

Approved
Town of Ridgefield Form of Government Committee
Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes for Saturday, January 25, 2025
Town Hall Large Conference Room – 400 Main Street

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1. Call to order

The Form of Government Committee meeting convened at 10:30AM on Saturday, January 25, 2025 in the Town Hall Main Conference Room.

Members present: Laurie Christiansen, Michael Rettger, Jonathan Seem, Robert Hendrick, Todd Zagorec, Rachel Sondheimer, Steve Zemo, Dennis Tracey

Members absent: Charles Robbins

Others Participating:

2. Public Comments

Mr. Zagorec made a brief overview presentation on the purpose and goals of the Committee, and responded to questions from the audience.

The following comments were made in the Public Hearing portion of the meeting:

Andy Sternlieb, Ridge Crest Drive, stated that he would like to see the Town Meeting be replaced by an elected board, perhaps with expanded membership, having the decision authorities now held by the town meeting. He indicated he felt many Town Meeting decisions were not very democratic, but determined by the most vocal and loudest participants.

Coco Barron, Prospect Ridge, requested that more materials relating to meeting notices and town activity be published in Spanish to facilitate access for residents for whom English is not their first language. She also expressed concern about the limitations on posting of community access information in parts of the Ridgefield Housing Authority properties and offered suggestions for improving access to board and committee meeting information to that community.

Linda Handley, Grand View Drive, asked that the Committee look closely at the added budgetary costs that would be involved with the hiring of a town administrator position.

Andy Sternlieb commented that he felt creation of a town administrator would have minimal budget impact after taking into account efficiencies and other sources of revenue that could be achieved, like additional grants. He also felt that there would be non-economic benefits in terms of communications and operating efficiencies.

Angela Liptak, Wilton Road East, asked what the budget impact of hiring a town administrator would be.

Rudy Marconi, First Selectperson, commented on the significant expansion of the scope and complexity of local government over time, and on the potential benefits of a town administrator supporting the operations of the town. He noted that in many nearby states, county government is responsible for many public service functions such as road maintenance and public health services. In Connecticut, those and many other functions are part of local government responsibilities, which should be recognized by the Committee. He expressed strong support for maintaining the Town Meeting form. He also noted that in thinking about how the town operates, people need to recognize that there are other parts of government that have specific independent decision authority, like the Planning and Zoning Commission, and that not everything that happens is the decision or under the control of the Board of Selectpersons.

Sean Connelly, Barrack Hill Road, asked questions of the Committee members regarding the differences between a town administrator and a town manager in terms of implications for the Town Meeting form.

Joe Shapiro, Blackman Road, express support for consideration of a town administrator or town manager. He cautioned that in evaluating those alternatives, the Committee should be attentive to the likely reaction of voters, and particularly whether voters would consider a Town Manager form to be a more radical change given the implications for the Town Meeting form.

Debra Franceschini, Spire View Road, commented via Zoom that the town should explore if the costs of a town administrator position could be covered by grants, and that the WestCOG organization might be helpful in researching such grants. She also stated that any proposed changes that might be proposed by the Committee regarding a town administrator role should not require a change in the Town Charter.

Interspersed with and following public comments, there was a general discussion among the committee members and the hearing attendees on the various comments and suggestions that had been offered.

There being no further comment from the public, at 11:45 it was

Moved to adjourn the Public Hearing portion of the meeting. Motion by Mr. Rettger, seconded by Mr. Tracey. All in favor.

3. Meeting Minutes

As not everyone had not had the opportunity to review the minutes of the recent January 23 meeting, it was agreed to defer consideration to the next regular meeting.

4. Communications and Work Plan

Mr. Zagorec reviewed updates on Communications outreach by the Committee.

Mr. Zagorec and Mr. Seem reported on updates to the Comment Tracker tool that have been made following comments at the last meeting. *It was agreed to include review of the current inventory of comments received to date at the next Committee meeting.*

Mr. Zemo volunteered to follow up on the comments from the public hearing regarding information access at the Housing Authority properties.

Mr. Zemo suggested that in response to the several comments from the public hearing regarding potential costs of adding a town administrator, it would be helpful for the Committee to document the historical cost of the First Selectperson's budget relative to the overall town budget. *Mr. Rettger agreed to provide that information at a future meeting.*

6. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 12:45PM by Mr. Zemo, seconded by Mr. Seem. All in favor.

Next meeting February 3, 2025.

Submitted by
Michael Rettger