



TOWN OF RIDGEFIELD PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION APPROVED/REVISED MEETING MINUTES

These minutes and motions (votes) are a general summary of the meeting. This is not a verbatim transcription.

Tuesday, January 21, 2025

Present:

IN PERSON

Robert Hendrick, Chair
Mariah Okrongly, Vice Chair
Chris Molyneaux
Elizabeth DiSalvo
Ben Nneji
Sebastiano D'Acunto
Ben Nissim
Joseph Dowdell

VIRTUAL

Also Present: Alice Dew, Director, Planning and Zoning

Absent: Joe Sorena

1. CALL TO ORDER

Robert Hendrick, Chair, called meeting to order at 7:01 PM in East Ridge Middle School Auditorium and via Zoom and quorum was established.

1.1. Distribution of agenda & previous minutes. (Published on Commission's webpage prior to meeting.)

1.2. Administrative Announcements & Correspondence

(Note: Correspondence *related to an application* will be uploaded to the relevant application file (see links on agenda items) and reviewed/acknowledged during the relevant public hearing. Correspondence unrelated to an application will be acknowledged as this point in the meeting, and uploaded to the Commission's webpage at <https://www.ridgefieldct.gov/planning-and-zoning-commission/pages/correspondence>).

1.3. Approval of agenda.

Motion to add discussion regarding staff support (*Maker: M. Okrongly, second by C. Molyneaux*) *Unanimous Approval*

2. PUBLIC HEARING

2.1. **A-24-3:** Text Amendment change (Per RZR 9.2.B) to add a Temporary and Limited Development Moratorium. *Commission initiated.* <https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/99421>

Before opening Public Hearing, Chair Hendrick disclosed that earlier today he received an email claiming the legal notice for the temporary and limited moratorium was defective (again). This was the same person that made the complaint last time which resulted in delay of opening the public hearing. The Commission Counsel has advised Chair Hendrick and Alice Dew, Director of Planning and Zoning, that this defect is not sufficient enough to warrant another delay of opening the public hearing. Chair Hendrick's advise is to continue and open the public hearing.

Chair Hendrick allowed Attorney Tim Hollister to speak. Attorney Hollister is representing Thomas Montanari. Attorney Hollister summarized his email he sent earlier today to Chair Hendrick. Attorney Hollister stated that the published notice was again defective due to the legal notice not informing the public that a copy of the proposal may be found in the Town Clerk's office. Attorney Hollister gave a sample from another town for Commission to view. Hollister's opinion is that the notice is defective.

Per Alice Dew, the notice and proposed amendment is on file at the Town Clerk's office. Chair Hendrick, Attorney Beecher and Alice Dew suggest to continue and public has been well notified of the public hearing. There was no objection to opening of the public hearing, therefore Chair Hendrick opened.

Alice Dew read the dates of the public notice in the newspaper.

Chair Hendrick read the correspondence that has been uploaded to the application for the temporary moratorium. There have been 16 letters of support, 6 letters in opposition, and 7 letters described as neutral/informational.

Letters have been received from:

1. Debra Franceschini requesting Commission refers out to Tree Committee, Social Services and Conservation Commission
2. WestCOG (Commission made referral to them) – neutral
3. Mike Mitchell - neutral letter
4. Denise Corsetti – in support of moratorium
5. Joseph and Lisa Ternullo letter of support
6. Dave Liederback, letter of support
7. Joe Ternullo – letter in support on behalf of Commission of Aging after extensive discussion at Commission
8. Historic District Commission – support but suggested the time be productively used to conduct formal study of high-density development, etc.
9. Kevin and Sharon McSpedon – letter of support
10. Heather Payne – letter of support
11. Ann Wagnblas – letter of support
12. Bethany Pajak – letter of support
13. Meg Powell – letter of support, suggested Commission create a Ridgefield smart growth strategy
14. Kirk Carr – letter generally in support, stated it is critical to establish reasons for the moratorium, gave some data in his letter and encouraged Commission to get additional data during public hearing.
15. Robert Jewell – submitted multiple letters but this one was not particularly in support or against, but to call attention to misinformation on social media, specifically how voting would be conducted and matters regarding 8-30g.
16. Richard Lipton – supported intent but thought draft was too broad and included 5 suggestions for Commission.
17. Chief Kreitz – letter on behalf of Board of Police stating no position but pointed out safe streets and roads study will be conducted during time of proposed moratorium.
18. Charles Lichtenauer on behalf of Regency Centers sent letter opposing due to commercial restrictions being too broad
19. OCA (Open Communities Alliance) – letter opposing stating Ridgefield needs affordable housing and cited court cases.
20. ECDC – letter opposing mainly due to limiting of business expansion
21. Ridgefield Historical Society – letter of support
22. Tim Bilinskis– letter of opposition, would prefer a working group rather than moratorium
23. Robert Jewell – letter in opposition, extensive letter with in-depth critique and suggestions
24. Dave Goldenberg – letter of support
25. James and Nancy Young – letter of support
26. Tim Hollister – letter of opposition stating the scope is excessively broad, 8-30g and public act 21-29
27. Lori Bean – letter of support – concerned about excessive and fast development
28. Mike Autuori – letter of support and suggested Commission investigate envirocluster strategy
29. Deb Franchesini – additional letter was sent

Chair Hendrick recapped the proposal. Chair Hendrick stated that is important to note that this is temporary and limited on certain types of applications which involve a heightened level of technical complexity and greater potential impact on Town infrastructure and resources. During the moratorium the intent is to take a comprehensive review of the Zoning regulations, look at the Plan of Conservation and Development, review Town zoning maps, look at Town infrastructure and resources, review internal capacity capabilities and procedures within the Zoning department. Purpose of the moratorium is to take the time to look at these items and identify and consider amendments to Zoning

regulations, enhancements or other changes to procedures to assure applications are properly guided, reviewed and accessed. This is not to stop all development in Ridgefield. More complex applications include multi-family applications in any zone, projects that have a creation of 5 or more dwellings, special permit applications which requires zone change or regulation amendment as a pre-condition, any zone change or amendment, any special permit for commercial or mixed use in any zone except municipal improvements or government uses. The effective date in the draft is January to January but Commission is interested in hearing from public before Commission decides what the appropriate time period is. Chair Hendrick addressed the question of whether or not the moratorium applies to 8-30g projects. Chair Hendrick has spoken to Counsel and the advice on this matter is that the moratorium should not be specific about 8-30g. It would be prejudicial of the Commission to give thoughts whether the moratorium should/would apply to 8-30g projects. The decision would be made when and if the Commission receives an 8-30g application if moratorium is in place. 8-30g is a state statute. This commission recognizes the imperative of affordable housing and has adopted a mandatory inclusionary zoning regulation approximately a year ago.

Public Comment

Dan O'Brien, 67 Main Street, Chair of Historic District Commission, read two sentences from the letter that was previously submitted. The Historic District Commission supports the moratorium and suggests that the time be productive and a formal study be conducted.

Dave Liederboch appreciates the thoughtfulness behind this amendment and thinks Mr. O'Brien's comments are spot on in terms of thoughtful planning analysis and data driven exercise to accomplish quality infrastructure and balance between single family and multi-family homes.

Barbara Hoffman, 5 Mountain View Ave., not opposed to affordable housing, but opposed to the behavior of some builders who use 8-30g as a way to force the Planning and Zoning Commission into submission. Ms. Hoffman stated she thinks affordable housing is an asset to any town, but 8-30g needs to be amended.

Chair Hendrick read Debrah Franceschini's letter dated January 7 per Ms. Franceschini's request. The letter states concern with the 8-30g laws. Ms. Franceschini would like the Planning and Zoning Commission to create a coalition with all P&Z Commissions throughout Connecticut.

Frank Malafronte, 17 Hillcrest Court, asked Commission to explain more about how some applications are more complex than others. Chair Hendrick responded that when applications involve items such as multiple dwelling units, multiple homes and large commercial projects, it often requires Commission to be more specific and technical regarding possible issues such as parking, traffic, water, sewer, engineering complexities, landscaping, as well as others.

Mike Occhicone, 23 Seymour Lane, is concerned about density and if the moratorium does not apply to 8-30g, his concern is this will accelerate multi-unit applications. Will a moratorium help or hurt the situation and will it force developers to file 8-30g applications because there is no alternative.

Charles Cox, 52 Sherwood Road, is supportive of the moratorium but would like to make sure the study encompasses full traffic of the area and not just downtown and is a one-year study long enough.

Steven Bartkus, Executive Director of Ridgefield Historical Society, read a letter that was submitted on behalf of the Historical Society. The Historical Society supports the moratorium and stepping back to fully analyze the Town's capacity for further development. The Historical Society suggests to take time to study issues and bring back to the public for discussion which may take more than the proposed one year.

Dera Foresta, 367 Wilton Road West, via Zoom, stated that it is prudent the Commission consider the full scope of the proposals and if the Commission can give thoughts on how the overlapping complex criteria should be addressed with 8-30g proposals.

Krystyna Wanta, 52 Nod Hill Road, is supportive of moratorium. Concerns include increased traffic on Danbury Rd, Main St., Danbury Rd, Branchville and side roads.

Emily Rock, Senior Staff Attorney for Open Communities Alliance, is in opposition of moratorium and concern is Ridgefield's housing crisis, low number of affordable housing and legal concerns.

Lori Mazzola, 34 Quincy Close, (via Zoom), spokesperson for Ridgefield Residents for Smart Development, asked for clarification that if the moratorium is passed, can it include an 8-30g project. Chair Hendrick reiterated what he stated at the beginning of the meeting in that this Commission is not intending on taking a position on this matter. This moratorium which is proposed does not have anything regarding 8-30g and is not specific to affordable housing and have been advised by Counsel that it would be inappropriate to address it in the context of this draft and in public hearing.

Sarah Sved, Branchville Road, is supportive of moratorium and suggested a minimum of 3 years stating concerns of Town's infrastructure and Branchville area. Ms. Sved stated she finds this Commission to be professional, patient, qualified and ethical.

Robert and Masha Walsh spoke. They are currently in contract to buy 723 Branchville, which is a small building and dilapidated, and intends to open small veterinary practice. Their concern is not being able to obtain a special permit for their veterinary business.

Michael Autuori, Florida Road, would like Commission to take a new and continuing look at the balance between conservation and development.

Brad Lundquist, 381 Wilton Road West, is supportive of the moratorium and thinks it's time to build a strategic plan. Need to move forward while protecting what makes the town special.

Sam Schnapp, 19 Old Branchville Road, urges Commission to not let Ridgefield lose its soul.

Joseph Santoro, 341 Wilton Road East, (via Zoom) stated sacrificing the town for development would be a tragedy.

Renee Whitworth, 17 Mountain View Ave, in support and suggested moratorium be retroactive.

Attorney Tim Hollister, representing Thomas Montanari, in opposition, highlighted a memo that was submitted January 17th stating reasons why this moratorium is invalid. Attorney Hollister requested public hearing be kept open until he receives a response from Commissioners on his Freedom of Information Act request dated January 10. Chair Hendrick responded to Attorney Hollister that he disagrees with the way Mr. Hollister restated his position on behalf of the Commission regarding his position on 8-30g. 8-30g is not the focus of this moratorium. The Commission is not currently taking a position on 8-30g in regards to moratorium.

Kevin O'Connor, 42 Jefferson Drive, in support of moratorium.

Charles Lichtenauer, Attorney with Chipman, Mazzucco, and Anderson, Counsel to Regency Centers, in opposition to moratorium. Some of the problems Attorney Lichtenauer stated included its broad scope, restricts commercial property development, stifle investment in Ridgefield, legal concerns, violates Connecticut state statute 8-2h by applying to pending applications, inconsistent with statute 8-2a, limits ability to attract and obtain tenants who require special permits, promotes 8-30g applications. Chair Hendrick clarified the intent is focused on large scale and complex housing.

Max Capshaw, 38 Stony Hill Road, stated that developers try to make it look like they have Ridgefield's best interest in mind but he sees it as a manifest destiny and developers not caring. Mr. Capshaw would like to see more open space.

Susan O'Connor, 42 Jefferson Drive, is concerned that if more and more people continue to come into Ridgefield, the impact it will have on schools, police stations, fire stations, traffic and open space.

Laura Castelluccio, 32 Abbott Avenue, in support of moratorium with concerns regarding infrastructure and traffic.

Andrea Beebe, 378 Main Street, in support of moratorium with concerns including infrastructure, density, safety and traffic and advocates adaptive reuse.

Sam Smith, Branchville Road, asked if moratorium was to pass, would it include all of Ridgefield. Chair Hendrick stated that as the moratorium is drafted now, it encompasses certain types of applications but covers all zones. Ms. Smith requested thoughtful and considerate development.

Steven Jamison, is supportive of moratorium.

Lisa Deljudice, 99 North Salem Road, believes in very thoughtful planning and zoning. Ms. Deljudice shared some statistics from Ridgefield Police Department which was posted on Facebook.

Dave Goldenberg, Seth Low Mountain Road, was initially not in favor of moratorium. If the intent is to be limited and temporary in order to look at and rationalize zoning regulations so that we can build the kind of housing the Town and state need then Mr. Goldenberg is supportive, but if it is an attempt to stall Mr. Goldenberg can not support. Mr. Goldenberg looks forward to the next draft.

Charles Cox, 52 Sherwood Road, spoke for a second time.

Caroline Jancowski, Nod Road, concerns include traffic. Ms. Jancowski inquired about acreage for 8-30g applications.

Robert Jewell, 55-year resident of Ridgefield, stated Ridgefield has a balance problem. Attorney Jewell would like to reinstate full panel pre-application meetings. Attorney Jewell's concerns also included staffing such as a Town Planner/Asst. Planner. Attorney Jewell mentioned the moratorium including Special Permits and gave examples of recent applications that the moratorium would have banned.

Collette Kabasakalian, 2 Washington Ave, spoke regarding fair share housing and stated that it is a study and not the law in Connecticut.

Katarzyna La Barr, is supportive of moratorium and concerns include Ridgefield becoming more a city and infrastructure.

Chris Conroy, 51 New Street, concern regarding traffic and New Street being a cut through street.

Sue Manning, 58 East Ridge, stated the proposed moratorium does not ban anything but instead gives people time to think and plan.

Michael Autuori spoke for second time. He handed commission a letter regarding NIMBY (not in my backyard). Michael Autuori spoke regarding pre applications and the benefits and negatives.

Michael Raduazzo, (via Zoom) spoke in support of moratorium siting concerns including infrastructure, traffic and sewage treatment plant.

Kirk Carr, 62 Prospect Ridge, is in support of moratorium. Mr. Carr stated Commission should have a bullet proof defense on record prior to closing public hearing.

Peter Olsen, Attorney on behalf of Ljatif Ramadani who is owner of 43 Danbury Road, strongly encourages Commission to delete the language in the proposed moratorium that includes pending applications due to general statute 8-2h. Attorney Olsen also suggested the Commission create a section stating the moratorium does not apply to 8-30g applications.

Caroline Jancowski, Nod Road, spoke again and asked Commission to clarify receiving applications, pending applications and public hearings.

Kirk Carr, 62 Prospect Ridge, stated whether there is a moratorium or not a study is imperative.

Motion to continue Public Hearing to next regular meeting (*Maker: B. Nneji, second by E. DiSalvo*) *Unanimous Approval*

3. OLD/CONTINUED BUSINESS

- 3.1. **If Public Hearing is closed: A-24-3:** Text Amendment change (Per RZR 9.2.B) to add a Temporary and Limited Development Moratorium. *Commission initiated.*

<https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/99421>

Public Hearing continued to next regular meeting.

- 3.2. **MISC-24-10: 58 Prospect Ridge and 62 East Ridge: Pre-submission concept for multi-family development under 8-30g:** *Owner: Thomas Montanari; Applicant: Robert Jewell.*

<https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/99327>

Deferred by applicant to next regular meeting.

4. NEW BUSINESS

4.1. Approval of Minutes

4.1.1: [Meeting Minutes](#): January 7, 2025

Sitewalk: December 15, 2024

Motion to approve meeting minutes from January 7 (*Maker: C. Molyneaux, second by B. Nneji*) *Unanimous Approval*

4.2. (Added to Agenda) Discussion of Staffing needs in Planning and Zoning Office

The Zoning Enforcement Officer is out on leave temporarily. Alice Dew, Director of Planning and Zoning updated Commission that Aarti, ZEO, will hopefully be back January 27th. M. Okrongly stated that if Aarti is unable to return on that date, we should be proactive in addressing support for the Planning and Zoning staff. Alice Dew, Director, said how difficult it is to find a part time ZEO to fill in temporarily. Discussion ensued regarding staffing in general such as a Town Planner.

5. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn (*Maker: M. Okrongly, second by B. Nneji*) *Unanimous Approval*

Meeting adjourned at 10:17 PM

Submitted by Misty Dorsch,

Recording Secretary

FOOTNOTES:

RZR = Town of Ridgefield Zoning Regulations

CGS = Connecticut General Statutes