



Town of Ridgefield

Form of Government Task Force Approved Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 16, 2024

FINAL

I. Call to order

The Form of Government Task Force meeting convened at 7:00 PM on Monday September 16, 2024 in the Town Hall large conference room.

Members present: Laurie Christiansen, Michael Rettger, Jonathan Seem, Dennis Tracey, Steve Zemo, Todd Zagorec, Robert Hendrick

Members absent: Charles Robbins, Rachel Sondheimer

Others Participating: None

II. Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of the August 19, 2024 meeting by Mr. Zemo, seconded by Mr. Tracey. All in favor

III. Old Business – Review of Action Items

Mr. Zagorec reviewed the status of action items from the prior meeting:

- Meeting dates for the balance of the year have been set and posted to the town calendar.
- Arrangements have been made for the meetings to be live streamed, which precludes the need for a separate audio recording.
- Mr. Hendrick has offered to manage the use of Zoom to enable hybrid meetings when needed.

The members discussed the regular use of Zoom in parallel with live streaming and as an alternative to live streaming in the future. It was suggested that regular use of Zoom might offer more convenient access for members of the public wishing to offer comments at the meeting. There was concern that having just Zoom without also having a live stream might make access less convenient for some. There were several questions about what would be needed to comply with rules for public meetings if only Zoom were used. *Mr. Hendrick will investigate these questions as well as any technical concerns by the town's IT department for continuation of the discussion at the next meeting.*

Ms. Christiansen reported on progress on getting the town to establish a web page for the Task Force. The two items needed to proceed are finalization of the Task Force Mission Statement so it can be posted and a decision on use of town emails by members, including whether to have a generic email for people to communicate with the Task Force.

IV. Old Business – Task Force Mission Statement

Mr. Rettger proposed that the mission statement discussed at the prior meeting be amended to include the words “authorized by State Statutes” to clarify the scope of possible alternatives that would be considered by the Task Force. Members indicated agreement with this suggestion. After further discussion,

Motion to adopt the Task Force Mission Statement as amended at the prior and this meeting, to read as follows:

Town of Ridgefield Form of Government Task Force: Mission Statement

The task force is charged with conducting a comprehensive study to compare various types of municipal governments. This study should delve into the structures, functions, and efficacy of different municipal government models authorized by State Statutes, including but not limited to council-manager, mayor-council, and town meeting forms of government. The task force’s analysis should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of each model in terms of promoting efficiency, accountability, citizen participation, and responsiveness to local needs. Furthermore, the task force is expected to gather evidence and best practices from municipalities that have implemented innovative governance strategies, with the ultimate goal of providing evidence-based recommendations for improving municipal governance in Ridgefield and better serving the community

Motion by Mr. Seem, seconded by Mr. Hendrick. All in favor.

V. New Business - Task Force Structure

Mr. Zagorec reported on discussions by the Board of Selectpersons to change the status of the Task Force from an advisory group to that of a formal BOS committee appointed under Section 5-16 of the Town Charter. The BOS may be discussing this change at its September 25 meeting. As part of the change, the BOS may consider expanding the number of members to 11, in order to broaden minority party representation, although it was noted that the membership already complies with representation rules for a nine-member board.

Mr. Zagorec also reviewed Freedom of Information rules as they apply to the Task Force and member communications, including that all meeting work product as well as member written communication pertaining to Task Force activity was subject to FOI. To facilitate compliance, members will be provided with town email accounts. Mr. Zagorec also distributed the town’s guidelines for board operations and discussed the applicability of the Code of Ethics in the Town Charter to members’ participation on the Task Force.

VI. New Business – Task Force Work Plan

The members’ discussed the second draft of the work plan that Mr. Zagorec had prepared in response to members’ suggestions. Points of discussion included the timing of work on various

elements, types of research needed, and potential sources of information. There was general agreement that the work should be divided into smaller teams working in parallel to accomplish work plan tasks, with two main areas of focus – development of the concept of a chief administrative role and the implications of that concept for other town governance roles, and exploration of the potential benefits and implications of alternative forms of government, focusing on the legislative authorities for each. It was also suggested that initial research focus on the towns that comprise the “District Reference Group A” (a grouping of towns that are similar in size and socio-economic character to Ridgefield), and expanding the scope of research from that population as needed.

Mr. Zagorec will prepare a summary of his sense of the suggestions to further refine the workplan document. Mr. Rettger offered to further develop the matrix of governance authorities and responsibilities that he circulated previously to include the other major forms of government that will be reviewed.

VII. Continuation of Planned Agenda

Motion to table discussion of Item 5c on the agenda (Task Force Members’ Views on Current Form of Government) to the following meeting by Mr. Tracey, seconded by Mr. Hendrick. All in favor.

VIII. Planning Future Agendas

Members discussed additional items for inclusion on the agenda for the next meeting, in addition to the item being postponed from the current meeting.

IX. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 9:07 pm by Mr. Seem, seconded by Mr. Zemo. All in favor.

Next meeting October 7, 2024, 7:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by
Michael Rettger