

**PUBLIC HEARING & BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING**  
**JUNE 20, 2007**

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:30 P.M.  
REVISED/APPROVED MINUTES

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

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

**Special Town Meeting**

A **Special Town Meeting** was held on June 20, 2007, 7:30 P.M., in the Town Hall Large Conference Room, 400 Main Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut for consideration of:

1. Waiver of Small Property Tax Bills
2. Waiver of Refunds of Excess Payments Less Than \$5

Minutes of the Special Town Meeting are under separate cover.

**Public Hearing**

A **Public Hearing** was held on June 20, 2007, 7:30 P.M., in the Town Hall Large Conference Room, 400 Main Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut to discuss the proposed parking lot for 28 Catoonah Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut.

**Board of Selectmen Meeting Agenda** (immediately following Public Hearing)

1. Donation of Land – Steve Zemo
2. Livestock Ordinance
3. Selectman's Report
4. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 5/23/07, 6/6/07
5. Executive Session: Discussion of Police Chief Contract

R. Marconi called the **Special Town Meeting** to order at 7:30 p.m. Minutes of the Special Town Meeting are under separate cover.

R. Marconi called the **Public Hearing** to order at 7:42 p.m. for the purpose of discussion of the proposed parking lot for 28 Catoonah Street adjacent to the Post Office. Present again this evening were Kathleen Walker, Real Estate Specialist for the US Postal Service and Ridgefield Postmaster Tim Hushion. Copies of a map of the property were available as well as a large map on display in the front of the Conference Room.

Andy Bodner asked if the house were gone, would the entire piece of property become the parking lot? Ms. Walker responded – “yes”.

Joe Mullen, 37 Catoonah St., expressed concern about the commercial expansion of Catoonah Street. He feels the Post Office and the BOS are reacting to comments from the general public without conducting a real study. He feels the main problem is the undermanned Post Office service desk plus the parking by those checking their post office boxes. If access to the post office boxes was moved to the rear of the

building, this would relieve the congestion in the front of the building. Mr. Mullen requests: 1) a formal study, 2) move the post office boxes to the rear of the building, and 3) expand the front counter and increase the number of employees serving the public.

Barbara Amrod, 34 Catoonah St., indicated that she has conducted her own “little survey”. There are never more than two clerks at a time at the front service desk. A line forms extending out of the building. If there are 40-50 employees as Postmaster Husion indicated, then there needs to be a time study to ascertain how these 40-50 employees are being utilized.

Mike, a resident of 44 Catoonah St., stated that he is in agreement with the comments that have been made. Often the Front Desk clerk will put up a sign “Closed” at his/her work station while there is a long line of waiting patrons.

Phil Esser, of the Ridgefield Historical District Commission, stated that the 28 Catoonah Street property is located in the National Registry Historical District, and this designation forbids actions which cause an adverse effect to the character of the property. Mr. Esser reviewed how the Section 106 review process is relevant to this property.

Kristen Cohen, 30 Catoonah St., inquired as to the length of time involved in this Section 106 review process. Mr. Esser replied that he is not sure – probably each situation is different. This is the first time he has personally been involved with this process.

Chad Cohen, 30-32 Catoonah St., indicated how he is the immediate neighbor to this property. The house has been abandoned for over two years. Mr. Cohen stated that he had spoken previously to Jim Hickey of the Post Office with the suggestion that the Post Office purchase approximately 6,000 sq. feet at the rear of Mr. Cohen’s property and use it for employee parking. Mr. Cohen said he had measured where the postal trucks are currently being parked and that is approximately 2,500 sq. feet. Mr. Hickey expressed interest in this idea as one of the solutions to the parking situation and they were working on a possible selling price. Ms. Walker has indicated that she was not aware of this discussion between Mr. Hickey and Mr. Cohen.

Kristen Cohen stated that they have lived on Catoonah Street for the past six years. Historical houses have been torn down. The street is becoming much too commercial. There are old magnificent trees on the 28 Catoonah Street property. The post office needs to solve their service desk staffing problem and find a way to get the various Federal government employees to communicate. Ms. Walker should have been aware of the discussion between the Cohen’s and Mr. Hickey.

Kathleen Walker, USPS, stated that there is no definite plan for 28 Catoonah Street at this time; they just have an idea that is being explored.

Jim Grimley, 77 Olcott Way, indicated that he is hearing what is being said this evening and does not feel that the solution needs to be so complex. The Post Office needs to staff the front desk and move the post office boxes to the rear of the building with a separate door for access to the boxes. “All these complications will go away.” Why not start with increased staffing and see what happens.

Kay Ables, Town Historian, stated that Catoonah Street is “in jeopardy”. Second to Main Street, it is one of the oldest streets in Ridgefield.

Phil Esser stressed the complexity of the Section 106 process as required for historically designated properties. A consulting group needs to be established with individuals like himself and Kay Ables on

such a committee. He has polled the Historical District Commission and they are opposed to destroying the house at 28 Catoonah Street. They will be writing to state their position on this issue.

B. Manners asked for a show of hands from the public as to anyone who does not agree that there is a staffing problem at the front desk at the post office. No one disagreed.

A. Bodner stated that he is in agreement that staffing is an issue, but also that there is not currently adequate parking, and the house the way it is now is not an asset to the town.

Postmaster Hushion responded that the paperwork has been submitted for one additional employee. Only 8 out of the 52 employees can staff the front desk. They all have responsibilities in the back of the post office as well. He has to make do with the employees he is provided. The local post office has little control over staffing numbers. He will make a request to the District Manager in Hartford.

R. Marconi requested the name of the contact person in Hartford. The BOS has looked into this before. The post office is no longer a Federal agency.

J. Plock inquired as to the possibility of moving the post office to a different location. Ms. Walker said, "no". This would happen only in a desperate situation. There is no funding for such a move. Ms. Plock stated that the post office has always been in a difficult location. She is in agreement with the staffing and parking problems and agrees that the configuration of the post office is difficult. The post office boxes are not filled every day, and patrons will sometimes come twice a day to check on their boxes.

Kristen Cohen inquired as to how a non-profit business such as the post office can sign a lease on adjacent land when they do not yet know how they can use the land. The lease money would be better spent on additional employees.

Wendy Lionetti, Parley Rd., reported that it is faster for her to drive to Danbury and use the post office there than to line up at the Ridgefield post office. Danbury also has a self-serve machine for packages. It would be helpful for Ridgefield to also have such a package set-up.

John Katz, Ridgebury Rd., expressed his opinion that it is a mistake to turn 28 Catoonah Street into a parking lot even if the house is in disrepair. He would like to see a substantial increase in service before agreeing to any new parking lot.

Gary Singer, Main Street and President of the Historical Society, stated that it is difficult to assess the problem without a formal study. The town does not have sufficient information about postal standards/measurements. There must be a system in place for assessing current postal locations. A management tool is needed to look at the demographics.

J. Plock stated that everyone this evening is in agreement that they do not want a parking lot at 28 Catoonah Street.

Kristen Cohen stressed that this has been a problem for a long time. She would like to have the post office send someone to Ridgefield to supply some "real answers".

R. Marconi indicated that something needs to happen with the house. He asked Ms. Walker if the post office for sure does have a lease on the 28 Catoonah Street property. She replied "yes". He then asked if the post office could sublet the property. The answer is "no". If the property is not going to be used for a parking lot, the post office needs to find some way to recover their investment. Could we come up with a

compromise and help the post office move forward? Ms. Walker indicated that she would pass on Ridgefield's wishes.

Phil Esser stated how 28 Catoonah Street has been recognized as being a property of historical significance. Someone has done historical research relevant to the character and identity of the property.

D. Masters asked Ms. Walker what message would she take from this meeting and what does she expect to have happen now? Ms. Walker responded that there is strong feelings for operational changes and possible solutions were suggested, and that the residents care deeply for the historic feeling of the town and Catoonah Street. She stated that she was here this evening to simply listen to the concerns of the residents.

Kitty Rosa has been an active Ridgefield historic preservationist for the past thirty years. She feels that if one or two homes are town down on Catoonah Street, it will ruin the street. Why has this house been allowed to go to ruin?

R. Marconi closed the Public Hearing at 8:45 p.m. and called the Board of Selectmen Meeting to order.

1. Donation of Land – Steve Zemo

Mr. Zemo came forward to discuss the possibility of the donation of his land at 76 Governor Street, the property east of the Police Station, to the Town of Ridgefield, a 3200 sq. foot strip of approximately 31 x 100 ft. irregular. Mr. Zemo passed out a preliminary layout of the site. This strip of land would provide space for 12-14 parking spots. He would like to see if there is interest in this donation by both the BOS and the Police Department before he goes further into full design of the donation. A. Bodner asked if Planning & Zoning needs to approve this donation; is the donation contingent upon approval of anyone else? The answer is yes. R. Marconi indicated that the Police Commission should have the opportunity to offer an opinion. The proposed donation will be forwarded to the Police Commission for their review.

2. Livestock Ordinance

Betty Brosius was present and has reviewed the proposed ordinance since the last BOS meeting. She has made some language suggestions so as to make the ordinance enforceable and in keeping with zoning regulations. The next step would be for Ed Briggs, Director of Health, to review the proposed ordinance as well. Ms. Brosius expressed concern over the statements regarding whether or not the neighbor objects. What if the neighbor does not object, but there is still a health violation? She foresees some problem with implementation of this clause. J. Plock indicated the desire of the BOS to "grandfather" existing animals with the approval of all neighbors. Does this apply to replacement of existing animals? Ms. Brosius also suggested that the title of the ordinance should list the applicable zones. R. Marconi will review the ordinance again and speak to Mr. Briggs as well. Another idea was to have a specific number of feet specified for a setback area, such as 50 feet. Mr. Katz pointed out that in some small pieces of property, a 50 ft. setback is excessive. It isn't appropriate to the size of the property.

It was agreed that it would be best to wait until early September to schedule a public hearing when residents are less likely to be on vacation. This issue will be on the BOS agenda again for the July 11 meeting.

3. Selectman's Report –

- Legislative Update – Hartford is still working on the state budget. R. Marconi reviewed the key points under discussion
- Pension Plans Contribution – R. Marconi read the June 18, 2007 letter received from Dave Campbell, Pension Commission Chairman, relating to the July 2006 BOS contribution to the Town’s pension plans, an amount that was below the amount recommended by the Town’s actuary. However, the BOS had made an additional contribution in June of 2006, which for all practical purposes satisfied the shortfall even though the fiscal timing was different. In June 2007, there is an expected contribution payment which is again below the number recommended by the actuary. The Commission wants to point out that even though an additional amount may be forthcoming, the shortfall will not go away, and actually widens in time until properly funded.
- Draft from CCM has been received listing all bills introduced this session, those voted down and those passed.
- Water Lines – two lines have been applied for: 1) Out to Barlow/Scotland School and 2) Acre Lane. Both these projects are in the “fundable” category.
- Long-Term Infectious Disease Coverage – The Town needs to look into this type of coverage. Any potential cancer claim could have a drastic effect.
- Trial by Jury – Legal case was tried this past Monday, June 18 and R. Marconi was told to not attend. The Town of Ridgefield and R. Marconi personally were found in violation of civil rights. The insurance company will pay the \$1 fine and the issue will be closed. B. Manners stated that the Town of Ridgefield should write a letter and ask the insurance company to appeal the decision. R. Marconi would have attended but took the advice of Town Counsel to not do so.

The question is whether we as public officials, Board of Selectmen members, are really “covered” by insurance? This issue needs to be looked at carefully. The insurance policy has been forwarded to the Insurance Risk Committee for their review. B. Manners indicated that she has read the policy and there are so many exclusions. Chief Ligi would like the Insurance Risk Committee to also review coverage for other Town officials besides those elected. It was a business decision to settle this case.

4. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 5/23/07, 6/6/07

**J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the May 23, 2007, Public Hearing & Board of Selectmen Meeting. Motion passed 5-0.**

**J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve as amended the revised minutes of the June 6, 2007, Public Hearing & Board of Selectmen Meeting. Motion passed 4-0. B. Manners abstained as she was not present at the June 6 meeting.**

5. Executive Session: Discussion of Police Chief Contract

**D. Masters moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to recess the Board of Selectmen Meeting at 9:45 p.m. and go into Executive Session for a discussion of the Police Chief contract with Laurie Scholl, Director of Human Resources, and Charles Knoche, Chairman of the Police Commission, invited to participate. Motion passed 5-0.**

**J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to close the Executive Session, bring the BOS Meeting back to order and adjourn the Board of Selectmen Meeting at 10:45 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson