

Town of Ridgefield
Charter Revision Commission Public Hearing
Monday, January 8, 2018 – 7:00 p.m.
Town Hall Large Conference Room
400 Main Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut
APPROVED PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

Policy: Charter Revision Commission's Public Hearing is conducted under Roberts Rules of Order with public comment invited. Individuals are recognized for comment.

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

Members Present: E. Burns, W. Davidson, J. Egan, E. Geisinger, C. Hancock,
J. Shapiro, L. Steinman, P. Walsh
Member Absent: J. Seem (Chairman)

Agenda

1. Purpose of the Charter Revision Commission:
 - a. According to the Ridgefield Town Charter "the Board of Selectmen shall appoint a Charter Revision Commission not later than October 1, 2003, and every four (4) years thereafter, in accordance with the Connecticut General Statutes."
 - b. Connecticut General Statutes, Section 7-191, states: "The commission shall hold at least two public hearings on the proposed charter, charter amendments or home rule ordinance amendments; one prior to the beginning of any substantive work on such charter, charter amendments or home rule ordinance amendments, and one after the draft report to the appointing authority has been completed, but not submitted, after which hearings the commission may amend such report. The commission may hold such other public hearings as it deems necessary."
2. Individuals will be recognized for comment
3. Adjournment

Meeting Minutes

At 7:00 p.m., the public hearing was called to order by Charter Revision Commission (CRC) Vice Chair Ellen Burns, who chaired the public hearing in the absence of CRC Chairman Jonathan Seem, who was unable to attend.

She explained the purpose of the public hearing and the manner in which the public hearing would be conducted, including identification of speakers and sign-in procedure.

W. Davidson asked First Selectman Rudy Marconi, who was present at the Public Hearing, when the CRC will receive recommendations from the Board of Selectmen regarding changes to the Charter. Mr. Marconi stated that the Board of Selectmen will meet on Wednesday, January 31, to discuss any recommended changes for the CRC to consider. Upon further questioning, Mr. Marconi indicated that the Board of Selectmen would send the CRC those recommendations the following day.

Four speakers came forward to present public comment, followed by comments from Mr. Marconi. Their remarks are as follows.

John F. Metzger of 21 Colonial Lane explained that there is a residence on Colonial Lane that he said has been unoccupied for six years and is a blight upon the community. The matter has been brought before the Blight Prevention Board but, as Mr. Metzger explained, that board has not acted on the situation. He said that he was bringing this matter up before the CRC for appropriate action. Upon questioning by CRC members, it appeared that the Blight Prevention Board is controlled by town ordinance and not by specific provisions within the Charter.

Dave Goldenberg of 79 Seth Low Mountain Road spoke in advocacy of the establishment of a Ridgefield Housing Opportunity Commission as a specifically named commission under the Charter. He presented a six-page comment document to the CRC and he read excerpts from the document to the public hearing. Mr. Goldenberg explained that in May 1997, the Board of Selectmen established an Affordable Housing Committee as an advisory committee not specifically named in the Charter. Mr. Goldenberg advocated that a Housing Opportunity Commission be established as a commission specifically named in the Charter. He cited three reasons: the need for housing diversity continues to grow; no one is taking responsibility for affordable housing; and we are required to act. He said that the purpose of the new commission would be to help Ridgefield fulfill an objective clearly established in the town's Plan of Conservation and Development and he cited that objective from page 10-4 of the 2010 Plan of Conservation and Development. Mr. Goldenberg identified six responsibilities that he advocated such a newly created commission would be charged with. He concluded by saying that with Ridgefield largely developed, and the need for affordable housing options only growing, it's urgent that Ridgefield adopt a thoughtful, sophisticated, responsible strategy; and he recommended that it should be done through the creation of a Housing Opportunity Commission.

Susan Baker of 163 High Ridge Avenue spoke on behalf of the Ridgefield Conservation Commission (RCC). She presented to the CRC a one-page January 8, 2018 letter to Jonathan Seem, Chairman of the CRC, from James J. Coyle, Chairman of the RCC, and she read that letter to the hearing. The letter notes that the RCC recommends that the issue of separating the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) from the Inland Wetlands Board (IWB) be raised with the CRC at the January 8, 2018 public hearing. The letter notes that four years ago, the 2014 CRC failed by only one vote to recommend to the Board of Selectmen splitting the P&Z and IWB. The letter states that it is the opinion of the RCC that the issue of whether to split the P&Z and IWB is an important enough issue to warrant a review and be submitted to the voters of Ridgefield to decide. The letter further notes that there are only eight municipalities among Connecticut's 169 towns and cities that have their IWB combined with their P&Z. The letter states that the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection recommends that IWBs not be part of P&Zs, a position also echoed by the Connecticut Association of Conservation & Inland Wetlands Commissions. The letter requests a mutually agreed-upon date be set when the RCC can present to the CRC more detailed arguments on this issue.

Michael Raduazzo of 195 Peaceable Street commented that no person should be able to run for two town positions or seats in a municipal election. He explained that when a person is elected to two or more positions or seats in an election, that person has to resign or not accept all but one, which can result in the affected commission or board appointing a person to fill the vacancy. That result, appointment of a member of a board or commission, is not as satisfactory a method of filling the position or seat as filling it based on an election by voters. Mr. Raduazzo also proposed that if a person holds a municipal elective position or seat that is not up for election at the upcoming municipal election because the term does not end upon or shortly after the upcoming election, and the person wants to run in the upcoming election for another municipal board or commission or office, that person would have to resign from the position currently held in order to run for another position or seat.

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman, of 145 Main Street commented on one issue of concern to him. He said that the CRC should re-evaluate the small percentage of Ridgefield voters whose signatures can trigger a requirement to hold a town meeting to decide upon an issue. He pointed out that, for example, a petition signed by only 2% of voters in a matter not involving expenditures is sufficient to require that a town meeting be called. He commented that this 2% threshold is too low. Mr. Marconi also reported that the Board of Selectmen plans to develop, at its January 31, 2018 meeting, its recommendations to the CRC regarding changes to the Charter.

Ms. Burns noted that the CRC had received some written comments including comments from Peter Hill, the town's Director of Public Services, regarding the dollar threshold for requiring a purchase to be put out to bid, and from Michael Autuori regarding the separation of the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Inland Wetlands Board.

There being no further public comment, at 7:46 p.m., on motion duly made and seconded by members of the CRC, the public hearing was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Joe Shapiro, Recording Secretary