



Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission

400 Main Street • Ridgefield, CT 06877 • 203-431-2700

Glori Norwitt - Chair

Rudy Marconi, First Selectperson

Geoffrey Morris – Secretary

ridgefieldct.com

Sean Dowd

Kay Gelfman

Jennifer Gioffre

Brittney Howell

Bob Knight

Mark Riser

Jonathan Winn

Economic & Community Development Commission

unApproved Minutes

May 13, 2024, at 6:30 pm

Town Hall Large Conference Room

The meeting called to order at 6:38 pm

In attendance: Chair Glori Norwitt, Secretary Geoffrey Morris, Commissioners Mark Riser, Jonathan Winn, Jenn Gioffre, Bob Knight, Kay Gelfman, Sean Dowd, and Brittney Howell

Announcements

Next meeting: June 3, 2024

Approval of **April Minutes**. Dowd moves to approve the April 2024 minutes without changes, Gioffre 2nds. All vote in favor.

Public Comment

Resident Kirk Carr suggests we put together an inventory of commercial properties in Ridgefield as stipulated by the town ordinance.

Recap of Recent Events/Info

Commissioners should note there is a Freedom of Information Workshop on Monday, May 20, at 6 pm in the Town Hall Annex, and should rsvp to Wendy Lionetti.

On April 10, the BOS reappointed Sean Dowd and Brittney Howell to the ECDC for a two-year term.

The RHS Business Symposium was held on April 25. The Keynote speaker was IBM CEO Arvind Krishna. Dowd, Riser, and Norwitt presented breakout sessions on Entrepreneurship, Investing, and the Power of Volunteering, respectively.

Princesses in the Park will be held on Sunday, June 9, from 11 am to 2 pm. Learn more at sweetbeanevents.com. The ECDC shared information with the Western CT Tourism District on the event to post.

Dan O'Brien was chosen as the Rotary Club's "Citizen of the Year" for 2024.

Commissioner Morris was appointed by the Board of Selectpersons to co-chair with Ridgefield Arts Council member and Ridgefield Theater Barn head Pamme Jones to lead the Committee: Ridgefield Celebrates America at 250. The committee will organize events that will commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence starting on July 4, 2025, and culminating on July 4, 2026. The two co-chairs will assemble a committee of 11 residents.

Norwitt attended a virtual AdvanceCT Partners meeting on April 10. Matt Pugliese, Deputy Commissioner and Chief Investment Officer of the DECD. Also Michelle McCabe, Executive Director of CT Main Street Center, provided an overview of its economic development work happening on Main Streets throughout CT.



Building Dynamic & Vibrant Communities



\$1B+ investments over 5 yrs
with Community Investment
Fund, Communities Challenge
& Brownfield Grants



+3,300 housing units
funded by DECD
programs



Fixed rate 4.5% interest
loans of \$5,000 to
\$500,000



Michelle McCabe focused on the importance of a Main Street manager in order to have a successful downtown.



2022 Reinvestment Statistics

Dollars Reinvested*:	\$6.25 billion
Buildings Rehabilitated:	10,688
Net Gain in Jobs:	29,174
Net Gain in Businesses:	7,657
Reinvestment Ratio**:	\$24.07:1

The following estimates are based on statistics gathered from January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022 for all designated Main Street communities nationwide. There were 1,200 programs included in this report.

*Total reinvestment in physical improvements from public & private sources

**The Reinvestment Ratio measures the amount of new investment that occurs, on average, for every dollar a participating community spends to support the operation of its Main Street program, based on median annual program costs reported to the National Main Street Center by its coordinating programs. This number is not cumulative and represents investment and organization budgets from January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2022.



Main Street Management Assessment Results to Date

	Not Managed (2)	Planning Dept. (1)	Ec. Dev. (8)	Cultural District (3)	Main Street (7)	BID (5)
Needs Improvement	100%	100%	75%	33%	-	-
Satisfactory	-	-	25%	66%	100%	100%

AGENDA

Ridgefield Farmers Market

Corrin Arasa attended the meeting and reported that she is heading up the second year of the Ridgefield Farmers Market, to take place every other Saturday beginning June 1 on the green at Jesse Lee Church on Main Street. Last year, its first year, the market had 3,800 visitors, 28 vendors, and took in about \$125,000. All invited members from last year are returning this year. Arassa says that she has been successful compared to past unsuccessful attempts because: "I ran it like a business." She hopes to have it be weekly in 2025.

KC&E Adventures

Collin Daulong, who heads up KC&E Adventures, attended, and reported on an app he is working on related to travel and touring. KC&E is a CT-based business that organizes travel tours around the world – most of which are bicycle based. The group is headed by Collin, who proposed an app called Trovare that could be customized for guided tours and information about Ridgefield. For a fee his company would customize the app to include information about organizations, events, and guided tours of the area. He will offer a proposal and commissioners will discuss the idea at the June meeting.

Norwitt motioned and Dowd 2nd to move the discussion of Planning & Zoning activities to the top of the agenda. All in favor.

Planning & Zoning Update (Gelfman)

P&Z Director Alice Dew requested that the ECDC provide an opinion on an application by Luc's Café for their outdoor seating area and structure. Commissioner Gelfman reported that Luc's Café is seeking permission to get full approval for its outdoor dining structure that it erected during COVID. The glass, partially covered structure has been in place since 2020. Morris motioned, Norwitt 2nd, that Gelfman write an opinion to send to P&Z stating ECDC's opinion, which is: ECDC fully supports allowing the outdoor dining structure at 3 Big Shop Lane to stay in place, and for Luc's Café to benefit from the additional seating provided by the structure. ECDC is in favor of outdoor dining, particularly when it is done through the Planning & Zoning permitting process and in keeping with the character of the establishment and the town. Outdoor dining provides an economic boost to individual restaurants and to the commercial district as a whole.

Business Programs (Morris, Riser)

On May 8, the Library hosted "The Rewarding (and Painful) Path to Opening a Business" where Commissioner Morris spoke with Megan Searfoss, owner of Ridgefield Running Company. It was well attended.

On May 28, the Library will host a "Starting a Small Business" presentation by Commissioner Riser. The event will walk attendees through the business startup process in Ridgefield in CT, and may include a member of the Town's Planning & Zoning department.

Business Connections (Gioffre)

Commissioner Gioffre reported that she has spoken further with BluDot about setting up a holiday shopping rewards program and will report again soon.

Cultural District (Morris, Norwitt)

Winn updated the Ridgefield Cultural District logo and created and ordered 200 new window clings to be distributed to local businesses. Gelfman is organizing businesses and organizations in the Cultural District to march together in the Town's Memorial Day parade. Winn designed, ordered and received a horizontal banner to be used in the Parade. Gelfman designed, ordered and received sashes for Cultural District Award winners that will march in the Memorial Day parade.

Motion by Dowd, 2nd by Riser to pay \$200 for the window clings, \$100 for a banner for the cultural district to carry in the Memorial Day Parade, \$50 for sashes for those marching in the parade. All in favor.

Morris updated the commission on the use of previously approved funds for marketing purposes. The Cultural District marketing group will be hiring three social-media influencers to visit town and share their experiences with their audience. The three selected are: (1) @brunchwithbabs | 3.4 million followers because of her large number of followers, her content, and her knowledge of the area (2) @ctattractions | 71.9k followers which has a good number of followers and has good knowledge of the event market (3) @tasteconnecticut | 396k followers which has a good number of followers, is bold, and pushes followers to go to the places posted about.

Norwitt was contacted by Barbara Cirella from Danbury about the Ridgefield Cultural District. The new Danbury Mayor created several volunteer groups, such as Arts & Culture, Transportation, Education, and more. Danbury is interested in possibly having a Cultural District designation.

Norwitt and Morris reported that the Cultural District group had a meeting on April 16. During the meeting, Norwitt was elected as Chair, Morris was elected as Vice Chair, and Dan O'Brien was elected as Treasurer of the Cultural District. Subsequently, Norwitt and Morris attended the May 8 Board of Selectpersons meeting to request that the "Cultural District of Ridgefield" become a member of the "Friends of Ridgefield" in order to fundraise with 501(c)3 status. The BOS approved the request.

Cultural District Award (Morris, Gelfman)

The CD Award for Barbara Manners was presented at the RAC's "Behind the Scenes" Awards evening on Thursday May 9. Morris acted as emcee for the event and offered the background of the Cultural District and the award, and introduced and presented the award.

Tiger Shark Tank

The deadline for applicants to submit their proposals to the ECDC will be Tuesday October 1, 2024. Dowd is working with the Playhouse to establish an October date for the event. Dowd's goal is to expand the event every year to have something new—whether a preshow expo, wider regional invitation to businesses, etc. He is also putting out feelers for 2024 judges.

Marketing (Gioffre, Morris, Howell)

Various social media posts have been put out and Gioffre is getting info about the CD Award event to various media outlets.

Parking (Morris, Norwitt)

US Senator Richard Blumenthal has been attempting to have the USPS allow the Town to use the unused fenced-in parking lot behind the post office (of 30 spaces) as open parking for everyone. He recently raised the issue in a Senate committee hearing with USPS Postmaster DeJoy, and DeJoy promised to follow-up. Subsequently the Senator's office reached out to Morris and Norwitt to summarize the issue in Ridgefield. On April 19 the Senator sent a letter to Postmaster DeJoy with a summary of several USPS problems throughout CT including Ridgefield. Postmaster DeJoy responded and said that parking will not be available.

Database and upcoming Projects

Goal is to have a proposal at the June ECDC meeting to hire a database manager to create an inventory of commercial spaces and more.

First Selectperson Rudy Marconi has a number of RHS interns for the next month, and offered that some interns could do projects for the ECDC. Commissioners discussed ideas for projects, and decided on the following: (1) create a parking map to count parking spots in the greater downtown area (2) update the downtown map (3) create a new mailing list, and send out Welcome postcards to new residents (4) distribute Cultural District window clings with an accompanying letter from the ECDC to businesses and organizations in the Cultural District (5) see if any intern would be interested in walking in the Memorial Day parade with the Cultural District, and carrying the banner (7) create a marketing calendar for events. Commissioner Dowd offered to oversee the RHS interns.

Dowd motions to end the meeting, Gioffre 2nd. All in favor. Meeting ends at 9:03 pm.