

**Town of Ridgefield  
Economic Development Commission  
Meeting held June 8, 2009  
Town Hall/Large Conference Room**

Unapproved 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,  
Magdalena Fincham and Rick O'Brien.

Guests - Mark Waterhouse, Garnet Consulting Services, Inc., Rebecca Mucchetti, Chairman Ridgefield Planning & Zoning Commission and John Papa, Webster Bank Building project.

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m.

Bob Knight informed members of the Economic Development Commission that they are up for reappointment as of July 1, 2009. Each member seeking reappointment should email the Board of Selectmen this week via the First Selectman's office stating his or her interest in being reappointed.

Bob Knight noted that the EDC has primarily new members. The EDC is making progress on an ambitious agenda and it would be positive for Ridgefield if all the members continued on the EDC.

Mark Waterhouse gave a progress report:

- The first round of interviews is nearing completion.
- Next week the testimony from interviews will be written.
- Mark will not be available for the June 30<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting. This will be a Five-minute presentation by the EDC for Planimetrics.
- BK will make the presentation at the June 30<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Mark Waterhouse was asked to provide highlights of his interviews. The following are his comments and those of EDC members:

- The objective of 20-25% of the Ridgefield grand list to be commercial property is not realistic
- The current grand list includes 13-15% commercial property.
  - Rick O'Brien stated 13-15% is a good number.
  - Mark Robinson said it would be useful to understand why a higher % is not realistic.
  - Rick O'Brien said we should look at commercial % of surrounding towns.
  - Magdalena Fincham suggested comparing Ridgefield to Redding, Wilton, New Canaan and Newtown. We also need to understand what is included in commercial and residential. How do you classify apartment buildings?

- The gateways to Ridgefield from the north and the south on Route 7 are unattractive.
  - Rick O'Brien said Ridgebury Road should have a sign when entering Ridgefield.
- Downtown and Branchville were important recurring themes. There needs to be a more robust business interest program.
  - Magdalena Fincham thinks it is important to have more interaction with business.
  - Rick O'Brien said vacant space in town should be on the Ridgefield website where interested parties, landlords or potential tenants, could view them. The EDC needs to create the website infrastructure.
  - Mark Waterhouse said that the website "Sight Finder" could list properties.
  - Paul Levine said the best way to keep in touch with local businesses is one on one.
  - Mark Waterhouse said the website "Epulse" allows collection of data on business activities. EDC members receive requests and questions from local businesses. EDC needs protocol on what to act on.
  - Bob Knight thinks protocol is required to avoid unnecessary complaints.
  - Paul Levine doesn't agree because all inquiries deserve a response.
  - Bob Knight said we are volunteers and responding to all inquiries is not realistic.
  - Mark Robinson said requests should be forwarded to the proper party for follow up.
  - Magdalena Fincham thinks the EDC should be selective about what is passed on.
  - Mark Waterhouse said this highlights the need for EDC coordination and communication with other town commissions.
  - Paul Levine said the EDC is the advocate for business in town.
  - Bob Knight has asked Rudy Marconi to attend the June 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting. We should review the EDC role with Rudy at that meeting.
- Another recurring theme was where would more development take place?
  - Paul Levine thinks we need to maximize possibilities.
  - Rick O'Brien said the percentage of business/commercial property must make sense in town.
- There was a mixed response to Ridgefield being pro business or a business inhibitor.
  - Bill Markus said the EDC should promote info on Ridgefield's pro business actions.
  - Magdalena Fincham said the promotion of Ridgefield's pro business activities was discussed at the P&Z workshop.
  - Mark Robinson said we use the term business ambassadors. We should promote testimonials on the EDC website.
  - Mark Waterhouse said Ridgefield should be positioned as a destination.

The EDC should run a downtown-planning summit.

-Rick O'Brien and Bob Knight want to discuss the concept of EDC business ambassador at a future meeting.

-Mark Waterhouse noted the Chamber of Commerce has someone to market Ridgefield.

-Bill Markus said the EDC is the advocate of what is proper for the town. The EDC is not pro landlord or pro tenant. We must be balanced.

-Mark Waterhouse said the term "Arts District" is too limiting a definition. It should be an "Arts, Culture and History Cluster". The use/involvement with arts should be the focus as opposed to the physical area.

Rebecca Mucchetti gave the following background on the above discussion:

- The goal of 22% for commercial (non residential) property value on the Ridgefield Grand List was from a 1999 report. At that time the commercial property in Ridgefield comprised 18% of the Grand List. It has since fallen to 11%.
- There had been some discussion about a business owner questioning the flashing light at the intersection of Rtes. 116 and 35. The Police Commission recommended a round about for that location but the town did not approve it.
- 100% of commercial business applications that have come before the P&Z have been approved.
- Weir Farm is the only park facility that is under the National Commission for the Arts.
- Tenants in town want the knowledge/security of who their neighbors will be.
- Landlords want long-term tenants.
- Downtown's concerns are parking, signage and 1<sup>st</sup> floor use.

### **Task Force Updates**

Magdalena Fincham – River Bend Park – Route 7 – Energy Friendly Business

- No new progress to report.

Rick O'Brien – Schlumberger

- Met with Board of Selectmen and an interested party.
- Meeting scheduled with Rudy Marconi.
- Rudy is supportive of getting interested parties together.

Mark Robinson – Branchville

- Met with Joe Ancona, owner of Ancona's Market.
- Joe Ancona has given thought to area development. He is concerned with sewage. He needs Georgetown development to be open-minded.
- A follow up meeting with Joe Ancona is scheduled for Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup>.

Bill Markus – Arts Walk

- A meeting is scheduled for June 26<sup>th</sup> with John Cusano of Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism. Also attending are Nancy Andrews - Ridgefield Arts Council Chairman, Marion Roth - Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce and Bob Knight.
- Connecticut budget cuts have reduced funding for John Cusano's commission.

Bob Knight – A Ponds Edge meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 9<sup>th</sup> at 8 a.m. in the First Selectmen's office. Attending will be Bob Knight, Bill Markus, Chris Fisher, Rudy Marconi and Al Garzi.

**John Papa from the Webster Bank Building Project made the following remarks:**

- There is a plan to raze the old Webster Bank building and use the space for some yet-to-be determined purpose.
- He is working to maintain the Webster Bank building as a museum depicting Ridgefield's history and the revolutionary war "Battle of Ridgefield". Ridgefield is one of the few places where a revolutionary war battle took place that is not commemorated. John thinks this commemoration would attract visitors to Ridgefield.

**Website**

Mark Robinson reported there are no updates at this time.

**EDC Officer Responsibilities**

Bob Knight – EDC Chairman and Bill Markus – EDC Secretary agreed that Bob would run the meetings and Bill would prepare monthly agendas. Other officer responsibilities would be shared as appropriate and adjusted based on availability.

Rick O'Brien moved and Magdalena Fincham seconded a motion to adjourn the EDC meeting at 8:48 p.m. The motion passed 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Wolnick  
Secretary