



Town of Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, March 18, 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		Via Zoom
Elizabeth DiSalvo	Commissioner	X		(Joined at 7:03 p.m.)
Chris Molyneaux	Commissioner	X		
Joe Sorena	Commissioner	X		Via Zoom
Sebastian D'Acunto	Commissioner		X	Excused
Ben Nissim	Commissioner		X	Excused
Alice Dew	Director (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 7:02 PM at Town Hall Annex, Meeting Room #2, and via Zoom; Quorum established.

1.1 Distribution of agenda & previous minutes.

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>

Mr. Hendrick asked the Commission if item 4.2 on tonight's agenda could be moved up in the order.

Ms. Okrongly made MOTION to move item 4.2 up in tonight's agenda. Seconded by Mr. Dowdell. APPROVED unanimously.

1.3 Approval of agenda.

2. PUBLIC HEARING

2.1(Contd.) 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 the Commission has received several letters regarding **AH-24-4** since the last meeting and Ms. **Dew** briefly summarized the correspondence. Ms. **Okrongly** asked if the public hearing can be limited in the interests of getting to the other items on the agenda, to which Mr. **Hendrick** replied that the public hearing won't close tonight because at a minimum Mr. **Olson** would respond to the public comments. Several members of the public in attendance also asked to be heard. Mr. **Sorena** made a motion to close the hearing to public comments by 9:30 p.m., which was not seconded.

Mr. **Hendrick** opened the hearing to public comments.

John Pierandri (3 Hillside Avenue) stated that the owner has accommodated the neighbors over the past 25 years in their request to keep the neighborhood isolated, but he has shown no respect for the neighbors with the current application. **Mr. Hendrick** asked for specific ideas, and **Mr. Piriandri** responded that the building could have an underground garage which would take it down a story.

Karen Albright (4 Mountainview Avenue) summarized a letter signed by 60 residents of the neighborhood with three main concerns: the driveway access that provides an egress/ingress to Mountainview would increase vehicular traffic in the neighborhood. Second, the proposed removal of all the trees on Mountainview Avenue to be replaced with five maple trees is not acceptable. Third, the scale of the project is huge. Ms. **Albright** pointed out that the affordable housing parameters outlined in 8-30g could be attained with a more scaled-down design like the one at 21 Island Hill. **Mr. Hendrick** asked if she was okay with the egress/ingress on Danbury Road. Ms. **Albright** stated that she was more concerned with Mountainview Avenue. Ms. **Okrongly** asked what type of screening she would like to see on Mountainview Avenue. Ms. **Albright** replied that something more than five maple trees would be preferable. In response to a question on whether the applicant can do planting outside of the actual property, **Mr. Hendrick** responded that Connecticut has not looked favorably on applicants who want to do offsite improvements.

Robert Baugham (5 Mountainview Avenue) stated that the application would negate an easement that was granted for his property in 1997 or 1998 and put the applicant's fence in his driveway. No one representing the owner of the property has engaged the neighbors. He is not opposed to affordable housing but suggested that the design can be improved by knocking off the top floor and putting the parking lot underneath the structure. **Mr. Kendrick** asked if an improvement can be made on the fence proposal, such as the inclusion of arborvitaes. **Mr. Baugham** stated that he would like to have the arborvitaes in addition to the proposed fence.

Mary Pierandri (3 Hillsdale Avenue) suggested reducing the building by a floor and moving it to the other side of the property. The fire hydrant can be moved in either direction per the Fire Marshall. She is strongly opposed to the size and scale of the project. The project was initiated without consulting the neighborhood, and the completion timeline is unknown. She submitted a UCONN traffic study that contradicted the findings of the one submitted by applicant. **Mr. Sorena** asked how she would feel if the building had a flat roof. Ms. **Pierandri** answered that the pitch of the roof should be lowered, but she doesn't think this style building fits into the neighborhood. **Mr. Hendrick** asked if she had any health and safety concerns. Ms. **Terry Andrew** answered that any time you increase traffic in the neighborhood, it will be a safety issue because of the large number of children in the neighborhood.

Susan O'Connor (42 Jefferson Drive) asked if there was a height limit for buildings in Ridgefield and if this is because of 8-30g. **Mr. Hendrick** answered that there is a height limit.

Chris Conroy (51 New Street) stated that we do not need any more development. Traffic is already problematic.

Amy McKinstry (1 Hillsdale Avenue) spoke about health and safety issues in relation to the size of the project. Congestion and traffic will decrease safety for Danbury Road, which is already a high traffic, high crash area.

Christopher Rees (4 Mountainview Avenue) representing the Mountainview, Hillsdale, and Island Hill Neighbors Association, presented a slideshow in opposition to the application centered around three main concerns:

Snow Removal Plan: the neighborhood association does not believe the applicant's snow removal plan is credible. The applicant's snow response does not allow for heavy machinery to be parked onsite. That is needed to pile the snow into large piles. Snow cannot be piled into 3.5-foot inch narrow strips. This would lead to the snow getting pushed into the back corner of the lot and will lead to flooding issues with the drainage ditch. Moving heavy machinery in tight parking lots poses risks to both vehicle damage and pedestrian safety. The owner has not responded appropriately to snow events in the past, shoveling the driveway only twice in the past ten years.

Mr. Hendrick asked what background or qualifications **Mr. Reese** has for these arguments. **Mr. Rees** replied that he is a mechanical engineer. **Mr. Nneji** asked what the health and safety issues are if the snow is not cleared properly. **Mr. Rees** replied that emergency services will be impaired if the snow is not cleared properly. **Mr. Hendrick** asked if he had any recommendations for the applicant and **Mr. Rees** replied that there should be a dedicated area north of the garbage bins which can be moved over for snow to be piled, or the building can be downsized.

Emergency Access Gate: the neighborhood association believes that electronic gate opening systems are not highly reliable and the proposed gate will eventually fail. When the gate fails, it will fail in the open position. This increases pedestrian and safety risks. The owner must maintain the gate and the current owner has not done a good job maintaining the property. **Mr. Sorena** agreed with **Mr. Rees** and asked the Commission to revisit the idea of trading pedestrian safety for fire safety with the Fire Marshall. The town must do an overall traffic study. Why hasn't the town finished the traffic study the state is asking for? **Mr. Nneji** asked **Mr. Rees** for data on accident reports, and he responded that he would be presenting that. **Mr. Hendrick** inquired if there existed a landscaping solution that would discourage regular through traffic via the emergency access gate. **Mr. Rees** responded that it would improve the situation.

Assessment of Applicant's Traffic Impact and Access Study: the neighborhood association believes there is queueing on Danbury Road. A private camera was set up by the association for a community traffic study. The applicant's traffic study shows there is no queueing, but it omitted vehicles that were too close or too slow. When vehicles are too close or too slow it means there is a congestion issue. Seventy-nine percent of the data in applicant's traffic study was comprised of vehicles that were too close or too slow and while applicant's study emphasized speed, the issue is congestion. Congestion is a factor that causes accidents. The applicant's traffic study also did not look at the radius of where the traffic originated from. There were trip generation math errors which led to incorrect analysis input leads and incorrect conclusions. The traffic engineer had preconceived conclusions for the outcome of the report. The applicant should be asked to provide the sources of the ITE data presented in his traffic study. Data can go all the way back to 1980 and traffic patterns have changed significantly since that time. Site context should be considered. ITE data should be complemented with local data taken near the site. The applicant's study did not do that.

The association will submit its own Traffic Impact and Access Study shortly. It looks at all the traffic surrounding the site. It will be based on UCONN traffic data. Regarding the safety of Danbury Road, the one mile stretch of Route 35 from Copps Hill road to Main Street has resulted in twelve injuries per year based on the last three years of data. Danbury Road has the most injuries in all surrounding towns excluding highway traffic. This is a safety concern.

Mr. Rees concluded with the recommendation that the application be paused or denied until the issue of traffic safety can be resolved.

Marge Mellon (18 Lafayette Avenue) has observed high traffic volume going south on Danbury Road every morning. She asked the Commission if they have any ability to control safety conditions during construction. **Mr. Hendrick** replied that the Commission can approve the application with such conditions during construction.

Jerry McKinstry (1 Hillsdale Avenue) is very skeptical of the developer's study indicating a negative impact on traffic. He also feels that the design of the building doesn't fit the surrounding community. He asked the commissioners to trust what they see. **Mr. Hendrick** stated the Commission is not allowed to do its own research. The commissioners must be impartial, and like judges, adjudicate between the different viewpoints. **Ms. DiSalvo** asked the public in attendance to submit professional evidence that the Commission can use to make decisions.

Sarah (via Zoom) asked the Commission to remove the applicant's traffic study presented at the last meeting due to its errors and inaccuracies.

Mr. **Hendrick** read a statement submitted by **Deborah Franceschini**, chair of the Affordable Housing Committee, which concluded that the proposed application would have the least amount of impact on people who need affordable housing.

Renee Whitworth (17 Mountainview Avenue) stated that Mountainview is essentially a one-way street. It is the gateway to town. Pedestrian issues are a main concern.

Mr. **Hendrick** stated that there is a long road still ahead and the Commission would hear the applicant's response to its questions and the public's concerns at the next meeting. The public hearing will remain open.

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>

Mr. **Hendrick** stated that Commissioners **Nissim** and **D'Acunto** wanted to be involved in this discussion. Ms. **DiSalvo** asked if this decision can be made in executive session. This will be continued at the next scheduled meeting.

3.2 **If Public Hearing is closed: 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>

This was skipped because the Public Hearing remains open.

4. NEW BUSINESS

4.1 **SUB-25-1: 15 Bear Mountain Rd:** Resubdivision application under Section 7.5 of Subdivision Regulations to create two lots from parcel of ± 6.05 acres with existing dwelling in RAAA zone. Owner: Giovanni Capocci; Applicant: Michael Mazzucco. *To be received, schedule sitewalk and public hearing. (Staff suggests sitewalk on May 4th and public hearing May 6th)* <https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/100239>

Mr. Nneji made MOTION to RECEIVE, schedule a sitewalk on May 4, 2025 and a PUBLIC HEARING on May 6, 2025.

Seconded by Ms. DiSalvo. APPROVED unanimously.

4.2 **MISC-25-2: 195 Danbury Road:** Preconcept for location of Pickleball courts at Parks and Recreation facility. % Dennis DiPinto. <https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/100427>

Dennis DiPinto, Director of Parks and Recreation, Ridgefield, CT outlined two proposals for the construction of pickleball courts and asked for feedback from the Commission on the best path forward. Options were narrowed from four to two locations.

Site A; Located south of existing playing fields and parking lot at the Rec Center. It is sloping with ten to twelve significant trees. Mr. **Nneji** asked if the neighbors have been informed, and Mr. **DiPinto** answered that they have not. There has been, however, initial excitement about building these courts.

Site B: An underutilized commuter lot. The area has been previously disturbed and has little ecological value. All construction will be within the existing footprint. Mr. Sorena asked if the town would be extending the sidewalk and Mr. **DiPinto** said the next phase is to connect it with the walking trail.

Ms. **Dew** stated that a special permit would be required from PZC and would need Wetlands approval first.

Mr. **Dowdell** asked why the previous application was denied. Mr. **DiPinto** stated that PZC had asked him to exhaust all options on the REC Center before considering Prospect Ridge. A school is currently being built on Prospect Ridge so that it is no longer a viable site.

Ms. **DiSalvo** stated that Option B is the preferable option because nothing would be disturbed.

Mr. **Hendrick** stated that either option is viable, and each has pros and cons. He added that the neighbors be advised of these proposals.

Mr. **Sorena** agreed with Ms. DiSalvo that Option B is the better site.

Ms. **Okrongly** agreed that Option B is the better site as well.

4.3 Approval of Minutes

4.2.1: [Meeting Minutes](#): March 4, 2025

Ms. Dew recommended an amendment stating that the Commission's executive session at March 4, 2025, meeting ended at 11:35 p.m. and the meeting adjourned at 11:37 p.m.

Mr. Dowdell made MOTION TO APPROVE amended meeting minutes for March 4, 2025. Seconded by Ms. DiSalvo. APPROVED unanimously.

5. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

Submitted by Steve Foundoukis
Recording Secretary

