

From: Debra Franceschini <debrafranceschini@yahoo.com>

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 4:05 PM

To: Laurie Christiansen <torfoga@ridgefieldct.gov>

Subject: FOG Feedback to consider

Hello FOG Committee.

Thank you for taking on this important task in addition to all your other volunteer efforts. I thought I would share the below with the committee.

1. During the interview of town leaders who already have a different form of government such as a town administration. Have these two individuals butted heads? If so, how have those issues been resolved?
2. Our current government/BOS is elected in its entirety every four years. Some consideration should be given to implementing a staggered board of elections similar to other elected town government. A complete change in a Selectpersons board would cripple the town. Although unlikely, no one ever thought Donald Trump would be elected as president once, let alone twice.
3. I hope some consideration is given to implementing some of your findings in a possible town charter change, which can be done anytime as town government sees fit as I understand it.
4. Committee Outreach to educate the residents on the process of this committee and what it could lead to via Zoom with replay available.
5. Outreach via a high school assembly event to review process and ask for feedback from our soon to be voters.

Thanks,

Debra Franceschini-Gatje

###

From: Debra Franceschini <debrafranceschini@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 18, 2024 8:11 AM
To: Laurie Christiansen <torfoga@ridgefieldct.gov>
Subject: Town Votes procedures

Hello Form of Government Committee,

Thank you for your volunteerism for this committee and the many others you sit on.

I wanted to share another concern that I think needs attention pertaining to town meetings.

The current most common town meetings collect votes by who has the loudest voices versus a paper ballot.

For someone who is very some spoken it makes it extremely difficult for me to have my voice heard. This form of democracy needs to be updated so all residents can be seen and heard if this process continues.

For folks who are nonverbal this is especially important to allow the disabled community to become a more inclusive part of town government.

I also feel that town meetings and the associated public hearing should never happen on the same night. For individuals who are unable to attend a public hearings but also want to have an informed decision, it's important that some questions be allowed, versus this meeting is not a time for questions but rather to convince your fellow voters how and why to vote accordingly.

The oral votes taken at most town meetings are also seen as a form of intimidation IMO as some voters may not be willing to voice their opinion at a town meeting without someone form of negative comments and possible retaliation.

Thanks for everything you do.

Thanks,
Debra Franceschini-Gatje
72 Spireview Rd.

###

12/19/2024

**Town of Ridgefield
Attention: First Selectperson Rudy Marconi
400 Main St.
Ridgefield, CT 06877**

Dear First Selectperson and Board of Selectpersons,

I am writing to formally address a concern regarding a lack of accessibility at the town hall large conference room in Ridgefield, CT that has affected my ability, as a person with a disability, to fully participate in the current town meeting process.

While I understand the complexities involved in managing the town meeting voting process, I want to emphasize that accessibility is a fundamental right protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

During my recent participation in a Special Town Meeting on Wednesday, December 19th at 7:30pm, I encountered the lack of effective and equal communication for all during the town meeting voting process.

As a result, I was discriminated and disparaged when trying to effectively participate in the same manner and method given to the other 70+ residents in the voting process.

I was unable to fully participate in the current antiquated town meeting voting process which left me feeling excluded and unable to engage in what should have been in an effective democratic process without being singled out and embarrassed by the Board of Selectpersons and the meeting moderator who the Board of Selectpersons nominated and ultimately moderated the meeting.

It's ironic that the subject of this meeting was to provide funds for the planning and development of an appropriate location of our most vulnerable population, particularly the Ridgefield Special Education population.

I was also extremely disturbed that although not their meeting, the special education administration failed to recognize the situation and advocate for me as experts in this field.

I trust that this was not your intention, but I must emphasize that the lack of appropriate accommodations poses a significant barrier to individuals with disabilities.

ToR Form of Government Committee: Copies of Correspondence Received

The ADA requires public accommodations to ensure equal access for everyone, and noncompliance not only affects individuals like myself but also risks further exclusion of a substantial portion of the community.

I respectfully request that you address this issue as soon as possible to ensure the town meeting process meets ADA standards.

By making the necessary changes, you not only comply with the law but also demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and respect for all members of the community.

Please inform me of the steps you plan to take to resolve this matter. I would be happy to discuss any specific details that might help guide you in addressing this issue.

I appreciate your attention to this concern and hope to see the necessary improvements made in the near future.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response by December 31st, 2024

Sincerely,
Debra Franceschini
72 Spireview Road
Ridgefield, CT 06877
Cell 203-496-1834

cc: Cohen and Wolf
cc: Chair of Ridgefield Commission for Accessibility
cc: Anthony Phillips, Ridgefield Municipal Agent for Disabled
cc: The Form of Government Committee
cc: U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
Disability Rights Section
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

###

Anthony Phillips

To:Robert Hendrick;Laurie Christiansen;Rudy Marconi;Todd Zagorec

Mon 1/6/2025 1:40 PM

High importance

Hi Rudy, Rob, Todd and Laurie,

I am Tony Phillips, Director of Social Services and the ADA Coordinator for the Town of Ridgefield.

The Town has a responsibility to ensure the public can participate in our programs.

As such we are required to make reasonable accommodations to ensure everyone has the ability to participate in town programs, including public meetings.

I have included the four of you on this message, as a request has come in for a reasonable accommodation related to an upcoming meeting you will chair.

One of those meetings, "Form of Government" she identified as scheduled for tonight.

Below in the breadcrumbs of this email you will find a request for an accommodation due to a disability, requested by a Town resident who wishes to participate in your upcoming public meeting(s).

I presume you all have some form of public comment portion of your meetings.

Below Debra has asked for an accommodation to have "the Chair (or I'll suggest someone of your or her choosing) read her public comments during the meeting."

This sounds like a reasonable accommodation to me, that will allow her to participate fully in the public comments portion of your meetings.

I believe this to be made available at BOS meetings, as well people have asked for letters to be entered into the minutes as well.

This is of course provided that her comments meet any other specifics you have that are particular to your meeting i.e. the comments are only by invitation by the Chair, the comments need to be pertinent to the discussion, be read under 3 minute time limit, etc.

Please let me know if you are agreeable to this request and can make this happen anytime Debra wishes to participate in your meetings?

If you are unable to accommodate, please reach out to me with specific reasons why you cannot or please offer a reasonable alternative.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.

Once I know you are in agreement I will contact Debra to let her know.

Thank you, I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,
Tony Phillips, LCSW
Director of Social Services
ADA Coordinator
Town of Ridgefield
O 203-431-2777
C 203-807-4524
(he/him/his)

###

Debra Franceschini

Mon 1/6/2025 3:23 PM

Hi Laurie,

I've sent my public comment to you and Mr. Zagorec in a separate communication. Thanks in advance for your support.

Thanks, Debra Franceschini-Gatje On Jan 6, 2025, at 1:26 PM,

###

Debra Franceschini<debrafranceschini@yahoo.com>

To:Laurie Christiansen

Mon 1/6/2025 3:19 PM

SUBJECT : Discussion of Potential Changes to Ridgefield's type and structure of government.

Currently Ridgefield operates via the Home Rule model under a T own Charter with a Board of Selectpersons and a First Selection person as defined by the State of Connecticut. I believe strongly that Ridgefield should RETAIN the current government type and structure with a few

necessary modifications.

Below are many of the areas that have been discussed amongst residents and some Town Commissions, Boards, and Committees as well as thoughts on each.

TOWN MANAGER/ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER

There has been some discussion about adding an additional position under the First Selectman such as a Town or Administrative Manager. I strongly OPPOSE this change. For multiple reasons I believe such an addition would be in violation of the intent and spirit of the Town Charter and is contrary to residents' desire to meet government responsibility towards the least cost. A redistribution of certain responsibilities, regularly scheduled interfunctional sessions and a defined Town Plan (i.e.

"How do we want Ridgefield to look and function in ten years from right now and what are the specific actions the town needs to do to make that a reality") could minimize or eliminate the need for additional headcount.

TERM LIMITS FOR FIRST SELECTPERSON AND MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF SELECTPERSONS

I RECOMMEND this change which many residents believe will provide new perspectives, talent and skills and generally more vigor, new ideas and resident involvement in our town government. I suggest a maximum of 3 terms, concurrent or disparate, as elected by the residents.

CREATION OF AN EXECUTABLE AND MEASURABLE TOWN PLAN

I RECOMMEND the creation of a task force, (perhaps working as a subcommittee within P & Z) to create a town plan. This could be an appointed position approved by Planning and Zoning, Inland Wetlands, Conservation Commission and BOS. A job description is required. This could be done internally or via a consultant who has helped other towns in Connecticut that have created such plans.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

A change in the Town Chart is RECOMMENDED. Recommendations and position papers submitted by the Conservation Commission have to be given serious consideration. Any entity that does not adopt their proposed plans must submit in writing to the BOS a specific, validated reason for not doing so

Thanks,
Debra Franceschini-Gatje
72 Spireview Rd.

###

From: Anthony Phillips <socialservices@ridgefieldct.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 7, 2025 10:55 AM
To: Todd Zagorec <torfogchair@ridgefieldct.gov>
Cc: Don Ciota <torcfachair@ridgefieldct.gov>
Subject: FoG meeting and voting/ADA related matters

Hi Todd,

I tuned in this morning to see how last night's meeting went.
Seemed to go alright, except for the technical issues.
Thank you for reading the resident's public comment.

I wonder, one of the Committee members mentioned receiving "an ADA letter", but I wasn't clear to what that referred.

Was he referring to Debra's email from 12/19?, my email from yesterday or did you all receive another email?

I am curious to know if there is another issue that needs my attention or if we are talking about the same thing?

I don't know if this is within your purview, but may be worth the academic exercise to consider solutions as you study and discuss; but related to in person voting/meetings I have had one or two people over the years who suggest more flexibility to vote "remotely", specific to in person voice, hand or paper ballot type votes. The particular ask is framed around having a health issue with anxiety/risk that is caused by upticks in things like infectious diseases; Covid, RSV, etc. Generally the discussion has been around "I'd like to vote, but don't want to/can't attend the in person meeting due to risk." I have understood that if its an in person vote, they must be there in person just like everyone else; although I suspect the Town/moderator could be flexible to receive that specific vote in a different way; while the person remains in another room or listens nearby on a phone or other device. But I also understand some of these procedures related to voting are dictated by either Town charter or by State law, so there may not be as much flexibility as I presume? Although I've had questions about this issue over the past few years, we have never actually had someone attend a meeting in person (or be nearby in the building) and ask to vote remotely via paper or another form. They have all been posed as "what if I/person wants to attend and vote, but can't/won't be in the room with everyone else?"

Where issues like this are related to disability, The Town may be required to provide a reasonable accommodation.

There have also been suggestions there may be residents who cannot or do not drive at night (when most public or Town meetings are scheduled), therefore making it so those residents may be less likely to participate in the meetings and/or voting. As well, it is a reality that our town funded senior/disability transportation services 1) SweetHart and 2) the Town bus are limited to daytime hours leaving those with transportation needs at a disadvantage if they wish to attend or vote at an evening meeting. Again, I don't have people calling to complain but we are aware the issue exists and may impact some.

In this case related to ADA, the Town perspective would be since the Town does not offer transportation to anyone else to get to night meetings, we would not be compelled to offer it for special populations. But the consequence is that seniors/people with disabilities who rely on town transportation could be disadvantaged.

I cc'd Don Ciota our Chair of the Commission for Accessibility as we have discussed these issues at our past meetings.

He may have a perspective to share.

Let me know if you have any questions and I am happy to discuss or explain further.

Best regards,
Tony Phillips, LCSW
Director of Social Services
ADA Coordinator
Town of Ridgefield
O 203-431-2777
C 203-807-4524
(he/him/his)

###

Debra Franceschini<debrafranceschini@yahoo.com>
:Laurie Christiansen
Tue 1/14/2025 5:06 PM

Hi Laurie,

Passing this along. Also has any thought been given to potentially hiring or researching an assistant town administrator/CFO.

<https://www.ctinsider.com/fairfield/article/fairfield-cfo-tom-harris-fiscal-officer-ct-20020276.php>

Thanks,
Debra Franceschini-Gatje

###

January 23, 2025
Andrea Reeves Beebe
378 Main Street #201
Ridgefield, CT 06877

Re: Voting at Town Meetings

Dear the Change of Government Task Force Committee,

I would like to submit a request for a change to the method of voting at town meetings, In today's environment when the needs of individuals must be taken into account, the voice vote seems antiquated. For example, if an individual with special needs who is unable to project his/her voice is not heard, the vote is muted and not counted. I believe with the number of various options that may be available, a truer accounting of the actual vote is preferable over a voice vote. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely, Andrea Beebe

###

From: Maureen Kozlark <torselectpersonb@ridgefieldct.gov>
Sent: Friday, January 24, 2025 8:57 AM
To: Todd Zagorec <torfogchair@ridgefieldct.gov>; Laurie Christiansen <torfoga@ridgefieldct.gov>
Subject: Grouping Town Meetings

Good morning

Thank you for all your work- it was a very interesting discussion last night at your public hearing.

As I was thinking about Town Meetings on my way home, I remembered the BOS had scheduled quarterly Town meetings a few years ago to address the points made last night. It didn't work out.

There still might be value in this and it would have to be a deeper dive into the question Laurie asked about grouping the votes and timing. With more directed organization it perhaps could be accomplished.

I am happy to speak further about this if interested.

Have a great day,

Maureen

###

Fleuri MacIntyre<fleuri121@yahoo.com>
To:Laurie Christiansen
Tue 2/4/2025 1:51 PM

Hi~

I am interested in learning more about this committee and town govt.

Missed last night meeting but hope to make the next one. Let me know whether it's the 17th and zoom info.

Thanks~

Fleur

Fleur M. MacIntyre 🌸
41 old mill rd
ridgefield ct 06877

###

Debra Franceschini<debrafranceschini@yahoo.com>
To: Todd Zagorec; Laurie Christiansen
Tue 5/20/2025 8:22 AM

news_worth_sharing_01.20.2022.pdf

2 attachments (84 KB) Download all

Hi I saw you meeting last night in reference to remote electronic voting town meetings see Kent, CT below.

https://www.townofkentct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3311/f/uploads/news_worth_sharing_01.20.2022.pdf

###

Redefining participation at Elon University | Poll Everywhere

DF

Debra Franceschini<debrafranceschini@yahoo.com>
To: Todd Zagorec; Laurie Christiansen
Tue 5/20/2025 8:39 AM

Here's an example of how polling/voting is handled at a university, but there are several enterprise levels examples as well that seem to have a high level of needed security.

<https://www.pollerywhere.com/case-studies/redefining-participation-inclusive-engagement>

Kind Regards,
Deb Franceschini

###

Empowering teams with live engagement | Poll Everywhere

DF

Debra Franceschini<debrafranceschini@yahoo.com>
To: Todd Zagorec; Laurie Christiansen
Tue 5/20/2025 8:40 AM

Here's a better example.

<https://www.pollerywhere.com/case-studies/empowering-teams-with-live-engagement>

Kind Regards,
Deb Franceschini