

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Laurie Christiansen, torfoga@ridgefieldct.gov

October 29, 2024, Ridgefield, CT; – In response to questions raised by both residents and Town officials during the last two Charter revision cycles, the Board of Selectpersons has appointed a committee to research whether alternatives or enhancements to our current form of government would better serve the needs of residents. The Form of Government Committee meets on the first and third Monday of each month, at 7 PM, usually in the Town Hall large conference room. Due to the election, its November 4th meeting will be at the Town Hall Annex, Conference Room #2. All meetings are open for public comment at the start.

About Our Current Form of Government

Ridgefield's Board of Selectpersons (BoS) is responsible for most of the day-to-day decisions regarding town activities. Certain key decisions, such as approving the annual budget and modifying town ordinances, are reserved for the Town Meeting, in which citizens meet face-to-face to deliberate and vote on issues. This BoS/Town Meeting approach is the oldest form of government in our country, and the most prevalent in New England. Of the 169 municipalities in Connecticut, over half have a BoS/Town Meeting form.

The Changing Nature of Local Government

Of the 24 towns in Connecticut with populations between 20,000 and 30,000, only seven continue to use the Town Meeting format. With Town meetings, attendance is vital. As people's lives have gotten more complex, it can be difficult for them to get to meetings. Records both here and elsewhere show that voter turnout is typically high only when issues are deemed important or contentious. For example, in 2006, over 700 people turned out for the vote to allow controlled deer hunts in the Town's open spaces. But for less controversial issues, turnout is often much lower.

The role of First Selectperson, who serves as the town's CEO, has also gotten more complex. It requires expertise in both local and state issues and legislative processes, management, finance, human resources, land use, and more. The First Selectperson must also oversee and work closely with the Town's many volunteer and elected boards.

Over the years, some Connecticut towns have moved away from BoS/Town Meetings in favor of representative forms of local government. Others have modified the format to include an administrator or manager to oversee day-to-day operations, which can free up the First Selectperson to focus on policy, and help ensure continuity in operations when elected officials change.

About the Committee

The mission of the Form of Government Committee is to analyze what is working well for Ridgefield and what might be improved, and to research experiences in similar towns that have considered or changed their form of government. Specifically, the committee will examine the implications of adding the role of a town administrator within our existing form of government, as well as consider other representative

forms. The committee intends to identify advantages and disadvantages of each in terms of efficiency, accountability, citizen participation, and suitability for Ridgefield. Over the coming months, the committee's nine members will hold public hearings, interview local officials (in Ridgefield and elsewhere) and employees, and analyze data from state resources. Ultimately, they will develop a written report of their process, findings, and recommendations, and will present that report in public hearings before finalizing it for the Board of Selectpersons. Any recommended changes would likely require a vote by citizens, and possibly a change to the Town's Charter.

How to Stay Informed

You can follow the committee's progress by attending its meetings. Posted meeting agendas will give directions for accessing the meetings through the livestream and/or Zoom. Those agendas, along with minutes, reports, and meeting recordings, will be available on its [Town website page](#). Public hearings will also give you an opportunity to express your views and to hear those of your fellow citizens. In addition to attending hearings and meetings, you can read updates in local news outlets, and by subscribing to the [Town newsletter](#). For questions, please email the committee at torfoga@ridgefieldct.gov

###