

CHAPTER 12: COMMUNITY SERVICES & FACILITIES



*Provide for adequate
community services and
facilities to meet the needs of
current and future residents*

OVERVIEW

Community services (such as education, public works, public safety, and recreation) contribute significantly to Ridgefield's character and quality of life. A POCD reviews the physical aspects of services and facilities to ensure they are appropriately located and sized to meet community needs during the planning period and beyond.

Three issues that may affect many community services and facilities emerged since the 1999 Plan:

- Population projections suggest fluctuating demographics – understanding and being prepared for possible demographic changes will be important.
- There is a need to make town facilities more accessible to handicapped residents.
- Residents would like the Town to become more “green”.

These and other issues are addressed in this Chapter. Ridgefield's community facilities are identified on the Community Facilities Plan on p. 12-3.

Key to Map

1. Ridgefield High School / Fields
2. East Ridge Middle School / Fields
3. Scotts Ridge Middle School / Fields
4. Barlow Mountain Elementary School / Fields
5. Branchville Elementary School / Fields
6. Farmingville Elementary School / Fields
7. Ridgebury Elementary School / Fields
8. Scotland Elementary School / Fields
9. Veterans Park Elementary School / Fields
10. Town Hall
11. Library
12. Recreation Center / Senior Center
13. Police Station
14. Venus Municipal Center
15. Ridgefield Playhouse
16. Ballard Park
17. Martin Park
18. Skate Park
19. Ciuccoli Field
20. Branchville Civic Field
21. Lake Windwing
22. Aldrich Park and Field
23. Richardson Park
24. Sachem Field & Park
25. Scalzo and Diniz Fields
26. East Ridge II (Rink) Field
27. Strurges Park
28. Yanity Gym
29. Fire Headquarters
30. Fire Substation
31. Highway Department
32. Wastewater Treatment Plant
33. Transfer Station
34. Ridgefield Golf Course
35. Levy Park
36. Shadow Lake Park
37. Community Center
38. Ridgefield Theatre Barn
39. Teen Center

GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Town Hall and Venus Municipal Center

The Town Hall and Venus Municipal Center are located in Ridgefield Center. Over the long term, it would be desirable to have all general government offices in one building in Ridgefield Center. In the immediate future, however, it is expected that the current arrangement of having departments in two locations will continue.

As the State consolidates probate courts, additional space will become available at Town Hall. This would present an opportunity to reconfigure space to better meet the needs of various departments.

Since the 1999 Plan, the excess space at the Venus Municipal Center has been rented and is not currently available for use by Town departments. Space needs at the Venus Municipal Center may require future use of space that is currently leased to others.

Some areas in the Town Hall and Venus Municipal Center are not accessible to handicapped persons. The Town should explore options to improve accessibility in both buildings in the short term.



Photo 24: Town Hall.

Southeast, NY

Community Facilities Plan

Ridgefield, CT

Danbury

North Salem, NY

Lewisboro, NY

Redding

Weston

Wilton

Legend

- Open Space
- Community Facility
- Institutional

See
Inset



4,000

Feet

PUBLIC SAFETY

As discussed below, the Police and Fire Departments have outlined needs for larger facilities. The idea of building one public safety complex in a central location, possibly near the Department of Public Services, has been raised. This idea should be explored to determine if it is the best approach to meet the needs of both departments and if co-location would result in cost savings over time.

A co-location scenario would open up two important parcels in Ridgefield Center for reuse – the existing Fire and Police Headquarters. Any examination into the feasibility and cost of creating a public safety complex should also determine the best use for these two properties.

Police

In 1976, the Ridgefield Police Department moved from Town Hall into the former State Police Headquarters at the corner of Governor Street and East Ridge. The building consists of 17,650 square feet of usable space. In 2007, the Department received approval from the Planning and Zoning Commission to add 7,200 square feet to address space shortages, accommodate future staff additions, and improve code compliance. However, voters did not approve funding for the project.

The Police Department also runs the Town's animal shelter, which is located on South Street.

Fire and Ambulance

The Ridgefield Fire Department provides emergency services to residents, businesses and visitors to the community. The Department responds to approximately 3,400 service calls each year. The Department operates from two stations geographically dispersed north and south: Station 1, Fire Headquarters, at 6 Catoonah Street, and Station 2, Ridgebury Station, at 169 Old Stagecoach Road.

The Department is comprised of both career and volunteer members. Career personnel staff two engines and one ambulance, 24-hours per day, 365 days per year and they serve dual roles as both firefighters and EMS providers. The EMS system is a paramedic level transport system providing emergency transportation to area hospitals. Volunteer personnel serve as firefighters, support personnel, and Fire Police. Currently the volunteer roster includes approximately 65 members.

The Department identified the following issues related to growth and development:

- Congestion at Station 1 (Fire Headquarters) due to the small size of the site and the amount of equipment located there. The narrow streets and level of traffic near this station are also of concern.
- Need for dormitory space at Station 2 (Ridgebury Station).
- Need for continued improvements to the hydrant and non-hydrant water supply areas including the addition of hydrants where possible, the addition of cisterns and dry hydrants where possible, and the continued monitoring of large single family home construction in non-hydrant areas.

The Department also identified issues related to the communications system, apparatus replacement, potential demands due to an aging population, and other issues.



Photo 25: Ridgefield Fire Headquarters (Herbert Deutsch Photography).

PUBLIC WORKS

The Public Services Department's facilities are located on South Street. Since the 1999 Plan, the Department completed the salt barn and more bays have become available for their use. The Department feels that there is adequate land available to meet current and future needs. The current site serves them well in terms of the location and compatibility with uses in the surrounding area.

According to the Department, additional space needs over the short term include larger office space and the provision of sleeping quarters at its office facility.

Waste Disposal

Residents either contract with a private hauler for solid waste and recyclables collection or they bring these items and bulky wastes to the transfer station and recycling center. The waste is then transported out of town. The Town also recycles organic materials into topsoil.

Ridgefield has been collecting electronic waste for three years – well ahead of the State's recent requirement that all communities provide electronic waste disposal. The Town has seen great demand for this program and it has become one of the largest in the State, according to the Public Services Department. Electronic waste is stored at the transfer station until it is hauled out of town.

These programs should continue and expand as needed. Additional space needs for waste storage have not been identified.

Road Maintenance

The Department maintains and plows snow on all Town roads (190 miles of roads). The Department had been maintaining approximately 10 miles per year, meaning all roads receive some level of maintenance every 20 years. In recent years, budgetary constraints have reduced this amount to between five to six miles per year. Many communities have adopted a pavement management system to more efficiently program maintenance funds. Such systems include ongoing data collection, monitoring and analysis of road conditions. Computer programs test scenarios to determine how to improve roads and increase useful life in the most cost-effective manner. Ridgefield should consider establishing a pavement management system.

Over the long term, the Public Services Department sees a need for a satellite facility in Ridgebury to improve efficiency, especially for winter road maintenance. The Town did store road sand at a facility in Danbury, but Ridgefield now uses road salt and the Danbury facility cannot accommodate salt. The Department recognizes that finding land for an industrial-type use will be challenging, but options should be explored.

RECREATION FACILITIES

The wide array of programs and activities provided by the Ridgefield Parks and Recreation Department contributes to the Town's high quality of life. A new Recreation Center, built on Danbury Road in 2002, provides recreation opportunities to its 6,500 members and to others who participate in programs. The site, which is shared with the Senior Center, also includes a playground and trails. The primary issues at this facility are to improve parking and to expand aquatic facilities (pool and spray ground).

Other Park and Recreation facilities in Ridgefield include:

- Yanity Gym
- 2 indoor pools
- Martin Park (beach)
- Numerous parks
- Athletic fields
- Outdoor tennis courts
- Outdoor basketball courts
- Playgrounds
- Trails
- Camping areas
- Public golf course
- Skateboard park
- Bark Park (dog park)

The Parks and Recreation Department has been working to make its facilities, fields and parks more accessible to handicapped and older residents. It also recently built a new facility for vehicle and equipment maintenance and storage (thereby freeing up space for additional storage for other departments' vehicles and equipment).

The Department has identified a shortage of athletic fields, especially due to the need to "rest" fields as part of a maintenance protocol. There are various options for meeting demands for fields, with building new fields being one option. A range of options should be investigated.

Overall, the Town should continue to maintain high quality facilities. To do so, the Department established goals, including developing and implementing a master maintenance plan for grounds and buildings and exploring "green" options for facilities.

Private and non-profit entities, such as the Boys and Girls Club, also provide recreation facilities and should be encouraged in Ridgefield, especially if they reduce the need for additional municipal facilities.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACILITIES

Library

The Ridgefield Library is located in Ridgefield Center at the corner of Main Street (Route 35) and Prospect Street. The Library is funded by the Town (75%) and private donations and other sources (25%). The original part of the Library was built in 1903 and is roughly 5,000 square feet. The Library was expanded in 1962, 1984, and 2000 to its current size of 25,000 square feet.

The Library attracts many residents with its variety of high quality programs. Its popularity has resulted in space constraints in the building and issues with parking.

In 2000, the Library acquired the adjacent Old Ridgefield Playhouse building with the expectation of an expansion. The Library developed a master plan and is currently evaluating expansion options. Ultimately, it would like to complete its expansion within the next five years.

High quality library services enhance the quality of life in Ridgefield. The Library should remain in Ridgefield Center so that the Center continues to be a mixed use activity center, a destination, and the Town's civic hub.



Photo 26: Library site (2009 Microsoft Corporation).

Other Facilities

Other municipal social and cultural facilities include the Senior Center and the Barn (teen center). Parking at the Senior Center has been an issue (see earlier discussion of Recreation Center). Plans to address parking have been approved and should be implemented.

It is anticipated that the Barn can adequately host the teen center over the planning period, provided upgrades are made as needed. The site lacks outdoor activity space. Options for outdoor use should be explored, including the option of relocating the Barn.

Ridgefield is fortunate to have a number of non-profit community facilities. These include:

- The Lounsbury House (Ridgefield Community Center), located on Main Street. The building, home of former Governor Lounsbury, is historically significant and is in good physical condition. The town-owned facility is operated by a non-profit entity.
- The Ridgefield Playhouse for Movies and the Performing Arts opened in 2000 to provide a theater venue for performances and events. It is located at the Venus Municipal Building (former high school).
- The Ridgefield Music and Arts Center, currently in a temporary space, will provide an art venue for teenagers. Fundraising is underway to move and renovate the old Railroad Station at Ridgefield Supply Company to Governor Street for reuse by RMAC.
- The Halpin Lane Arts and Cultural Area.
- Various museums (Aldrich Museum, Keeler Tavern, etc.) and other cultural facilities contribute to the overall quality of life in Ridgefield.

The Town should also continue to offer and encourage other entities to offer programs and venues for families and children.

HOUSING FACILITIES

The Ridgefield Housing Authority operates three housing developments in Ridgefield:

- Ballard Green on Gilbert Street (elderly),
- Prospect Ridge Congregate (elderly), and
- Prospect Ridge (family and affordable) housing.

According to the Housing Authority, additional housing facilities are needed, as evidenced by waiting lists for all facilities. The Authority recently added new units and modernized existing units.

The Town should continue to add and update units as part of a comprehensive strategy to address housing needs (as discussed in Chapter 10).

EDUCATION FACILITIES

All schools have the capacity to handle current and projected enrollment, according to studies recently conducted for the Board of Education.

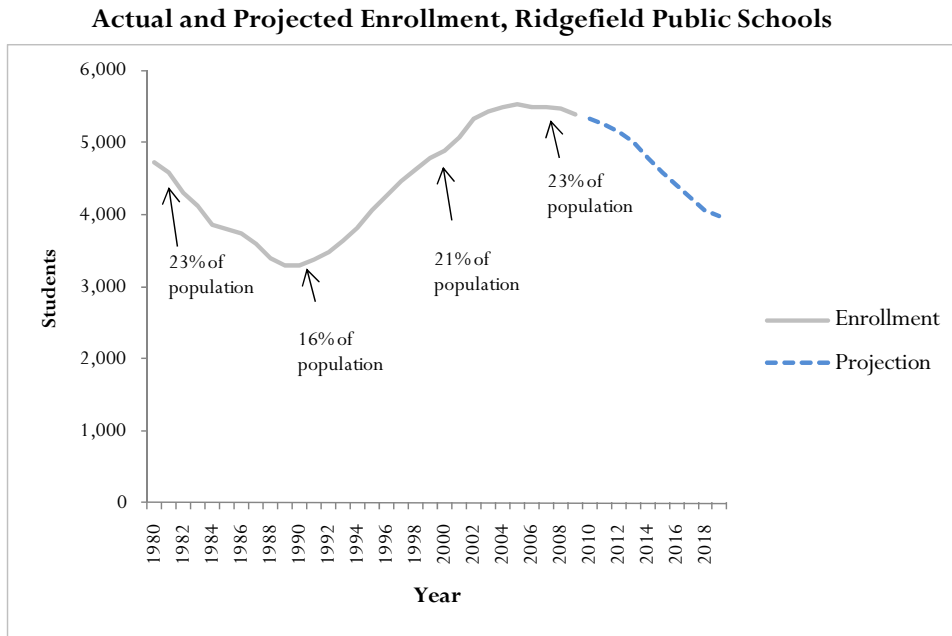
Ridgefield School Facilities			
School	Grades	Enrolled 10/09	Estimated Capacity
Barlow Mnt. Elem.	K-5	364	550
Branchville Elem.	K-5	425	550
Farmingville Elem.	K-5	367	550
Ridgebury Elem.	K-5	422	550
Scotland Elem.	K-5	392	550
Veterans Park Elem.	K-5	325	550
<i>Elementary Subtotal</i>		2,295	3,300
East Ridge Middle	6-8	742	800
Scotts Ridge Middle	6-8	611	650
<i>Middle Subtotal</i>		1,358	1,450
Ridgefield High	7-12	1,750	1,800
<i>Total –All Schools</i>		4,797	6,550

Notes: Does not include Pre-K.



Photo 27: Ridgefield High School (Tony Loomis).

Ridgefield has recently seen changes in enrollment, as the following chart indicates. To respond to fluctuations, the Board of Education is examining options for addressing declining enrollment including options for reconfiguring and redistricting.



Source: *Ridgefield Public Schools 10-Year Enrollment Projections, 2010 – 2019, 2009 Update.*

School enrollment is often cyclical and enrollment could peak again over the long term. It is not the intention of this Plan to make a recommendation on how (or if) redistricting or reconfigurations should occur. However, should any school not be needed over the next ten years, the school should be retained so that it is available for public school use in the future. If enrollments begin to climb over the next 10 to 20 years and space is again needed, it would be very difficult to find new land for new schools. In the meantime, it may be desirable to reuse or lease out space in the schools that is not needed over the coming years.

The Board of Education's administrative offices are located in the Venus Municipal Center. Officials feel that the location works well since it is centrally-located. However, the offices are not handicapped accessible, presenting a challenge for many visitors.

Needs for additional school athletic fields have not been identified.

“Green” Buildings

The U.S. Green Building Council has established a program to certify “green” buildings (LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design):

“LEED certification provides independent, third-party verification that a building project meets the highest green building and performance measures.”

Connecticut recently enacted legislation (Public Act 07-242) requiring that certain buildings must meet LEED standards including:

- Certain state-funded projects
- Buildings that cost \$5 million or more
- Renovations costing \$2 million or more

Communities are beginning to encourage development to meet LEED standards, without requiring developers to undergo the extensive LEED certification process.

ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC FACILITIES

There are many measures to help town facilities become more “green,” particularly in terms of reducing energy consumption, exploring alternative energy options, and reducing waste. These principles should apply to all types of town facilities – Town Government buildings, schools, parks, etc.

As noted earlier, the Town joined ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability). The Town also became a Connecticut “Clean Energy Community” in 2007. This program required a commitment by the Board of Selectmen to obtain 20% of the Town’s energy from renewable energy sources by 2010. The Town has made progress toward this goal, earning free solar panels, which were installed at the Recreation Center. Efforts to increase the use of alternative energy should continue.

To decrease energy consumption, the Town has studied many options including reducing lighting at Town parking facilities, turning off selected street lights, and converting to more energy efficient fixtures. The Town has been replacing equipment with more energy-efficient models.

The Town is measuring its carbon footprint. This number will serve as an educational tool and as a valuable benchmark from which progress can be measured.

Energy efficiency and green building standards should be incorporated as appropriate when new facilities are built or existing facilities are renovated or expanded. The State now requires that certain State-funded projects meet green building standards (see sidebar). The Town should consider requiring green building design for other public facilities that do not trigger the State mandate.

The Town’s recycling program, electronic waste program, and initiatives to recycle organic materials are all “green” initiatives. These programs should continue and be expanded as appropriate. Making recycling easy for residents can help increase recycling rates.

Finally, the Ridgefield Action Committee for the Environment (RACE) was formed in 2007 to encourage sustainability in the Town. Resident initiatives like RACE can build support and provide information on incorporating “green” measures into town practices and buildings.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES STRATEGIES

Address Current Needs

1. Improve handicapped accessibility of Town facilities.
2. Reconfigure space at the Town Hall and Venus Municipal Center to better meet needs.
3. Move forward with the expansion of the Police Station.
4. Provide additional dormitory space at Fire Station 2.
5. Implement the parking plan for the Recreation Center and Senior Center.
6. Make improvements to parks, fields and recreation facilities as needed.
7. Explore options for expanding the library, keeping it in Ridgefield Center.
8. Explore options for providing outdoor activity space at the Barn.
9. Continue to assess the needs for elderly and affordable housing.

Prepare for Future Needs

10. Determine how demographic changes might affect the needs and demands on various Town services and facilities.
11. Explore options for moving all Town departments into one location in the Town Center over the long term.
12. Investigate possible sites for a satellite Public Services facility in Ridgebury.
13. Explore approaches for meeting demand for additional recreation fields by determining types and amounts of fields needed and investigating alternative approaches to building new fields.
14. Continue to encourage non-profit community and cultural facilities.
15. Retain school buildings and sites to meet education needs.

Aim for Efficiency and Economy

16. Investigate the feasibility, benefits and fiscal implications of co-locating the police headquarters, fire headquarters and EMS at a centrally located Public Safety Complex.
17. Consider creating a pavement management system.
18. Continue arrangements between the School Department and the Recreation Department for use of facilities (such as gymnasiums) at existing schools.
19. Continue to maintain the following facilities in good condition:
 - educational facilities and grounds,
 - municipal facilities and grounds, and
 - local roads.

Improve Environmental Sustainability of Town Practices and Facilities

20. Continue to work towards the goal of obtaining at least 20% of energy from renewable energy sources.
21. Continue and expand efforts to reduce the energy consumption of municipal facilities.
22. Incorporate green building measures when facilities are built, renovated or expanded.
23. Continue recycling and electronic waste disposal programs and improve and expand as warranted.