



Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectman Meeting Minutes
UNAPPROVED
February 16, 2022 at 6:30pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi, Maureen Kozlark, Sean Connelly, Bob Hebert, Barbara Manners

1. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

2. Appointments & Reappointments

a. Michael McNamara – Ridgefield Arts Council

R. Marconi read Michael McNamara's letter to the Board that talks about his reasons for wanting to join the Ridgefield Arts Council and his qualifications.

M. McNamara reiterated his interest in the Arts Council and his love for the Town. The Board asked some questions about M. McNamara's goals for the Council if appointed, and his plan to help kids from the High School music program get more involved in Town events.

Colleen Cash, Chair of the Arts Council, spoke about M. McNamara's qualifications and gave reasons why she thinks he would be a great addition to their team.

Jennifer Dineen, Arts Council member, also gave a recommendation for M. McNamara.

M. Kozlark moved to approve the appointment of Michael McNamara for a four-year term to the Ridgefield Arts Council. S. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

b. Peter Nichols – Conservation Commission – Alternate

Peter Nichols talked about his involvement in many different organizations in Town, his qualifications and his love for Ridgefield.

B. Manners asked if a person can serve on two Commissions or Committees at the same time. R. Marconi clarified that there is a rule against elected officials serving on more than one Committee or Commission simultaneously, however that does not apply to appointed members.

S. Connelly moved to approve the appointment of Peter Nichols as an alternate for a three-year term to the Conservation Commission. B. Manners second the

motion. Motion carries 5-0.

c. Conservation Commission Reappointments

i. Allan Welby

Allan Welby talked about his experience on the Commission and what he's helped accomplish so far. His focus has been mostly on birds. Two projects in the pipeline are the development of a bird feeding station and a plan to help stimulate the screech owl population.

The Board asked about the habitats of different birds and if the bird feeding station will attract bears.

B. Hebert moved to approve the reappointment of Allan Welby for a three –year term to the Conservation Commission. M. Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

ii. Kitsey Snow

R. Marconi read Kitsy Snow's letter expressing her interest in reappointment to the Conservation Commission.

K. Snow was asked to provide details on the pollinator pathways around town and the upcoming projects for the Commission.

M. Kozlark moved to approve the reappointment of Kitsy Snow for a three –year term to the Conservation Commission. B. Manners second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

iii. Erik Keller

R. Marconi read Erik Keller's email requesting reappointment to the Conservation Commission.

E. Keller talked about the projects he has worked on during his time on the Commission and his qualifications, which includes master gardener, horticultural therapist, and published author.

E. Keller was asked to expand on several topics including horticultural therapy, the current Ash Tree issue and cultivating American Chestnut trees.

M. Kozlark moved to approve the reappointment of Erik Keller for a three –year term to the Conservation Commission. B. Hebert second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

iv. Daniel Levine

R. Marconi read Daniel Levine's letter requesting reappointment to the Conservation Commission.

D. Levine talked about the Ranger Program, which focuses on getting kids and families involved with trail maintenance within the open spaces around town. D. Levine also talked about the Commission's new newsletter and the Old Growth Forest network that the Commission is considering joining.

S. Connelly moved to approve the reappointment of Daniel Levine for a

three –year term to the Conservation Commission. B. Manners second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

3. Native Plant Policy

Conservation Commission members Roberta Barbieri and Kitsey Snow, and Garden Club member Barbara Hartman appeared before the Board to request the adoption of a policy decreeing that all new plantings on Town property be native plants only.

R. Barbieri talked about the reasons for the request. Because nonnative plants do not support our local insects, these plants have caused a decline in native insect species, which will have a domino effect causing a decrease in the bird population over time. Another reason is that native plants have suffered dramatically over that last few years due to out of control growth from invasive plants. Nonnative invasive plants have no natural competitors, which allows them to easily out compete the native plants and propagate out of control.

A clarification was made that all nonnative plants are not necessarily invasive, however all invasive plants are nonnative. R. Marconi asked if there are any nonnative plants that are not invasive and could be an asset to our environment in Ridgefield. R. Barbieri responded with no and gave an example of several nonnative plants that are also noninvasive in town that offer no environmental support and/or bring unwanted species.

There was a discussion about different nonnative and invasive plants around town. The list of invasive species is available online.

It was mentioned that the State currently does not have a Native Plant Policy.

M. Kozlark asked how climate change will affect native plants and S. Connelly asked what defines plants as native.

The hope is to eventually remove the nonnative plants on main street and replace them with native plants. Ridgebury Elementary School has already asked that the nonnative plants be removed from the school grounds. R. Barbieri, K. Snow and B. Hartman would like to put in place a public education campaign with flyers and information about the negative impacts of nonnative and invasive plants, and the benefits of implementing a Native Plant Policy.

The policy presented is mirrored off the current Newtown guidelines. R. Marconi explained the difference between a policy and an ordinance. Adopting a policy would mean that the nonnative plants that are already in place will be grandfathered in and moving forward only native plants can be planted. Implementing an ordinance would mean that all nonnative plants already in the ground will be required to be removed.

Robert Roth, Chairman of the Tree Committee, commented on the meeting they had about the Native Plant Policy and expressed some of the concerns that were addressed at that meeting. R. Marconi will present the policy to the town's legal department and there will be another meeting in the beginning of March to discuss the policy further.

4. Rotary – Downtown Clock

Rotary Club members Bill Wyman and Dennis Bishop appeared before the Board to discuss the Downtown Clock Project.

There was a discussion about the different quotes and ways to reduce costs.

B. Hebert asked if the clock can be restored instead of replacing it altogether. There are two

ways the clock can be repaired, either with a regular analog clock or with an upgrade to the more expensive atomic version.

There was a discussion about the location of the clock. The current placement has been an issue because of the snow accumulation at the base, which then drains into the ground when it melts and damages the clock. B. Manners commented that many people are attached to the location of the clock and asked if there is a way to protect it from the snow.

The Board will need to decide between the different project options which are: repair the clock and keep it in place, repair the clock and move it in front of Town Hall or the Historic Society, or replace the clock completely and put it in a new location. There was a long discussion about the pros and cons of each scenario in which the Board members voiced their opinions.

B. Wyman and D. Bishop will review the bullet points from tonight's meeting with the Rotary Club Board.

5. Approve Public Hearing and Town Meeting date for the approval of FY21 Bonding Language

In order to keep the dollar amount under the \$3 million limit, the Capital Improvement Plan has been broken down into three sections, which will require three separate Town Meetings to approve the Bond Language. There was a discussion about the best way to schedule the meetings and make sure the public understands the purpose of them.

B. Hebert moved to approve scheduling a Town Meeting on March 1st, 2nd and 3rd for the purpose of approving Bond Language for the 2021 Fiscal Year that was not voted on due to COVID. B. Manners second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

6. Tax Collector Refunds

The tax collector refund total is \$18,492.11.

B. Manners moved to approve the Tax Collector Refunds. B. Hebert second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

7. Approval of BOS Meeting Minutes

M. Kozlark moved to approve the January 31, 2022 BOS Budget Meeting Minutes as modified. S. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

B. Hebert moved to approve the February 1, 2022 BOS Budget Meeting Minutes. M. Kozlark second the motion. Motion 5-0.

S. Connelly moved to approve the February 2, 2022 BOS Regular and Budget Meeting Minutes. M. Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

M. Kozlark moved to approve the February 3, 2022 BOS Budget Meeting Minutes. S. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

8. Possible Budget Review

R. Marconi asked if everyone is comfortable with the increase in budget due to projected road repairs or if the Board is interested in considering different avenues that would adjust the numbers. There was a discussion about the condition of the roads in town, both locally and state, and the repairs that are needed. R. Marconi will put together some numbers on road repairs for the Board to review.

The Board talked about different ways to keep the budget low, the challenges that the Town and the BOE face with budgeting, and how the past few years of low spending is most likely not sustainable.

9. Selectman's Report

R. Marconi drafted an authorization letter for an application to Planning and Zoning for the property on Route 7.

R. Marconi handed out a report regarding cannabis retail for the Board to review. Fentanyl has been a big issue in black market marijuana which brings up the question, should a cannabis retailer be approved in Ridgefield to provide a safer option for marijuana users. There will be three Public Hearings. The first meeting will focus on hearing about the pros, the second meeting will focus on hearing about the cons, and the third will be a mix of both sides. There may also be a question about it on the budget referendum to draw more people to the Public Hearings.pr

R. Marconi talked briefly about a report from Eversource that details what they are doing and the costs associated with it. Eversource has a new liaison who attended the last meeting with the town when they discussed rolling blackouts.

R. Marconi provided a report from the Finance Department regarding postage rates.

B. Hebert asked about an email from a Regional Research Manager for an Integrated Marketing Systems company regarding the development on Prospect Ridge. R. Marconi told B. Hebert to send the email to Jake Muller, Director of Purchasing.

An email was sent to the Board from a parent who attended the most recent Board of Education meeting. The parent was very upset that the towns Health Director advocated for unmasking the kids. Starting February 28, 2022, masks will be optional within the schools. Prior to the announcement from Susie Da Silva, Superintendent of Ridgefield Schools, the COVID task force met to discuss whether or not to lift the mandate. Of the 12 members, only one wanted to keep the mandate in place.

B. Manners moved to adjourn the BOS meeting at 9:25pm. M. Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.