

BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING – SEPTEMBER 19, 2007

TOWN HALL/LOWER LEVEL CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:30 P.M.

REVISED/APPROVED MINUTES

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

Agenda

1. Parks & Recreation Commission Fields Discussion
2. Deer Management Implementation Committee Fall Program
3. Livestock Ordinance
4. Family Day Proclamation
5. STEAP Grant Resolution
6. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 4/9/07, 4/11/07, 4/12/07, 9/5/07
7. Selectman's Report
8. Executive Session: Police Chief Contract Final Approval & Possible Vote

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

1. Park & Recreation Commission Fields Discussion – Paul Roche, Director of the Parks & Recreation Commission, Phil Kearns, Chairman of the Commission, Wayne Tinker, Parks & Recreation Fields Committee, and Bob Schneider, Assistant Director of the Commission, came forward to discuss the rotation of Ridgefield's playing fields, the purpose of the rotations and the impact moving forward. The referendum was not passed in the Spring. Therefore, what is the plan going forward for the field without the monies from the proposed referendum?

Phil Kearns led a discussion detailing the plans for the playing fields in town. The sports teams need to limit their expansion plans for increased participation and a broader age span coverage. Also, is the Town willing to lower the bar on field quality? The Barlow Front field is closed for the fall and also the two fields behind Scotland School which affect the soccer program. All teams seem to be covered and have places to practice. The hope is to reopen in the Spring as baseball is not as hard on the fields. Hopefully, the winter will be kind to the fields. The Ridgefield High School lower athletic field needs a major redo. This field is heavily used in the Fall with high school soccer and high school and youth lacrosse in the Spring. The schedule for the closing has not yet been set. 50,000 sq. feet is in dire need for a redo. Perhaps the way to go is to sod the worst 10,000 sq. feet, heavily seed the next 10,000 sq. feet and then overseed the 30,000 sq. feet balance. Water issues on the field are also being addressed. East Ridge Middle School North Field needs to come off-line sometime soon also, but that too has not yet been scheduled. The smaller the children, the less damage there is to the fields.

J. Plock inquired as to how to monitor the size of the groups for each sport so as to not overtax the fields. Someone has to draw the line and not expand the teams until additional fields are put into use.

D. Masters asked if the message from the voters with the turn-down of the referendum was that they are willing to take a lower quality of playing fields? Mr. Kearns replied that he did not take

the vote that way. A lot of residents did come out for the vote. He interprets the vote as those who have children in the sports programs and those who do not. Parents involved with youth groups seemed to be in favor of the referendum. J. Plock commented on how perhaps any increase in taxes is an economical drain at this time. B. Manners indicated that we all want our children playing on adequate fields. We may have to look at the ages involved and limit expansion of the teams. Mr. Kearns replied that Parks & Rec needs to be “stronger stewards” of the fields. P. Roche concurred and stated that it is a safety issue, not just “looks” of the fields. Head injuries can occur when rocks are present and the fields become slippery when muddy. Mr. Tinker stated that the plan originally called for taking one field out of use each year for refurbishment.

R. Marconi responded that the concern he hears the most is the need for fields available for the Spring lacrosse season. Hopefully, the closed fields can be reopened in the Spring if they get a good rest over the winter months – just do not know yet. Mr. Kearns responded that in the Spring the programs can be doubled up as it is light later in the evening; in the fall it gets dark too early. They just do not know yet what will be the field assignments for the Spring.

Andy Bodner stated that he thinks it is important to rest the fields and that criticism is unfounded. The request for passage of the referendum was a clear disclosure of the problem last year. The consequences of not passing the referendum now have to be dealt with. It is important for safety, looks and public relations with other Towns visiting Ridgefield and using our fields, that the fields be in good condition.

R. Marconi indicated that he met with SCORE today and they are doing a petition for the projects that were turned down by the voters. When the petition comes in, the choice can then be made to do a town meeting or a referendum in response.

D. Masters stressed the need to increase the communication and the importance of curtailing programs to fit the ability of the fields to accommodate the programs. Need to look again at other fields that may be available at Ridgefield Academy, Wooster School, Gilbert & Bennett, etc. Are there any other private schools in the immediate area? Residents do not like to go out of town for practice fields.

Dr. Oko mentioned the Shadow Lake field. It was seeded but has not been maintained. Mr. Kearns replied that they plan to have the Shadow Lake field in good shape in the Spring. The chain needs to be moved to provide access to the parking lot.

The BOS thanked the representatives from Parks & Recreation for their report and continued vigilance in maintaining the fields and sports programs.

2. Deer Management Implementation Committee Fall Program – Tom Belote, Chairman of the Deer Management Implementation Committee, Stefano Zandri, Hunt Master, Sid Kelly and Police Major John Roche came forward to discuss the Deer Management Implementation Committee’s plans for the 2007 Controlled Hunt. Maps were available noting the Town of Ridgefield Proposed Locations of Deer Hunts for 2007 as well as large maps on display at the front of the Conference room.

The 2006 Hunt was conducted safely with carefully screened hunters. 24 deer were taken on the one Hemlock Hills parcel. Redding took 100 deer on 5 parcels. Wilton took 50 deer on 5 parcels. The number of deer taken last year was down as a whole in all the communities. The State has

estimated Ridgefield's deer population as approximately 80 deer/sq. mile. The goal is to reduce the herd to approximately 20 deer/sq. mile. Ridgefield has yet to achieve their goal. The deer/auto accident rates are still high and the degradation of the undergrowth in the woods continues. Private individuals often call the Committee for recommendations for archers. The DEP numbers for Ridgefield total 309 deer killed in 2006, 184 by archery only, 38 by shotgun (not including the Hemlock Hills controlled hunt), 6 by muzzle and 73 by car. Ridgefield is #3 in the State for car accidents. Major Roche reported that 2007 numbers are already higher than last year in deer-related car accidents, and this number only includes when the police are called and doesn't include deer found along the roads.

A discussion followed relative to the areas in addition to Hemlock Hills selected for the controlled hunts for 2007: 1) Spectacle Swamp – south side of town, a very wet area which would be a good place for stationery bow hunters. A longer hunt time would be possible for this location as would not affect much recreational use when closed; 2) Canterbury/Turtle Court – borders New York State for bow hunters only, landowners in this area are already making the effort to hire hunters; now the public would be joining in; 3) Levy Park – an archery only controlled hunt from October 15 to December 18, mornings only.

B. Manners expressed concern about the safety of a hunt in Levy Park; the roads bordering the park are heavily trafficked and deer run when hit. The committee response was that the hunting would be in the Thunder Hill/Grandview areas at the top end of the park and away from the roads. The hunters will not be hunting along the roads nor will they be in full view.

D. Masters expressed support for the controlled hunt, feels there is a need to cull the herd, and commends the Committee on last year's safe successful hunt, but is uncomfortable with bow hunting. "No bow zones" have been discussed. She would prefer a shorter hunt season with sharpshooters. The designated open space areas will be limited to hunters for too long a period of time. The Spectacle Swamp area is surrounded by neighbors.

A. Bodner feels that there is an issue regarding a perception of public safety and effectiveness when bow hunting.

Mr. Belote stated that a significant number of residents have been hiring archers for bow hunting on their own property.

Dr. Ben Oko, Chairman of the Conservation Commission, stated that the Commission did take into consideration the taking of open space land out of use for the general population. The Commission approved the Spectacle area as there are no trails there. The Canterbury area was requested by neighboring residents. The Commission will check to make sure there are no horse trails there. The Levy Park parcel was approved for morning hunting only and not on weekends or holidays and only for two months rather than four months.

R. Marconi asked if adequate safety measures are being taken? The two questions are: 1) Do we want bow hunting? and 2) Do we want to approve hunting for the properties proposed?

Mr. Belote pointed out that the DEP requests that any sharpshooter prepare an application. Guns will be used during the dead of winter when open space is not as likely to be used by the general population. Levy Park is a 40 acre parcel and would be closed off to the public just like Hemlock Hills was last year.

A. Bodner indicated that the BOS should not be micro-managing the Deer Implementation Committee's plan; the objective is to lower the number of deer.

J. Plock pointed out that the Committee did say that there would be bow hunting, but not in last year's trial run. Last year's hunt was conducted safely.

D. Masters indicated that the proposed 2007 hunts are for a longer and greater scope than she is comfortable with. She prefers a shotgun hunt with a shorter season – twenty days and not two months. Dr. Oko responded that the proposed bow hunt at Levy Park could be cut down to a trial two weeks and then ascertain what is the effectiveness there.

B. Manners repeated her opposition to hunting and commended the Committee for a well-managed hunt last year, but Hemlock Hills was a much larger area than Levy Park. This is why the BOS is requiring the Committee to return each year to present that year's hunt proposal.

R. Marconi indicated continued concern about the prevalence of Lyme Disease, the deer accident rate, and the damage to landscaping and undergrowth problem. Ridgefield does need to proceed with a safe program. He believes the Committee will again oversee a safe hunting season and indicated his support for the proposed program. J. Plock indicated her support for the program. A. Bodner concurred as the objective is to reduce deer density.

John Katz, Ridgebury Rd. pointed out that residents walk their dogs every day in the early morning hours. Scott Mason, Riverside Drive, asked if gun hunting is safer than bow hunting? D. Masters replied that she thinks it is.

A. Bodner moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to approve the 2007 Ridgefield Controlled Hunt Memorandum of Understanding Between the Conservation Commission and the Deer Management Implementation Committee as presented and described in the September 12, 2007 letter from Thomas H. Belote, Chairman of the Deer Management Implementation Committee to Benjamin Oko, Chairman of the Ridgefield Conservation Commission, and signed in agreement by Dr. Oko. Motion passed 3-2. B. Manners and D. Masters voted against.

3. Livestock Ordinance – The latest update was again reviewed. It was agreed to delete Section Five titled "Exceptions". Another correction was to use the term "livestock" throughout the document instead of the word "animal". It was also noted that the SD R20 zone was listed under Section One: "Purpose" as one of the zones covered by the Ordinance, but was not listed in the title. The title will be corrected.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve as amended the Proposed Ordinance Concerning the Keeping of Livestock on Residential Property in R-7.5, R-10, R-20 and SD R-20 Zones, pursuant to Authority Conferred unto the Town of Ridgefield by the Public Health Code, and set a Public Hearing to discuss this proposed ordinance for Wednesday, October 3, 2007, at 7:30 P.M., Town Hall Large Conference Room, Town of Ridgefield. CT. Motion passed 5-0.

4. Family Day Proclamation

B. Manners moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to approve the Proclamation of Monday, September 24, 2007, as "Family Day—A Day to Eat Dinner with your Children" in

Ridgefield and further proclaim that the fourth Monday in September shall henceforth be designated National Family Day—A Day to Eat Dinner with your Children. Motion passed 5-0.

5. STEAP Grant Resolution

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve the Resolution that First Selectman, Rudy Marconi, be authorized to execute and deliver on behalf of the Town of Ridgefield a STEAP grant agreement with the Department of Environmental Protection of the State of Connecticut for financial assistance to complete various site improvements at the Venus Municipal Building Complex. Motion passed 5-0.

6. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 4/9/07, 4/11/07, 4/12/07, 9/5/07

D. Masters moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to approve as written the minutes of the Board of Selectmen Special Meeting of April 9, 2007. Motion passed 5-0.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the April 11, 2007 Public Hearing and Board of Selectmen Meeting. Motion passed 4-0. B. Manners abstained as she was not present at the April 11, 2007 BOS Meeting.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve as written the minutes of the Board of Selectmen Special Meeting of April 12, 2007. Motion passed 5-0.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the September 5, 2007 Board of Selectmen Meeting. Motion passed 5-0.

7. Selectman's Report –

- FAA Redesign – R. Marconi reported that he has been conversing with Bill Brennan, First Selectman of Wilton, and Judy Neville, First Selectwoman of New Canaan, about the possibility of the affected CT municipalities joining together in a legal effort to protest the flight plan redesign that would bring planes over towns in Fairfield County. Michael Kroposki stated that the LaGuardia flights would fly at less than 8,000 feet over Connecticut. In addition to Connecticut, other areas affected include Rockland County, Elizabeth, NJ, Passaic Valley towns in N.J., and Westchester County.
- Turner Hill issue relative to the open space violations will be on an upcoming BOS agenda. The discussion will include what the Conservation Commission has written regarding this issue.
- ROAR – John Katz, Ridgebury Rd., asked if the walking area for the dogs can be expanded. He has checked with Peter Hill who was in agreement. This will result in about an additional 900 sq. feet plus installation of a fence.
- SCORE – R. Marconi indicated that he met with SCORE today and they are doing a petition for the Parks & Rec projects that were turned down by the voters. When the petition comes in, the choice can then be made to do a town meeting or a referendum in response

- Yanity Gym – Boy’s & Girl’s Club will be moving out in 2-3 weeks. Growing Tree childcare wants to move into the space and has agreed to the \$18/sq. ft. rental rate.
- Ridgefield Playhouse – has increased their rental space by an additional 1400 sq. feet at the \$18/sq. ft. rental rate. Their original lease was for 600 sq. feet which they continue to rent at a \$10.80/sq. feet rate. Blending the two rates would be \$15.60/sq. ft. A. Bodner indicated that the lease should indicate what the rental rate actually is for the correct sq footage. The Playhouse can pay rent at two different rates. R. Marconi asked if non-profit organizations should be charged the same rate as for-profit organizations?
- Aquarian Rate Hike – D. Masters commented on how this 55% rate increase is a big hike for Ridgefield and how Aquarian has been called about this. There will be a Special Public Hearing on October 9, 7:30 p.m., relative to this issue. R. Marconi will invite John Frey and Richard Blumenthal to attend this Public Hearing.

8. Executive Session: Police Chief Contract Final Approval & Possible Vote – Laurie Scholl, Director of Human Resources, came forward to present the proposed Police Chief Contract. It was agreed that an Executive Session was not needed for further discussion on the proposed contract as the BOS was ready to approve the contract as written. **A. Bodner moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to approve as written the Police Chief Contract as presented by Laurie Scholl, Director of Human Resources, Town of Ridgefield. Motion passed 5-0.**

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Meeting at 9:50 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson