



**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
Approved Minutes
April 5, 2021, 6:30 pm, via ZOOM Video Conference**

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

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

Announcements

Next meeting: May 10, 2021

Minutes

With no modifications, Glori made a motion to approve the March 2021 meeting minutes; seconded by Dee Dee. Motion carries 7-0.

General Discussion

1. Plan of Conservation and Development (Gessner)

POCD Implementation is being managed by Karen Martin from the Planning Department. The Implementation task force includes representatives from multiple Ridgefield commissions and nonprofits. Dave Goldenberg, Affordable Housing Committee, Ben Oko, Ridgefield Action Committee for the Environment, Susan Gessner from ECDC, and Bob Hebert, Board of Selectman attended the first meeting on March 19 to review the overall plan.

Action Items for ECDC include:

- Explore installation of kiosks/wayfinding signage at strategic locations to inform visitors of business location and Town Center sidewalks and pathways. (Geoffrey suggests development of a comprehensive app which can be promoted instead of a physical kiosk) (A Visitors Center could be created in the first room in Town Hall)
- Install pavement markings, signage, and wayfinding to direct employees and visitors to parking spaces.
- Consider participating in the CT Main Street Program.
- Consider the possible establishment of a Main Street manager. (Glori notes that the Town should maintain some authority over such a person)
- Participate in the State program for “municipal cultural districts” for the benefit of Ridgefield businesses and orgs.
- Strategically coordinate town marketing with the resources available.
- Hire/assign staff to assist with economic development efforts.

(Bob notes that fiber optic initiative should be considered/included since it is a priority for the Board of Selectmen)

2. Branding Initiative (Gessner)

Susan, Cameron, Dee Dee and Steve continue to formalize a branding process in order to attract businesses to town, and also create more of a destination here. Now they have developed a messaging platform for marketing, and are currently developing some taglines. They may conduct an informal focus group with people in town before finalizing. There was discussion about the ECDC possibly becoming the de facto marketing group for the Town at large. Also discussion of possibility to hire someone to keep events up to date on the website. Susan may call an ECDC special meeting before the May regularly scheduled meeting to review taglines.

Discussion of need to promote the ECDC website and social medial pages. We are waiting for Andrew in Town Hall to connect the previous ECDC website to the new one.

3. Make Music Day (Spivak)

Ridgefield Arts Council President Jennifer DiLaura reached out to ECDC initially, and Steve will be the liaison. Effort to have Make Music Day seen not just as a fun event, but as a driver to support the business community.

This global music initiative started 38 years ago in France, organized by “Make Music Alliance.” It is intended to be one day with free music – to hear, play and experience it. Then use this as the launching point (kick off) to demonstrate all the music that Ridgefield offers throughout the summer, such as CHIRP and other park performances, Playhouse shows, etc.

Make Music Day has requested the ECDC to help fund their marketing. The ECDC can help promote this for the business and nonprofit communities. Geoffrey suggests we use monies from the Holiday Village to promote this day and promote a developed music calendar of all music events in town. DeeDee suggests that it could be used to promote not just music but arts and culture overall. Glori noted that monies could also be used when/if the Town receives the Cultural District designation from the State, to both create 2 signs (as required by the State) and promote it. Geoffrey motions, and Dee Dee seconds, to allocate \$2,500 for Make Music Day marketing, with marketing also for arts and culture at large. Discussion concludes that \$2,500 will be earmarked, but not approved at this point. Steve will review a plan from Make Music Day to ensure that includes overall marketing of arts and culture in town. ECDC Commissioners may be asked to vote on this motion via email once more information is received.

4. Long Term Recovery Committee (Knight and Norwitt)

There are approximately three dozen people involved in the various Subcommittee so that the ECDC can learn of and deal with needs in relation to the Covid19 pandemic. Additionally, a Survey is live to learn of the unmet needs of local businesses and organizations.

The Arts, Culture, Tourism & Recreation (“ACTR”) Subcommittee met again, and afterwards Bob created a letter summarizing the needs of its members which was submitted to the CT DEMHS Region 5 Long Term Recovery Committee. The letter stressed the importance of ACTR to our local economy.

One need was satisfied recently: the Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra asked Glori to reach out to the School Superintendent in hopes of learning whether the RSO could use the RHS Auditorium in the fall, which is needed in order to have its fall season. Superintendent DaSilva recently replied that given the State’s current condition and easing of restrictions, she anticipates that the Auditorium would be available to the RSO (and other outside organizations).

Discussion of monies which could be allocated to arts and cultural organizations from the federal American Recovery Act funds. Various State/regional organizations

suggested that local arts councils seek 1% of Town funds to go towards support of arts and culture. Bob noted that Town nonprofits reported a 70-80% loss in revenue year-over-year, according to the January 2021 survey by the ECDC.

While Bob had the floor, he mentioned that the First Selectman's Office was issuing an Internet Satisfaction Survey in response to multiple complaints from residents and businesses since the beginning of the pandemic. Bob noted that high-speed broadband continues to be critical in enabling post-pandemic economic recovery, access to healthcare, work, learning, and commerce, and will remain so after the pandemic.

5. Cultural District Update and Video (Norwitt)

On March 31, 2021 the Cultural District Subcommittee met over zoom with Liz Shapiro, the Director of the CT Office of the Arts, and Lisa Scails of the Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut to have a "virtual visit and tour." First Selectman Rudy Marconi expressed the Town's support of and excitement for a Cultural District designation. He and Subcommittee members were asked specific questions about the schools' art curriculum, and other issues. Liz Shapiro asked for information beyond the original Application guidelines. Glori will prepare an Addendum to the Town's Application for a Cultural District and submit it soon. A video (which can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/509357299>) was shown during the call, giving the CT Office of the Arts a virtual walking tour of the proposed District. We anticipate receiving the designation, but must wait to receive official notice, and will postpone all marketing etc until official notice is received.

Glori noted that if the Cultural District designation is received, she asked the CT Office of the Arts to prepare a brief Press Release which we could use in marketing. Also, Glori would like to ask the Governor and the Director of the State DECD to attend a ribbon cutting ceremony. Jonathan Winn had offered to help the CT Office of the Arts to create a logo for the Cultural District.

If the Cultural District is so designated, the Town is required to put up at least 2 signs, so noting it. Discussion of the look and verbiage and location for the signs.

Glori and Susan will talk separately about planning the marketing, to be ready once/if the Cultural District is designated.

6. Green Energy Update (Carcelen and Morris)

From the Energy Task Force, Geoffrey and Cameron report that the Town has requested a grant for 6 electric cars for the Town. Further, they look to ensure that the Board of Education renegotiates bus contracts to ensure electric buses are used to a certain extent.

There is a proposal recommending mini energy efficient projects for all school and Town buildings. When any change is made now, an energy efficient alternative is used, for

example heating systems with electric heat pump, which can be generated by many different sources of energy.

The Energy Task Force has been successful with solar panels: 3 schools have solar, 3 more will this year, and all schools by 2022. The current solar buildings have experienced a good deal of savings. The Town seeks to reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2030. The Board of Selectmen recently responded positively to an Energy Task Force presentation. The presentation was broken down into actionable segments. Funding of approximately \$1 million per year would accomplish a great deal. Overall goal of more efficient energy systems to save taxpayer dollars, in addition to reducing carbon emissions.

If the proposed Federal Infrastructure Bill is passed, funding would go to swift and shovel-ready projects. Thus there is an incentive for Town to be well-positioned.

7. Community Data Platform Survey Collaboration (Morris)

Community Data Platform partnered with ECDC for Fairfield Vaccine Survey Toolkit. 2,600 people took this survey in the County over three weeks. Not much racial diversity in responses.

From the results as of March 16, 2021, the most hesitant to receive Covid19 vaccine is those with income over \$100,000 with graduate degrees. 88% would get vaccinated today. Biggest worries re vaccination are side effects and safety and effectiveness. Roughly 90% think the vaccine is safe and effective.

8. Consumer Confidence Campaign (Morris)

This campaign is in response to requests of the Long Term Recovery ACTR and Business & Jobs Subcommittees. Suzanne Brennan of Lounsbury House had noted that the recent State relaxation of State Covid19 restrictions are confusing; Restaurants are “fully open” and venues can have more guests, but all still must abide by social distancing so guests don’t fully comprehend how restricted businesses still are.

Bob with assistance from his work colleagues created Memes. Examples include a Museum in the Street (“One Day Masks Will be History. Just not yet.”) and baseball (“It’s the Bottom of the 9th against covid. Don’t Strike Out.”) and movies (“This summer, movies won’t be the only place to see Superheroes. Get vaccinated. Mask up. Enjoy Ridgefield!”) and others. Memes are being sent to the Long Term Recovery subcommittees, put in press release, and should be used throughout town.

Geoffrey and Dee Dee also created a “Health & Safety Rated” flyer that businesses and organizations can post (on their doors/windows/etc) to note that they follow State and Town Covid19 guidelines for opening safely; masks are required for entry; persons feeling Covid19 symptoms should not enter businesses; everyone should respect capacity limits indoors.

Dee Dee will create a short questionnaire for businesses/organizations to read/review/abide by, to receive when they post the "Health & Safety Rated" flyer.

9. Other

All are disappointed that the Prospector Theater had to close, and hope that it will re-open soon. Steve noted that perhaps we could help them find an alternative use. The Prospector has developed so much goodwill in our town. Glori will reach out to learn of any unmet needs they have.

Geoffrey motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Steve. Motion carries 7-0. The meeting concluded at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Glori Norwitt, ECDC Secretary