



Town of Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 4, 2025

(Revised/Approved)

ATTENDANCE

Commission & Staff

NAME	TITLE/ROLE	PRESENT		NOTES
		Yes	No	
Robert Hendrick	Chair	X		
Mariah Okrongly	Vice Chair	X		Via Zoom
Joe Dowdell	Commissioner	X		
Ben Nneji	Commissioner		X	Excused
Elizabeth DiSalvo	Commissioner	X		
Chris Molyneaux	Commissioner		X	Excused
Joe Sorena	Commissioner		X	Excused
Sebastian D'Acunto	Commissioner	X		
Ben Nissim	Commissioner	X		
Alice Dew	Director (Staff)	X		
Aarti Paranjape	ZEO (Staff)	X		Acting Recording Secretary

Others

- Approximately 25 people in Zoom audience, plus 30-40 in person. Individuals who actively participated are identified in minutes below.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Hendrick called meeting to order at 7:02 PM in East Ridge Middle School Auditorium and via Zoom; 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>).

Ms. Dew shared that two general letters were recently received:

- *Letter from DEEP, re: public information session concerning environmental clean-up at 145 High Ridge Road.*
- *Letter from Richard Steinhart (49 Country Club Road), re: continued concerns with Silver Spring Country Club.*

Ms. Dew then asked the members if they would like to hear a technical presentation and informal discussion on the advancements in the sewage treatment technologies by New England Technology and Fuss O'Neil, and if yes it could happen on February 25. At least 5 members should be available for that date, so it was agreed to call a special meeting. Mr. Hendrick suggested we could publicize the event via town newsletter.

1.3. Approval of agenda.

No changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC HEARING

- 2.1. (Contd.)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>

Mr. Hendrick gave an overview of proposed amendment initiated by Commission, emphasizing the importance of understanding the heading and intent section: the proposed moratorium would be temporary and limited, focused on complex and high-intensity development (not targeted to housing or affordable housing, as some media have reported), and for the specific purpose of getting things in order (including regulation and zoning map updates, an interim POCD update, and staffing/consultants ready), so that development can be reviewed and handled properly. He reviewed the full regulation draft, noting the clarifications and adjustments made since the last meeting (public hearing) when the Commission heard input. In particular, language has been added in several sections to clarify that the moratorium is focused on new construction, including a threshold of 5000 square feet of coverage for commercial and mixed-use projects. He mentioned the specific numbers may be subject to further debate/discussion, but hopefully the added language reinforces the intent of pausing complex and high-intensity construction projects, not all activities. At the end, he reiterated that Commission feels strongly about the need for additional housing in town, and that it recognizes the state mandate concerning affordable housing, and in fact this same Commission recently adopted a mandatory Inclusionary Zoning regulation to require all larger projects to include an affordable mix, and a recent smaller project that was denied was, in part, not compelling to at least one vocal Commissioner due to a lack of any affordable units.

Mr. Hendrick then summarized for the record the correspondence received. To date, 61 letters have been received (~30 since last meeting) – 45 of those in support, 8 in opposition, and 8 neutral or unclear. In the last meeting, the Commission heard from 41 people – 25 in support, 5 in opposition, and 11 neutral or unclear. Mr. Hendrick quickly acknowledged each of the new letters received, as follows:

1/21/25	Mike Autuori	SUPPORTS
1/21/25	Mike Autuori	SUPPORTS
1/21/25	Tim Hollister	OPPOSES
1/21/25	Jackie Rostow	SUPPORTS
1/21/25	Robert Ceccarini	SUPPORTS
1/21/25	Rachel & David Boucher	SUPPORTS
1/21/25	Michael Occicone	SUPPORTS
1/21/25	Caroline Dankowski	SUPPORTS
1/22/25	Lisa & Sean McEvoy	SUPPORTS
1/22/25	Jeff & Megan Dec	SUPPORTS
1/22/25	Lisa Sauer	SUPPORTS
1/22/25	Susan Ferguson	SUPPORTS
1/23/25	Gina Carey	SUPPORTS
1/23/25	Elizabeth Fogerty	SUPPORTS
1/23/25	John Ahern	SUPPORTS
1/23/25	April Pereyra	SUPPORTS
1/23/25	Will Demers	SUPPORTS
1/27/25	Michele DiMiceli	SUPPORTS

1/27/25	Benjamin Ortiz & Victor P Torchia Jr	SUPPORTS
1/27/25	Nick Amendola	SUPPORTS
1/29/25	Robert Leocadi	SUPPORTS
2/1/25	Karen Albright	SUPPORTS
2/1/25	Chris Rees	SUPPORTS
2/3/25	Steve Zemo	SUPPORTS
2/3/25	Jason Klein (rep. owner of 27 Abbott Ave)	OPPOSES
2/3/25	Board of Selectpersons	
2/3/25	Renee Whitworth	SUPPORTS
2/3/25	Michelle Conklin	SUPPORTS
2/3/25	Nancy Baldeserini	SUPPORTS
2/4/25	Michele Coonklin	SUPPORTS
2/4/25	Priscilla Urgiles Leocadi	SUPPORTS
2/4/25	Kirk Carr	SUPPORTS

Mr. Hendrick then asked if Commissioners had anything to add or correct, before they open to new public input.

Mr. **Nissim** stated that Commission's efforts are in alignment with the CGS 8-2, the proposed amendment will give a holistic review of the town's zoning regulations.

Mr. **D'Acunto** also agreed with Mr. Nissim's comments, he added that intent of Commission is not anti-development, but to review town's requirements and revise the regulations.

Mr. **Hendrick** opened the floor for public comments via zoom and in person.

The following people spoke in person:

1. Mr. **Rudy Marconi**, on behalf of Board of Selectpeople, read the letter (already in file/record) with collective comments and concerns from the BOS discussion. Members expressed concerns with the language of moratorium stating it's too broad. He said that the BOS is concerned about misinformation and confusion between this moratorium and a state 8-30g moratorium. Members also raised concern about economic impact on business zones, which appears to have been addressed in this draft (the BOS letter was written earlier). BOS members worry the proposed moratorium could have the effect of stimulating 8-30g. The BOS does feel issues like sewer collection system capacity should get more focus, adding that applicant should address it if the project will put increased strain on local collectors. He briefly informed about the 145 High Ridge contamination noticed due to leaking sewer, which has been verified by DEEP.

Although the BOS acknowledges and supports the efforts of Commission regarding the health, safety and economic stability, modifications are necessary to prevent unintended consequences that could hinder Ridgefield's growth and development.

He mentioned the comments were submitted before the edits were made to the draft as presented at the meeting that day.

Mr. Hendrick asked Mr. Marconi how the Planning & Zoning Commission can get better technical feedback from departments (e.g. sewer, fire, police) on the implications of the proposed projects when they are presented to P&Z.

- 2. Mr. **Sean Connelly**, member of BOS acknowledged the changes. He reiterated concerns of members of BOS regarding not enough clarity on 8-30g applications. He added that strategic planning is definitely a right direction*
- 3. Mr. **David Leiderback** spoke in support of the moratorium and expressed concern that development shall have impact on accelerated density, environmental, historical structures being removed, traffic and economic shift towards developers.*
- 4. Mr. **Peter Olson** expressed concern with the language stating that Commission should clearly state that this moratorium does not apply to 8-30g. He said his client has submitted 8-30g application, which is scheduled for Public hearing, but if this moratorium is adopted, he would advise his client to appeal the amendment so that there are no surprises when their application is reviewed by Commission. He said even though the moratorium does not apply to 8-30g applications, still it should be clearly mentioned in the proposed moratorium to avoid any appeals by applicants.*
- 5. Mr. **Michael Autuori** supported the moratorium. He raised a point stated in the BOS letter about economic development and said that during the 1995 Plan of development where he was involved as a Commissioner, the focus was on economic stability. He suggested that Commission and Legislators should work with State to modify the 8-30g and instead of units as criteria for setting aside to calculate the affordability for the 8-30g it should be percentage of floor area should be designated as affordable. He commended the work Commission is doing.*
- 6. Mr. **Scott Deyoung** (Cuadatowa Drive) spoke in favor of moratorium and expressed concern with sewer.*
- 7. Ms. **Priscilla Urgiles** (9 Deer Hill Drive) spoke in favor of moratorium. She read the letter she submitted expressing concern with the over development, traffic, history, architectural structures and Open Spaces in Ridgefield.*
- 8. Mr. **Marty Handshy** (77 Sunset Lane) gave a detail census of the population of Town of Ridgefield since 1960. He said the population of Ridgefield has not changed much in decade. He also added that the increase is traffic is not because of Ridgefield's population but statistics show commuters using Ridgefield roads for passing.*
- 9. Tom Montanari, 62 East Ridge and 58 Prospect Ridge Rd. He talked about history of Ridgefield, how in 1960 and 70's lot of development and single family homes were build when population boomed. He said neighborhoods like Westmoreland, Mimosa, and Twin Ridge developed. He said Fairfield County is one of the dense county in State. He suggested hiring a Town Planner.*
- 10. Mr. **Robert Jewell**, said that Commission should keep the Public Hearing open as he hasn't receive the final response to his FOI request. He said that keeping the Public Hearing open would also incorporate the revisions. He expressed concern with the language of the moratorium as well stating that she should be clear stating that the moratorium does not apply to 8-30g applications. He also talked about population of Ridgefield since 1980, he added during this time Fox Hill and Casagmo were built adding three hundred plus units. He said the traffic is more because, more people are driving cars including kids going to high school. Families have multiple cars as opposed to one or two in the past. He expressed concern with the process of moratorium where discussions and charrettes should have been done before introducing the draft amendment. He said the affect could be negative on the commercial real estate as well.*
- 11. Mr. **Mike Radauzzo**, spoke in favor of the moratorium. He talked about the impact of over development on traffic, school system and water treatment system.*

12. *Mr. Kirk Carr spoke in support of the proposal, but also emphasized the need to get involved with the legislation session. He said to work with State legislators and to testify against the Fair share and work, live ride.*

Mr. Hendrick responded that, as chair, each year he keeps the Commission updated regarding the Legislations sessions, and likely in the next meeting or two they would discuss that topic; also that WestCOG is an excellent voice for the area's P&Z Commissions on those matters.

The following people spoke via Zoom – each in support of the moratorium – expressing concerns about over development, increased density, traffic issues, historic preservation, and open spaces. Concerns were raised regarding the state override of local zoning, emergency preparedness and evacuations plan (in an event of catastrophe like California wildfires) as more development burdens town roads.

1. *Rachel Rosenbaum*
2. *Kevin O' Connor*
3. *Lori Mazzola*
4. *Charles Cox*

Hearing no more public input, Mr Hendrick asked Commissioners about closing or continuing the public hearing, and he encouraged them to at least keep it open for a short period, to assure letters could be sent with any feedback on this latest draft. Members seemed inclined to hold the public hearing open for one more actual meeting, and discussion centered on whether that should be the special meeting on February 25 or the regular meeting on March 04 (which has a very busy agenda already). Mr. Marconi mentioned that February 25 is a referendum vote day, and parking could be an issue at Town Hall Annex. Commissioners stated that the staff should research if that will be a major conflict for Feb 25, they should adjust schedule accordingly.

A MOTION was made to CONTINUE this Public Hearing to the next meeting (Special Meeting of February 25, 2025), or to the next Regular meeting (March 04, 2025) if the earlier date is deemed not feasible (made by Mr. Nissim, seconded by Ms. DiSalvo). APPROVED unanimously.

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.open.gov/records/99421>
n/a (public hearing not closed)

- 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>

Mr. Jewell began by stating “The applicant has no intention to build this, the applicant does not want to build this...” and continued to explain that this appears to be the only option since the Commission recently denied an application on this site, and what they would really like is to understand if there is another path forward.

Mr. Hendrick commented that, in his individual assessment of the Commission's decision, the members did not seem to have as many concerns about the specific project being proposed, but more regarding the regulation amendment draft and rezone which were required preconditions, and how they might impact the area, etc. Those elements were not strong and compelling enough (confusion on parcels involved, historic preservation priorities, etc.). While the Commission perhaps could have made extensive changes to Mr. Jewell's drafts, it seemed just “too far from the finish line”. Mr. Hendrick indicated that he personally believes there could be an opportunity

for an approval, but it would require much more prep work on the drafted reg amendment and rezone, as a package. He committed to welcome the applicant back for more pre-app discussions, and/or reviews via staff, if Mr. Jewell requests.

Mr. D'Acunto noted general agreement with Mr. Hendrick's comments. Ms. DiSalvo noted she was not in full agreement, and she is very concerned about density in that part of town.

Mr. Hendrick also expressed that it was unnecessary to create and publish the image (i.e. of a 60-unit project on the site), simply to have this discussion.

4. NEW BUSINESS

- 4.1. **SP-25-1: 723 Branchville Road:** Special Permit Application (Per RZR 9.2.A and 5.2.D.17) to convert service establishment to open a Veterinary hospital and from two apartments to single apartment in B-1 Zone. Owner: Fred Chan; Applicant: Robert Jewell <https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/100010>

Mr. D'Acunto made a MOTION to RECEIVE the above application, SCHEDULE a site walk for March 02 and Public Hearing on March 04, 2025. Seconded by Mr. Nissim. APPROVED unanimously.

- 4.2. Informal signage regulation review: % Commission.

Mr. Hendrick shared that office has been getting more inquiries recently about Community Sign Boards – specifically to clarify the list. He said that various people have their views on which signs are authorized Community Sign Boards, but there seems to be no clear list of record. This should be a fairly simple exercise to clarify, and maybe catch any procedural clarifications on the Community Sign Boards while at it. Mr. Hendrick asked the members, and especially Mr. Nissim who has been looking at the signage regs, if they could prioritize this item.

Mr. Nissim committed to dig into this and liaise with staff on details. All agreed to keep the topic on agenda for upcoming meeting(s) as necessary to keep it moving.

- 4.3. Approval of Minutes

4.1.1: [Meeting Minutes](#): January 21, 2025

4.1.2: Sitewalk: December 15, 2024

Mr. Hendrick recommended and asked, by unanimous consent, to POSTPONE items 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 until the following meeting. No objection.

5. Adjourn

Meeting ADJOURNED at 10:09 PM

Submitted by Aarti Paranjape
Recording Secretary

FOOTNOTES:

RZR = Town of Ridgefield Zoning Regulations

CGS = Connecticut General Statutes