



Town of Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 4, 2025

(Revised/Approved)

ATTENDANCE

Commission & Staff

NAME	TITLE/ROLE	PRESENT		NOTES
		Yes	No	
Robert Hendrick	Chair	X		
Mariah Okrongly	Vice Chair	X		
Joe Dowdell	Commissioner	X		
Ben Nneji	Commissioner	X		
Elizabeth DiSalvo	Commissioner	X		Via Zoom (left meeting at 9:45 PM)
Chris Molyneaux	Commissioner	X		
Joe Sorena	Commissioner	X		Via Zoom (left meeting at 10:05 PM)
Sebastian D'Acunto	Commissioner	X		
Ben Nissim	Commissioner	X		
Alice Dew	Director (Staff)			Excused
Aarti Paranjape	ZEO (Staff)	X		

Others

- **Steve Foundoukis** (Recording Secretary). Individuals who actively participated are identified in minutes below.

1. CALL TO ORDER

- Mr. **Hendrick** commenced the meeting at 7:01 PM at Town Hall Annex, Meeting Room #2, and via Zoom; Quorum established.

1.1. Distribution of agenda & previous minutes.

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>

The Director's Report for the Fourth Quarter was sent by Ms. Dew to all the commissioners

Ms. Okrongly made MOTION to approve agenda and for executive session to discuss personnel.

Seconded by Mr. Nneji. APPROVED unanimously.

Mr. **Hendrick** opened the meeting by stating the Commission had received notice from the applicant of 371 Wilton Road West asking for a continuance of the public hearing for Affordable Housing Application per CGS 8-30g for 21-unit multi-family development with 20 units in a new building and existing cottage as one unit including related site work in RAA zone. *Owner: Patricia and Raymond Garst; Applicant Robert Jewell.* As of this morning, the Commission received notice that the applicant has withdrawn this application. Therefore, item 2.2 of the Public Hearing scheduled from tonight's agenda has been removed.

2. PUBLIC HEARING

2.1. AH-24-4: 43 Danbury Road: Affordable Housing Application per CGS 8-30g for 20 units apartment building replacing the existing structures. *Owner: Ljatif Ramadani; Appl: Peter Olson.*
<https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/99636>

Mr. **Hendrick** stated that this is an Affordable Housing Application submitted under 8-30g which requires 30 percent affordable housing as part of the project. The applicant is represented by **Peter Olson**. Mr. Olson represented Mr. Hendrick and his wife on a wetlands issue last year. Mr. Hendrick believes he can make an unbiased decision on this application. There were no concerns by the public or the Commissioners in person or attending via zoom.

Mr. **Hendrick** stated that the Commission is required to be independent. There must be no bias, prejudice or predetermination. The Commission will listen to the applicant, independent peer review (paid for by the applicant), members of the public and neighbors and attempt to arbitrate where there is a dispute. The Commission will decide based on evidence and facts presented at the public hearing.

If the Commission denies an 8-30g application, the Commission must defend its decision in court if the applicant appeals the denial. Applications may be denied if there are concerns regarding public health and public safety. The applicant presents and the public may ask questions. The applicant can respond to the questions and the public can ask additional questions.

There are approximately 64 documents in the file on this public hearing of which 30 are written correspondence from the public. Mr. **Hendrick** summarized all letters received on this application to date and stated that any written correspondence from the public will be given the same weight as individuals who appear at the public hearing in person.

Ms. **Paranjape** read the legal notice into the record.

Mr. **Olson** spoke on behalf of the applicant **Ljatif Ramadani**. The property in question is at 43 Danbury Road and was formerly the Red Rooster Restaurant. The property is in a B-1 zoning district which does not allow multi-family residential properties. This application is an affordable housing application and non-compliance of zoning regulations is not enough to deny an 8-30 g application.

Mr. **D'Acunto** asked if any consideration was given to a mixed use of the property.

Mr. **Olson** replied that it was not.

The proposed building would be otherwise permitted in the current zone but for use and buffer setback. Thirty percent of the units must be set aside for affordable housing. There are 20 units in all and 6 will be affordable housing units.

The income levels required to qualify for an affordable housing unit are in the \$55,000 to \$80,000 per year range. An applicant earning less than \$55,000 per year would qualify for a one-bedroom unit while one earning less than \$88,000 per year would qualify for a two-bedroom unit. The average cost for an affordable housing unit is between \$1375 per month and \$2200 per month, which includes rent and utilities (heat, water, and electricity) but not include cable and internet service. This does not significantly differ from the market rent in the Danbury area which according to HUD was \$1825 for a one-bedroom and \$2221 for a two-bedroom as of December 2024. Rents in the Ridgefield area could differ slightly.

The project also will require a permit from the Department of Transportation. An application to the Wetlands Commission has been approved. The Police Commission has asked for additional information about what impact the proposed building will have on morning traffic. Mr. **Olson** will respond to their inquiries prior to the next PLZ meeting. The Commission did a site walk at the proposed building site on March 2, 2025.

Mr. **Olson** next introduced the architect of the proposed building, **Maura Newell Juan** of 72 Architects in Danbury, CT. Ms. Maura Newell Juan presented a slideshow detailing the architectural layout of the building. It will have ten two-bedroom units, ten 1-bedroom units and eight 1 car garages. There will be two accessible apartments and six affordable housing units. It will have high end finishes and windows. The proposed steep roofs are part of the architecture that makes it special. The building's height complies with zoning regulations. The current building at 43 Danbury Road is not listed as an historic site and the structure can be demolished to make way for the new apartments without any historical concern.

Mr. **Hendrick** asked if any consideration was given to a Gabriel roof pitch which respects the harmony of the local environment.

Ms. Maura Newell Juan stated that the proposed roof pitch would create something that is thoughtful and sensitive.

Ms. **DiSalvo** is very much in favor of this design because it looks like a higher quality product and is aesthetically pleasing.

Ms. **Okrongly** asked if there were any other iterations of design for multiple buildings considered.

Mr. **Olson** replied that a single building would best allow for compliance with all existing codes.

Benjamin Doto, a civil engineer from Danbury, CT was the next speaker. The proposed building would occupy a one-acre site in a B-1 zone. The existing restaurant and parking lot behind it would be demolished. The property is connected to the municipal sewer system. The water service will be upgraded, and a state-of-the-art sprinkler system will be installed. The existing parking lot on the west side of the building will remain. Handicapped parking will be allotted to the first two spaces on the right. No sidewalk is planned from Mountainview to preserve neighborhood privacy.

The Police Commission has requested a mountable island which will require replacement of the existing sidewalk. This was not included in the original application.

The building plan requires 35 parking spaces, and the proposal allows for 5 visitor spaces: two spaces each for two-bedroom units and one space for one-bedroom units. Parking spaces will be standard 9' X 18' except for the handicapped spaces which are required by law to be bigger. There will be 8 garage spaces and 32 surface spaces. There will also be 4 EV charging spaces for residents and their visitors.

Ms. **Okrongly** asked if the public will be able to use the EV charging spaces.

Mr. **Olson** and Mr. **Doto** will research the matter further.

According to **Mr. Doto**, the one building design is really all that fits this property and really lends itself well to this site. The driveway to Mountainview has been designated as an emergency access drive. The Fire Marshall has requested that the driveway to Mountainview be fitted with an arm gate with a keypad and delayed close access. The gate could be opened manually in the event of a power outage.

The building will have an underground power supply. Since the transformer cannot be placed near a stone wall, it will be on a main isle protected by bollards. It will sit on a 7'5" X 8'0" pad but the actual transformer will be much smaller.

The drainage system will be under the parking lot and will have an overflow into the existing system. Storm drainage for a B-1 zone allows 90 percent impervious coverage. The proposal will allow about 65 percent of impervious coverage which is under zoning requirements. Snow removal is a legitimate concern on any site. It must be properly managed and

maintained. Snowblowers, manual work, and skid steer with a bucket in front will all be utilized. Keep emergency access clear. The snow removal plan shows where snow can be stored. The plan allows for a 12-inch snowfall. The contractor in charge of snow removal will have to haul snow offsite in the event of continuous snow accumulation. A maximum of four parking spaces will be taken when snow piles up. Gutters and catch basins must be kept clean. The contractor must follow the plan.

Mr. Doto addressed some of the concerns regarding the building plan: could the site plan have been flipped? The simple answer is yes, but it would not be such a good site design. The garages and parking lot would then have faced Mountainview. It is more appropriate to have them face the commercial buildings.

To present the Traffic Impact Access Study, **Mr. Olson** introduced **Joseph Balskus** who joined the meeting via zoom. **Mr. Balskus** is an engineer based in Westfield, CT who has done extensive work in Ridgefield and is familiar with the town. The presentation agenda highlighted Existing Conditions, Traffic Generation, Recommendations, and a Question-and-Answer session.

Danbury Road is a busy corridor which averages 18,300 vehicles per day in both directions as of July 2022. Speeds are either at the posted limit or below. The UConn Crash Repository reported 10 crashes at the site driveway between 2021 and 2023. They were typical crash patterns and there were no fatalities. UConn crash data for the period 2014-2024 reported 20 crashes at Grove Street and 5 crashes at Mountainview.

Per the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), twenty units of housing will generate very low amounts of traffic. Morning traffic will generate new traffic, which would differ from the restaurant which did not operate during morning hours, but the overall effect will not be noticeable. It would add 200 to the daily count whereas the restaurant generated 400 per day.

The conclusions of the traffic study show that the existing site driveway may be used, the sightlines are ample, and the crash data show no significant patterns. The proposed conversion will not have a significant impact on traffic operations.

Mr. Nneji asked **Mr. Balskus** define what constitutes significant impact on traffic patterns.

Mr. Balskus responded that while there might be more peak hours of traffic, there are fewer pointed peaks of traffic.

Ms. Okrongly asked what is considered an optimal percentage of traffic for an intersection. Was any consideration given to pedestrian implications?

Mr. Balskus said it would depend on site context. Every intersection is different. He conceded that the pedestrian issue had not been addressed.

Mr. D'Acunto commented on what the difference would be between 80 percent capacity versus 100 percent capacity.

Mr. Nissim wanted to know what the scope of the independent traffic study was.

Mr. Hendrick indicated that the initial action by the Commission would be to evaluate the submitted Traffic Impact Access Study and subsequently offer any necessary recommendations.

The final presenter was **Abigail Adams**, Registered Landscape Architect and owner of A2 Land Consulting PLLC, New Fairfield, CT. She stated that all the trees along Danbury Road would have to be removed as they would interfere with construction and new ones planted. The tree removal plan has been approved by the town Tree Warden. A mix of Deciduous and Evergreen trees along with Perennials, Shrubs, and Grasses will be planted in their place.

The objective is an aesthetic that is residential in feel while creating a visual barrier. It is a streetscape aesthetic that works with architecture. We want to make this a beautiful residential property for the tenants of this site. This plan has also been reviewed and approved by the Tree Warden.

Lighting sconces will be installed above garage doors and at the main entrance on the southern and western side of the building. There will be no wall lighting on the Mountainview side. There will be 36-inch bollard lights for safety along the walkway and four fixtures in the parking area for safety purposes.

Mr. **Hendrick** pointed out that the Commission requires lighting not to be visible on the property line. Light by the sidewalk should be more subtle. All lights that are non-essential should be photocell on.

Ms. **Okrongly** asked what percentage of the overall plantings are native?

Ms. **Adams** will research and respond at the next meeting.

Mr. **Olson** will provide answers to questions asked by the Commission and submit a revised set of plans based on recommendations at the April 1st meeting.

Mr. **Hendrick** asked for comments from members of the public who would be unable to attend the next meeting.

Barbara Baughman (5 Mountainview Ave.) asked if there were things the Commission could do to maintain the privacy of the Mountainview residents.

Mr. Hendrick stated that the Commission does have a fair amount of discretion and latitude when granting approval. The approval may have certain conditions. The applicant can appeal conditional approval in court.

Angela Ricci (1 Washington Ave.) is concerned about deliveries and the location of the loading dock. She is also concerned about the outflow of traffic going into the residential streets. Children are at risk from excess traffic. The applicant has not addressed those concerns with the residents who live in the neighborhood. Would he be willing to sit down and negotiate with the neighbors?

Robert Baughman (5 Mountainview Ave.) No one from Mr. Olson's group has met with any of the neighborhood residents. He does not want a fire hydrant moved into his driveway.

Michelle Conklin (2 Mountainview Ave.) Joins her neighbors in their very valid concerns. Conceded some landscape improvements but fears that she will be staring at a wall while the newly planted trees are growing.

John Webb (6 Island Hill) Doesn't see any potential play areas for the children of the 20 families in the building.

Public hearing continued to next regular meeting

2.2 AH-25-1: 371 Wilton Road West: Affordable Housing Application per CGS 8-30g for 21-unit multi-family development with 20 units in a building and existing cottage as one unit including related site work in RAA zone. *Owner: Patricia and Raymond Garst; Appl: Robert Jewell.* <https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/99720>

Applicant submitted an email withdrawing the application.

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

Robert Jewell asked **Ms. Paranjape** to read the legal notice into the record.

Mr. Jewell stated that this is a change in use of the building that requires a permit. A veterinary clinic would be on the first floor. Offices to support the clinic would be on the second floor. The third floor would be converted into an apartment. The proposed name of the facility would be Paw-Paw Tree Veterinary Clinic of Ridgefield. All residents have been notified.

Maria Kremerman of Scruffy Mutt Estate LLC is fully committed to this project. She has had two delayed closings already and the seller will not agree to extend the contingency beyond March 11, 2025. She asked the Commission for approval on her application tonight if possible.

Ms. Okrongly asked if the Police or Fire Marshall commented on the directional signage. She would not make this a condition for approval.

Mr. Jewell stated that the existing signs would be taken down and replaced with new ones.

Mr. Nissim had concerns with a contaminated well on the property.

Mr. Jewell stated that the well will be legally abandoned and can be made a condition of the approval. He also submitted a landscape design for the property.

Mr. Hendrick asked for a motion to close the public hearing.

Mr. Nneji made MOTION to close public hearing and approve the application with the condition that applicant hooks into Aquarion water. Seconded by Mr. Nissim. APPROVED unanimously.

3. OLD/CONTINUED BUSINESS

3.1 (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>

Ms. Okrongly made MOTION to postpone until next meeting. Seconded by Mr.

D’Acunto. APPROVED unanimously.

4. NEW BUSINESS

4.1 SP-25-2: 529 Ethan Allen Highway: Revision to Special Permit (Per PZR 9.2A and 3.2.D.7) to open a day care with two preschool classrooms—one for two-year-old; second for three-four-year-old and outdoor play area. Owner: 529 Ethan Allen Highway LLC; *Applicant: Isaac Hirt-Manheimer. For receipt and schedule site walk, possible discussion/public hearing.* <http://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/100237>

Mr. Molyneaux made MOTION to RECEIVE, Schedule a site walk on March 30, 2025 and a PUBLIC HEARING April 1, 2025. Seconded by Mr. D’Acunto. APPROVED unanimously.

4.2 Approval of Minutes

4.2.1 Meeting Minutes: February 25, 2025

Ms. Okrongly made MOTION TO APPROVE Meeting minutes for February 25, 2025. SECONDED by Mr. Molyneaux. APPROVED unanimously.

Mr. Hendrick announced the meeting will adjourn after executive session.

Ms. Okrongly made MOTION TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION. SECONDED by Mr. Molyneaux.

APPROVED unanimously.

Commission went into executive session at 11:01 PM.

Commission ended executive session at 11:35 PM.

Meeting adjourned at 11:37 PM.

**Submitted by Steve Foundoukis
Recording Secretary**