



Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectpersons Meeting Minutes
UNAPPROVED

July 16, 2025 at 6:30pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Sean Connelly, Barbara Manners, Rudy Marconi, Geoffrey Morris

Present via Zoom: Maureen Kozlark

Absent: None

Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

Barbara Manners motioned to add item 7, Halpin Lane with two discussion points; the assignment of rental management of the 25 rental units to Acadia and the termination of the contract with Ability Beyond in order to transfer the right to build affordable housing to a new stakeholder such as Habitat for Humanity, on the lot at the corner of Halpin Lane at Prospect Ridge. Also, the second item 6 on the agenda will be moved to number 8. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

1. Public Comment

Beverly Kalil, Pickle Ball instructor, 15 Sawmill Road Unit A– The pickle ball community is ready, willing, and able, to help the town with any tasks.

2. Appointment – Corrin Arasa - Economic and Community Development Commission

Glori Norwitt, Chair of ECDC, introduced Corrin Arasa as the second candidate

considered during the candidate search earlier this year. Both candidates were remarkable, and Ms. Arasa was willing to wait for another vacancy. In the meantime, she has attended the meetings and is well informed of the activities of the ECDC. The commission unanimously supports her appointment.

- a. Ms. Arasa shared her background in entrepreneurship. She has started several companies and her current one is in New York serving 1200 events per year with marketing. She moved to Ridgefield four years ago and after one year, started the Ridgefield Farmers Market. She enjoys bringing commerce and community together and is excited to bring her skillset to the ECDC.
- b. Sean Connelly asked how she plans to translate her experience into service on the ECDC. Ms. Arasa stated that after observing several meetings, she feels a multiyear marketing and communications plan would be very advantageous. There are two distinct communities in Ridgefield, the businesses and the consumers. She proposes a plan that focuses on both.

- c. Barbara Manners asked if her current schedule allows for her to take on more work. Ms. Arasa stated that she can balance her schedule to support all her commitments and interests. She is aware that the ECDC manages several special projects and in fact, the Farmers Market also takes some of her time, but she is confident that she is not overcommitting.
- d. Geoffrey Morris inquired about her idea for a “Made in Ridgefield” initiative. She responded that through the Farmers Market she has learned of many local artisans creating unique and exceptional products. She would like to support those local businesses and inform the community of those products. Leveraging the local press would support both sides of the economic equation, business and consumer.
- e. Barbara Manners asked what products are made locally which led to discussion that Ms. Arasa has a network that the ECDC doesn’t have, and she is excited to create a pipeline for local and other area businesses to connect with the local business community and local consumers.

Barbara Manners motioned to appoint Corrin Arasa to the Economic and Community Development Commission. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

3. Ridgefield Historical Society – Request for Veterans Park Auditorium

Steven Bartkus, Executive Director) and Board member Betsy Reid were in attendance.

- a. Mr. Marconi stated that Veterans Park is scheduled for upgrades by the Board of Education. It has historical significance having been designed by architect, Willis N. Mills, and opened in 1955. He spoke with Board of Education Chair DaSilva who expressed interest and willingness to work with the Historical Society.
- b. Mr. Bartkus Read allowed the letter submitted to the Board from the Historical Preservation Committee of the Historical Society describing the architectural significance of the building as Ridgefield’s first modernist construction. The letter also describes the notability of the architect, Willis N. Mills.
- c. Mr. Marconi asked for the updates intended by the BOE. They include replacing seats, painting mahogany paneling, and carpeting. The presenters explained that the seats are part of the historical significance and can be improved with cushions. The mahogany panels are extraordinary and should not be altered. The dark environment can be improved with better lighting.
- d. Mr. Marconi asked the status of on-going communications with the BOE. The presenters explained that they’ve been reaching out to the chair for one year and only just a few months ago finally had a meeting. The BOE has very recently scheduled a site visit with the same contractor that worked on restoring the architect’s house in New Canaan. The Historical Society is optimistic that this contractor knows the work of this architect and will assess and advocate for preservation. There has been no discussion of cost to hire this contractor, nor which fund would pay for the expense.
- e. The board discussed differing opinions regarding the state of the seating. Ms. Manners expressed that she believes historical preservation relates more so to the exterior of structures than the decor inside.

- f. Mr. Connelly asked what the most desirable outcome would be. The presenters responded that the town would hire a historical preservation consultant to advise on best practices for maintaining as much of the historical fabric as is feasible and the BOE would accept the recommendations. Their hope is that this unaltered historic structure be preserved with all its characteristics from the original vision from 1955.
- g. Mr. Connelly acknowledged that while preservation is ideal, it must be balanced against the cost and needs for the current use as a school.
- h. Mr. Marconi requested that the Historical Society proceed with their walk-through with the consultant, invite the BOE and BOS, work with the BOE regarding any proposal or recommendations, and report back to the BOS.
- i. The presenters also reported that the site visit for the battlefield is the following morning. The Historical Society has found several historical artifacts and located the exact point of second engagement. They are grateful for the 25-year lease on the Branchville Schoolhouse and have begun restoration by digging test holes in search of the septic and water systems. Actual construction will begin in coming months. The tree that grew next to the schoolhouse is not scheduled for removal.

No action was taken.

4. Ridgefield Forms of Government Committee

Four members of the Ridgefield Forms of Government Committee were in attendance and presented a summary of their Final Report available online for the past several months. They were tasked with researching the different forms of government allowed in Connecticut. They found that the Town Meeting remains the best option for Ridgefield. They made several recommendations regarding scheduling regular town meetings, voting methods, and the transfer of limited decision-making authority to the BOS for routine or low impact matters. The committee also found that hiring a town manager to serve as Chief Operating Officer would best serve the town because it allows a more balanced workload for the Chief Executive Officer and brings expertise and continuity to operations.

- a. Ms. Manners commented that workload balance is critical to allow the CEO to spend more time in Hartford lobbying on behalf of the town.
- b. Mr. Marconi asked if a charter revision would be required because although the town has tried to limit revisions to no more than every five years, this schedule is not a requirement. He asked how the committee would address the language for the job description. The committee responded that a charter revision is not required for all the recommendations. In fact, they suggest the town administrator roll be defined by Human Resources and the BOS, division of responsibilities be outlined by the CEO, and flexibility for future iterations be highlighted. There should be regular evaluations in the first several months. Then, the Charter can be revised with language that has already been forged by experience.
- c. Mr. Connelly stated that although the discussion is centering around Wilton, the committee's research was broad and deep into many towns. The report thoroughly describes the exhaustive research and is very thorough and well-done.
- d. Mr. Morris commented that the report seemed to lean in favor of town councils but then recommends the current town meeting form of government. The committee explained that while the arguments in favor of a town council are very strong,

Ridgefield's current size and needs are best addressed by the town meeting. However, as Ridgefield grows, the time may come to move to a town council form of government.

- e. Mr. Connelly asked what the criteria would be to justify the change to a town council form of government. The committee didn't consider the criteria but there would need to be a dysfunction in the town meeting form to justify the change.
- f. The clarification was made by Mr. Connelly and the committee that the BOS is not a governing body except in certain cases.
- g. Mr. Marconi asked if changing voting methods would be a violation of Robert's Rules of Order since the meeting moderator has the authority to determine the voting method. The committee explained that Robert's Rules provides guidelines not requirements. If the meeting moderator policies are written to require a new voting method, then they would still be adhering to Robert's Rules.
- h. Mr. Connelly asked for the evidence to support the premise that a regularly scheduled monthly town meeting would encourage more participation. Mr. Marconi added that regular quarterly town meetings were implemented in the past and participation did not improve. The committee explained that the feedback from the community was that they didn't attend the town meetings because they didn't know what was going on in the town. The committee unanimously felt that a scheduled monthly town meeting would allow the community to set aside that evening for town business should it be of their interest. They added that a study out of a Vermont university found that that larger the community, the less the participation in town meetings.
- i. Mr. Marconi asked if any legislation is needed to implement electronic voting. The committee clarified that they are not proposing remote electronic voting but rather in-person electronic voting via a handheld voting device.
- j. Mr. Connelly expressed concern for challenges about the decision-making authority transfer to the BOS. The committee reassured him that it was well debated, and some potential decisions were retained at the town meeting level to avoid any negative impressions. But at the four town hearings attended by 35-40 townspeople, there was no hint of suspicion that the BOS would abuse this authority.
- k. There was also positive feedback about hiring a town administrator.
- l. Mr. Marconi complimented the committee for the breadth and depth of their research. He stated that while the final report concludes the work of the committee, he anticipates needing their support in the future for execution. He suggested that the BOS will be studying the report and implementing the easier changes as soon as possible.

No action was taken.

Maureen Kozlark left the meeting at 7:41PM.

5. Ridgefield Parks and Recreation – Pickle ball courts location study

Dennis DiPinto, Director of Parks and Recreation, Michael West, Assistant Director of Parks, and Phil Kearns, Chair of the Parks and Recreation Commission, were in attendance to present an update on the installation of the Sport Courts at 195 Danbury Road. Over the past year, they have met with various departments and commissions, performed soil studies, and worked to stay within the approved budget. Inland Wetlands Board and Planning and Zoning Department looked at four possible locations and disqualified two of them. The other two locations were further studied until narrowed down to one location based on existing conditions, ecological impacts, invasive species remediation, and connectivity and character of the property. Steve

Sullivan of CCA is working on the final design. Wetland and soil scientists have been engaged to site-specific assessments. Reports are expected by mid-September with updated costs. Then the Invasive Species Mitigation Plan will be incorporated into the final design package. Next, the Inland Wetlands Board application will be submitted for a summary ruling. Then, start the Connecticut DOT District 4 Encroachment Permit process, complete all the technical studies, and engage the public. Finally, an application for special permit will be submitted to the Planning and Zoning Commission. The presenters were appreciative of the collaboration with all the commissions and departments.

- a. Mr. Connelly asked regarding noise impact and parking spaces. There will be a noise study and traffic study to confirm that the proposed location sufficiently mitigates noise to the residential areas and adequately accommodates the number of guests at the courts.
- b. Mr. Marconi asked about waterway maintenance and invasive species remediation. The presenters reported that phragmite would be removed regularly until it no longer grows but the waterway would not be altered. Canopy planting will be done to cool the water so that the invasive species doesn't have an environment to thrive. The construction would not be impacted by the remediation which is expected to last around three years. The Inland Wetlands Board supported the mitigation plan presented.
- c. Mr. Connelly asked when construction is expected, and the presenters said it should begin in one year. He also asked if costs are on track with the approved budget. The presenters discussed funding explaining that the available budget in July 2024 was \$387,000. Through discussions with Mr. Marconi and Mr. Muller, Director of Public Works, additional funding of \$217,271 was available for a total of \$604,271. \$70,000 was required just to explore the possibility of having the sports courts, leaving \$313,000 plus the \$217,000. They believe the project will come very close to that available funding considering trending costs for the upcoming high school court project.
- d. Mr. Marconi explained that the additional funding sources are from the state's tar grant.
- e. Mr. Connelly asked if the courts could be installed before the parking pavement is completed but the presenters explained that the mitigation efforts can't be initiated until the parking is paved because the waterway will filter through a section of the parking. Taking any part of the project out of order would create a mess with the waterway.
- f. Mr. Marconi asked if a bubble over the four courts is feasible and if the design will accommodate the bubble at some point in the future. The presenters will explore it with the design.

No action was taken.

6. Set Public Hearing and Special Town Meeting for the below Ordinance modifications:

- a. Modify:128-1, A. No person shall skateboard, skate, use e-bike or e-scooter, in any public area, or on any public sidewalk. B. Add any motorized vehicle. C. Change the \$25 amount to whatever is current. Town Counsel will finalize BOS proposed language.
- b. Modify:310-44, Road Classification, C (2) delete phrase after cul de sac. BOS accepts language as proposed.
- c. Chapter 4, Affordable Housing Trust Fund, Town Counsel will finalize BOS proposed language.

The public hearing and special town meeting will be scheduled at the August 13, 2025 meeting for September.

7. Halpin Lane

- a. The town owns the land leased to Nolan Enterprises in 1990 for 65 years, with 27 years remaining. Nolan built and owns HUD housing of 25 units. They want BOS approval to transfer management of the rental units to Acadia Housing. The BOS agrees and Mr. Marconi will provide the approval notice.
- b. Termination of lease with Ability Beyond which allowed them to build housing on the lot at the corner of Halpin Lane and Prospect Ridge. Ability Beyond acknowledges that they've not complied and do not object to the lease termination. The public hearing and special town meeting will be scheduled at the August 13, 2025 meeting for September.

8. Approval of Meeting Minutes

a. May 28, 2025 BOS Meeting

No corrections.

Sean Connelly motioned to approve the minutes from the May 28, 2025 Board of Selectpersons Meeting. Barbara Manners seconded. Motion carried 3-0-1, with Maureen Kozlark absent and Geoffrey Morris abstaining.

b. June 13, 2025 BOS Special Meeting

Mr. Connelly requested one correction of his last name in the adjourning motion.

Sean Connelly motioned to approve the minutes from the June 13, 2025 Board of Selectpersons Special Meeting, as amended. Barbara Manners seconded. Motion carried 3-0-1, with Maureen Kozlark absent and Geoffrey Morris abstaining.

c. June 19, 2025 BOS Special (Executive) Meeting

Mr. Connelly requested deleting the phrase "due to illness."

Sean Connelly motioned to approve the minutes from the June 19, 2025 Board of Selectpersons Special (Executive) Meeting, as amended. Rudy Marconi seconded. Motion carried 2-0-2, with Maureen Kozlark absent and Barbara Manners and Geoffrey Morris abstaining.

d. June 20, 2025 BOS Special Meeting

No corrections.

Sean Connelly motioned to approve the minutes from the June 20, 2025 Board of Selectpersons Special Meeting. Barbara Manners seconded. Motion carried 3-0-1, with Maureen Kozlark absent and Geoffrey Morris abstaining.

e. June 25, 2025, BOS Meeting

Mr. Connelly corrected the first motion to state that it was made by Barbara Manners, and he seconded. He also asks that addresses be added for all public commenters. He

corrected the last name of a public commenter, and it should be Paige PAJAK. Mr. Morris requests to add in item 2, Port of Missing Men, the phrase, "which is overseen by Parks and Recreation" to the sentence in line 3 ending in "...Sturges Park." Mr. Connelly corrected item 3, second last line, change the word "lead" to "support." Mr. Connelly corrected page 4, second statement, "They" to "America 250."

Barbara Manners motioned to approve the minutes from the June 25, 2025 Board of Selectpersons Meeting, as amended. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 4-0 (Maureen Kozlark was absent).

9. Selectpersons Report

Mr. Marconi wrote a letter to DEEP regarding 145 High Ridge Avenue. The response was disappointing because it wasn't from the Commissioner and it repeated everything Mr. Marconi wrote in his letter to them. He will formulate another letter and request a meeting.

Dr. Brittany Howell of the ECDC And Alice Dew of Planning & Zoning have resigned. The Planning and Zoning Commission voted in executive session to promote Aarte Paranjape to Planning and Zoning Director.

Mr. Marconi distributed a document regarding the roof repairs that will be discussed by the BOF at the next BOF meeting. Town Counsel responded and his letter will be forwarded to the BOS.

Mr. Marconi reminded the BOS that the Fire Station 2 remodel of the second story included adding fire sprinklers and new furniture. The furniture was about \$5000 and is covered by the total budgeted allocation.

Saturday, July 19, 2PM at the library, there is a Planning and Zoning Commission Public Workshop for the Branchville area.

Thursday morning, July 17 is the dig for the Battle of Ridgefield.

There may be a new contributor for the 11-acre property on New Street. Mr. Marconi will be working on that.

Most likely there will only be one unit from Habitat for Humanity on the Halpin Lane corner lot.

Mr. Connelly asked about the FOIA request for all BOS notes pertaining to the appointment of Geoffrey Morris to the BOS.

Barbara Manners motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:15PM. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 4-0 (Maureen Kozlark was absent).