

RIDGEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Lower Level Small Conference Room
Town Hall, 400 Main Street
Ridgefield, CT 06877
February 18, 2021

APPROVED MINUTES

A meeting of the Ridgefield Historic District Commission (“HDC”) was held via teleconferencing, which was open to the public, on Thursday, February 18, 2021, and beginning at 7:30 p.m.

The following members were present:

Dan O’Brien, Chair
Briggs Tobin, Vice Chair
Rhys Moore
Sean O’Kane
Kathleen Daughters (Alternate to Harriet Hanlon)
Mark Blandford (Alternate)

AGENDA

- 1) 43 West Lane – Addition of a shed to the property**
- 2) Discussion of Possible Changes to the State’s Zoning Statutes**
- 3) Signage for the Ridgefield Historic Districts**
- 4) Main Street Trees**
- 5) Approval of Minutes**

MEETING

The meeting was called to order by Mr. D. O’Brien at 7:31 p.m.

- 1) 43 West Lane – Addition of a shed to the property**

D. O’Brien advised the property owners weren’t ready to present. They may present next month.

- 2) Discussion of Possible Changes to the State’s Zoning Statutes**

D. O’Brien advised B. Tobin would be updating the group on Zoning legislation being presented by the organization “Desegregate CT”.

B. Tobin is Board Chair of Fairfield County’s Community Foundation for which accessible housing is an important initiative. As such, he has been following the proposed Zoning changes. The Foundation is supportive of various groups focused on more accessible and more affordable housing. The Desegregate CT group is led by Sara Bronin, who is a land use attorney, preservationist and a professor at UConn. Desegregate

CT's goals are to promote equity (in access to housing), economic savings (in the cost of housing), and environmental protection (by increasing density and reducing sprawl)

They would like to make certain changes to the state's zoning laws. The first change is to allow for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) for up to 30% of existing housing stock. The second change is to increase allowable density around main streets and transit centers so that within ¼ mile of train stations and town centers you have 50% zoned multi-family or mixed use. That's an idea that Ridgefield has promoted, especially around the Branchville area.

The third change is to reduce minimum parking space requirements under existing zoning regulations.

Lastly, they have also proposed a set of model building and street codes which would be designed to increase efficiency in the approval process and construction. B. Tobin wanted to stress that Desegregate CT is very much of the view that whatever happens ought to happen in the way that is consistent with the architectural character of an area.

We understand from R. Marconi that WestCOG has looked at Desegregate CT's proposed legislation and has 13 specific objections. B. Tobin has asked for those objections but hasn't received them yet.

B. Tobin said he would circulate a link to Desegregate CT's website. D. O'Brien said he didn't see anything in the proposals that changed the purview of the HDC.

3) Signage for the Ridgefield Historic Districts

D. O'Brien said B. Tobin had proposed signage for the Ridgefield Historic Districts a while ago. Initially we were thinking of signage just within the Ridgefield regulatory districts. However, with the various other historic districts in Town, D. O'Brien said that perhaps we should have a more inclusive signage covering all Ridgefield's historic districts. This would be a great way to promote the historic districts in general by putting signage at the entry ways for all those districts. We plan to proceed with a sub-committee. D. O'Brien has asked B. Tobin and K. Daughters to join him in a subcommittee. Anyone else who would like to participate is welcomed. Some things to consider are the location of signs, the sign design, how it's going to hang and its cost. D. O'Brien has mentioned this project to the First Selectman on a few occasions. We will have to go before the BOS for approval and funding. B. Tobin has researched a variety of signs. D. O'Brien will circulate.

B. Tobin said the timing is appropriate. Ridgefield is in the process of applying as a designation as a cultural district under the recent legislation John Frey promoted. B. Tobin is on the sub-committee moving it forward. Ridgefield is the first application to the State. It's all part of the broader theme that's being promoted by the Community and Economic Development commission that Ridgefield wants to be seen as the regional hub for the arts, entertainment and education. The signage around the historic district would fit into that nicely. S. O'Kane said DOT will have to be contacted for signage on State roads. D. O'Brien said this should not be an issue since the Town would likely carry the cost, not the State. Only State approval would be required via a permit, which is a routine matter. S. O'Kane said the signs need to be readable at 25-30mph as well as by walkers by the side walk.

4) Main Street Trees

D. O'Brien said that recently there has been the loss of trees on Main Street and elsewhere in Town due to disease, storm damage and tree age. Ridgefield is one of 18 towns that is designated as a Tree City in CT. There should be a long-range plan to replant trees, not only on Main Street but throughout Town on what is town/state controlled property that being the area between the sidewalk and the curb. Street scape is an important asset and element of Ridgefield. D. O'Brien spoke about this matter with the Tree Warden, the Tree Committee, and the Conservation Committee. He believes that when Town budgets are done, the line item for tree care should be increased to adequately provide for tree replacement. A Town plan is needed.

S. O'Kane said when a significant tree is taken down, there should there be a plan, if on Town property, to remove the root system completely and replace with the same caliber. R. Moore said this is an urgent issue. Two or three years from now, with no replacements, half of Main Street will be empty of trees. What would that vista look like? That is a huge part of the appeal of Ridgefield when you drive into Town. You see the sugar maples lined in front of these beautiful homes. There should be some commitment from the Town. S. O'Kane said the Tree Committee should put together a survey focusing on Main Street with a map identifying the trees, the caliber, the tree types and a short description of the tree's condition. A survey would identify the timeline for those trees continued existence and the 5-10 year plan.

5) Approval of the December 12, 2020 HDC Site Visit minutes, December 17, 2020 HDC meeting minutes and January 17, 2021 HDC Site Visit and Special Meeting Minutes

S. O'Kane moved and K. Daughters seconded a motion to approve the December 12, 2020 HDC meeting minutes, with Commission members who did not attend such meeting abstaining. Motion passed 5-0.

M. Blandford moved and B. Tobin seconded a motion to approve the December 17, 2020 HDC meeting minutes, with Commission members who did not attend such meeting abstaining. Motion passed 5-0.

B. Tobin moved and K. Daughters seconded a motion to approve the January 17, 2021 HDC meeting minutes, with Commission members who did not attend such meeting abstaining. Motion passed 5-0.

R. Moore moved and S. O'Kane seconded a motion to adjourn the Historic District Commission meeting at 8:41 p.m. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Fields
Recording Secretary