

**Town of Ridgefield
Economic Development Commission
Meeting held May 11, 2009
Town Hall/Large Conference Room**

Unapproved Minutes

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

In attendance: Bob Knight, Paul Levine, Chris Fisher, Mark Robinson, Bill Markus,
Magdalena Fincham and Rick O'Brien
Guest - Mark Waterhouse, Garnet Consulting Services, Inc.

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m.

Task Force Updates:

Ponds Edge – Chris Fisher reported Danbury Hospital contacted the First Selectman about Pond's Edge. Chris spoke with members of Danbury Hospital's Facility Planning Group about the facility and they have a keen interest. Chris also spoke with Betty Brosius who said there are no environmental impediments preventing occupancy. The same doctors that own the medical building on Sand Pitt Road and are affiliated with Danbury Hospital are ready to bring a wellness center to Ridgefield. Chris will find out more when he speaks with them next week.

Paul Levine suggested pursuing cutting edge interests such a nutrition center.

Sustainable and Renewable Energy Business Park and Showroom – Magdalena Fincham reported she called a contact at CL&P that is knowledgeable about what funds are available from the State and got the name someone to contact. There is nothing new to report on these projects until she gets something more concrete from Mike Greenberg. Magdalena gave the First Selectman's Office a copy of the letter she wrote to Mr. Greenberg to keep on file and she will follow up on the letter. Magdalena said there are some remediation issues but she does not know what the issues are or what is being done.

Branchville – Mark Robinson said there is nothing new to report. Branchville has limitations from the hillside and most of it is already developed. Mark wants to create and find funding for a Branchville façade improvement program, perhaps with low interest financing through the Town. Tying the separate plaza parking areas together is another idea.

Mark said that Ancona's owns property on the NE side of the train station which cannot be developed. With the proper stimulus, the Town may want to do something with this parcel.

Chris Fisher said that long-term market forces should encourage the development of the whole Branchville area to the south end of town.

Paul Levine said Redding is willing to discuss joining forces for Branchville development.

Rebecca Mucchetti cautioned that the Norwalk River runs through Branchville, there are low areas which flood, there are no sewers and it is an aquifer protection area. Planning and Zoning has held 3 meetings with Branchville owners and Ancona's feels they are the anchor and should be included in all conversations with the State regarding expansion of Rte. 7 to 4 lanes. There is some resistance to the expansion and the State may have to invoke eminent domain as a catalyst element.

Arts and Cultural Development – Bill Markus reported he done a lot of networking with the members of the Ridgefield Arts Council. Both he and Bob Knight attended an RAC networking event at which John Cusano, Community Development Coordinator, State of CT Commission on the Arts, spoke on the significance of the arts in respect to the economic impact they make. Bill said RAC is very happy to have EDC's support and his contribution will be as a facilitator between the Ridgefield Arts Council, the Chamber of Commerce, Planning and Zoning and the First Selectman's Office.

Bill and Bob Knight will meet with Nancy Andrews and Marion Roth on June 26th to discuss what Ridgefield is doing in relation to the arts and any State assistance that may be available.

Paul Levine told Bill he should organize them around where there are specific funds available for the Arts Council use.

Bob Knight mentioned the John Papa would like to create a Battle of Ridgefield Museum in the old playhouse building.

Chris Fisher suggested this be made part of the plan so funding for improvements can be obtained.

Rick O'Brien said he is looking into State funding for sidewalks.

Mark Robinson suggested putting informational plaques in the sidewalk.

Prospective Development – Rick O'Brien said there is nothing new to report on Schlumberger.

Downtown – Bob Knight reported there is further discussion of forming a Downtown BID or Special Services District. Marion Roth is in favor of this but Rudy Marconi is not as it involves more fees to property owners.

Paul Levine said the EDC should not get involved if we have nothing new to offer.

Mark Robinson suggested the EDC gather information on facts and myths surrounding this issue. Rebecca Mucchetti said Planning and Zoning has already done this.

Pending items for Garnet Consulting Services – Mark Waterhouse said the most important information he needs is who to interview. Mark has time for 20 interviews and he asked EDC members to each circle 4-5 names from each of the key projects. Mark will concentrate on how to get things done in 6 target areas. Mark needs the right cross-section of people to get the most information and to develop 15- 20 actionable things that can be accomplished in the next 3 years.

Rick O'Brien expressed concern that nothing big is overlooked in the plan. Mark Robinson does not want to inhibit Mark from examining other treasures.

Election of Officers

Bill Markus moved and Chris Fisher seconded a motion to elect Bob Knight as Chairman of the Economic Development Commission. The motion passed unanimously.

Bob Knight moved and Paul Levine seconded a motion to elect Bill Markus as Secretary of the Economic Development Commission. The motion passed unanimously.

Website

Mark Robinson said he contacted Chris Uzzo of Two Brothers Web Design on Rick O'Brien's recommendation and looked at their credentials, discussed a price for setting up the site and steps for taking over website duties.

Chris Uzzo said the current website was created with a more technical infrastructure (Joomla) than is necessary and talked about what the EDC's needs are for the site. Chris would like to set up a website using HTML which is an easier web language.

The EDC was paying \$1,000/year for web hosting that ended in April. Chris would charge \$300/year. He would migrate the Joomla site to HTML for free.

Bob Knight said the website cannot be put together until the EDC plan is complete. Bob asked if the EDC should have a blog component or search engine component.

Magdalena Fincham thinks blogging would be resource intensive and a big time commitment and asked if the EDC should talk with other website hosting companies. Magdalena would like to get a 2nd opinion on whether to migrate the website to another language when the EDC has one with high functionality. She is reluctant to strip what the EDC has in case there is a need to upgrade in the future.

Mark Robinson said he has built websites and there would be no loss in functionality that is presently being used.

Bob Knight thinks it is so important he would contribute 2-3 times a week. Bob also asked if the EDC should get another bid.

Rick O'Brien said the EDC is only committing to 1 year of web hosting.

Mark Waterhouse said to look at Colorado Springs website for ideas.

Approval of Minutes

Bob Knight moved and Mark Robinson seconded a motion to approve the minutes as revised of the meeting held 04/13/09. The motion passed 5-0-2 with Magdalena Fincham and Chris Fisher abstaining because they were not in attendance.

Rick O'Brien moved and Mark Robinson seconded a motion to adjourn the EDC meeting at 8:55 p.m. The motion passed 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Wolnick
Secretary