, and photo refresh for ridgefieldct.com
- that we allocate \$2,000 to social media marketing between now and end 2023 calendar year
- that we consider funding for the BluDot reward program as mentioned in the public discussion and after a review by other commissioners'

More details to come at October meeting.

Knight motioned that we adjourn, Gioffre 2nd, all in favor. Meeting adjourned 8:43pm