



Town of Ridgefield

Form of Government Committee Unapproved Minutes Meeting of Monday, October 21, 2024 Draft FINAL

1. Call to order

The Form of Government Committee meeting convened at 7:00 PM on Monday, October 21, 2024 in the Town Hall large conference room.

Members present: Laurie Christiansen, Michael Rettger, Charles Robbins (by telephone), Jonathan Seem, Dennis Tracey, Steve Zemo, Todd Zagorec

Members absent: Robert Hendrick, Rachel Sondheimer

Others Participating: None

2. Public Comment

There were no comments from the public.

3. Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of the October 7, 2024 meeting by Ms. Christiansen, seconded by Mr. Tracey. All in favor

4. Old Business

Committee Operations

Mr. Zagorec reviewed several requirements of committee operation. The members present confirmed they have completed their oath of service requirement and were set up with town emails.

Use of Zoom

It was noted that the session was not being streamed on Zoom with Mr. Hendrick's absence. The members discussed ideas for backup arrangements in the future.

Use of Drop Box

The members discussed having a DropBox repository set up for the committee's use. Mr. Zagorec will check with Mr. Hendrick to see if this request has been discussed with town IT staff.

Communications

Ms. Christiansen reported that the committee's page on the town web site has been established, and discussed several remaining changes that will be made.

Ms. Christiansen reported on the planned press release regarding the committee's purpose and planned activities, and reviewed several remaining questions that arose from members' comments. The members discussed potential audiences that should receive the release. *Ms. Christiansen will send out the press release in the near future.*

Mr. Seem reviewed his discussion with the First Selectman on suggestions for community groups and organizations who should be contacted to provide education on the committee's activity and to encourage public participation and comment. *Mr. Seem will circulate the proposed listing to the committee. Members are asked to review the list and volunteer to serve as the lead in making contact for organizations where they have a relationship. Mr. Seem will develop and circulate a short presentation on the committee for members to use when contacting or speaking to organizations, so that everyone is working from a common message.*

5. Committee Members' Comments

Members shared and discussed their respective thoughts on Ridgefield's current form of government and on the committee's charge. Comments included the following ideas and observations:

- The committee should avoid the presumption that "something is broken" just because the committee was established, and keep an open mind to both potential changes and to maintaining the current form.
- Any recommendation for change, if made, should meet the criteria that a sense of effective participatory democracy is preserved and that any proposed change would have the result of more effective citizen involvement and government operation.
- Are there ways to increase the sense and reality of citizen participation through the use of electronic communication technologies? What is possible?
- How does the committee judge the level of citizen participation and the public's satisfaction with their ability to have their voice heard in the governing process?
- Analysis of alternatives should consider the ability for residents not affiliated with a political party (which is the largest segment of voters in town) to engage effectively in town government.

6. Discussion of Work Plan

Mr. Zagorec reviewed the changes he had made to the work plan based on members' comments. It was agreed that the plan was sufficiently well defined to move forward with actions at this time.

After discussion, there was agreement that the planned interviews with the members of the Board of Selectpersons should be done individually, rather than in a group. It was suggested that the Town Clerk also be interviewed, but that interviews with the Treasurer and Tax Collector and with other town staff could wait until work on the concept of a town administrator had progressed further. It was also agreed that interviews with other town boards and committees were not needed at this time.

The members discussed suggestions for other towns that should be contacted to schedule interviews for the fact gathering stage of the work plan. Town were selected based on having similar size and demographics to Ridgefield. Two sets of towns were proposed:

Questions regarding Form of Government

- Westport (Representative Town Meeting)
- New Milford (Mayor Council)
- New Canaan (Mayor Council or RTF?)
- Cheshire (Council Manager)

Questions regarding Town Administrator

- Wilton
- Weston
- Darien

Members were requested to communicate to Mr. Zagorec their interest in participating in the interview process, and which topic they wanted to be involved with. Members were also requested to suggest possible interview questions for each topic so that a preliminary set of interview questions could be formulated.

Mr. Zagorec will contact WestCOG and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities to arrange interviews with each group at future committee meetings, as an additional avenue for information gathering.

7. Future Agendas

Members discussed focusing at the next meeting on setting a more detailed calendar of tasks and deadlines around upcoming meeting dates.

Mr. Zagorec noted that the location of the next meeting may need to be changed because of preparations for election day and absentee ballot counting. *He will arrange an alternate room and advise the members if necessary. Ms. Christiansen will hold off on sending the planned press release until that information is known.*

8. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 8:50 pm by Mr. Zemo, seconded by Mr. Seem. All in favor.

Next meeting November 4, 7:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by
Michael Rettger