



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

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Glori Norwitt - Chair
Geoffrey Morris – Secretary
Sean Dowd
Kay Gelfman
Jennifer Gioffre
Brittney Howell
Bob Knight
Mark Riser
Jonathan Winn

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman

ridgefieldct.com

**Economic & Community Development Committee
Approved Minutes
April 3, 2023, at 6:30 pm
Lower Level Conference Room - Town Hall**

In attendance: Chair Glori Norwitt, Secretary Geoffrey Morris, Commissioners Jennifer Gioffre, Mark Riser, Kay Gelfman, and Bob Knight

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm

The next meeting is Monday, May 8, 6:30 pm, lower level conference room of Town Hall. Morris motioned that we approve the March 2023 meeting minutes. Gelfman seconded. The vote was 3-0. Norwitt, Knight, Gioffre abstained because of their absence from the March meeting.

Public comment

Kirk Carr mentioned that he tried to get the FOIA complaint that he filed dropped but he could not get the information that ECDC provided to Planning & Zoning.

Recap of Recent Events

Chair Norwitt pointed out that LoopNet is a good resource to find commercial property

AEP6 – Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 is a national study of the economic impact of the nonprofit arts & culture industry. In October 2023, new findings will be released.

Norwitt attended a statewide Meeting of Cultural Districts on March 16. The Western CT Tourism District apparently receives \$400k for marketing from the state. There is a new person coming to DECD for marketing. CT Cultural funds grants thru CT Humanities—\$5,000 first year, \$2,500 second year.

On March 15, Morris, Riser, and Norwitt had lunch with Jessica Vonashek, Director of ECD for Norwalk. She provided great insights into how Norwalk restructured itself and has since made plan to make the city more welcoming for people to move there and to move a business there. It is following the “If you build it, they will come” model and not doing outreach and advertising to attract businesses. If the business climate is welcoming, businesses will find Norwalk. It does offer some small grants and incentives.

Make Music Day is Wed June 21. Additional music and art day on Sunday, June 18 (Father’s Day). ECDC has in the past offered promotional assistance.

Farmers Market – Corrin Arasa is heading up an effort to start a farmers market and has a permit application before Planning & Zoning. It will be where the pumpkin patch is at Jesse Lee Church on Main Street.

There is a new magazine called Ridgefield City Lifestyle Magazine, published by Mary Dougherty.

First Selectman Rudy Marconi and Chair Norwitt spoke with Terry McAuliffe and ShawnaLee Kwashnak of Middlebury re ECDC issues and promoting Downtown.

Glori Norwitt earned Ridgefield Chamber Volunteer of the Year at the State of the Town address at Lounsbury House on March 16.

Gioffre noted that she attended a Ridgefield Chamber event on March 22 put on by their Business Management Council team. They will hold a Speed Networking event on June 8.

Agenda

Special Guest: Tax Assessor Al Garzi

Mr. Garzi provided a list of the top ten taxpayers. He talked about how Boehringer Ingelheim moved here in the mid-1970s, first in the old high school, then to build a place on the Danbury border. 1) Boehringer Ingelheim (\$305,000,000), 2) CL&P (\$36,000,000), 3) Equity One-Copps Hill (\$24,000,000), 4) Stephen Zemo (\$20,000,000), 5) SHP VI Ridgefield - Ridgefield Station (\$20,000,000), 6) Kre-Bsk Husky - Ridgefield Crossing (\$19,000,000), 7) Flat Rock - Silver Spring Country Club (\$15,000,000), 8) Keeler Properties - BMW (\$15,000,000), 9) Ridgefield Professional Office (\$14,000,000), 10) Harrison Hunter - Double H Farm (\$10,700,000)

Multi-unit residential brings in the most tax revenue. We have diversity in housing from \$200,000 to \$25 million.

Charter Revision Commission (Morris)

We submitted to the Charter Revision Commission changes that were already made in the Town ordinance: we now have nine members in the commission, not seven, and each serves for two-year terms, not one. The second request made—to remove from our duties keeping an inventory of commercial properties—needs to be changed in the ordinance before it can change in the charter.

Cultural District Award (Gelfman, Morris):

The four awards for the years 2021, 2022, and 2023 will be presented at the Ridgefield Arts Council Behind the Scenes ceremony on May 11, 2023, at 6 pm, at Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center. The 2021 winners are former State Rep. John Frey and Books on the Common owner Ellen Burns; the 2022 winner is former Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum curator Richard Klein; and the 2023 honoree is retired longtime Ridgefield Playhouse executive director Allison Stockel. Commissioner Gelfman discussed an idea for a permanent statue to celebrate the Cultural District and its award winners, which could be placed in a yet-unknown location in the downtown area. Someone from ECDC will hand out the awards at the May 11 event. Commissioner Jennifer Gioffre will send a list of questions to each winner for insights into their thoughts on the Cultural District. Morris proposed, and Gioffre seconded that we allocate up to **\$500 for food, drink, and decor for the event, which is organized by the Ridgefield Arts Council. The vote was 6-0.**

Town Info and Guidelines (Norwitt)

Norwitt highlighted some sections of this document, a digital copy of which she forwarded to each Commissioner.

Broadband Feasibility Study (Morris/Knight):

Commissioner Morris and Knight reported on the news from the weekly meetings the ECDC attends as part of the town effort to create a feasibility study to install a fiber network in town. The feasibility study is being produced by EntryPoint, a Utah-based company, and is being paid for by the Western Connecticut Council of Governments. First Selectman Rudy Marconi, Ridgefield IT head Andrew Nesbitt, facility manager Jake Muller, and WestCOG rep Mike Towle are also part of the committee, which meets via video every Tuesday. The Feasibility Study has been completed and the Ridgefield members of the committee met and came up with a list of questions. The main issue was that pricing the study was based on a 60% take rate (percentage of residents who would sign up for the broadband service) but Commissioner Knight, from his experience, says 40% is more realistic. So we are asking for a new cost estimate. The study will provide an estimate based on having 80% of the wiring buried and 20% no poles and another estimate for 20% buried and 80% on poles.

Marketing (Gioffre, Norwitt, Morris)

Norwitt noted that she and Winn attended the March 15, 2023, BOS meeting, and discussed the idea of a digital sign in the Deborah Ann's Sweet Shoppe kiosk. The sign would have a digital map of downtown Ridgefield, and include information from the town and about downtown events. The BOS noted that Architectural Advisory Commission and Planning & Zoning needed to be contacted, and possibly the Historic District Commission.

Morris noted that the longtime retail establishment Deborah Ann's, which sells chocolate, ice cream, and more, moved its location to a different part of Main Street. Its new location features a kiosk meant for showcasing information. Deborah Ann's has permitted ECDC to use a portion of the kiosk to display a digital monitor that will share information about town events. Until the monitor can be approved by Planning & Zoning, purchased and installed, ECDC hired the graphic design firm Maida Design to produce a paper 2' x 6' map listing all the businesses in the downtown area and display that map in the kiosk. The map has been designed, approved, and sent to the printer and should be ready for installation by April 5.

Business Connections (Gioffre)

Gioffre asked everyone to review the list of businesses that had been shared and see if there are additions or if there are changes to contact info, etc. Gioffre will be sending a letter to businesses that we have email addresses for, asking for info on their concerns, and inviting them to attend a monthly video call to share info and ideas, and inform the ECDC of concerns.

Downtown Beautification (Norwitt, Gelfman)

Norwitt says the group is making progress on beautifying the alleyway between Botanika and Baja Kitchen, with discussion of overhead lights, a mural, and more.

Update on Planning & Zoning (Gelfman): Discussion was put off until the next meeting as there was no additional reporting other than items raised with Guest Garzi.

Planning/Projects for 2023 (Norwitt): Our current and future budget was discussed and we agreed that formal budgeting would take place at the May 8 meeting to allocate the remainder of the current fiscal year budget to such items as web updates, Shark Tank awards; and will make a spending plan for the new allocation of next year's budget.

Motion to dismiss by Morris, seconded by Gioffre. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:42 pm.