



**Town of Ridgefield  
Public Safety Facilities Committee  
Minutes  
APPROVED**

**February 19, 2026, 7PM**

**ANNEX, Large conference room, 66 Prospect Street, Ridgefield, CT**

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

**Committee Members Present:** David Brickley, Pamela Dunaway, Denis Graves, Wally Martinez, Adam Safir, Stephen Scalzo, Ed Tyrrell

**Committee Members Absent:** None

**Presenters in Attendance:** Jacob Muller, Director of Public Works; Steve Zemo, Sue Manning, Chuck Hancock, Kirk Carr, and Marty Handshy of the Citizen's Group

Wally Martinez called the meeting to order at 7 pm.

1. **Public Comment – Andrew Sternlieb, Ridgecrest Drive,** shared his experience as a former North Salem resident and the Ridgefield benefits that brought him here. He explained that taxes are low by comparison, and the police and fire departments are assets to the community that brought him and his family to Ridgefield.
2. **Discussion and vote on KBA follow-up work** – Public Works Director, Jake Muller, gave an overview of the role KBA played in the public safety building proposal. He explained that KBA is an architectural firm specializing in public safety buildings and was awarded the bid for a feasibility study in late 2019 to determine whether one or two buildings were best and site locations for the one or two buildings. KBA works with a subconsultant, Wendel Associates, who specializes in the fire management side of facilities. He added that historical documents were provided to the committee that include a 2001 feasibility study for the fire department and a 2005 feasibility study for the police department. He added that he began with the Town of Ridgefield in 2001 as an engineering assistant and has worked in different roles leading to his current role as director. The committee would like to engage KBA for a review of their work for the public safety building proposal. They will provide a list of deliverables to the committee. The committee will provide a list of questions for KBA.

David Brickley asked for KBA rates for time and materials and contract terms. Pamela Dunaway asked how many KBA representatives would be present. Mr. Muller explained that there will be two people. Adam Safir suggested that KBA be sent the work this committee has done thus far. He will send it to Mr. Muller to forward it to KBA.

***Ed Tyrrell motioned to approve \$10,000 cost to KBA for the retrospective review with the committee. Denis Graves seconded. Motion carried 7-0.***

- 3. Presentation from the citizens' group led by Chuck Hancock** – Wally Martinez welcomed the group and asked that they share why the proposal was opposed, what other options they think the town should consider, and to identify any data or opinions that support their position. He also asked the committee members to engage with the group during the discussion. This is intended to be a dialogue.

Mr. Hancock began with introducing Steve Zemo, former Ridgefield selectperson, developer, landlord, and commercial real estate owner in Ridgefield; Sue Manning, former chair of Planning and Zoning, former selectperson for 5 years and first selectperson for 10 years; Kirk Carr, 38 years with the Wall Street Journal; Marty Handshy, CPA and developer and builder of condominiums at 77 Sunset and project manager for Pelham Homes. Mr. Hancock shared about himself that he has been a Ridgefield resident for 45 years. He added that 3 key members of their group are not present but whose contribution was significant; John Katz, 37 years on Planning and Zoning; Joe Ternullo, retired attorney and CPA; and Wendy Pola, lifelong resident and owner of Stonecrest Farm.

Mr. Hancock stated that they hope to be a resource for the committee. They found that after the first failed referendum, the project was reduced slightly in cost and scope but remained a single building on a lot that didn't enhance either police or fire department missions. The group felt that there wasn't enough community engagement. They acknowledge the efforts made to engage the community, but they simply weren't successful. Since the ballot was already printed, they realized it was too late to change the proposal. Therefore, they proceeded with two objectives; stop the ballot and call on the town to put together a citizen group that finds a solution that meets the needs and is acceptable to the voters. He explained that voters rejected the \$107 million total cost with interest, \$77 million before interest, a lot that required \$15 million prep work, a design that didn't enhance operations and even negatively impacted fire department response. Wally Martinez asked for the data that led to this understanding that response times would be worse. Mr. Hancock explained that it was a quote from Jake Muller. Then Pamela Dunaway shared that she saw a heat map and response time data that included the locations of calls to police and fire. The proposed building location had longer response times to some calls but improved response times to the area of concentration of the highest number of calls. Mr. Hancock responded that he had seen that data but there was no traffic study to provide

the basis for the assumptions. There are traffic issues with Old Quarry Road, Grove Street, South Street, and Ligi's Way; school bus traffic twice a day, barriers, culverts, steep grade, and narrowed segments that wouldn't accommodate an emergency vehicle if other vehicles were present. Wally Martinez, considering Mr. Hancock's statement about no traffic study, expressed concern about the validity of the data in a report from JD Consulting Group dated April 9, 2025. He read from page 17 that "the findings confirm that the relocation of the Ridgefield Fire Department Headquarters from Catoonah Street to Old Quarry Road into the new PSB [Public Safety Building] location is strategically sound and ensures reliable emergency response even during peak traffic hours." Wally Martinez continued reading that rush hour traffic adds an average delay of 20 seconds. The alternate route (with extensive discussion in the report) adds an additional 14 second delay. Response times remain within the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) guidelines. They recommended consideration of a traffic signal at Grove and Prospect, and further worst-case scenario testing to validate long-term trends. Mr. Hancock clarified that whenever they asked about a traffic study, the response was there wasn't one. Committee Secretary, Ed Tyrrell, will post this report titled, "Rush Hour Traffic and Its Effect on Arrival Times from the Proposed Public Safety Building," and Mr. Hancock and his group will review. Wally Martinez asked to discuss with the group, their traffic concerns point by point vis a vis the JD Consulting report. If the study needs to be repeated, the group's input on study variables will be helpful. Pamela Dunaway shared her experience with some of the streets that Mr. Hancock listed. She agreed Farmingville Road could get busy. She added that she makes frequent trips on Ligi's Way throughout the day from 8am to 8pm and hasn't found traffic. Mr. Hancock explained that twice, he went up Old Quarry to the corner with Grove and was backed up four or five cars. He also observed that once you turn from Grove onto Old Quarry, there is no room to yield to an emergency vehicle. He also went down Ligi's Way and watched the traffic. When there are a few cars present, there is nowhere for them to yield to an emergency vehicle. Pamela Dunaway compared this situation to Main Street. Mr. Hancock responded that the Fire Department can control the traffic lights on Main Street.

Mr. Hancock continued his presentation stating that he suggests that the committee hold structured listening sessions, charrettes, workshops, and transparent cost comparisons for proposals of consolidation (both departments in one building) versus dispersion (separate buildings). He explained that most existing police and fire departments across the country are separate structures. He agrees that proximity to highest call volume is a priority for public safety buildings. Pamela Dunaway commented that she has read articles and seen data that the national trend is to combine these facilities into one building and asked Mr. Hancock for the data supporting his statement. He explained that many existing police and fire departments are separate buildings, but he will look for data that could support that statement. He added that he thinks that the Town of Wilton just built a police department separate from the fire department.

Public comment was shared from Andy Sternlib, Catoonah Street, to clarify that Wilton built a separate police station building, but it's on the same municipal campus as the fire station.

Mr. Hancock returned to his presentation stating that any proposal must have a value proposition for the voters. Does the proposed building reduce response times, improve safety or insurance rating? Does the proposed building contribute or detract from the police and fire chiefs' objectives?

Next, Mr. Carr presented a written report with statistics, but first he emphasized that Mr. Hancock's main point was that the \$77 million proposal didn't improve the value proposition for the voters. He supports this committee's definition of success, which includes finding a solution the voters will approve of. He agrees with the committee's concept of reviewing the past as part of the due diligence process. Therefore, he presented information on the 2008 failed referendum, explaining that it failed by a much larger margin. Eighteen years later, the town's population is up by 1%. The needs haven't changed significantly. Yet the proposal has increased from \$4 million (which is \$7 million in today's value) to \$85 million. Mr. Carr then explored election results and voter turnout explaining that the referendum failed by a small margin, 51%. But in the second vote, 61% of voters voted no. Mr. Carr argues that voter turnout was not higher in the second vote, which included a municipal election. Instead, his report shows that voter participation was as much or higher in the first referendum as in the actual election. He also pointed out the fluctuation in voter registration.

Wally Martinez thanked Mr. Carr for his presentation stating that they thoroughly covered the requested explanation why the proposal failed. He would also like to hear the group's ideas about what would be approved. The committee is working to develop an ROI for public safety. Response times are critical. Although population growth is essentially flat at 1.5% not 1%, the number of residents under 18 has decreased by 7% and the number of residents aged 18 and older has increased by 13%.

Mr. Carr added that another point to consider is that there is more traffic congestion not just from residents, but also from non-residents commuting through the town. He states that concentrating all public safety in one place seems counter to that trend. He also feels that the PPC (public protection certification, which is measured on a scale of 1-10, best to worst) is a value proposition tool which is currently 5x. Can the new proposal improve that and other ratings? Mr. Carr also shared that he heard at one of the workshops that the cost of training a recruit is \$100 to \$200 thousand. But attracting the highest caliber recruits is challenging because of the facilities. Can the proposal include data showing that the investment in new facilities will attract those highest caliber recruits? That would be a value proposition. Mr. Hancock added that the committee should consider Chief Jeff Kreitz' duties and how his success is measured, including aspects of recruitment and retention. He said that perhaps they aren't using the term ROI in the traditional sense of financial return but

theoretically, voters need to see the tangible gains for the cost of that new facility. Mr. Carr commented that another value proposition is the consequential cost of operating out of the current facilities such as contamination. Adam Safir commented that in the public safety sphere, there are measures for ROI and the committee will incorporate that information into their work, but he is grateful to the citizens' group for this dialogue because they need to figure out some way to measure the impact of facilities on operations and service to the public and the officers' ability to serve the community.

Mr. Zemo stated that he went to three workshops to ask about a traffic study. He felt the location was inappropriate and would make travel on Ligi's Way difficult for his tenants because it's too narrow for people to make room for an emergency vehicle. He provided historical context as a former selectperson on the board when the issue of a new public safety building was first explored. He said some board members were opposed to the combined structure, while some were opposed to them even being separate but next to each other. Everyone he has spoken to agrees that public safety requires better facilities, but no one could approve of the cost. Pamela Dunaway asked if with his commercial developer experience, he knows a more appropriate location. Mr. Zemo said he feels the current police department location is best. Although he heard all the arguments against that site, he still feels it is the best location despite the challenges.

Ms. Manning added that she feels separate buildings would much more inexpensively serve the police and fire departments, and the community. She feels that the only true benefit of one building is the combined communications system but that could go anywhere. She said the combined facility had extra bathrooms. The separate and distinct functions, police are crime and fire is health, don't allow for much overlap of facilities. She believes the police station is victim of poor maintenance. It needs to be remodeled. It needs a sump pump in the basement, updated equipment, and document storage at the education department. The number of people in the building hasn't changed much since she was on the board of selectpersons. You don't have an expansion for people but for neatness and a way to do things well. Detainees aren't held in the cells very long because they are shipped up to Danbury, so you don't have to worry about that. It's time to think about the departments separately. She researched how other towns have their public safety structures and only a few small towns have them together. Pamela Dunaway commented that the document storage is not a concern because the police department is digitizing them. She also shared that the benefit of a single structure is more than just the dispatch, but also joint training is conducted between the police and fire. Ms. Manning responded that most of the time they've always gone to the state training facility, which is very adequate.

Mr. Handshy shared that his concerns with the proposal were that Ligi's Way doesn't have enough room to yield for emergency vehicles, the 15% grade, and a high cost that doesn't include road improvements. He also felt that \$15 million in site work was to force fit the

structure into an inadequate site. He stated that one building requires a much larger site while two separate buildings need two smaller lots that would be easier to accommodate.

Wally Martinez thanked the group for their presentation and opened the discussion by inviting each of the committee members to ask questions.

Adam Safir asked Mr. Hancock what he saw or learned during his most recent visit to the police and fire departments. He responded that they're a disaster, deferred maintenance for many years because of this potential project. He reached the conclusion that each department should stay where it is and be remodeled. The fire station has three options; gut the building, if expansion is needed, buy the lot next door, or buy another lot further away and move some emergency vehicles to that location and continue with the existing dispersed fire facilities. Then Adam Safir asked the group what they felt would be strong community engagement. The committee has a plan including surveys, town halls, and outreach. Mr. Hancock strongly supports charrettes. Ms. Manning suggested the committee reach out to other organizations in town. Pamela Dunaway responded that she has already begun that outreach having emailed 20 of them this week. Ms. Manning added that the committee should also be aware of and transparent about other town projects that will be coming to the voters, such as a rumored \$116 million Board of Education proposal.

Public comment was shared by Mike Gelormino, 126 Ledges Road, emphasizing the importance of capital funding although it's not in the committee's purview. He has heard \$50 million for an auditorium and \$100 million public safety building and a 4% tax increase. The numbers are startling, but voters want to hear what's needed and how it can be achieved most efficiently. They want to see that decisions are made with extreme fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Carr added that Mr. Marconi, Ridgefield First Selectperson, has said that you must look at each project on its own merit, but that's naive because taxpayers are going to inevitably weigh the importance of one project over another. Mr. Hancock added that this committee should reach a conclusion sooner rather than later while they have the voters' attention and while voters have all this information fresh in their minds. Steve Scalzo commented that he agrees that voters are going to look at all costs on the horizon. He asked the group if a function of leadership should include prioritization of the capital funding requests. Ms. Manning responded that it always was.

Public comment was shared by Michael Crest at 44 Crest Road that a statement was made earlier that capital funding isn't in the committee's purview, but he reads financial analysis in the committee charge. Wally Martinez clarified that the committee's charge of financial analysis is regarding the public safety facilities, but they also understand that they need the financial context of all other considerations. Adam Safir added that the committee did ask

Mr. Marconi about other projects on the horizon, community planning, future discussions with planning and zoning, and review of traffic impacts, because all of it will weigh in on their analysis. Wally Martinez clarified that this committee is charged with making a recommendation for the public safety building or buildings and not any other project nor rate its importance against any other capital project on the horizon. Pamela Dunaway asked if the group was aware of the tax increase that would come with approval of this project. Most were aware of the chart that demonstrated the tax amount. She also asked that the chair confirm if the site prep work in the proposal was \$15 million because she had seen \$12 million in the documents. Then she recommended that all those present visit the police and fire departments for a tour. She would like to record a live tour to make available to residents online because the current video available doesn't do justice.

Denis Graves was very appreciative of the group's thoughtful report and was especially grateful for all the ideas for community engagement.

David Brickley commented that as they understand all the needs, they also want to grasp the need to bring facilities to modern day capabilities. The current fire department is too small for today's standards. The lot is too small for expansion and outdoor needs. The police department perhaps isn't as inadequate in building size and lot size. But they also must extrapolate current needs for 50 years from now. Were the needs defined in any of the town's workshops or presentations? It's difficult to say if current structures can be updated without understanding what is needed. If a building is needed that is double or triple the size of the current structure, then remodeling wouldn't be cost efficient. But what if the proposed structure included extras that aren't true needs? Mr. Zemo explained that although there were plans and designs shared on a screen, it was too far and difficult to study well enough to make any determination, and he never saw a proposed design overlaid with the existing structure. Mr. Carr added that he asked for the size of current buildings and proposed buildings and realized that the proposal more than doubled the square footage for the facilities. Then he asked, "Why do you need more than double the space if neither the town's population nor the police and fire staff have doubled?" David Brickley commented that he originally felt that two buildings would best serve each department and wanted to know what size building they each needed. He thought it would be easier and more feasible to find suitable sites for two buildings. Then he realized that there could be savings if one building is shared because the two departments would share certain aspects of the building and the cost for those shared resources. But he is looking for detailed square footage information.

Wally Martinez asked what cost would be palatable to the voters, \$50 million? The group said that amount would be the high side but also should consider what else is on the ballot.

Pamela Dunaway shared that she is very grateful for this informative dialogue. She is a data scientist who looks for research and supporting evidence before she accepts any statements as facts. She has learned that police and fire are responsible for the town's residents and visitors, as well as people who travel through the town on their way somewhere else. 75% of calls to fire are EMS related needs and the trend is increasing calls from the older community members.

Steve Scalzo said thank you for the presentation and please stay involved with us as we go through our work.

Ed Tyrrell also expressed his gratitude for the contribution each presenter made to the committee's work.

Wally Martinez thanked the group and reminded everyone that this is iterative, and they are asked to stay involved.

4. **General Discussion** – Wally Martinez asked that next week the different working groups provide a status report on their due diligence and date for providing findings. Next week they will have more KBA discussion planning. Then, he hopes they can start setting a timeline for early-stage discussions for different conceptual alternatives to frame useful charrettes. The committee agreed. Ed Tyrrell suggested inviting Dick Larson to speak about his experience with the Schlumberger surveys and charrettes. Wally Martinez asked him to extend the invitation and place it on whatever agenda they can attend.
5. **Old Business** – none
6. **New Business** – Pamela Dunaway reported that to submit invoices the committee must use the specified accounts payable vouchers. She volunteered to process any invoices using these vouchers and submit them to Town Hall. Jake Muller will process the KBA invoice because he will confirm that they provide everything requested. David Brickley shared a written list of questions for KBA. The committee reviewed and will individually provide feedback to David Brickley so that he can forward the list to KBA next week. Ed Tyrrell will email Jake Muller for a list of town land that wasn't considered.
7. **Adoption of meeting minutes** – *Adam Safir motioned to approve the February 12, 2026, meeting minutes as presented. Steve Scalzo seconded. The motion carried 7-0.*

*Denis Graves motioned to adjourn the Public Safety Facilities Commission meeting at 9:17 PM. Ed Tyrrell seconded. Motion carried 7-0.*

Respectfully submitted by Etna Monsalve