



**Town of Ridgefield
Public Hearing Minutes
UNAPPROVED
October 8, 2025 at 7:30pm**

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

BOS Present: Sean Connelly, Maureen Kozlark, Barbara Manners, Rudy Marconi, Geoffrey Morris

BOS Absent: None

Others Present: Todd Costa, Kaestle Boos Associates, Architects for the Public Safety Building; Assistant Chief Tony Ciruli; Fire Chief Rommie Duckworth; Major Dick Fowler, Police Dept; Jacob Muller, Facilities and Public Works Director

Location: East Ridge Middle School Auditorium, 10 East Ridge Road, Ridgefield, CT 06877

Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:30pm and shared that the BOS started meetings in August 2018 to discuss this project. He shared that the purpose of this public hearing is to answer questions of clarification to correct misinformation.

Todd Costa shared an overview of the project. The inadequate space of the existing structures does not accommodate the number of service members and equipment.

The police and fire departments have grown exponentially since the initial use of the current structures.

There is no way to give privacy to someone coming in to discuss a delicate matter.

The decontamination space doesn't allow for efficiency and directly affects the turnaround time to go back into the community to address the next emergency.

The team presented the building design and use of spaces as well as a cost breakdown.

They also presented a straight amortization schedule showing that an annual property tax bill of \$10,000 would carry approximately a \$500 contribution toward this project, not including bond costs.

They addressed some claims that comparable projects in scope were much less in cost. But a comparison of apples to apples, shows that the project actually falls in line with the \$1000 per square foot estimate of similar projects in nearby towns.

Public Comment

Andrew Neblett, 31 Ashbee Lane, is in favor of the project and as IT Director for the town, has gone to the existing structures and has seen the inadequate space for the staff.

Eric Scheck, 61 Rising Ridge Road, Twin Ridge, stated that he struggles with the size and cost of the project because he anticipates that after other budget increases are tallied, his taxes will be going up by \$750-1000 per year. He says it will become cost prohibitive for retirees to remain in Ridgefield. He asked for creative ways to offset on-going costs. The team responded that strict study has concluded that the building size is the most efficient to address actual needs. Mr. Marconi added that current estimates showing the cost to run a building to code is roughly equivalent to the cost of heat pumps to keep the building green and off the grid. They added that the old buildings are currently running very inefficiently and new energy-efficient materials and construction will lower those run costs.

Gentleman expressed appreciation for the work of the police and fire departments. He asked why the measure didn't pass and he asked why there wasn't use of a group of the citizenry as with a previous project. Mr. Marconi explained that this project was a different community need. If the vote goes down, perhaps it can be passed to a citizenry group to come up with an alternative that will be acceptable to the public but also meet the needs of the police and fire departments. Sean Connelly added that a citizenry group may not have the expertise to address the design and architectural needs of a public safety building.

Art Meyer, 114 Regan Road, asked if the architects considered road width on Quarry Road especially during peak traffic hours. The team responded that yes, they are well aware of road width due to regular trainings and daily operations. Mr. Meyer also asked if the lowest bid came with any guarantees to be responsive to finish the job on budget. The team responded that they have reasonable expectations and contingencies built into the budget.

Mr. Marconi added that \$8-9 million is for state mandated prevailing wage labor costs. People have commented that the labor should be much less but that figure is a state mandated estimate that in the private sector, could be much lower.

WOMAN, 34 Market Street, asked what stress testing was done on the assumptions, especially the assumption that the size of the structure needed is 75,000 square feet. The team responded that the in-house stress testing did consider, compare, and prioritize needs versus wants.

Gentleman asked for a run cost for the new building and if the new building will be fully bonded. Mr. Marconi explained that the board of selectpersons considered the sale of each building as well as grant funding. Mr. Muller explained that they will pursue different grants but there is no budget plan for grants.

Peter Vanderbinden, 24 Arrowhead Place, commented that he doesn't believe that Quarry Road can accommodate the fire, police, and traffic needs. He recommended a network analysis of the roads. The team replied that while they didn't perform a traffic study, they did complete a response study which confirmed project improvements to travel times.

John Burns, Nutmeg Ridge, asked if the \$77 million includes equipment upgrades such as will be needed to the decontamination area, living quarters, simulation, etc. The team responded that all those costs are built into the project costs. He also asked about any disadvantages to this area. The team responded that the site work will be a disadvantage but of all the sites considered, this was the least disadvantageous.

Guy Hutchinson, 111 Eye Hill Rd, said the traffic study is needed because he feels the streets cannot accommodate the equipment. He also feels the site work is too expensive because the site is not right for the project.

Willie Garafalo, 11 Grandview Drive is concerned with the cost of inflation numbers on pages 33-34. He asked if the project is delayed a few years to complete the studies requested by the public, what does inflation alone do to the cost? The team responded that if you take time to reduce the project costs, each year inflation alone will add \$3-4 million to the project. Therefore, you'll end up with less building for the same or higher costs.

Gentleman, 382 North Street, explained that he attended several of the information meetings and appreciates the efforts of the team as well as the public's concerns for transparency. He asked the BOS to elaborate on what happens next if the vote passes. Mr. Marconi explained that \$3-4 million for documentation and then the project can go out to bid. The gentleman suggested that once the project passes, there could be a community group involved to participate in any deliberations.

Sue Lioni, former selectperson, shared that she is concerned about the project. The town's five-year plan doesn't include this project. It should be discussed during the regular budget process. Some questions remain such as what to do with existing buildings, traffic study, long-term maintenance, and bonding costs. She stated that she would rather have separate buildings for the two services. Mr. Marconi commented that the board of finance wanted it to be separate from the budget.

Gus Olsen, 3 Sugar Maple Lane, expressed support for the project with one concern, that the architectural design is very pedestrian and boring. Mr. Marconi commented that the original design was modern but no one liked it.

Sharon N, 65 Ridge Drive, shared that she is a community member who has been working on this project along with many other community members who have worked on 21 iterations of this project. They have heard all these concerns before and addressed them. The community feedback has been received from the beginning. Why go back to the beginning when costs only go up?

Gentleman asked how this building will affect the station 2 fire department building? The team responded that station 2 will remain in service.

John Wagner, Marshall Road, asked how many community members present have actually visited the existing buildings. The current structures were built over 125 years ago as residences. They are not slightly suitable for the town's current needs.

David Levit, 23 Woodchuck Ln, asked if there are any violations with the existing structures? Mr. Marconi stated that there are OSHA violations but no state mandates. There are also ADA compliance issues as well as wellness and health conditions that affect employee health.

Marty Hanshe, 77 Sunset Lane, expressed concerns about the location and the roads as well as the cost impact. He feels that a traffic study is needed.

John Burns asked if there will be any fire apparatus purchased. Mr. Marconi explained that there is no expansion of the fleet anticipated. Eventually a custom ladder truck will be needed to replace the existing one but that won't be in relation to this project and it will go through the normal budget process.

Debra Francheschini, 72 Spireview Rd, asked if there was a town vote on the initial use of this property for this purpose? Mr. Marconi said this vote addresses that She also asked if all the revisions to the

design were for this same site. Yes, they were. She then asked why this site wasn't considered for the preschool and the alternative high school and if the town applied for grant funding for the alternative high school. The team responded that the alternative quarry site was not considered and no, grant funding for the school was not sought.

Andy Sterly, 62 Ridgecrest Drive, asked that people understand that costs presented were inflated for future 2026 projected costs.

Kenneth Bedlemen, 372 Parents Corn Road, suggested considering a rule for public hearings that each person be permitted to ask one question or make one comment at a time and go to the end of the line for each additional question or comment.

Kirk Carr, 62 Prospect Ridge, stated that if another vote is again defeated, will there be a study to explore why. Mr. Marconi confirmed that yes, they will seek that feedback.

Chris Wallace, asked Mr. Costa about alterations to existing facilities to address the needs. Mr. Costa explained that any modifications would require bringing the structure to current code and because it's a public safety building, it has to be brought to higher safety thresholds than other structures. There would also be a ripple effect of bringing one feature up to code that would lead to other items requiring upgrades. The cost impacts would be significant and inefficient.

Gentleman asked if there is another location that would be more appropriate. Mr. Marconi said the center of town could be ideal but 80% of calls are north of Main Street, so Cobbs Hill area or the rec center area could work but all alternatives require purchase of private property and building demolition.

Charles Cox, 52 Sherwood Rd, asked for project completion from start to finish and cost escalations over time. The team responded that it will be about 3 years and inflation costs have been budgeted into the projections.

David Levitt asked if the town votes no, what are the next steps and what is the plan for the police and fire departments to make conditions tolerable for the staff. There will be a citizens committee and remodeling inside the structures. There is no plan B with a different location.

Debra Francheschini asked if there will be another public hearing. Mr. Marconi stated that there are two more information meetings.

Gentleman commented that any repairs to the existing buildings will not be wasted because they will add value to the property if sold or make them safe for future town uses.

Mr. Marconi closed the public hearing at 10:23 pm.

Sean Connelly motioned to adjourn the public hearing at 8:34 PM. Maureen Kozlark seconded. Motion carried 5-0.