

Economic & Community Development Committee
Approved Minutes
July 11, 2022, at 6:30pm in-person in Town Hall Large Conference
Room and via Zoom

In attendance Commissioners Geoffrey Morris, Christa Carone, Jonathan Winn, and Bob Knight; commissioner-elect Kay Gelfman

Announcements

Next meeting: August 1, 2022

Approval of June 2022 Minutes

Minutes

- Commissioner Jonathan Winn motioned that we approve the June 6, 2022, meeting minutes; Commissioner Christa Carone seconded the motion; all approved (4-0)
- Commissioner Jonathan Winn motioned that we approve the June 18, 2022, special meeting minutes; Commissioner Christa Carone seconded the motion; all approved (4-0)

General Discussion

- Update on Planning & Zoning application for Route 7/Route 35 Rezone (Gelfman)

Commissioner-elect Kay Gelfman attended the Planning & Zone meeting on this application and reported that Attorney Bob Jewell and Developer Dr. Lipton representing Ridgefield Professional Office Complex, LLC presented their case for the rezone of 29.2 acres of the 54 acres owned by this developer. The rezone does not include the medical buildings and storage building at 901 Ethan Allen Highway.

Two acres in the middle of the four parcels that make up the area in question are owned by the Town of Ridgefield and hold a wastewater treatment plant that has been decommissioned. The acres are currently zoned B-2, light industrial use, and Dr. Lipton wants to rezone them to MFDD, a multi-family development district - or purely residential use.

In the current zoning designation, there can be residential use of 2.2 units per acre. MFDD would allow 6 units per acre for the 29.2 acres.

In either case, Little Pond sits on 15.394 of the 29.2 acres, so 6 x 29.2 acres worth of housing units would be clustered on roughly half the acreage since they would get credit for the pond.

The pond has a conservation easement so that piece would not be developed. In the current vision, the developer would keep the Route 35 frontage intact, although traffic studies allowed for a curb cut at the blinking yellow light (Buck Hill). The developer contends their plan will be the least dense compared to mixed use or 8-30G.

The P&Z brought up the Eureka project on Bennetts Farm Road, which is already approved for more than 200 units, and whether it was in the town's best interest to develop this parcel residentially as well. P&Z pointed out that you can get more affordable housing with the current zoning designation. A P&Z commissioner wondered if they had considered putting a hotel in. The developer had not. The developer envisions a townhouse complex of 80-90 units in a gated community with pool and communal recreation facility.

- Update on 34 Bailey Avenue (Gelfman)

Commissioner-elect Gelfman read ECDC's letter of provisional support for the project into the record at the Planning & Zoning meeting and Attorney Bob Jewell responded to the points made in ECDC's letter. At a subsequent meeting, an individual who was speaking to the Commission quoted our letter as evidence of the problems with the plan. In his summary, Attorney Jewell said:

- the parcel has been sitting there for 60 years not in use
- the parcel closes the loop of Bailey Avenue and will continue the redevelopment of the Prospect Street District
- the developer will clean up contaminated soil and years of environmental damage to the parcel and a half acre will be restored to the wild
- the roughly \$18,000 current tax bill will probably triple, as well as sewer hookup fees of \$5,400 for each of the 25 apartments units - revenue for the town
- the developer has agreed to make two of the units in his plan 80% of the median income, i.e. affordable housing. The town should have about 10% affordable housing to be up
- the parking is a total of 44 spaces: one space for each of the 25 apartments, and 19 additional spaces, nine spots (4.5 each) for the two commercial tenants, four guest spots, two of these spots will be handicap spots. There will be an EV car charger with two ports and electrical service to the building can accommodate more car chargers as warranted.

- There will also be bike storage on site.
- The Drainage situation has been examined by an independent engineer for the town. The plans have been adjusted according to her specifications. The developer's engineer examined the plans taking into account up to a hundred-year storm.

ECDC commissioners discussed whether to submit an advisory opinion to P&Z, but all felt ECDC was operating without a complete set of facts. Commissioner-elect Gelfman offered to find out more information.

In an effort to better engage community stakeholders during the development process, Commissioner Bob Knight suggested that P&Z should require or strongly suggest developers go through a community-engagement process as part of the development process, which could include social media, community listening sessions, and more to achieve feedback. Knight suggested that ECDC could author guidelines for developers and others formulating plans for construction and renovation to follow. Commissioner Morris wondered if ECDC can do this informally and not formalize the process with a charter revision or ordinance. Knight went on to say that listening sessions get the public involved before plans get too far down the road. There was general agreement that better dialogue could exist among all stakeholders before a plan gets officially submitted to P&Z.

- Ridgefield CEDS (Norwitt)

WestCOG (Western Connecticut Council of Governments) is updating the Region's CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy), which is a five-year plan for the WestCOG. Part of the plan is to include projects that would help move economic development forward within the region.

The document needs to be updated every five years and filed with the EDA so that WestCOG is able to apply for federal funds/grants to support its various efforts. Part of updating the plan is to include various projects within the region from each municipality that would support economic development.

ECDC Chair Glori Norwitt met with First Selectman Rudy Marconi, P&Z director Alice Dew, and WestCOG project manager Betsy Paynter to consider Ridgefield projects, but also regional projects that would support the town as well. They discussed parking plans, increasing public transportation, broadband coverage throughout the community, signage/wayfinding, tourism efforts within the Cultural District, and more. The Branchville Transit Oriented Design Plan Implementation (to create a pedestrian and transit-oriented area around the Branchville train station, but also sewer allocation) will

be added to the CEDS list. First Selectman Marconi will work with town facilities manager Jake Muller to estimate costs and timeline for the CEDS paperwork.

- Parking (Morris)

Commissioner Morris reported that the license agreement drafted in March will be discussed before the July 13 Board of Selectmen meeting for approval, so that it can get moved along to the landlord and US Postal Service for approval.

- Internet Access Survey (Knight)

First Selectman Marconi forwarded a state request for the town to conduct an Internet-access survey, and Rudy asked ECDC to distribute it. Commissioner Knight is drafting a press release to precede our distribution of the survey to town residents and businesses later this month.

- Update on Welcome Postcard (Norwitt)

Quick summary: Commissioner Winn designed a postcard and ECDC printed 5,000 copies to send to all new residents. He created a survey for all new residents to complete. Chair Norwitt created a summary of information that people will receive after completing the survey (and that info is on the ECDC website). Commissioner Morris made address labels for the 2,000 houses and apartments that were sold between June 2020 and April 2022. The ECDC intern put the address labels on 2,000 postcards and they were dropped off at Town Hall, which will be mailing them using a clearinghouse. So now we wait for people to complete the Welcome Survey, and we collect the data. Chair Norwitt reached out to the Welcome Wagon woman, for her to distribute postcards also, but they haven't connected yet.

- Small Business Workgroup (Dowd)

Commissioner Sean Dowd was appointed to lead the organizational efforts for ECDC to host a "Shark Tank" event for this fall. We purchased \$2,000 worth of Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce gift certificates for the prizes. First steps:

- Pick date, time, and location
- Determine who is moderating/hosting event
- Determine parameters for competition
- Then: we need to begin marketing so that existing or potential new businesses prepare materials to be in our competition.

- Update on request to expand ECDC to 9 Commissioners (Norwitt)

The ECDC is on the BOS Agenda for July 13 to request that the ECDC is expanded to nine Commissioners. Meeting begins at 7:30 pm. BOS may discuss whether ECDC Commissioners should serve two-year terms instead of one-year terms.

- Update on ARPA request for Broadband Feasibility Study (Knight and Morris)

The ARPA working committee approved distribution of ARPA funds to RVNA for vaccines, the Affordable House Commission for security and lost rent during COVID-19, for a broadband study commissioned by ECDC, and to the Ridgefield Arts Council for future growth initiatives. Because of this Chair Norwitt is asking facilities manager Jake Muller to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for an engineering study for the town's broadband situation.

- Idea of Honoring/Celebrating Individual (Gelfman)

Commissioner-elect Gelfman would like to honor an individual every year who has made a significant contribution to the Cultural District. She suggests Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum curator Richard Klein, who has stepped down after 30 years with the museum. Commissioner Morris and Gelfman will work together to formulate a plan and possibly work with the Ridgefield Arts Council.

- Updated requirements for Meetings (Norwitt)

For Commissioners/Boards/Committees that hold regular meetings held using electronic equipment, there are additional requirements. And there are even more additional requirements if meetings are held solely using electronic equipment.

- Kiosk of Town info in Kiosk at new Deborah Ann's Sweet Shoppe

ECDC approved the purchase and installation of an outdoor monitor for the kiosk in front of the new Deborah Ann's Sweet Shoppe on Main Street. P&Z director Alice Dew pointed out that in order to put an electronic sign in the outdoor kiosk, we would need to apply to both the Architectural Advisory Committee (AAC) and Planning & Zoning for approval. We are awaiting information for next steps.

Meeting adjourned at 7:51 pm (motion by Bob Knight, second by Jonathan Winn, all in favor).