Planning and Zoning Commission
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 27, 2026
(Unrevised/Unapproved)

ATTENDANCE

Commission & Staff

NAME	TITLE/ROLE	PRESENT		NOTES
		Yes	No	
Robert Hendrick	Chair	X		
Mariah Okrongly	Vice Chair	X		She left the room during the Public hearing.
Joe Dowdell	Commissioner	X		
Ben Nneji	Commissioner	X		
Elizabeth DiSalvo	Commissioner		X	
Chris Molyneaux	Commissioner		X	
Joe Sorena	Commissioner		X	
Sebastian D'Acunto	Commissioner	X		via Zoom – Left at 8:56PM
Ben Nissim	Commissioner	X		
Aarti Paranjape	Director, (Staff)	X		

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Hendrick called meeting to order at 7:00 PM; Quorum established.

1.1. **Distribution of agenda & previous minutes. (Published on Commission's webpage prior to meeting.)**

1.2. **Administrative Announcements & Correspondence**

- Letter from B and J Gannon re: Branchville study dated 10.20.2026 uploaded to MISC-25-3
- Letter from M. Autori: The letter includes his opinion on the CDMA program.

1.3. **Approval of agenda.**

2. ENFORCEMENT (COMPLAINTS/VIOLATIONS)

2.1. **225 Bennetts Farm Road:** No new updates on this application. Tabled to Next meeting in November.

3. PUBLIC HEARING

3.1. **(Contd.) SP-26-7: 0 Ethan Allen Hwy: Special Permit Application** (per RZR 9.2.A and 5.3.D.13) to create a golf driving range, parking area and related improvements in B-2 Zone. *Owner: EAP Property; Applicant: Robert Jewell.* https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/106587

This is a continued application. Mr. Hendrick introduced the application. Mr. Jewell was present to represent the application. Mr. Hendrick reminded everyone of the process of a public hearing. Ms. Okrongly recused herself from this application. Mr. Trinkaus, project engineer, and Edward Murphy architect on behalf of the application, is at Architectural Advisory Committee meeting. Mr. Jewell anticipates having one more continuation. They are awaiting the results of the acoustic survey. The applicant submitted a set of revised plans. Based on the concerns regarding noise, an enclosure with acoustic panels has been designed instead of

an open bay with exposed sound. In reference to a study that was submitted, Mr. Jewell thinks the acoustic design will eliminate any concerns from that study. They are eliminating the turf and will use natural grass to eliminate concerns of artificial turf. Mr. Jewell went to the police commission, who has not yet submitted comment but intends to. They do not have concerns with the driveway location from a safety perspective. Mr. Trinkaus submitted a pole letter. There is also an architect from DCA who has done an ADA analysis. They will be updating the plans based on this study so the site will be ADA compliant. The designs include permeable pavers so no additional impervious surface will be added. Mr. Trinkaus was present but had no additional comment. He will make the engineering changes Mr. Jewell discussed. Mr. Jewell would like to take time to address comments this evening.

Discussion ensued by the PZC. Mr. Hendrick states that the application should be assessed by the PZC based on the set of plans dated October 7, 2026. No additional wall system will be included. The PZC inquired about the composition of the acoustic wall. The acoustic panels composition is detailed in the plans. No artificial turf included. Mr. Hendrick has multiple other questions but reminds Mr. Jewell that there is a series of questions on the elements of this plan including impervious coverage, materials, and 8 to 10 additional technical comments that are expected to be seen on an engineer and technical plan. Mr. Hendrick believes this went from a simple plan to a more designed plan. Mr. Jewell believes they will have the information by the Next meeting on November 10. The extension expires on December 17. Mr. Hendrick suggests potentially withdrawing and resubmitting. Mr. Jewell does not want to withdraw and resubmit. Mr. Hendrick mentions the netting system and poles. He would like to see a more engineered plan. Mr. Jewell suggests that it will be like the netting across the street. The engineer submitted a letter describing the installation plan. Ms. Paranjape showed the letter on the screen. Mr. D'Acunto inquired about testimony by a neighbor that they had a discussion with the owner or one of the members or shareholders of the entity that owns the property. They were talking about lighting. The testimony was that the gentleman who is part of the ownership thinks lights are definitely coming in a future application. Mr. D'Acunto asks whether it is known that there will be lighting. Mr. Jewell said that should be disregarded and also says lighting is not part of this application. If down the line lighting became part of this application, the applicant would have to resubmit as a revision. Mr. Jewell indicates there has been no indication lighting will be brought to the PZC. Mr. Hendrick stated that Mr. Jewell was comfortable with an expressed condition to the effect of no lighting included in the application. Mr. Jewell reiterated that no lighting has been discussed. Ms. Paranjape suggests that the applicant has added a lounge. Mr. Jewell said that while it is called a lounge it is just seats and tables while in enclosure. Ms. Paranjape inquires how it will be contained after hours. She suggests lock and key so it is only used for golf. Mr. Jewell stated that the intent is not for people to be hanging around. The place will be locked and people will leave. Mr. Hendrick stated that it looks like a baseball dugout. Mr. Hendrick stated that Mr. Jewell says it will be secure, but it doesn't appear on the plans that it will be secure. Ms. Paranjape also suggests that if food is allowed, a trash receptacle is required. She asked how it will be maintained. Mr. Jewell stated a trash can will be in place, and it will regularly be maintained by the facility across the street.

Mr. Hendrick opens the floor to the public.

Dan Casagrande, attorney of Cramer and Anderson is representing the Arbucci family across the street at 220 Haviland Road. He has been a land use attorney for a number of years. He submitted a letter yesterday which Ms. Paranjape had shared on the screen. He went through the letter. No change to the letter since it was submitted. He wanted to comment on Mr. Jewell's representation. He accepts there is no lighting as part of this application. Mr. Arbucci spoke to the owner about lighting and that is not hearsay. He suggests that in the future if a minor addition comes back for lighting, the entire application should be considered. Therefore, he deems the application incomplete at this time. He summarized the applicable regulations in his letter and case law that addresses these kinds of applications. Mr. Hendrick asks that he speaks on the acoustic study. Mr. Casagrande brought his acoustic engineer from SH Acoustics. He commended the PZC decision to deny the pickleball application under the same Special Permit application criteria that is being discussed here. If the PZC denied the application then, why wouldn't they deny the application now. He believes the facility being discussed has a far more significant impact than the pickleball court. He believes his clients have the ability to oppose any application as a Ridgefield resident. He believes the PZC would be wrong to oppose the comments just because the clients bought their home next to a commercial use property. He hired the acoustic engineer

to draft a report and summarize his findings. Jesse Kaye is an acoustical engineer with experience evaluating outdoor sports facilities. He went over his study report. It was comprised of examining the noise impacts on the residential neighborhood from the nine-bay driving range. He predicts 75dBA from driving ranges simultaneously. He believes all nine bays would be operating simultaneously at times which would create the highest sound impact. He referenced the Ridgefield noise code. Being 20 dBA over the applicable noise criteria with accepted industry standard. He explained the context of his numbers that are explained in his report. The model that he ran is based on the old plan prior to this evening with no structure in place. Now that there is a structure in place to help mitigate, there has been no evaluation done on the new structure. The noise engineer does not believe there is a structure that could decrease the sound to a safe level. Mr. Nissim inquired about what noise the PZC should be considering. Mr. Alan Graham is part of the acoustic company. He stated that he couldn't do an analysis based on a drawing. He would need construction design plans. Mr. Nissim asked what the baseline data is. The noise ordinance is exceeded in both locations. Mr. Hendrick asked to confirm the noise for single hit of a single ball which is 75dBA. Mr. Hendrick stated that it is unlikely that all nine bays will be hitting a golf ball at the same time. The engineering firm reiterates that it is unpredictable but possible. Per the acoustical engineer, this is "peak sound". Mr. Nneji asked if he heard correctly that the acoustic wall would not make a difference. Industry standard is that an acoustic wall cannot bring the decibel level down more than 20 dBA, so even with the wall, the sound will still be above. Discussion continued by the PZC to understand noise levels. Criteria would be decreased to 62dBA at the best-case scenario. Mr. Hendrick asks how they can justify continuous golf ball hitting. Worst case scenario could be multiple hits per second. Mr. Hendrick would like to see a quantification of how many hits per player per minute is realistic. Mr. Hendrick suggests going to an existing 10-bay driving range and getting actual numbers in a real scenario. The attorney suggests that there are psychological impacts whether the hits are simultaneous or not simultaneous. He averages 36 balls per minute. He suggests that there are far less noise levels from an office building than from the golf ball hits in this driving range. The attorney came back with final comments including that he doesn't understand how the PZC determined the noise levels of the pickleball court justified denial, yet these higher noise levels could not be considered. Mr. Hendrick stated that the applicant feels the traffic study should not be necessary due to the low intensity. Possibly it could be appropriate, but the applicant states it should not be necessary. The applicant also spoke to the police commission who did not believe there were traffic concerns. Mr. Casagrande would like to see a traffic report. He also suggests that this development could decrease property values. Mr. Hendrick argues it could increase the value to the right buyer. Mr. Casagrande does not believe the application meets the Special Permit criteria and therefore the application should be denied. He believes they have proven even though it is not their burden that the application does not meet the criteria.

Mr. Scott Robin of 191 Haviland Road. He submitted a letter yesterday at 3:25PM. He brought a physical copy and will hand it in once he discusses the letter. He adjoins the property. He asks that the PZC does not consider the application until the full application has been submitted. There is not sufficient information submitted to understand the impact this will have on the community. There have been significant plan changes from initial submission. The PZC asked the applicant to submit additional plans on the netting system. They have not yet been submitted. He would like to see what the visual will be from the surrounding properties. The designer of the netting system does not install them. He has not seen the project design in the record. He is concerned that this is a public facility. Mr. Jewell has stated the applicant runs a solid private facility. This appears to be a public facility. He believes the operating rules and defined hours should be submitted prior to considering approval. This directly impacts the use and impact on the surrounding neighborhood. He will re-email the letter for the record.

Craig Sherter, 174 Haviland. He represents the Norwalk River Valley Watershed Association. He discussed the quality of lawn and turf. He wants to know that fertilizer will not be used now that turf is no longer proposed and lawn will be used. He also has concerns about an abundance of trees being removed.

Ms. Bohjalian of 2 Haviland Road. She lives on the far end of Haviland and assumes there will be increased traffic. She is concerned as a parent with young children and a bus stop nearby. In the years she has lived there she has seen increased traffic. She has asked if speed bumps could be added. She would like to assure there is not an impact on safety for her children being able to walk in a neighborhood. The applicant has stated that there is not enough additional traffic for the 10 additional parking spots that will be added.

Jim Mele. 32 Haviland Road. He has lived there 34 years. Traffic is considerable during rush hours as a cut through. He is concerned that the police did not feel there was a traffic issue and a traffic study should be completed.

Steve Armstrong, 26 Dawn Lane (off Haviland). He has been a home owner since the 80s. There is a significant increase in traffic over the years. He wanted to make sure the PZC understands traffic is an issue on the road.

Ms. Susan Sherter, 174 Haviland Road. She spoke on Zoom. She wanted to point out that although there are 10 parking spaces and it is not going to be heavily used. With the change in structure, it is creating a much more social environment. She has never seen anyone cross Route 7 at that intersection. She mentioned that the neighborhood fought a daycare going in on the corner. She did not believe the structure was true to character of the neighborhood.

Mr. Jewell came back to address comments. Calculating site lines are not difficult. He had his licensed engineer, Mr. Trinkaus, to calculate the site line. He does not believe it is necessary to have a traffic engineer complete this study. This application does not meet the criteria of more than 5,000 square feet structure to complete a traffic study. He believes traffic study has been completed on less than 2% of the applications and none on applications where no structures were present. He also believes that zoning approvals are not precedent. The pickleball court is not relevant to this application. Lights are not part of the application. He does not believe that you can hit the ball four times per minute. He physically showed the process of preparing to hit the ball and how much time that takes. He also discussed the sound data. He states that the sound is all from hitting with a titanium driver. There are multiple types of clubs that could be used. Sound regulations are not zoning regulations. They are under the ordinances and enforced by the police. Mr. Hendrick stated that the PZC does not approve if sound is a concern. Sound is measured one foot from the property line of the complainant. The sound barrier is not fully confined. It is enclosed on three sides. Site lines have been calculated by a professional engineer. You don't see people crossing Route 7 now because there is nothing there now. Mr. Jewell used to cross on his bike as a kid when you could swim in Great Pond. There is a crosswalk there that meets the state regulations. He suspects that once there is a reason to cross people will do so. The reason the design changed is because there were comments and the applicant changed the design to address the concerns. This included enclosing it to address the complaint. For property values, golf course houses can be worth a lot of money if the buyer plays golf. He notes that a house has been for sale for a very long time and hasn't sold, so the location is possibly the reason for the lack of sale, and not the golf driving range. He states that this property is designated Commercial. Recreational uses including golf is permitted under the regulations on this property. If the public component of the application is a concern, the applicant is open to making this private and members only. Either way it will be nine tees. The applicant is hoping for it to be open to the public, but it is noted that he is open to changing that to private and members only. He plans to come back. He isn't sure he will have the information by November 10. If he is not going to have information by then he will be back by the December 8 meeting. Currently extensions allow until December 17. If at that time it is necessary, he will withdraw his application. Mr. Nissim asked whether he believed the PZC could deny the application based on negative impacts on the neighborhood. He believes use must satisfy special criteria that is defined under regulations. The applicant must demonstrate, and the burden is on the applicant to prove that he meets the Special Permit criteria.

Mr. Hendrick suggests that it will be helpful to have the technical information for the next Public Hearing a little bit more than 2 or 3 days before the next meeting. He has asked that information comes in as quickly as possible and as available.

Mr. Casagrande disagrees with Mr. Jewells' comments on Special Permit criteria. Mr. Hendrick states that these criteria are anchored in being appropriate for the surroundings. The PZC can exercise its authority based on what is permitted. Mr. Casagrande believes the question is, is this use a negative impact on the people of the neighborhood. He stated that this design has changed significantly over time. There is a rule that if there are substantive changes you cannot approve the application because there are inadequate notices to the public. It should be denied as incomplete.

Ms. Arbucci. 220 Haviland Road. She wanted to mention that there are automated golf driving ranges. She went to one and timed it and there were 14 hits between two people. She disagrees with Mr. Jewell and believes there could absolutely be seven hits per person per minute. Mr. Hendrick recommended submitting a video submission if she wants the PZC to consider this.

The public hearing is still open and continued to November 10, 2026.

Mr. Nissim is interested in hearing Mr. Beecher's thoughts on whether the substantial changes to this application over time would be to withdraw the application. Mr. Hendrick asked Ms. Paranjape to reach out to Mr. Beecher to understand his perspective on that. Mr. Nissim clarifies that he does not want to waste resources if this should be withdrawn. Mr. Hendrick wants to understand where the line is drawn between small changes in response to comments and large changes on an application.

4. OLD/CONTINUED BUSINESS

4.1. **IF PUBLIC HEARING IS CLOSED: SP-26-7: Special Permit Application** (per RZR 9.2.a AND 5.3.D.13) to create a golf driving range, parking area and related improvements in B-2 Zone. Owner: EAP Property; Applicant: Robert Jewell. https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/106587

Public hearing was not closed.

4.2. **VDC-26-8: 421 Main Street: Village District Application** (per RZR 8.3; 5.1.B and 7.2.E.3) for front and rear wall/building sign "Monet Nails & Spa" located in CBD zone. *Owner: GAJ LLC; Applicant Hui Su.* https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/108431

Mr. Hendrick introduced the application. Ms. Su came to the table to represent the application. She explains her application. Ms. Okrongly asked if there were special kinds of nails. Ms. Su agreed that she does all nail styles. Ms. Paranjape gave her staff comments. The VDC has approved the sign.

Motion made by Mr. D'Acunto to approve the application as presented. Seconded by Mr. Nneji. Motion passes unanimously.

4.3. **VDC-26-9: 439 Main Street: Village District Application** (per RZR 8.3; 5.1.B and 7.2.E) for building/wall signs and awning "Fieldhouse Kitchen and Bar" located in CBD zone. *Owner: Addessi Center II LLC; Appl: John Gazzola.* https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/108971

Mr. Hendrick introduces the application. Ms. Paranjape summarized her staff comments. VDC asked for clarification. If the sign goes with the tenant, then they approve. He is opening an upscale restaurant in Tequila Escape old location. There are four-six televisions. Ms. Okrongly is double-checking the staff report. Ms. Okrongly asked if there was lighting. Yes, the light is internally illuminated. Ms Okrongly mentioned to include the special condition where it will state the color temperature will be 2700K as stated by the Architectural advisory in their minutes.

Mr. Nissim made a motion to approve the application with the special conditions as discussed above. Seconded by Mr. D'Acunto. Motion carries unanimously in favor.

4.4. **Zoning Regulations Update**

4.4.1. **MISC-26-1:** Zoning Regulations review. c/o Chair.

No comments this evening on the general regulations topic.

4.4.1.1. Native Plant Discussion

A presentation was given by Roberta, a specialist, to understand what input would be needed to move forward. Ms. Okrongly suggested giving an overview of the changes so it wasn't so stringent that it would be overly restrictive to all environments. First, they discussed applicability and called attention to the exempt seasonal annual plantings, lawn grass, and food production or green roof materials. Under the planting requirements she tried to include flexibility. There is no commercial or physical reason why shade trees, ornamental grasses or ground covers, and herbaceous perennials could not be native. Other categories have built in statements that if a native is not commercially available to fit the use intended, there is an opportunity to use a non-native. There is good science on cultivars to indicate that cultivars can be as beneficial to native wildlife as the straight species. She also tried to land on a source for determining whether a plant is native or not native. The request was for a website vs a spreadsheet that must be updated. This was tricky because there is a lot. And the term native is vague. So, she ended up recommending the three most credible and bounded by science and widely used sources she could find: Native Plant Trust, the BONAP, and the USDA database. A plant should show up on all three sources the same way. The BONAP is the most scientifically rigorous source.

Mr. Hendrick asked for input on an application put together by a professional team. And how this would be checked. Ms. Okrongly suggests a section about this in the sustainability checklist and talking about the green space around it. She suggests a line suggesting that all plants are native and add a list. Ms. Paranjape suggests adding a line in the sustainability checklist. Ms. Okrongly suggests making it a part of that and reclarify one of the questions to make it part of this. Ms. Paranjape suggests proposing an amendment introducing a checkbox introducing native plants. Mr. Hendrick asks how a homeowner putting a shed in his front yard would submit this and who would check. Ms. Paranjape suggests that office would be looking through the checklist to assure the plantings are native. Ms. Paranjape would give the list to the administrative assistant to double check the list and confirm the plantings are native. Mr. Hendrick suggests a smarter policy might be to exempt if less than five plants is worthy of exemption so we are not making too much administrative paperwork on the office and the average homeowner. The specialist suggested doing an exemption by square feet of planting area.

Mr. Nissim asked if there was anything that accommodates Climate Change and changing plant life. Mr. Hendrick clarifies that the sources are living documents. Discussion continued on what is native. Ms. Okrongly suggested a link to how to check your plant list to make sure they are native. Ms. Paranjape also suggested the UCONN website is a source with nurseries that have native plantings. Ms. Paranjape reminded that the specifics will be discussed during the Public Hearing. Ms. Okrongly suggested a How To document for seamless implementation between the people and the office. The expert stated that other towns have adopted a similar policy. There is a list she can share but they are not in Connecticut. Mr. Nissim thinks we are on forward thinking policy but anticipating putting the burden on individual homeowner projects. He believes some pushback would be expected here. He is not opposed but just wanted to make that statement to anticipate at the Public Hearing. Ms. Okrongly is impressed how nurseries have focused on native plantings even in the short time she has lived back in Ridgefield. Ms. Okrongly thinks this is important from a building perspective in town. She thinks small changes like this can have a much larger impact to the overall impact on the Town. Discussion continued on percent of applications that were Special Permits.

Motion made by Ms. Okrongly to place this draft on the docket on December 8 for a Regulation Amendment and Public Hearing opening on December 8. Seconded by Mr. Nissim. Motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Hendrick stated that there should be a 5 to 10 minute introduction to the Public Hearing. The plant specialist will also be present as a special guest to add comment. Ms. Paranjape states that the PZC will have to receive the application on November 10 but then cannot be discussed on December 8 because it will not be 30 days. This will be the meeting later in January (January 19 or 26) to have on the agenda for a Public Hearing. Ms. Okrongly also suggested it would be helpful for any landscape architects to be present.

The specialist asked if the PZC will request an opinion from the Conservation Commission on this regulation prior to putting it on the agenda for a Public Hearing. This needs to come up during the receipt discussion. Discussion continued on the Conservation Commission level of interest in this Public Hearing.

4.4.2. **MISC-25-3:** Branchville Strategic Review

No discussion at this meeting.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1. **SUB-26-1: 33 Oak Knoll: Re-subdivision Application:** (per Section 7.5 of Subdivision Regulations of Town of Ridgefield) for creating two lots in RAA zone. *Owner: Michael Forbes Trustee and Isabel Forbes Trustee; Appl: Robert Jewell. (To receive and schedule sitewalk and Public Hearing. Staff suggests sitewalk on December 6 and Public Hearing December 8th)* *https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/109154*

Motion made by Mr. Nissim to receive and schedule the sitewalk on December 6 and Public Hearing on December 8. Seconded by Ms. Okrongly. Motion passes unanimously.

5.2. **SP-26-14: 237 Florida Road;** Short-term Rental Application for residential lodging (per Section 3.3.B.4 and 8.11.C.3) for a property located in RAA zone. Owner/Appl: Stephen Saloon. *(To receive and schedule sitewalk and Public Hearing. Staff suggests sitewalk December 6th and Public Hearing December 8th)* https://ridgefieldct.portal.opengov.com/records/109185

Motion made by Mr. Nissim to receive and schedule the sitewalk on December 6 and Public Hearing on December 8. Seconded by Ms. Okrongly. Motion passes unanimously.

5.3. Meeting Minutes - Regular Meeting, October 13, 2026

Motion made by Mr. Dowdell to approve the minutes as drafted and as amended, if amended. Seconded by Mr. Nneji. Motion carries unanimously. Mr. Nissim abstains.

6. ADJOURN

Ms. Paranjape will distribute the proposed PZC calendar for 2027 prior to the next meeting.

Hearing no further business or public discussion, meeting adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Submitted by Beth Peyser,
Recording Secretary (via video recording)
FOOTNOTES:
PZC =Town of Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission
RZR = Town of Ridgefield Zoning Regulations
CGS = Connecticut General Statutes