



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

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Geoffrey Morris, Chair
Glori Norwitt, Secretary
Dee Dee Colabella
Cameron Cole Carcelén
Susan Gessner
Bob Knight
Steve Spivak

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman

ridgefieldct.com

**Economic & Community Development Commission
Unapproved Minutes
November 2, 2020, 6:30 pm, via ZOOM Video Conference**

In Attendance: Chairman Geoffrey Morris; Secretary Glori Norwitt; Commissioners Cameron Carcelén Cole, Dee Dee Colabella, Susan Gessner, Bob Knight, and Steve Spivak.

G. Morris called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

Announcements

Next meeting: December 7, 2020

Cameron Carcelén made a motion to approve the October meeting minutes, seconded by G. Norwitt. Motion carried 6-0 (D. Colabella was not yet present).

General Discussion

1. Ridgefield Holiday Village (RHV) November 27 – December 20:
S. Spivak provided a program update. Budgets have been submitted, the facilities team is on point, and vendor sales are going well. Although Downtown Ridgefield disagreed with non-Main Street vendors having pop-up booths, the ECDC represents all Ridgefield businesses and all businesses should have the opportunity to participate. There was a public meeting at the onset of this program which detailed the Holiday Village concept.

B. Knight and G. Morris from the RHV marketing committee developed a press release, a landing page for the ECDC website, and sponsorship materials which quickly sparked initial participation, publicity, and donations. To date, 250 people have signed up.

G. Morris stated that Ridgefield and all of Connecticut will be going back to Phase 2 (COVID protocol) by Friday, November 6. This means scaling back large-scale outdoor events to 500 people, therefore Ballard Park is the preferable location for the holiday events. Ridgefield currently has a 'yellow' status. If the positivity rate goes up to 10% to 15% then the town changes to 'orange'. The Holiday Village will be scaled back if the rate increases but stays below 10%. If the rate goes up to 13% or 14% then we have to consider curtailing the Holiday Village events. G. Morris and S. Spivak will present an update to the Board of Selectmen at their November 4 meeting.

The events committee, D. Colabella and Suzanne Brennan, have assembled a variety of events and activities including ice sculptures, musical performances, and amusements geared for children. S. Spivak will begin recruiting volunteers to help staff these events.

Initial fundraising effort has brought in \$18,000 in donations. Since the fundraising goal is \$40,000 this is a critical week. G. Morris encouraged everyone to review sponsorship opportunities and call at least five contacts. Social media will also be used to promote the sponsorship message. In past years the Holiday Stroll, sponsored by Downtown Ridgefield was 'for the merchants' and 'by the merchants'. Since the organization was not able to sponsor the event this year, local donors are supporting local holiday shopping for all Ridgefield businesses and are making contributions. S. Spivak inquired if there was a way to boost the fundraising effort through Go-Fund Me or other local social media platforms such as the Ridgefield FB page or Hello Ridgefield.

The annual tree lighting ceremony will be a virtual event this year as a result of the pandemic. Rudy Marconi and Ira Joe Fisher will pre-record the ceremony and make it available virtually for Ridgefield residents on Friday, November 27, 2020.

2. Ridgefield Business Development Initiative: G. Morris and B. Knight met with First Selectman Marconi and Dick Aarons from the Ridgefield Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to discuss an economic recovery plan for the town. B. Knight is spearheading this initiative and presented his initial plan outlining short- and long-term goals. Commissioner Knight referenced the Economic Development Action Plan drafted in 2009 which was not fully implemented as several members of the Commission did not seek reappointment at the time. He emphasized the timeliness of a proactive and strategic approach to the town's current challenges given the global pandemic, the economic vulnerability of Ridgefield businesses, pressure on the town's commercial tax base, and a likely reduction in State aid.

A Ridgefield Economic Development Plan subcommittee was formed to review the 2009 plan and identify necessary actions and desired outcomes for: business retention and expansion, business attraction and recruitment in key sectors, workforce development, innovation and entrepreneurship, infrastructure, regulatory matters, branding and marketing, short-term COVID recovery and a pandemic-era economy. In conjunction with the Office of Management, the subcommittee will create an assessment of economic need informed by the: current

conditions, a strategic, long-term economic development plan, and an assessment of financial and technical needs from the State of Connecticut.

The timeline for submitting Ridgefield's Economic Development and Recovery Plan by OEM is slated for December 1, 2020.

G. Morris made a motion to create a sub-committee to develop the Ridgefield Economic Development and Recovery Plan. Glori Norwitt seconded the motion. Motion carried 7-0.

3. Shop Local Initiative: The key mission of the Ridgefield Holiday Village is to encourage people to shop local. C. Carcélen is creating a social media plan to promote 'Shop Local'. The month-long promotion through December 20 will include a portion of paid media to boost specific posts. G. Morris mentioned that there are 10 banners that can be affixed to light posts that could be used for additional promotion. The Arts Council and ECDC monitor banner requests. The banner design must be approved by the Arts Council. The cost of a banner is \$50, and they are always in high demand.

S. Spivak suggested that C. Carcélen leverage companies such as AMEX since they sponsor Small Business Saturday (November 28) and have resources and information on their website.

4. Roundtable Discussion: S. Gessner shared highlights of the virtual E-Commerce Roundtable on October 14. G. Morris served as the moderator along with three dynamic speakers – Justin Loeber, Fractional CIO and E-Commerce Consultant, Richard Pereira, Head of Business Development and Strategy, ReserveBar.com, and Megan Searfoss, Owner Ridgefield Running Co and Darien Running. The speakers shared compelling case studies to emphasize the positive effect of digital marketing and e-commerce on their business and their business clients. This recap spurred ideas for future roundtables including a focus on the importance of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) for local businesses. S. Spivak explained the importance of this marketing activity and the influence it can have on sales. D. Colabella proposed having a 'Tips and Tricks' for Social Media forum. Also, having a way to gauge what topics would be relevant for Ridgefield businesses was also discussed. The Roundtable series will begin again in January 2021.

5. General Discussion Points:

S. Spivak was recently named to the Western Connecticut Tourism Board, replacing Barbara Manners. He will be the town's representative to this board.

There was a robust discussion about supporting local businesses through non-paid media, similar to Hamlet Hub's 'Why Businesses Matter'. C. Carcélen emphasized the importance of creating an equitable way to promote individual businesses. The group suggested that businesses could be featured on the ECDC website after it is updated next year.

S. Spivak motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by D. Colabella. The meeting concluded at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:
Susan Gessner, Commissioner