



Town of Ridgefield
Public Hearing & Board of Selectpersons Meeting Minutes
APPROVED

December 13, 2023 at 7:30pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi, Maureen Kozlark, Sean Connelly, Barbara Manners, Chris Murray

Rudy Marconi called Public Hearing to order at 7:30pm.

1. Public Comment

Jacob Muller, Director of Facilities, gave an overview of the three grants the Town has been approved for: (1) VW EVSE ZIP Grant (\$50,917.10) which would fund the purchase and installation of six Dual-Port Level 2 Chargers in Town, (2) CT DEEP Urbanized Act Grant (\$400,000.00) which would provide funding to upgrade playgrounds at Ridgebury and Barlow Mountain Elementary Schools to be fully ADA compliant, and (3) CT DOT Community Connectivity Grant (\$370,000.00) which would fully fund the construction and installation of sidewalks along a portion of New Street and Pound Street.

Sean Connelly asked Mr. Muller for clarification about the VW EVSE Zip Grant.

Mr. Muller clarified the six new EV chargers would create 12 new parking spaces. Once installed, the BOS may decide whether to charge for the use of the chargers. The locations of the chargers: Richard E. Venus Building, Parks and Recreation Center, Governor Street Municipal Parking Lot, and Yannity Gym.

Mike Rettger, 25 Fairview Avenue, asked Mr. Muller to confirm the grants the Town has been awarded are fully refundable from the State. Mr. Muller confirmed.

Marc Greco, 197 Old Sib Road, asked whether the Town will incur the cost of the electricity used at the charging stations. Mr. Marconi confirmed the plan is to charge for use of the chargers. The two chargers behind Town Hall are also expected to be transitioned over to charging per use.

Mr. Greco asked about the chargers at Stop & Shop, and Mr. Marconi confirmed those are third-party owned, operated, and paid for by Stop & Shop, not the Town.

Mike Raduazzo, 195 Peaceable Street, asked where the funds will come from to pay for these projects up-front. Mr. Marconi confirmed these funds would come from the General Fund and the Town would submit for reimbursement as projects are completed.

Mr. Marconi asked Mr. Rettger, Vice Chair of the Board of Finance, to comment. Mr. Rettger confirmed these are considered additional financial appropriations for this year's budget, and

what would be authorized to be spent would come from the General Fund, and the grant reimbursement funds would be placed back in the General Fund.

Mr. Raduazzo asked whether specific EV spots will be designated for use of the chargers. Mr. Marconi confirmed there will be signage indicating EV parking.

Scott Mitchell, 2 Silver Birch Lane, asked how long it takes the State to reimburse funds. Mr. Muller indicated the Town typically runs a 30-day reimbursement request.

Wanda Taktikos, 67 Chelsea Place, requested an example of a past project that has worked successfully in this manner. Mr. Marconi confirmed the Town works with State-reimbursable grants every year for sidewalk projects.

Alex Crouch, 44 New Street, requested clarification for whether the new sidewalks will place a burden on the residents living on that side of the street to clear the ice and snow. Mr. Marconi confirmed the ordinance currently places the obligation of maintaining sidewalks on the “abutting property owner.”

Cynthia Bachman, 25 Pound Street, wondered whether Mr. Crouch’s question also applies to Pound Street. Mr. Marconi confirmed sidewalk maintenance is the responsibility of the abutting property owner.

Flavia Lodato, 38 Southridge Court, expressed a concern about the parking lot behind the Ridgefield Conservatory for Dance and the safety of the parking lot behind the building. Mr. Marconi confirmed it is private property and recommended Ms. Lodato speak with the Conservatory of Dance (property owned by Willette Properties in White Plains) or the Parking Authority.

John Scarborough, 47 New Street, expressed concern about the speed of drivers on their road, and shared Mr. Crouch’s concerns about snow and ice maintenance on their sidewalks. Mr. Marconi commented that the Town applied for the CT DOT Community Connectivity Grant to install new sidewalks following resident concerns about the speed of traffic on New Street.

Ms. Taktikos asked whether New Street could be made a one-way street. Mr. Marconi stated it was unlikely but would ultimately be up to the Police Commission.

Mr. Scarborough stated there are no “No Parking” signs on New Street, and wondered whether parking on the street would help slow the speed of drivers on the street. Mr. Marconi commented that may make the street more dangerous.

Two residents had follow-up questions about the leaf blower petition. Mr. Marconi stated the petition was withdrawn and the Board of Selectpersons will discuss creating a task force to explore the issue in the new year.

Mr. Marconi closed the Public Hearing.

Maureen Kozlark motioned to add an interview with Anthony Marcus as an Alternate for the Conservation Commission and add it as Agenda item 4a. Sean Connelly seconded the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

Mr. Marconi opened the floor for public comment, specifically about the Town Flagpole Policy.

Dawn-Marie Callahan, 56 Ridgewood Road, expressed concerns about the Board of Education budget, around mental health considerations for students and arts teachers and curricula.

Allen Rubin, 14 Comstock Court, stated their support for flying most flags the BOS chooses, and suggests a calendar for managing requests and duration.

Sean Archambault, 85 Ramapoo Road, expressed concerns that when the Town chooses to fly a flag, it symbolizes the support and opinions of the whole Town. Mr. Archambault suggested simply flying the State, Country, and POW-MIA flags.

Jonathan Thompson, 26 Rita Road, seconded the statement made by Mr. Archambault.

2. Odeen's – Ridgefield Golf Club Concession Renewal

Marshall Odeen, the Owner of Odeen's was in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- An increase in rent, based on CPI. Rudy Marconi will verify the rent increase with Mr. Odeen. The updated rent will hold a five-year term, the same length as the Odeen's current lease.
- Chris Murray asked about the number of guests they have each year. Mr. Odeen said COVID helped grow their business, thanks to the size of their outdoor space, and golfers and non-golfers both eat in their restaurant.
- Sean Connelly confirmed the restaurant is closed when the Golf Course is closed, and Mr. Odeen confirmed their business runs with the same season as the Golf Course season.

Sean Connelly motioned to approve the Odeen's – Ridgefield Golf Club Concession Agreement, contingent upon the discussion about the increase in rent, based on CPI. Maureen Kozlark seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

3. Ridgefield Library Agreement

The Ridgefield Library and the Town developed an original agreement in 1983 with a revision in 2012. The goal with this next update is to make it reflective of how the Library Association and the Town operate today. Topics discussed included:

- Barbara Manners questioned the library's operating budget, which is roughly 70% supported by the Town and 30% by the Library. Ms. Manners requested language around annual operating appropriations increases include a limitation to the support the Town is expected to provide, to prevent it from being expected to provide 100% financial support.
- Rudy Marconi expressed concern including such language because it could then obligate the Town to that percentage of support, even when it cannot or may not choose to do so. Both Sean Connelly and Maureen Kozlark also voiced an appreciation for the flexibility presented with the current language of the draft.

- The Town currently appoints up to 75% of the Library's Board of Directors members.
 - o The BOS does not feel that need still exists. The Library indicated they would be content with the Town appointing up to 25% of the seats.
- The Library will review the draft document based on the BOS feedback and it will be included on the agenda in the next BOS meeting in January.

4. Board of Education – Indoor Air Quality Grant & HVAC Capital Project

Jill Browne, Director of Finance, and Dr. Susie Da Silva, Superintendent were in attendance. Ms. Browne and Dr. Da Silva discussed the grant program which encourages public schools to upgrade their heating and ventilation systems and includes an option to retroactively apply for previously completed jobs up to March 2020.

- No new work was created to suit this grant, all projects included are either scheduled or completed. In total, just over \$841,000 with the General Construction reimbursement rate from Ridgefield of 23.57%, so this grant offers an opportunity to relieve roughly \$198,000 burden from the Town.
- This would require creation of a Building Committee, which could be the Board of Education's Strategic Planning Committee.
- One project, a 5-ton split cooling system for Ridgefield High School, is on the Board of Education's current capital plan request (\$36,036) for fiscal year 2025. It will be removed if they receive the grant.
- Sean Connelly asked about Scott's Ridge, which is the only school not included in the grant. Ms. Browne confirmed Scott's Ridge is a newer school with fewer upgrade needs and is the only school without projects that qualified for grant funds.

Sean Connelly moved to approve the resolution prepared by the Board of Finance with respect to the Board of Education's plans to fund HVAC projects at Ridgefield Schools, as modified, with the addition of creating the Building Committee. Maureen Kozlark seconded the motion. Motion carries 5-0.

Mike Raduazzo, 195 Peaceable Street, expressed concern about outlaying additional capital for these projects. Dr. Da Silva confirmed all the projects have already been approved in the 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 capital plans.

Maureen Kozlark moved to approve the resolution for Bond Council, resolution appropriating \$42,194 to improve air quality, \$42,194 of the town to meet said appropriations, and the authorization for the Board of Education to act as the Building Committee, to be approved and recommended by a town meeting vote. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

4a. Interview with Anthony Markert

Anthony Markert explained his career path, and his volunteer experience with Ridgefield's Office of Emergency Management and Connecticut Autobahn. A copy of his Woodland Survey was distributed to each Selectperson. He recently completed an online certificate program with Auburn University in Restoration Ecology and volunteers as a Conservation Ranger with the Conservation Commission. Eric Heller, Vice Chairman of the Conservation Commission, voiced his support for Mr. Markert.

Barbara Manners moved to approve Anthony Markert as an Alternate for the Conservation Commission. Chris Murray seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

5. Cyber Security Policy

Mr. Marconi distributed copies of a letter of support from the Ridgefield Insurance and Risk Management Committee to the Board of Selectpersons, regarding the importance of managing cyber security and cyber security-related email risks at Town Hall. He requested the BOS review and discuss at their upcoming meeting in January for potential further action.

6. Town Flagpole Policy

Mr. Marconi advised that the Israeli flag will be taken down from the Town Hall Flagpole on Friday, December 15. He proposed the Town currently fly the Country and State flags and maintain the option to fly the POW-MIA flag and Town GRADD flag, in collaboration with the Police Department. He suggested the BOS review policies from other communities before creating a Town Flagpole Policy.

Some residents specifically asked to have their names read for the record that they'd sent in feedback, questions, or comments about flags flying at Town Hall: Debra Franceschini, Lisa McEvoy, Ray & Kay Sementini, Joseph O'Dea, Daniel Wehking, Kreshnik Jusufi, and Rachel Mann.

Sean Connelly moved to approve the proposed policy limiting the flags that fly at Town Hall to the Country, State, POW-MIA and Town GRADD flag until there's greater debate, discussion, and a formal Town Flagpole Policy be proposed. Chris Murray seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

7. Reappointments – Terms all Expired 12.5.23

- a. Affordable Housing Committee
- b. Cable Advisory Council
- c. Deer Management Implementation Committee
- d. Golf Committee
- e. Graveyard Restoration Committee
- f. Insurance & Risk Management Committee
- g. Ridgefield Arts Council
- h. Ridgefield Prevention Council
- i. Architectural Advisory Committee

Barbara Manners moved to re-approve the existence of the Committees and Councils of the Board of Selectpersons. Maureen Kozlark seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

8. Approval of Meeting Minutes

a. Minutes from 10.11.23

Maureen Kozlark indicated the BOS made a motion to approve the survey, but they didn't approve the \$750,000 indicated. Requested additional language in that motion about requesting a survey, such as "further approvals will be necessary."

Sean Connelly called out a portion about "some wear and tear at the Tiger Hollow Field in 2025," but it will eventually need to be fully replaced, which would need to be included in the next capital budget, which it currently is not.

Mr. Connelly and Ms. Kozlark also noted the monument discussed was at the Police Station, not the High School as indicated.

b. Minutes from 10.25.23

Maureen Kozlark requested the minutes indicate the BOS had a conversation about electric motorboats and agreed to research the possible use of electric motorboats and their associated costs.

Maureen Kozlark moved to approve the minutes, as modified. Barbara Manners seconded. Motion carries 3-0-2.

c. Minutes from 11.29.23

Maureen Kozlark indicated Bob Herbert was noted as present but should not have been listed. She also recommended saying “Denise Qualey” instead of simply “Denise” on page 3 and correcting “Saasha” to “Sasha” on page 1.

For the “Noise Ordinance” section, Chris Murray stated he “expressed concerns” but not about legality and the Selectperson who seconded the motion to set a Public Hearing needs to be indicated.

Ms. Kozlark indicated a change to the Board of Selectperson Meeting Calendar section, to indicate the 6:00pm start-time for the four meetings with the Fire Commission. And to update the Selectman’s Report to “create a rent commission in Ridgefield” instead of simply discussing “rent.” Approval of meeting minutes needs to be verified for motions.

9. Selectperson’s Report

Rudy Marconi updated the Board of Selectpersons that the town received an okay from the flood management certification for the Depot Road bridge going in next year (2024).

Mr. Marconi secured fuel pricing for next year, Diesel 135,000 gallons at \$2.752/gallon and Gasoline 81,000 gallons at \$2.31/gallon, approximately a 10% reduction in the budget line.

Mr. Marconi mentioned receiving a letter from Vincent Giordano, on behalf of Ridgefield CALM. And the resignation of Maurice Mancini from the Golf Committee, so there’s a vacancy there.

The Town applied for funding through the IIJA (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) Fund for rapid flashing beacons at several different locations for pedestrian safety, especially at the crosswalk in front of Starbucks. But first are required to conduct a town-wide safety assessment, which would cost \$320,000. The Town received a grant for the safety audit and Jake Muller, Director of Facilities, will add a 20% match to their capital for FYE 25 and will reduce some other line items to balance their budget.

Chris Murray and Sean Connelly asked about the creation of the task force about the gas-powered leaf blowers, Mr. Marconi confirmed members of a task force must be Ridgefield residents.

Maureen Kozlark motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:09pm. Sean Connelly seconded the motion. Motion carries 5-0.