

Economic & Community Development Committee
unApproved Minutes
August 16, 2022, at 8 am via Zoom

In attendance Chair Glori Norwitt, Commissioners Geoffrey Morris, Christa Carone, Sean Dowd, and Kay Gelfman

Meeting started at 8:03 am

Agenda

1. Cannabis

A motion to approve this letter to be read into the record at the August 17 Planning & Zoning meeting. Motion by Commissioner Carone, seconded by Commissioner Morris. Unanimous approval 5-0.

The mission of the ECDC is to support orderly and planned economic development in keeping with the character of the town. A productive and prosperous community stems from creating a viable economic foundation. To this end, the ECDC supports allowing for cannabis establishments in the Town, whether for medical or recreational use.

Members of the commission feel strongly that Ridgefield's economic success is dependent on supporting businesses that will bolster our tax base.

In reviewing the application from resident Kirk Carr to the Planning & Zoning Commission re Prohibition of Cannabis Establishments per Public Act 21-2, the ECDC concluded that Cannabis Establishments will enhance economic activity. Further, the ECDC anticipates that allowed Cannabis establishments would be regulated by the Town as to location, use, and more. Additionally, if at any point the Town (whether through ordinance or Town vote) prohibits retail sales of Cannabis, the ECDC suggests that the Town consider that non-retail businesses could be allowed such as production, cultivation, packaging, and transportation.

2. Rezoning at Route 35 and Route 7

A motion to read this into the record was put forth by Commissioner Dowd and seconded by Commissioner Morris. Unanimous approval 5-0.

RZ-22-1; Ethan Allen Highway (F10-0092, G10-0057, G10-0037, G10-0056 totaling 29.204 acres). Zone change application per Section 9.2.C of the Town of Ridgefield Zoning Regulations, to change the zone from B-2 to Multi Family Development District (MFDD) for four parcels: Tax Assessor's Lots F10-0092, G10-0057, G10-0037, and a 2.782 acre portion of G10-0056.

The mission of Ridgefield's Economic & Community Development Commission is to support orderly and planned economic development in keeping with the character of the town. A productive and prosperous community stems from creating a viable economic

foundation. Planned residential development can enhance the economic framework of commercial neighborhoods.

To this end, the ECDC believes that a zone change from B-2 (light industrial zone) to MFDD (multi-family development district) on Ethan Allen Highway in the area defined above, could provide a valuable opportunity for planned development, adding to the existing townscape without negatively impacting the current residential and commercial opportunities. The ECDC supports residential communities with pedestrian access to the commerce around them. A multi-family development of the empty acreage adjacent to the north end of Route 7 could knit together a patchwork of commercial and residential buildings into an appealing village.

In reviewing the information surrounding the request to rezone 29.204 acres of land adjacent to 901 Ethan Allen Highway from B-2 to MFDD, we concluded as a Commission that a residential development under the rezoned MFDD designation could provide the glue for a thriving commercial and residential hub for these reasons:

1) Knit Together Existing Pieces: Starting past the blinking light at Buck Hill Road we find condos at 570 Danbury Road, stores at 590 Danbury Road, Patio.com at the end of the “block”, and turning the corner restaurants at 967 Ethan Allen Highway and 955 Ethan Allen Highway. Gas and donuts are across the intersection of Route 35 and Route 7, with further multi family dwellings, 599 and 619 Danbury Road, and assisted living facilities, 640 and 642 Danbury Road, heading north. While these buildings are tenuously connected, they offer a variety of residential and commercial choices. With a proximate, larger residential development, sidewalks and green buffers could be created to bring an inviting walkability to all.

2) Affordable Housing Opportunity: Rather than face imminent state mandates regarding affordable housing, Ridgefield has an opportunity in the context of this rezone to discuss what a mixed income, multi-family development would look like. The developer currently has no plans to include affordable housing in the project. As a town we have the opportunity to come together and request it here.

3) Environmental Sustainability, Wetlands, Watershed, and Wildlife Corridor: Little Pond sits on 15.394 of the 29 acres in question. This would allow the developer to cluster his development on the balance of the 29 acres and leave the land around Little Pond as open space. Ridgefield Brook winds its way through the back piece of the parcels under consideration for the rezone. Thoughtful development around wetlands and watershed could leave more intact open space and wildlife corridors.

4) Enhanced Public Spaces: The acreage considered in the rezone backs up on several residential cul de sacs. Rather than denude them of the adjacent

undeveloped land, here is an opportunity to provide a park for both the residents in the new development, and the long-time residents of the existing neighborhoods. We would discourage the developer from pursuing designs for a gated community with a recreation center. We believe the developer should be designing a community that reaches outward rather than inward, with a walkable and tree-filled park space, as well as tennis, pickleball, and basketball courts to act as an inviting buffer between new and old development. A park that benefitted new and existing residents could be a wonderful addition, and could include the two town-owned acres in the midst of the parcels under consideration. (In comparison, Ballard Park is five acres; similar acreage could be set aside here.)

The Ridgefield ECDC looks forward to continued discussion of the rezone of Ethan Allen Highway. We encourage thoughtful planning that fosters new and burnishes existing economic development and provides inviting living and commercial space for our community.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:23 am