

PUBLIC HEARING – MARCH 15, 2006

VETERAN’S PARK SCHOOL AUDITORIUM, 8 GOVERNOR STREET – 7:30 P.M.

REVISED/APPROVED MINUTES

These minutes are a general summary of the meeting and are not intended to be verbatim transcription.

In attendance: R. Marconi, A. Bodner, B. Manners, D. Masters, J. Plock

AGENDA

A Public Hearing will be held on Wednesday, March 15, 2006, 7:30 p.m. in the Auditorium of Veteran’s Park School, 8 Governor Street, Ridgefield, CT, to consider the following addition to Ridgefield’s Code of Ordinances under **Article IV Open Space Use**.

Section 4-75 Controlled Hunting

Notwithstanding the provisions of Sections 4-61, 4-62, 4-64, 4-65, 4-71 and 4-74 of this Article, the Board of Selectmen may authorize the Deer Management Committee or other entity designated by the Board of Selectmen to initiate and supervise the hunting of deer on Town-owned open space lands.

On open space lands under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission and owned by the Town, the Board of Selectmen, after written referral to and response from the Conservation Commission, may authorize the Deer Management Committee or other entity designated by the Board of Selectmen to initiate and supervise, with Conservation Commission consent, hunting of deer on open space lands.

R. Marconi called the Public Hearing to order at 7:30 p.m. Ridgefield residents will have the opportunity to speak first and then non-residents. Approximately ten emails have been received relevant to this issue. R. Marconi will not read these emails into the record but will give copies of the emails to members of the Board of Selectmen.

Linda Walker, Old Sib Road - expressed her displeasure with the hunting ordinance. Tax dollars have been given for the purchase of open space and not to support deer hunting. Open space areas are especially enjoyed in the fall. It is not safe to have “outsiders come in to kill”. Why does Ridgefield have such a large number of deer/auto accidents? The speed limit needs to be lowered and enforced. Georgina Scholl is a Lyme Disease expert; her expertise has not been used by Ridgefield.

Barry Corn, N. Salem Rd. – indicated that he is an attorney and he is not happy with the wording of the ordinance. The language is confusing. It doesn’t indicate if the hunt is a one-time occurrence or an annual happening. It doesn’t give authority to the Board of Selectmen to determine the time, place, and manner of the hunt. Is a program for killing deer necessary, effective and if so, it is being done in the most humane way possible? These are questions that need to be answered. Mr. Corn does not feel that killing deer will impact significantly the proliferation of Lyme Disease. He feels studies indicate that the deer have to be practically eliminated before there will be a significant reduction in Lyme Disease. If deer are killed, the ticks go to other hosts. Mr. Corn feels that a reduction of the deer population in one area of Ridgefield will not impact the effect of the deer population on gardens in other areas of town.

Regarding deer/auto accidents, Wilton has had several deer hunts, and their deer auto accident numbers continue to increase.

Donald Damoth, Peaceable St. – indicated that he served as a member of the Deer Committee. He feels all available studies were considered and the Committee came up with a rational decision to reduce the deer herd. Since the 1970's, there have been no natural predators, resulting in the increase in the deer population. The Implementation Committee needs to be given the opportunity to proceed.

Mary Saccucci, Continental Dr. – is a nurse and has a degree in environmental health. She would like to see other opinions of experts. She has served on the Lyme Disease Committee and her husband has had it twice. She would like more info regarding contraception of the deer – heating of the vaccine versus non-heated vaccine. She is very against bow hunting. She does not want animals slaughtered on public property. Open space should be a sanctuary for all animals.

Dr. Douglas Barile, Market St. – has served on the Deer Committee and the Conservation Commission. He is speaking at the Public Hearing as a representative from the Lyme Disease Task Force. Lyme Disease is the highest in Connecticut of any state in the country, the highest in Fairfield County, and the highest in Ridgefield. This is a very debilitating disease. The deer are being used as hosts by the ticks. Without deer, the tick life cycle is interrupted – fewer deer will result in fewer ticks. Studies do show this. The substitute tick host is temporary; the tick count may go up temporarily when there are fewer deer, but then the tick count does go down. The Lyme Task Force is committed to a reduction in Lyme Disease, and deer management is a means to this desired reduction.

Joe Quirolo, Old Branchville Rd. – indicated that his property is surrounded on three sides by open space. He likes to see the deer grazing. Would one accident caused by permitted hunting worth the desired results? He thinks not!! How do we control who is doing the shooting? How do we track down the deer after they are hit?

Mike Caputo, Topcrest Lane – inquired about the deer/auto accident studies. He would like to see the statistics broken down to other possible causes for such accidents such as speeding, cell phone usage. He would also like to see a map indicating which town-opened space is appropriate for hunting and what is not. What responsibilities do the hunters have with respect to their use of open space? Tom Belote replied that no blinds will be allowed, removable tree stands will be allowed. Dr. Ben Oko, Chairman of the Conservation Commission, indicated that there is not intention for all the open spaces be hunted on at one time. Only one or two areas will be open to hunting at one time. There is no intention to make Ridgefield a “sportsman's paradise”. No permanent hunting structures will be allowed. Hunting is not to occur where open space borders residential property.

William Osgood, Ivy Hill Rd. – has personally had Lyme Disease three times. He is concerned about the decimation of the woods – there is no longer little growth. His property borders the Great Swamp. Any hunters he has encountered have been licensed and respectful.

Stephanie Mann, (non-resident, sister of Gwen Baxter) - indicated that Gwen was unable to be present at the Public Hearing and she was appearing in her place. It is her desire to have the facts and evidence of the minority report submitted as part of the record of the Public Hearing.

Scott Meserve, High Ridge Rd. – indicated his support for managed hunting. He is himself an avid hunter, but it is the moral responsibility of the hunter to take the animal humanely. The deer have no predators for this situation to be managed thru nature. Man is the only predator for these animals right now. The hunters he knows are good people. When he hunts, he donates the meat at considerable cost.

Resident, Barry Avenue (did not give her name) – indicated her willingness to trust the Deer Implementation Committee. She has respect for the life and health of the deer herd. Weeding is part of taking care of a garden. Daylilies are being wiped out. The deer now eat plants they did not eat in the past such as holly and peonies. Management for healthy deer is important.

Karen Gaudian, Woodland Way – shared her experience with Lyme Disease. Her daughter is now 14 and has had Lyme Disease since she was in 5th grade. She is not well enough to attend school, and is “sitting at home waiting for a cure”. Deer ticks are not the only cause of Lyme Disease, all the facts of the disease are not known. Lyme Disease is a horrible disease and can be devastating to those who have it and cannot get well.

Penny Hoffman, Memory Lane – indicated that she was also a member of the Deer Committee. The Committee met for nine months and heard from many experts. She previously was not aware that deer contraception did not work. The Committee looked at all options. Eighteen members of the Committee voted on this report and brought to the Board of Selectmen the best possible report. There is a serious deer problem in Ridgefield and she supports this ordinance change.

Susan Fandel, Topcrest Lane – indicated that she is a concerned parent. Her property borders on open space. One Sunday there was a hunter in a blind right near her yard. How are the hunters going to distinguish between open space and residential property? She does not want hunters in her backyard. She does not like the way the Ordinance is written. It is not at all specific. She wants it to state that hunting will not be allowed on property adjacent to residential property.

Neil Casey, Old Sib Road – is a life-long resident of Ridgefield and is against hunting in this case. He has only had one tick and he is in the woods all the time. He does not feel that deer hunting is going to reduce Lyme Disease. He has never hit a deer when driving. Drivers need to drive more carefully. He feels more studies need to be done.

Mark Bluet, Round Hill Rd. – thanked the Committee for a job well done. He has been a Ridgefield resident for one year and has seen many deer. He feels it is best to manage the herd, tag the hunters’ licenses, and address the deer problem in the high school detailing the history and future of the deer population.

Jennifer Reid, Bloomer Rd. – is one of the Co-Chairs of the Lyme Task Force. Mrs. Reid grew up in Ridgefield and returned to have her children grow up here. Both of her daughters have had Lyme Disease. She stressed that this hunting decision is not a pro and con hunting decision, but a health issue. This is not a small health issue. As a parent, she is concerned about the well-being of the children of the community. Not everyone who get Lyme Disease gets seriously ill from the disease. Everyone reacts differently. We need to do what science tells us and eliminate as many ticks as possible.

Glenn Cordelli, Blue Ridge Rd. – stressed the issue of public safety. A dead deer was found in his driveway with an embedded arrow. Ridgefield residents have paid millions of dollars to purchase open space. The Conservation Commission will determine what parcels will be hunted and these will change yearly. Residents will not know what parcels are to be hunted when. This is an unmanageable safety issue.

Patricia Sesto, Nod Hill Rd. – is employed by the Town of Wilton as their Director of Environmental Affairs. She reports that a controlled hunt can be done safely. The Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society have dealt with this problem as well. The task of making neighborhoods adjacent to open space

aware of a scheduled hunt is possible to do. Such a hunt is coordinated with the Police Department and control of the hunters. She pointed out that there is a difference between “hunters” and “poachers”. We have been entrusted with the stewardship of the Weir Preserve. The woodlands are being devastated by the over abundance of the deer population. Our forests can be saved by fewer deer.

Matthew Denusek, High Ridge Rd. – is a scientist by profession and was also a member of the Deer Committee. He applauds the committee’s work. He feels the Deer Committee was an unbiased committee that took a measured approach to examining the studies and science relative to control of the deer population. It will take 3-4 years to obtain a significant reduction in ticks.

Margaret Eustide, Peaceable St. – indicated that she did sponsor a hunt on her property and did so safely.

Cheryl Symmes, Peaceable St. – inquired as to what is the ending date for these hunts? She lived in Texas and their hunts resulted in no deer. R. Marconi replied that they do not intend to remove the entire deer population in Ridgefield.

Mike Anderson, Linden Rd. – indicated that he has lived in Ridgefield for 38 years. His property borders the Great Swamp. In the last five years, his wife has had Lyme Disease three times. The undergrowth in the woods is disappearing. He has had bow and arrow hunters on his property and they have conducted themselves in a “professional” manner. He urges approval of the new Ordinance.

Major John Roche, Holmes Rd. – of the Ridgefield Police Dept. has lived in Ridgefield for the past twenty-six years. He served as an ex officio member of the Deer Committee and a member of the Deer Management Committee. From 2000 to 2003, there were approximately 300 deer related accidents each year. This year the count is 836 deer kills – calls of accidents, whatever. With each deer report, the investigating officer checks for any other factors which may have caused the accident such as speeding, other distractions, etc. Sometimes the deer runs into the vehicle. Public safety is the number one issue relative to any deer hunt.

Kitty Stone, Canterbury Lane – suggested the wording in the ordinance to designating hunting only in “un-trailed open space”. She does not see any way to control residential use of the trails, people hiking, children on bikes.

Tom Falconieri, Limestone Rd. – held up the Humane Society ad in the Ridgefield press. The picture is not the type of deer found in Connecticut. Regarding a concern for “over-hunting”, the DEP will control this. A reduction of the deer population by 80% will reduce Lyme Disease by 90%, these are DEP numbers.

John Doran, Walnut Grove Rd. – posed a question for the Deer Implementation Committee – “Do you really think we can get the deer population numbers to below 20 per sq. mile? How long will it take to get to this number?”

Tom Belote, Bailey Avenue – replied as Co-Chairman of the Deer Committee and currently Chairman of the Deer Implementation Committee. There are no natural predators to deal with the deer population. The Conservation Commission will be overseeing any public property to be used for a deer hunt. The original Ridgefield ordinance was adopted in the 70’s when deer hunting was not allowed in Connecticut. This ordinance was not meant for deer management. Deer hunts have been done safely in other Connecticut towns. A deer population of 8/sq. mile is the initial goal. A lower number than this will take years to accomplish. This goal will not happen with one controlled hunt; this has to be a sustained effort of controlled hunts and hunting on private property as well.

Amanda Condor, Granite Hill Rd. – What can be done if we think the hunter is a “poacher”? Major Roche replied that the Police Dept. will send out an office to investigate. Another question was how will this controlled hunt to advertised/managed? Proposed signage was held up for viewing.

Barry Corn, N. Salem Road – pointed out that studies show that nothing more than a drastic reduction in the deer population will make a difference in the number of cases of Lyme Disease. A small controlled hunt, how can this have an effect? Rudy Marconi replied that his messages to Dr. Auschwitz of Yale have not been returned. He has been away on sabbatical. He will try to reach him before any hunt occurs in Ridgefield so a definitive study can be done in Ridgefield. What will be the effect on Lyme Disease with the reduction of the deer population? It can’t fail to help.

Lynn Schneider, Forest Dr. – is an Open Space Ranger. She suggests that residents drive more slowly in town. She does not like to see the deer suffer.

Lynn Gorfinkle, Fire Hill Rd., W. Redding – has served as the reporter in the middle of controlled hunts. She does not want to see hunters take over the Town-owned open spaces. She feels hunting is a “state-supported slaughter of animals”. What does the term “any entity” mean in the proposed ordinance? She suggests that the existing ordinance not be changed.

R. Marconi closed the Public Hearing at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson