



**Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectman Meeting Minutes**

APPROVED

October 7, 2020 at 7.30pm via Zoom

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi (RM), Bob Hebert (BH), Sean Connelly (SC), Barbara Manners (BM), Maureen Kozlark (MK)

Mr. Marconi asked to add an item to the agenda:

Mr. Hebert moved, Ms. Kozlark seconded the motion to add agenda item Replacement of an engine for engine one fire truck at the Fire Department. Motion carries 3-0. (Ms. Manners and Mr. Connelly could not vote, they were having trouble with their connection to the Zoom meeting.)

1) Public comment

There were no public comments.

2) Appointments: Ridgefield Arts Council

Ms. DiLaura introduced three excellent candidates for appointment to the Arts Council – Andrew J. Okrongly (D), Dr. Rajender Kaur (D), Joseph Collin (D). Ms. DiLaura highlighted each candidate's strengths: Mr. Okrongly has a strong financial background and has expressed willingness to serve as the council treasurer, a position soon being vacated by Christopher Sorgie, the current treasurer; Dr. Kaur offers the strength of academia and would be an asset for multicultural diversity in arts and education; and Mr. Collin has great knowledge of working with non-profits and in grant writing. Each candidate has been attending meetings and has been involved in current projects of the Arts Council in an advisory capacity.

The board discussed the details of the minority representation law governing board, committee, council, and commission membership. The state statute requires minority representation with no one party representing more than two thirds majority. Since all three candidate are Democrat, one candidate can be appointed at this time because of party affiliation.

Mr. Marconi suggested that one candidate be appointed now and the other two continue to serve as advisors to the council. Mr. Hebert suggested admitting the other two candidates as

alternate members. However, in order to expand the Arts Council to include alternate members a public hearing and town meeting would have to be held.

The expansion of the Arts council was discussed. Ms. DiLaura said the large volume of work and number of projects currently being undertaken by the council meant that they were in need of more members.

Mr. Hebert suggested appointing Mr. Okrongly to the council because he has offered to step up as treasurer. Mr. Okrongly has interviewed for other boards so his credentials are known to the BOS. Mr. Hebert ask that the other two candidates to stay on as advisors. He suggested a town meeting be held at a later date to change the ordinance to allow alternate members in the Arts Council, since all three candidates offer valuable strengths needed. Mr. Connelly supported this suggestion.

Ms. DiLaura said that having a treasurer when Mr. Sorgie leaves was important, but that the strengths of the other two candidates were equally important. Dr. Kaur asked to intervene. Dr. Kaur asked if the goal of the committees and boards was to rotate the same candidates on different boards, or to involve more people. Dr. Kaur said she feels more diversity was needed instead of having the same people move between the different boards and committees. Mr. Marconi said that having more people involved is always the goal but the two-thirds rule was binding. Ms. Manners added having three excellent candidates is unusual and that the board did not want to lose any of them.

Ms. Kozlark asked if the other two candidates also wanted to weigh in on the discussion. Mr. Collin said he understands the rules of the statute and that he would be willing to continue to volunteer to help the council in any way he can. Mr. Okrongly said he would also continue to serve as a volunteer in any way he can. Ms. Manners asked if Dr. Kaur would also be prepared to stay as on in an advisory capacity. Dr. Kaur said after attending the meeting she feels it is even more important to have diversity on the committee, she feels it is time for her to step up to serve.

Mr. Hebert moved and Mr. Connelly seconded the motion to appoint Andrew Okrongly to the Ridgefield Arts Council. Motion carries 4-0. (Ms. Manners abstained.)

The discussion regarding adding alternate membership to the Arts Council will be on the agenda for the BOS meeting on October 21. Ms. Manners asked Ms. DiLaura to consider expanding the Arts council to 15 members. Mr. Marconi will seek legal opinion on expanding the number of members and the possibility of adding alternate members to the Arts Council.

Mr. Connelly expressed appreciation for every candidate and the strengths they offer and recognized the important point made by Dr. Kaur of having diversity in representation and hopes that Dr. Kaur would consider remaining in an advisory capacity because the diverse opinion she offers is important.

3) Storm Update – PURA Legal Review

Mr. Marconi gave his report: PURA ordered Eversource to follow up with all the municipalities on the make safe protocol, the liaison program and to give feedback on the failure of the voice recording system. The failure of the 800 number was said to be due to too many calls and Eversource was working on fixing this. Mr. Marconi noted this does not explain why people were receiving messages reporting restoration of their electricity was imminent, and then only having their electricity restored five to seven days later. Eversource have responded that this was human error that needed addressing.

Mr. Marconi said that after the storm two weeks ago in Ridgefield, the flow of information had improved, but it was still not clear how Eversource would handle a state wide disruption due to storm damage and more information was needed to address that issue. The make safe protocols were still in need of more attention. Mr. Marconi asked the person in charge of field operations at Eversource about safe and what the definition of a crew was to Eversource and based this question on a direct quote from the orders PURA have given Eversource. The Eversource representative said priority one incidents require immediate resources, which Eversource needs to consider first. Mr. Marconi mentioned that Eversource have 230 crews in the state of Connecticut at any given time, with 149 towns in this jurisdiction, he requested Eversource deploy one truck to cover Ridgefield and Redding. The response from the Eversource representative was this is not possible. Mr. Marconi reiterated that make safe was a PURA order. The Eversource person then said he would not respond to anything further on this issue.

Mr. Marconi said there will be a public hearing in November. Mr. Marconi said that Ridgefield would testify at the public hearing, but the submission of written testimony from the public was still the most important thing at this stage.

Regarding the cost of litigation, Mr. Marconi has now received a bill of \$12,000. Split three ways between Ridgefield, Newtown and New Fairfield, Ridgefield's share is \$4,000. Subsequent to filing the motion, Bethel has joined the proceedings and any further bills will be split four ways. Mr. Hebert asked if any other towns would be joining the proceedings, to which Mr. Marconi responded no.

Ms. Manners asked if Ridgefield would seek compensation from Eversource. Mr. Marconi referred to "Take back our grid" legislation with very specific requirements that allow people to be reimbursed if their power was not restored within 96 hours. Eversource's position is storm Isaiah was an act of God beyond their control and they restored power far quicker than after hurricane Sandy.

Ms. Kozlark asked if there was benefit to Ridgefield proceeding with litigation if Eversource are required by legislation to reimburse all towns for losses. Mr. Marconi said that the filing was to require Eversource to immediately improve their make safe protocols and liaison with towns. He added that other towns are benefitting from the result of our lawsuit because PURA

have ordered Eversource to address all towns on this issue. Ms. Kozlark expressed concern that Bethel was part of the group going forward with the litigation, but was not contributing to the initial cost of filing the motion. Mr. Hebert concurred. Mr. Marconi said he would address this with First Selectman Knickerbocker of Bethel.

4) Tax Collector Refunds

Tax Collector request for rebases of \$21000.55 is before the board.

Mr. Hebert moved and Mr. Connelly seconded the motion to approve tax rebates of \$21,000.55. Motion carries 5-0.

5) Fire Department – replacement of engine for Engine One fire truck.

Chief Jerry Myers explained: Engine One is a 2012 - E1 pumper. Over the years the head gasket has had to be replaced numerous times. At a recent mechanical inspection there was an odor which the highway department mechanics traced back to the head gasket again. The engine was sent to Cummins Inc, the engine manufacturer and they reported the head gasket is completely rusted. A new engine is required - cost is \$65,000. The replacement engine is covered by a 3 year warranty. Engine One has half its life left. To replace the pumper engine truck is will cost \$750,000. The manufacturer has suggested the only way this rust could have happened is the use of the wrong anti-freeze in the engine but Chief Myers reports it is the same anti-freeze used in all the fire trucks with no problems being reported. Mr. Connelly asked if the replacement of the engine extends the life of the truck or if there were other things to be concerned about. Chief Myers said that the other parts of the truck were in good condition. Ms. Manners asked about the condition of the body. Chief Myers responded that the body was in good condition. Ms. Kozlark recalled that this truck has always had issues. Chief Myers responded that the initial problem was electrical, which had been resolved under warranty and had not recurred. Mr. Marconi highlighted to the board that there were no guarantees that other systems on the truck could not fail. Mr. Hebert asked about the expected life of a fire truck. Chief Myers said 25 years was the standard, but after 20 years the fire truck would not be used as a frontline truck. Chief Myers suggests addressing the issues of the repeat problem with the manufacturing company and town attorneys. Ms. Kozlark asked if rust has been seen with any of the other fire trucks. Chief Myers said no.

Mr. Hebert moved and Ms. Kozlark seconded the motion to approve the use of \$66,000.00 of capital funds for the replacement engine as presented by Finance Director Kevin Redmond. Motion carries 5-0.

Ms. Kozlark requested a full investigation into why this engine keeps requiring head gasket replacements. Mr. Connelly asked for and Chief Myers confirmed the engine model being replaced each time was the same.

6) Road Discontinuance

Ridgefield has a number of roads only on paper (The road does not physically exist; it only exists on a map.) and the town attorney has recommended they be taken off the map so that the town is not required to build these roads. Residents could be allowed to pave a driveway to their plot if it is off such a road. The tax assessor's office is working on providing a full list of paper roads. The discussion of these roads will be continued at the October 21 meeting.

7) Selectman's Report

- Main Street landscape architectural proposal: The state has worked on a proposal. Mr. Marconi has spoken to private landscape architects for input. The state would not fund any extra cost, but the town budget has a contingency for professional consultations like this.

Ms. Manners asked for a full proposal from the state before going with a private architectural landscape proposal. Mr. Marconi said he is working with the state and a private landscape architects proposal now before the contract goes out to bid in 2021 to be sure the materials used meet the long term wear and tear requirements and character of Ridgefield. Mr. Hebert recalled Ridgefield tweaking state architectural proposals in the past. Ms. Kozlark asked for clarity on the price. Mr. Marconi answered the price quoted by Jane Didona was \$21,000 for services, which does not include material costs. Ms. Didona would review the state architectural proposal and to attend state architectural meetings for this project. The project work should begin in 2022. We will ask for the work to be done when Ridgefield has the least traffic disruption. Mr. Hebert asked if there is grant money available for landscaping. Mr. Marconi said a COG grant was available, as well as other state programs. Ms. Kozlark asked if other landscape architects have submitted proposals. Mr. Marconi said another proposal had come from Craig Stooter. The board will vote on this at the October 21 meeting.

- Revenues: recording is up; golf is up, building is up, tax collection is running very well. Three areas of concern are: Parks and Recreation, Covid reimbursement and ambulance. Chief Myers weighed in saying that calls are down and therefore billing revenue is down. Storm Isaiah reimbursement is unknown because the state did not qualify for reimbursement; we are waiting to hear if we qualify as a county. There is an increase in cost in the registrar's office due to absentee ballots because of Covid. The Fire department is over budget, some of it is because of Covid and some is disability related. The rates for workers comp and liability came in much higher than anticipated. The bottom line is Ridgefield is up in the first quarter. The budget is being watched very closely because Covid is such an unknown.
- Appointment of administrators: Laurie Fernandez to administer the pension plan and Dawn Norton to administer the Board of Education.
- Connectivity: The future of connectivity is an issue. Demands for broadband have increased because of Covid and this will stay high while distance learning is ongoing. 5G is not planned for rural areas. Mr. Connelly asked where the recommendation came from. Mr. Marconi said the ACLU wrote it.

- Tiger Hollow: Capital budget request for turf replacement. This will go out to bid. The requirement is approximately \$200,000 from the capital budget. Ms. Kozlark requested agreements be codified between the Town and the Tiger Hollow board. Mr. Conelly asked if the capital budget requirement was over and above the sinking fund. Mr. Marconi confirmed this.
- The ECDC are working on a replacement for the cancelled Holiday Stroll. A Ridgefield Holiday Village Walk is proposed, commencing with Thanksgiving holiday going to Christmas, to try and stimulate the local economy. Mr. Bob Cassella, chairman of the new Village Walk event, asked if the event could be covered by the town liability and if funds raised could go through the Friends of Ridgefield.
- The Halloween Walk is cancelled this year due to Covid-19. Most Main Street residents will not be opening their doors this year. The police are having a drive through event at Lounsbury House this year. People are asked not to leave their cars. Residents are not prevented from celebrating Halloween but large gatherings are not allowed. Confirmation is needed as to whether New Street will be closed by the police this year. The selectmen recommend a drive by to view New Street decorations.
- Guidelines for boards, committees and commission: A sample document was sent to the board for review. The document covers easy to read guidelines on FIOA, ethics and state requirements for standards of social media use. Mr. Hebert recommends that the ethics commission look it.
- Ms. Kozlark asked about the report on the new Police and Fire building. Mr. Marconi reports that discussions are ongoing regarding the recommendation to put forward. Mr. Hebert asked if there were documents for review. Mr. Marconi responded once the police and fire chiefs have made their recommendations, a proposal can be put forward for review. Chief Myers said proposals have been presented but added that the finer details are still being decided based on growth 10 to 25 years into the future.
- From July 1st, the utility reform bill requires electric companies to credit customers \$25 per day for outages of more than 96 consecutive hours. Additionally customers may claim up to \$250 if they have who have food or medication spoilage as a result of outages of more than 96 consecutive hours. The electric companies may not recover the cost of reimbursement through rate increases. Mr. Hebert asked for the formula Eversource use for calculating usage and distribution rates.

8) Minutes Approval

Ms. Kozlark moved and Ms. Manners seconded the motion to approve the minutes of the BOS Meeting on September 16, 2020 as modified. Motion carries 5-0.

9) Motion to adjourn

Ms. Manners moved and Mr. Connelly seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:03 p.m. Motion carries 5-0.