

RIDGEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Town Hall, 400 Main Street
Ridgefield, CT 06877
June 23, 2026
Minutes are not verbatim

Policy: Historic District Commission meetings will be conducted under Roberts Rules of Order and all participants are expected to conduct themselves with dignity and treat all those present with respect, empathy and civility.

APPROVED PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

A Public Hearing of the Ridgefield Historic District Commission (“HDC”) was held at lower level conference room at Town Hall on Tuesday, June 23, 2026, and beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Agenda / Meeting Objectives

To provide a brief overview for the possible designation of Olmstead Lane and a portion of West Lane as two new historic districts.

Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Dan O’Brien at 6:33 p.m.

Dan O’Brien, Chair, introduced the following HDC members present: Sean O’Kane, Vice Chair, Sara Kaplan, Rhys Moore and Mark Blandford (joined meeting later).

Meeting Objectives

Two objectives of meeting:

- Sum up what historic districts are all about.
- Hear your questions and concerns.
- Two areas for possible designation as historic districts:
 1. Extension of existing West Lane historic area from the corner of High Ridge Avenue to the corner of Olmstead Lane - background
 2. Olmstead Lane from West Lane to Wilton Road West
- Both areas have Ridgefield historic and architectural significance.

West Lane Proposed District

- West Lane is the historic gateway to Ridgefield. Laid out in 1722.
- West Lane was the original stage coach road from Ridgefield to the next stop in Bedford, NY.
- West Lane from the fountain to its intersection with High Ridge is part of the High Ridge historic district designated more than 50 years ago.
- The proposed designation is an extension of the present West Lane designated historic area from its current terminus at High Ridge west to West Lane’s intersection with Olmstead Lane at the corner with horse fountain.

- The proposed extension area of historic West Lane contains 17 properties, 15 of which are historic houses, with 12 of the houses older than 100 years.

Olmstead Lane

- Olmstead Lane dates back to the founding of Ridgefield and has been home to a great many notable people in Ridgefield's history. Known to exist in **1750's**.
- 27 properties, 22 of which are historic (**11** over 100 years).
- The **Olmstead family** were some of the first Ridgefield settlers. Nearly 100 of them grew up or lived on Olmstead Lane.
- **Many notable people** have lived on Olmstead Lane including:
 - Civic leaders including selectpersons, judges and others.
 - Home to authors, artists and actors.

Benefits of Being a Property Owner in an Historic District

1. **Helps protect the historical character of your neighborhood** from **incompatible** construction **including demolition**.
2. **Purpose of HDC – to approve changes – manage change.**
3. **Example**, walk down Main Street / there have been **hundreds of approved changes** and the area has retained its historic character.
4. **Home ownership** in an historic district **where** the neighborhood's **historic character is protected** is an important protection of your **real estate** value.
5. **Living in** an historic district with its **character and beauty** preserved is **more valuable than** living in an area **without this protection**.
6. **Various municipal studies** – show better appreciation and less value loss or down markets for real estate in historic districts.

Facts

Only existing features visible from a public way are subject to historic district approval.

Not Covered

1. **Exterior features** not visible from the street
 2. **Maintenance** and repair items
 3. **Interior changes**
 4. **Landscaping**
 5. **Paint** color
- Whether you live in an historic district or not, most exterior changes to your property require a building permit and in some cases P&Z approval.
 - Having a Certificate of Appropriateness from the historic district for changes is needed before going to **P&Z** or the **Building Department**.
 - And the certificate is usually favorably viewed by these bodies and can be helpful to your application for property changes with the Building Department and P&Z.

Collaborative Approach

- Our HDC has a very collaborative approach with all property owners.
- We **respond** to applications **fairly quickly** and many times have a **special meeting** with you at your property to discuss the project and in many cases approve the proposed changes at that time.
- We believe that in your **talking with residents of the existing Main Street** and High Ridge **historic districts** you will find that **our approval process is not onerous** or a negative experience.
- We have **supported historic district property owners** on occasion with testimony on their behalf at **P&Z** meetings and the **Zoning** Board of Appeals.

Historic District Designation Timeline

- **Based on the assumption** that there is strong property owner support for the designation, we will proceed with the process which is long and time consuming – **likely takes a year**.
- **Near the end of the** process, vote by **property owners** on the designation must be made by property owners by secret ballot conducted by the Town Clerk and approved by at least **2/3** of the ballots cast.
- The process to move forward involves the **following steps**:
 - **In-depth Study Report** of each of the two proposed districts documenting the historical and architectural significance of the areas. (This is where most of the work is required.) (East Ridge Study Report)
 - Study Report sent to the **State Historic Preservation Office** for their committee review and approval.
 - Following approval by the State, the Study Report is submitted to **P&Z and ECDC** for their review and approval.
 - Next is the **secret ballot sent** to property owners following another public meeting on the matter.
 - If **2/3** property owners approve:
 - **HDC meets with BOS** at a public meeting to set dates for another public meeting on this subject to answer questions and concerns from the public.
 - **Final step is a Town** meeting for the legislative body of the Town (voters) to approve the designation.

Questions and Answers

Public Comments

Mark Holzthum – West Lane

Mr. Holzthum had several questions.

Question: I was told by someone that I could always opt out of being in a Historic District.

Reply: Mr. O'Brien said that once a historic district is designated, property owners cannot opt out at a later date. However, for that reason there is a high bar to be met before an area can become a historic district, namely, after regulatory approvals have been met, all the property owners in the proposed district vote by secret ballot conducted by the Town Clerk. A 2/3 positive vote of votes cast needs to be met to approve the new district subject to a vote on the matter by the Town's legislative body (the voters) at a Town meeting.

Question: I have vinyl siding on my house. Can I replace it with new vinyl siding?

Reply: Mr. O'Brien said that you would be able to replace like material for like material subject to Commission review. The designation of a historic district does not require you to change your existing house in any way. Your house would be grandfathered in as is. However, changes going forward need to be approved.

Mr. O'Kane said there are other materials better than vinyl that we could suggest, but if you wanted to do vinyl and you already had vinyl, you can do it.

Question: What about PVC instead of wood for windows.

Reply: Mr. O'Brien said that it depends how and where you are using it. The HDC is guided by the standards established by the National Park Service. Historically, natural materials have been traditionally used like wood. However, they issued an interpretation in the past few years, where depending on if you're doing repair type items with synthetic materials that are a good match, generally may be acceptable upon Commission review. It depends on the synthetics being proposed. A plastic look would be a poor choice. With the newer synthetics though, you may be hard pressed to tell the difference between that and wood. However, each property is unique and the use of a synthetic depends on the particular circumstances subject to Commission review.

Mr. O'Kane said that on an application the HDC had just approved, Hardie plank was specified for siding by the applicant. Also approved was Azek for a water table. Synthetic technology has come a long way.

Question: Is using PVC acceptable?

Reply: Mr. O'Kane said if you currently have PVC and want to replace with PVC, that's generally acceptable.

Question: I have windows with aluminum clad, with rotting wood behind it. Is that an issue? Can I use PVC instead of Azek?

Reply: Mr. O'Brien said that window companies now have some pretty good historic replacement material. Mr. O'Kane said if you have vinyl and you're repairing it with vinyl, you can generally do so subject to Commission review. However, the approved use of a synthetic material depends on the age and other factors of the specific property.

Question: I have window casing around, and on the outside is rotted wood wrapped in aluminum. Can I replace with PVC, PVC being Azek?

Reply: Mr. O'Brien said if you're going from one synthetic to another synthetic, so yes, as long as the new synthetic is a better material than the aluminum you're removing and the Commission is informed beforehand.

Question: What are your parameters for the age of a historic home?

Reply: Mr. O'Brien said that the standards for what determines a historic structure are set by the National Park Service which is a structure 50 years old or greater. Mr. Jack Sanders said there are other homes on South Olmstead Lane that are ranch houses built in the 1950's and 1960's. Fifty years from now, they will be 100 years. That will be a sign of what life was like in our era. That is why East Ridge was a good mix. Everything doesn't have to be antique. Mr. O'Brien agreed, saying East Ridge is a good example because of the three distinct development periods within a ¼ mile stretch.

Mr. Holzthum said he could understand it if the home had architectural significance. But in how many years, will Casagmo and West Moreland be thought of as historic districts too? Ms. Kaplan said even if a home is old, it doesn't mean it will eventually be in a historic district. It is not possible to venture a guess as to what may be considered likely historic district candidates years in the future.

Emma Cartwright – Olmstead Lane

Ms. Cartwright had a couple of questions.

Question: A historic designation is for the neighborhood to preserve the character of the neighborhood. I live on Olmstead Lane where there are many different designs and styles of houses. So how are we preserving, house by house?

Reply: Mr. O'Brien said that the historic character of a neighborhood is its unique "personality" shaped by the physical, cultural and architectural elements that have survived over time, and as such, it is quite usual for historic districts to consist of properties of different designs and styles of houses.

Question: Is South Olmstead Lane included in the proposed historic district?

Reply: No. Olmstead Lane has a distinctive historic character based on the age of the lane along with house ages and architectural style which differs somewhat from South Olmstead Lane.

Sally Sanders – Olmstead Lane

Ms. Sanders had a question.

Question: Are homes protected against demolition?

Reply: The demolition of any structure within a designated historic district is subject to approval by the Historic District Commission. Demolitions in Ridgefield outside of a designed historic district, while subject to a 90-day demolition delay ordinance, do not have preservation protection against demolition once the 90-day period is met.

Public meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.