

Economic & Community Development Committee
Approved Minutes
August 1, 2022, at 6:30pm in-person in Town Hall Large Conference
Room and via Zoom

In attendance Chair Glori Norwitt, Commissioners Geoffrey Morris, Jonathan Winn, and Kay Gelfman

Guest Alice Dew from Planning & Zoning

Meeting started at 6:33 pm

The July 2022 meeting minutes were approved with a change suggested by Chair Norwitt. Motion by Commissioner Morris, second by Chair Norwitt. All approved.

General Discussion

Internet Access Survey (Knight)

Chair Glori Norwitt reported that Commissioner Bob Knight will be disseminating a survey produced by the state regarding Internet access in Ridgefield. ECDC hopes that every homeowner and business owner completes the survey so that we have an accurate picture of what people use to access the Internet, what speed it is etc. Both WestCOG, which is the Western Connecticut Council of Governments, and the state requested we get a survey to residents. We opted for the state survey, as it was more comprehensive and contained an Internet speed test.

Planning & Zoning: Applications and Engagement (Gelfman, Knight)

Commissioner Kay Gelfman reported on her visits to Planning & Zoning meetings. The most recent topic is a rezoning request for the property at the intersection of Route 7 and Route 35, to allow for denser residential units. We discussed whether we should write a letter of opinion to P&Z regarding it and the commission said yes, we should. Our general opinion is to favor it, as long as all associated matters are met, such as how it will affect traffic. Commission Gelfman will draft it and we will vote on it and send it to P&Z by Friday, August 12.

Guest: Planning & Zoning director Alice Dew

Recently hired as director of Planning & Zoning, Alice Drew joined us by Zoom to discuss her role, her relationship to the P&Z commissioners, and other matters. In our last meeting, we had discussed whether ECDC should facilitate public discussions on matters before they get to P&Z, to help applicants before they submit applications. She welcomed the idea but did say that P&Z welcomes applicants to discuss the matter and has invited many to partake in a town discussion.

Small Business Workgroup (Dowd)

Ridgefield Library Director Brenda McKinley approached Chair Norwitt to discuss a possible partnership to run Library Resource Skills programs. These would focus on topics that small businesses may need guidance. The programs could be a panel of experts for networking, or seminars. We will discuss further with the Library.

In Commissioner Dowd's absence, Chair Norwitt led the discussion. We established October 26 as a date for a Shark Tank-like event, to which we would invite businesses to share new ideas for a company, an expansion, or anyone seeking help.

Commissioner Sean Dowd will lead the effort, to be held at Ridgefield Library. ECDC has purchased Chamber of Commerce gift certificates as prizes for the event.

Idea for Award in Cultural District (Gelfman, Morris)

Commissioner Gelfman and Commissioner Morris proposed starting an award to honor those who have made a significant difference to the Cultural District, as a way to bolster the standing of the Cultural District.

This is the proposed language:

Cass Gilbert Award

The Cultural District is a major driver of economic activity for the town of Ridgefield. It provides jobs, attracts visitors, and supports local businesses. The people and organizations that comprise the cultural community are what provide this economic vitality. With the Cass Gilbert Award, the Economic & Community Development Commission annually honors one person who has made a significant contribution to Ridgefield's Cultural District.

One of Ridgefield's early cultural icons, Cass Gilbert was an architect whose creativity was a major driver of economic activity--designing the Woolworth Building, the U.S. Supreme Court House, and the fountain that welcomes visitors to Ridgefield. To recognize that honor, we will add this individual's name to a permanent sculpture installation in front of Town Hall on Main Street. ECDC will organize an award ceremony to bestow the designation at this annual event.

After discussion, it was decided not to name it after Cass Gilbert but to simply call it the Cultural District Award. Commissioner Morris will talk with the Ridgefield Arts Council and see if it makes sense to host the event at RAC's Behind the Scenes Award presentation in May.

The vote was unanimous 4-0

Broadband Feasibility Study (Norwitt, Morris)

Chair Norwitt explained that First Selectman Rudy Marconi approved financing of broadband feasibility study. She is preparing notes to send to town purchasing manager Jake Muller. He will get an RFP out the week of August 8 and we hope to have bids back in two to three weeks. This will give us a sense of what broadband assets we have and what it might cost to produce and plan and then install broadband townwide with the use of federal infrastructure funds.

Documentary on Ridgefield Fire Department

Documentary filmmaker Joe Lane is seeking funds for his project to capture the history of the Ridgefield Fire Department. No action was taken.

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

Chair Norwitt explained that the Board of Selectmen will vote on whether to expand the commission to nine members at its August 17 meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 pm