



**Ridgefield
Economic &
Community
Development
Commission**

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Geoffrey Morris, Chair
Glori Norwitt, Secretary
Dee Dee Colabella
Cameron Cole Carcelén
Susan Gessner
Bob Knight
Steve Spivak

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman
ridgefieldct.com

**Economic & Community Development Commission
Approved Minutes
May 10, 2021, 6:30 pm, via ZOOM Video Conference**

In Attendance: Chairman Geoffrey Morris; Secretary Glori Norwitt; Commissioners Dee Dee Colabella, Cameron Carcelén Cole, Susan Gessner, Bob Knight, and Steve Spivak.

Guest: Sean Dowd; John Fallon

Geoffrey Morris called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

Announcements

Next meeting: June 7, 2021

Minutes

With no modifications, Susan made a motion to approve the April 2021 meeting minutes; seconded by Cameron. Motion carries 7-0.

General Discussion

1. Cultural District (Norwitt)

On April 28, we received official notice that our application to designate part of Ridgefield as a “Cultural District” was approved by the CT Office of the Arts. Additionally, we are the first town to receive the designation! The State DECD put out a Press Release, and we (the ECDC) did as well. We received a great deal of positive feedback from many people, organizations and businesses around town.

On Friday May 21, 2021, we will host an event to announce the designation at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. The Governor will attend. Participation will be limited due to the continuing Covid19 pandemic. Glori will send out invitations soon to the Cultural District Subcommittee, the ECDC and Board of Selectmen, and some other arts and culture organizations in town, and the press.

Jonathan Winn of Thrown Stone Theater designed a logo to be used state-wide for all Cultural Districts; the CT Office of the Arts was happy with the design, and we are awaiting final approval. The design is an acorn shape with a clean look. This design process was a perfect example of teamwork: a local person offering his services to the state to create the logo so that Ridgefield can put up signs about our Cultural District.

Susan Gessner spoke with Books on the Common co-owner Ellen Burns about a Ridgefield map she created with an artist to promote tourism several years ago. Susan is customizing a version of the map to focus on the Cultural District section of town. We anticipate using this new map in a poster size at the Governor Lamont event on May 21.

Bob Knight added that a new Cultural District section was added to the ECDC website choos ridgefield.com

2. Plan of Conservation and Development (Gessner)

Susan is representing the ECDC on the Town Task Force for POCD Implementation. Others on the Task Force are Susan Consentino representing the P&Z, Eric Keller representing the Conservation Commission, Dave Goldenberg representing the Affordable Housing Committee, Ben Oko representing the Ridgefield Action Committee for the Environment, and Bob Hebert representing the Board of Selectmen.

During their April 26 meeting, Eric Keller reported that a new trail is being approved behind Ligi’s Way. The town seeks to have open space in 30% of the land; in order to do so, approximately another 1,000 more acres would need to be added.

Susan discussed the action items for the ECDC per the POCD:

a. Explore installation of kiosks/wayfinding signage at strategic locations to inform visitors of business location and Town Center sidewalks and pathways.

(Geoffrey suggests development of a comprehensive app which can be promoted instead of a physical kiosk) (A Visitors Center could be created in the first room in Town Hall).

b. Install pavement markings, signage, and wayfinding to direct employees and visitors to parking spaces.

c. Consider participating in the CT Main Street Program.

Susan met with the Executive Director of CT Main Street Center, Kimberly Parsons-Whitaker to determine if it made sense for Ridgefield to become a member of this organization. A number of towns are members, including Fairfield. The organization provides an overall ecosystem of contractors and resources for members. Joining would cost \$1,000 per year for our Town size; Susan is considering whether she would suggest this or not.

d. Consider the possible establishment of a Main Street manager.

e. Participate in the State program for “municipal cultural districts” for the benefit of Ridgefield businesses and orgs: This action item has been completed.

f. Strategically coordinate town marketing with the resources available.

g. Hire/assign staff to assist with economic development efforts. Susan and Geoffrey support this as a good investment for the Town; the ECDC could possibly have a consultant on retainer if funded.

3. Make Music Day (Spivak)

Make Music Day is an international event to promote playing, listening to and supporting music. The ECDC previously voted to support marketing this day and the overall arts & culture Town events this summer/fall with \$2,500.

The first step is to create a calendar of all events, which can be shared broadly. Steve suggested to the MMD local organizers that in addition to building out a landing page, the group could use free posting opportunities like Facebook pages Hello Ridgefield, Ridgefield Moms, etc and Hamlet Hub and other press.

The summer of Music and Culture can also be promoted by all local arts/culture orgs such as CHIRP, Ridgefield Chorale, museums by these orgs sending it to their supporters. Steve suggested targeted Facebook campaigns.

Of the \$2,500 previously voted in to support marketing of the MMD and full calendar of events, \$2,250 would purchase many ads over the entire summer; the remaining \$250 could be saved for banners and local needs. Steve is encouraging database emails to

lessen costs. A banner is being created for the corner of 35 and Farmingville in front of Pamby, and in front of Town Hall.

Geoffrey noted that the ECDC is increasingly being sought for its marketing efforts.

Sean Dowd asked if the marketing plan includes Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok and others to increase a diverse audience. He points out that TikTok is music-based. Geoffrey noted that some students that plan to perform at MMD could help explore this medium. Sean knows a student with a production team that creates sport highlight videos that he can contact about creating approved content. Further, The Prospector had a production team and could be a good partner. Susan noted that perhaps some radio stations could help promote; Geoffrey said that they are in contact with some.

4. Consumer Confidence Campaign (Knight)

The ads reached several thousand people on Facebook and created a good amount of traffic. For example, "More room to rock out" reached 1,500 people; another had 1,100 reach with 220 engagement.

The ECDC created a Facebook ad with a 40 mile radius in relation to the new Cultural District designation; it reached over 3,000 people with 71 clicks in one week.

The recent ECDC post on Facebook regarding the Internet satisfaction survey reached 5,000, with 234 clicking through.

5. Branding Initiative (Gessner)

Cameron, Dee Dee, Steve and Susan have been meeting for the last few months to develop a brand strategy to promote the Town. The project goals include:

a. Attract people to (1) start or relocate their business in Ridgefield (2) encourage residents to start a business and become entrepreneurs (3) promote Ridgefield as a desirable destination to visit and to move to (4) motivate people from neighboring towns (North Salem Wilton) to spend the day in Ridgefield to shop, dine, enjoy the cultural attractions.

b. Create a consistent brand identity that will reinforce the positive aspects of Ridgefield and influence how people perceive the benefits of our town.

c. Design a series of branded marketing materials to promote the town.

The Brand Positioning Statement below is a guide for the overall program.

As a premier town in CT, Ridgefield offers businesses a place to flourish with a professional workforce, strategic location, modern infrastructure and a commitment to sustainability. It's an ideal environment for families to thrive with high performing

schools, robust arts and culture, renowned restaurants, distinctive shops, a beautiful historic downtown, and an abundance of open recreation. Ridgefield is a community-oriented town with a strong loyalty to local businesses.

The Program Plan has three stages.

Discovery Stage: (1) determine brand attributes (2) develop brand positioning (3) create case studies and presentation (4) document and report findings.

Design Stage: (1) message platform (2) tagline (3) brand pillars (4) create narrative for all forms of communication (5) visual identity/graphic standards

Execution Stage: (1) create integrated marketing plan to include Promotional materials, showcase events; print, digital, radio ads; social media.

Dee Dee has been meeting with a designer John Fallon (artistic director at RPAC), to develop a wordmark with input from Cameron, Susan and Steve.

The committee proposes using “The Ridge” since this phrase is being used in many ways throughout the Town already; Rudy Marconi used it in his latest election campaign; one store currently sells stickers with this phrase. This approach is slated to attract a younger audience, similar to how Norwalk uses SoNo.

John shared some design variations on the wordmark “The Ridge.” He noted that multiple taglines are needed to represent the various sectors in town that need promotion. Examples include “Be revolutionary” “Savor more” and “Explore more”. He noted that first you need to identify different sectors in town, and then identify one word for each sector: “savor” for restaurants, “explore” for outdoor/recreation sector, etc. He showed several color treatments: different colors could be used for different sectors. Green for outdoor, red for restaurants perhaps, etc. He showed how this could work with a sample of banners.

Discussion that the wordmark would need context so that an audience outside of Ridgefield (or even in town) would understand that “The Ridge” refers to Ridgefield, CT.

Discussion of the process, and the need to workshop the wordmark. Susan noted that one future step is to have focus groups review it. Possible groups include outside businesses, commercial real estate audiences, those looking to move here, or start or grow business here, tourists for entertainment or shops, medical innovation business, Branchville local businesses. It was noted that local businesses have expressed that it is more difficult to attract younger people and families to the community. Hopefully this logo would assist with that, in addition to making them feel more like an “insider.”

Bob Knight applauded the efforts of the Branding Initiative Team and suggested that the campaign would work well internally within Ridgefield. He also suggested that the team obtain feedback from the commercial real estate sector and with other stakeholders not

from Ridgefield to see if the proposed brand was meaningful for business attraction and for consumer/tourism reach outside of Town.

The ECDC thanked the Committee and John Fallon for their time and energy on this project.

6. Long Term Recovery Efforts (Knight)

Now that vaccinations are strong in Fairfield County and the business community is largely up and running in Ridgefield, Bob advised that the Business and Jobs Subcommittee was decommissioned in late April. The subcommittee had many successes and served its purpose and was viewed by State leaders as the most active in all of Connecticut. Many issues that were raised have been escalated to the State and/or resolved. Form for ongoing concerns/issues still available through the ECDC website chooseridgefield.com. Bob also noted that the Arts, Culture, Tourism, Recreation Subcommittee chaired by Glori Norwitt was also the most active subcommittee of its kind in Connecticut, and that something all of Ridgefield could be especially proud of.

Bob reviewed the previously-discussed issues raised by some of the thirty community stakeholders on the Business & Jobs Subcommittee. Organizations within the subcommittee collaborated well together (ie. teachers vaccinated separately by the RVNA) which benefited the entire community.

Senior Living facility Ridgefield Crossing asked the Town and State for a crosswalk on Route 7 for employees arriving by bus, and also for a bus stop. This would also benefit residents of Ridgefield Crossing. Bob suggested that the ECDC could support this issue.

Bob noted that the Business and Jobs Subcommittee created a town-wide discussion with large and small businesses to create dialogue and some partnerships. Businesses included RVNA, Nuvance, Boehringer and Adam Broderick, Steve Zemo and some small businesses. He thanked the subcommittee members and Co-Chair Geoffrey Morris.

7. Arts, Culture, Tourism & Recreation Subcommittee (Norwitt)

The ACTR Subcommittee is still active. Recent discussions included Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) and the federal American Rescue Plan Act funding. Geoffrey and Glori are collecting information from nonprofit Arts & Culture organizations in town re their new expenses related to the Covid19 pandemic, lost income, and funding received related to Covid19. They will seek to support local Arts & Culture groups to receive some funding from monies received by the Town through the American Rescue Plan Act. A Finance Subcommittee (led by Bob Cascella) has been created under the Long Term Recovery Committee to try to determine a fair process for distributing funding from the federal monies to be received.

8. Survey re Broadband (Knight)

The First Selectman's office created a survey to determine how residents feel about their broadband options and service. Thus far there are nearly 800 responses, just under 10% of households responding. So far, over 90% of survey respondents want the Board of Selectmen to look into options for a fiber network to improve internet infrastructure. The survey is available for residents and businesses on the ECDC website chooseridgefield.com Anyone with questions on the topic can reach out to the First Selectman's office.

9. Consumer Confidence Campaign (Morris)

The ECDC may partner with the Community Data Platform in the future for additional surveys.

10. Additional Discussions

The ECDC has built out a revised, more contemporary website which will soon be attached to the ridgefieldct.com current website (temporary URL is chooseridgefield.com until Town IT points the URL to ridgefieldct.com). The previously used website ridgefielddevelopment.com will be discontinued afterwards and its address will point to the new website.

Dee Dee Colabella is stepping down from the ECDC when her term ends in June 2021; Cameron Carcelen is stepping down when her term ends in July 2021. The process to fill these seats is for the ECDC to recommend candidate(s) to the Board of Selectmen. Subsequently the BOS votes to approve new Commissioner(s). Sean Down, previous co-owner of Ridgefield Bicycle Company, is interested in becoming a Commissioner and discussed his background and ideas.

Knight motioned to adjourn the public portion of the meeting followed by an Executive Session to discuss a HR matter. Seconded by Dee Dee. Motion carries 7-0. The meeting concluded at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Glori Norwitt, ECDC Secretary