



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

400 Main Street • Ridgefield, CT 0687 • 203.546.2547 • ridgefielddevelopment.com

Geoffrey Morris, Chairman
Amanda Duff, Secretary
Cameron Cole Carcelén
Dee Dee Colabella
Bob Knight
Glori Norwitt
Steve Spivak

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman

**Approved Meeting Minutes
Town of Ridgefield Economic & Community Development Commission
September 14, 2020 6:30 p.m. via Zoom Video Conference**

Commissioners Present: Chairman Geoffrey Morris; Secretary Amanda Duff; Commissioners Cameron Carcelén Cole, Dee Dee Colabella, Bob Knight, Glori Norwitt; Steve Spivak; and Susan Gessner, Commissioner-Elect participated as a non-voting ECDC Member.

G. Morris called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

G. Morris made a motion to approve the August meeting minutes, seconded by G. Norwitt. Motion carried 6-0 (A. Duff was not yet present)

1. Roundtable Discussion:

There was a general discussion about the ECDC Marketing Roundtable that occurred on August 31st. In general, feedback was positive. G. Morris suggested more prepared content for future roundtables to keep discussions flowing before questions were asked. G. Morris asked the Commission if there was a preference for the next topic for the next virtual roundtable from ECDC. D. Colabella and B. Knight agreed with G. Morris that the next roundtable should be focused on how to support the business community as the weather gets colder and preparing for the holiday season. S. Gessner suggested roundtables should occur every 3-4 weeks. G. Morris pointed out that the purpose of the ECDC roundtables is to bring people together around topics and suggested that a quick survey be included at the end of each roundtable. S. Spivak suggested conducting a consumer-focused survey on the business climate.

Public Comment: Suzanne Brennan, Executive Director of Lounsbury House commented that “shop-dine-support local business is more than just retail.” D. Colabella said that initiatives should be inclusive of the entire business community.

2. Shop Local Initiative:

S. Spivak led the discussion on a shop local initiative in collaboration with the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Ridgefield. Steve presented the idea of the Ridgefield Holiday Market. The concept comes from European villages that sell their goods and services on festive sidewalks around fire pits, carolers. S. Spivak says it’s festive and inviting. He said that the goals are to expand holiday shopping and *purchasing* experience for merchants, create an experiential experience for visitors and consumers, social distancing, to create a legacy event that can attract consumers from all around, and to create fundraising for local businesses (e.g. could help those in need including those who need rent relief). Commissioner Spivak detailed several ideas that could be planned. He had met with commercial district stakeholders to receive input on the draft plan. The concern is if Ridgefield approaches the holiday season in the same way we did pre-COVID, we’ll only have a fraction of visitors. He said that we need to approach the matter differently. Next steps are to obtain approval from the First Selectman’s Office (which was received), and form a Committee between ECDC, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Merchants to move the process along in an organized fashion. The Committee would be tasked with creating budgets and possibly present to the Board of Selectmen. There would be experiences throughout the downtown ranging from Lounsbury House to Ballard Park.

Public Comment: Suzanne Brennan, Executive Director of Lounsbury House: “Magnificent! Very grateful for your combined efforts and eager to as a board member of both the CoC and DTR to do what I can to guide and facilitate this initiative.”

G. Morris suggested that S. Spivak should speak to stakeholders about temporarily displacing this year’s Holiday Stroll. D. Colabella said she’s looking forward to learning more details on the nuts and bolts of the event planning. S. Spivak says it will take a village to pull this off. In a perfect world, this would take a year to execute, but we only have a few months to pull this off safely, thoughtfully, and consideration for stakeholders. G. Norwitt suggested that a simple marketing piece would be useful. C. Carcélen, S. Gessner, D. Colabella, B. Knight, G. Morris, and G. Norwitt all expressed that they liked and supported the idea. There was general discussion on how the idea of the Holiday Market could be executed.

B. Knight made a motion that ECDC should pursue the Ridgefield Holiday Market concept as articulated by S. Spivak and conduct an ECDC Roundtable with appropriate stakeholders to begin the planning process and receive input and other feedback. D. Colabella seconded the motion. Motion carried 7-0.

3. Budget Discussion:

G. Morris suggested that we use \$3,000 (about 25% of total marketing budget) between now and the end of the calendar year to support the promotion of events and shopping throughout the fall and holiday season. B. Knight asked how many events need promotion and what is the average cost of promoting each event. G. Morris advised there were about 20 events between now and the year’s end. B. Knight asked that

ECDC put together a budget between now and the end of the fiscal year (June 2021) so ECDC can best prepare its spend.

G. Morris made a motion to allocate up to \$2,500 for promotional dollars to promote events in Ridgefield through the end of the calendar year. The allocation can be amended at future meetings. Motion was seconded by G. Norwitt. Motion carried 7-0.

4. Website Update:

D. Colabella gave an update on updating the ECDC website. There are very large files that aren't transferring over. It's proving to be a difficult task. G. Morris suggested to use ECDC web consultant time to address website updates and provide a cleaned-up site for D. Colabella to work with. D. Colabella asked for assistance from B. Knight and S. Gessner to help in the ECDC rebrand.

5. Our Town Grant Update:

G. Norwitt gave an update on the NEA "Our Town" grant that she has been working on with Compassionate Ridgefield members. Although technical difficulties prevented her from applying for the NEA "Our Town" grant in August 2020, these technical difficulties have been remedied so that people working on behalf of the Town of Ridgefield (like ECDC) now have the necessary accounts in place on the federal websites www.sam.gov and www.grants.gov in order to apply. G. Norwitt thanked multiple public and private stakeholders throughout the community who assisted as part of the grant process. She hopes that funding can be found to continue the public art installation project with Compassionate Ridgefield in the future.

6. Cultural District Update:

G. Norwitt updated the Commission on the application for a Ridgefield Cultural District designation from the State DECD. The Subcommittee includes various for- and not-for-profit stakeholders. G. Norwitt reports there was a public hearing at the August 12 Board of Selectmen meeting to inform the public and discuss the application for a Cultural District designation. The Board of Selectmen approved the application and it was submitted to the designated regional arts organization The Cultural Alliance of Western CT. The Cultural Alliance noted that the Town meets the standards and criteria for a Cultural District, and believes that Ridgefield is the first town to apply. The next step is a Site Visit by the State DECD and the Cultural Alliance, whereby they meet with the First Selectman, walk the district, and meet with the Subcommittee to hear about plans for managing the district. This will hopefully be done this fall.

7. Electric Vehicle and Solar Updates:

C. Carcélen followed up with Live Green CT. In October, the application will be coming out to finalize the designation of Route 7 meeting the density of becoming an Electric Vehicle ("EV") Corridor. Live Green CT plans to issue a letter of support. Live Green CT is putting on a series of virtual modules for EV readiness. C. Carcélen will be attending and is in alignment with Ridgefield's goals. By 2030 the goal is to have 30% of vehicles purchased to be EVs. School buses are a hot topic for Live Green CT. There was a discussion of having EV buses. There was discussion of Ridgefield's contractor First Student about EV buses, but First Student could not qualify for Volkswagen settlement monies because none of the Ridgefield fleet met the criteria of buses being model year 2009 and older. Live Green CT suggested engaging with Durham Transportation which is a school bus contractor committed to EVs. C. Carcélen advised Live Green CT that

there is still time left in the First Student contract. There was general discussion about engaging with the school board to join a subcommittee on energy to see if a school could be a model and there could be EV buses. B. Knight advised that he had met with Margaret Stematis, Chair of the Board of Education and Dr. Jeanann Pattyfote, Interim Superintendent of Ridgefield Public Schools last winter on the Downtown Wifi project. As part of the discussion, he had spoken about EV school buses **the them.** There was interest in the district exploring ownership of an EV bus or two to cut down on six-figure costs of activity runs for sporting events. The thought was that district-owned EV bus assets could be a cost savings for the district. B. Knight suggested that ECDC continue those discussions with the new Superintendent in the future.

8. General Discussion:

G. Morris thanked and congratulated Amanda Duff for her years of service on ECDC. A. Duff is leaving ECDC when her term ends in the next few weeks. S. Gessner will be sworn in during the next few weeks. S. Spivak suggested that the restaurants need assistance as the cold weather approaches. G. Morris suggested that ECDC holds a restaurant round table to find out what this sector needs. D. Colabella suggested pre-packaged meals that could be delivered to homes (like a Freshly model). B. Knight wanted to know if there were local or state regulations where ECDC could be helpful in addressing any perceived-burdensome regulation to make conducting business for the restaurant community easier (without compromising public health and safety). An example of addressing burdensome regulation that B. Knight provided was the Governor's executive order allowing carry-out alcohol to-go for restaurants during the height of the pandemic.

G. Morris motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by B. Knight and the meeting concluded at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:
Bob Knight, Commissioner