

**Town of Ridgefield
Economic Development Commission
Meeting held April 13, 2009
Town Hall/Large Conference Room**

Approved/Revised Minutes

These minutes are a general summary of the meeting and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.

In attendance: Bob Knight, Paul Levine, Mark Robinson, Bill Markus and Rick O'Brien
Guests – Marion Roth, Executive Director, Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce and Mark Waterhouse, Garnet Consulting Services, Inc.

The meeting was called to order at 7:13 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Paul Levine moved and Mark Robinson seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held 3/09/09. The motion passed 5-0.

Bill Markus moved and Rick O'Brien seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the special meeting held 3/30/09. The motion passed 5-0.

Rick O'Brien moved and Paul Levine seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the special meeting held 4/03/09. The motion passed 3-0-2 with Mark Robinson and Bill Markus abstaining because they did not attend.

Downtown Business Improvement District (BID)

Marion Roth, Executive Director, Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce made the following comments:

- The BID needs help from Planning and Zoning and the Economic Development Commission. Working together will be more effective than alone.
- The Chamber of Commerce is trying to “brand” Ridgefield and use this as a marketing tool. The COC has received a grant and is using it to hold private and public events to get feedback for the Intercept Study. The study will continue until the end of the year and it may not be until then that the “brand” is selected.
- Two websites have been secured for future use – DestinationRidgefield.com and VisitRidgefield.com
- The BID needs stronger unity with the Town, retailers and landlords. The COC is missing data on what makes a successful town. Landlords use a different marketing arm than the tenants. A tenant that can pay the rent may not be what is best for downtown retailers.

Paul Levine made two comments:

1. Bill Markus is the EDC Arts District Chairperson and would be the liaison with the Chamber of Commerce.

2. There is a lack of linkage between the “Town Treasures” (Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield Playhouse, restaurants and inns.)

Bill Markus said he has spoken with Nancy Andrews, Chairperson for the upcoming arts day, and he will attend the committee meetings. Bill would like to find out what the EDC can provide that they do not already have.

Rebecca Mucchetti, Chairman, Ridgefield Planning and Zoning, discussed the Downtown Study. Planning and Zoning is considering a village overlay district which will include extra taxing that would be used to upgrade the infrastructure. If this happens, it would be brought before a public hearing to make this clear.

Mark Waterhouse said there is a substantial public education process for a village district. Connecticut has a clear, defined process to do this.

Paul Levine commented that there should be some incentives evaluated for retail versus office and incentives for owners could also be evaluated.

Rick O’Brien said the differential in rent could go for signage, lighting and parking. Brokers are a great source for educating business owners.

Marion Roth said the Chamber of Commerce has not taken a position on whether a village district would further economic development.

Rebecca Mucchetti said in May 2007, Planning and Zoning revised the Central Business District to first floor retail, except real estate firms. When a tenant moves out, retail is given first priority and anything else requires a special permit and a public hearing. Also, Planning and Zoning received a letter from Willing Biddle who offered to bring CBD landlords together to work more closely together with the Town and possibly make the CBD more attractive.

Rick O’Brien agreed to reach out to Willing Biddle about his offer.

Planimetrics Timeline

1. Workshop at Parks and Recreation. There will be a second meeting in early June – the EDC has been asked to attend.
2. Planimetrics will come to Ridgefield to talk about specific solutions to specific problems.
3. The specifics of the Plan of Conservation and Development will be discussed at a public meeting in June.

Task Force Updates

Sustainable and Renewable Energy Business Park and Showroom – Paul Levine reported for Magdalena Fincham, that he and Magdalena met with Rudy Marconi and Mike

Greenberg. Plans are proceeding but they told Mr. Greenberg they would not divulge any information until he is ready.

Branchville – Mark Robinson said there is nothing new to report. Mark will set up a meeting with Mr. Ancona in May.

Arts and Cultural Development – Bill Markus spoke with Nancy Andrews about the one-day event being planned. Bill would like to turn this into a year round happening. Bill will meet with the other people on the committee and he thinks the EDC could help them organize their ideas.

Bob Knight suggested developing a themes which the Aldrich, Playhouse, restaurants, inns can all use and market together.

Mark Waterhouse said this approach will encourage people to visit many businesses and will bring more disposable income to all the town businesses.

John Katz suggested developing a Ridgefield Institute to bring people to town.

Prospective Development – Rick O'Brien reported the Schlumberger prospect is still out there but there has been little progress. The prospect has an existing relationship with Schlumberger and needs to work out some things from the core business.

New York State Budget – Bob Knight reported NY has passed (or is in the process of passing) a budget which increases corporate taxes. Some major corporations had mentioned relocating if higher taxes were approved. Pepsi Corp. may be looking to relocate in the Danbury area because of this and it could be an opportunity for Ridgefield and Danbury.

Mark Waterhouse cautioned that it is uncertain what the CT State Legislature will do to increase revenues.

Downtown – Bob Knight said he met with Marion Roth about Chamber of Commerce issues. The COC is trying to find a way to connect Downtown Ridgefield with the Copps Hill Sector. There is a challenge communicating and getting everyone to understand the issues.

Balducci's is closing 11 stores – what to do with this space and how to attract new tenants.

Pending items for Garnet Consulting Services

Mark Waterhouse asked for an interview list. Paul Levine said to interview the round table discussion attendees. Rick O'Brien will set up meetings with key Town personnel.

Bob Knight asked EDC members to email him a list of 10 important people who should be interviewed by Mark. Bob will compile the list and send it to Mark.

Mark Waterhouse asked if the EDC is going to do a business survey. Paul Levine said it is not necessary. Mark said he might give one page of the survey to people he interviews.

Mark Waterhouse said he is still comfortable with the initial timelines established.

EDC Website – Bob Knight reported the contract on the EDC website ends this month and it will not be renewed. The EDC can use the Town website.

Rick O'Brien suggested holding onto the website. It is not very expensive to continue to host the website. The maintenance service is the expensive part. The EDC should switch hosting services and find a new web designer.

Mark James, an expert on EDC websites, from New York was suggested. Mark is coming to Ridgefield in the fall and could tell the EDC what they need to put on the website.

Paul Levine suggested using NE Utilities to set up the website.

Mark Robinson agreed to chair the committee to oversee the EDC website development.

Mark Robinson moved and Bill Markus seconded a motion to adjourn the EDC Meeting at 8:31 p.m. The motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Wolnick, Secretary