

REVISED
NOTICE OF A SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
TOWN OF RIDGEFIELD, CONNECTICUT
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9th, 2024 AT 7:30 PM

RECEIVED

3:16 PM
SEP 30 2024
Wendy Gannon Lionetti
BY TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE
RIDGEFIELD, CT

Notice is hereby given that a formal Special Town Meeting for residents will be held on Wednesday, October 9th, 2024, at 7:30pm in the Auditorium at Scotts Ridge Middle School, 750 N Salem Rd, Ridgefield, CT 06877 to vote on an item pertaining to the following:

1. 66 Grove Street Lease- To vote on the proposed lease with the Town of Ridgefield for the Board of Education use.
2. Old Branchville School House Lease - To vote on the proposed lease between the Ridgefield Historical Society and the Town of Ridgefield for restoration.

See the Town calendar for details at www.ridgefieldct.gov.


Rudy Marconi, First Selectperson



TOWN OF RIDGEFIELD
Office of the First Selectperson

October 10, 2024

Wendy Gannon Lionetti
Town Clerk

This letter is to affirm that the legal public notices for the Special Town Meeting held on October 9, 2024, appeared in the *News Times* on Thursday, October 3rd, 2024.


Amy Escribano
First Selectperson's Office

Special Town Meeting October 9, 2024

First Selectperson Rudy Marconi addressed the STM attendees at 7:30 pm in the Scotts Ridge Middle School Auditorium, 750 North Salem Road, stating there were still many people waiting to be checked in to the meeting so the start time would be delayed. At approximately 7:40, R. Marconi asked those in attendance whether they would consider addressing Item #2 (the Old Branchville Road Schoolhouse lease) first as that topic would move along rather quickly. Those in attendance all agreed to move the order of items to be addressed.

At 7:50 pm R. Marconi asked the audience to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance, after which he stated that the first order of business was to appoint a Moderator. **Selectperson Barbara Manners moved and Selectperson Sean Connelly seconded the motion to appoint Ed Tyrrell Moderator for the Special Town Meeting. The "Aye" votes were unanimous and Ed Tyrrell was appointed Moderator.**

Moderator Ed Tyrrell called the meeting to order and requested a motion to appoint a secretary. **Barbara Manners moved and Andrew Neblett, Ashbee Lane, seconded the motion to appoint Wendy Gannon Lionetti, Town Clerk, secretary. The "Aye" votes were unanimous and Wendy Gannon Lionetti was appointed secretary.**

In addition to the Board of Selectperson members, the Moderator, and the Secretary, there were approximately 383 attendees at the Special Town Meeting.

Moderator Ed Tyrrell read the legal notice of the meeting that appears on page 84 of Volume 20 STM minutes book.

The Moderator then asked for a motion to approve Item #2. **Barbara Manners moved and Selectperson Chris Murray seconded the motion to approve the lease between the Ridgefield Historical Society and the Town of Ridgefield for restoration of the Old Branchville School House.**

Tracy Seem and Steven Bartkus from the Ridgefield Historical Society provided an overview. The Old Branchville Road one-room schoolhouse is in bad shape. The Historical Society has agreed to take on the restoration of the building. T. Seem stated the building is historic and architecturally significant; it is the last one-room schoolhouse in Town. Private donors and grants will fund the renovation. The Historical Society has been working with the neighbors; it is located in a residential area. The building will be used for exhibitions and community events. S. Bartkus stated that the schoolhouse building has been added to the National Historic Registry.

-Scott DeYoung, Caudatowa Drive, asked who handles the insurance? Old buildings can burn, etc. R. Marconi responded that the Town will insure the building and the tenants will have renter's insurance.

-Yvonne Franco, 304 Old Branchville Road, asked what kinds of events will be held? I am concerned about noise. T. Seem responded that it will be used as an educational center and the intention is to have a light footprint so as not to disturb neighbors. Ms. Franco asked whether events would be held outside? R. Marconi stated no outdoor events are anticipated.

Mr. Tyrrell called for a vote on the motion to approve the resolution. The "Aye" votes carried unanimously; the motion was approved.

The Moderator then asked for a motion to approve Item #1. **Selectperson Sean Connelly moved and Selectperson Maureen Kozlark seconded the motion to approve the 66 Grove Street Lease with the Town of Ridgefield for the Board of Education use.**

R. Marconi provided background, stated the Board of Education is seeking space for the Alternative High School (AHS) and 18-22 transition program. This evening would approve the lease only; there is much to do after, such as special P&Z permits, traffic studies, ADA, etc. The cost of the lease is \$14,000 per month and there will be fit-up costs of approximately \$2.7 million. The BOE has stated they can bring the fit-up cost down to \$2 million. This lease would be under the Town budget.

Susie DaSilva, Superintendent of Schools, spoke, encouraging voters to support this lease. Legislative changes have dictated the expansion of the transition program—we now have to educate these students to age 22; however, it may increase to age 26. They are currently in a portable classroom at Veteran's Park School, a one-room schoolhouse. If we don't take advantage of this lease, we will have to out-place these students, which is much more expensive. In addition, they are better served here in their home town of Ridgefield.

-Joe Turnello, 66 Grove Street and the Commission on Aging Chair, stated the current programs border on educational neglect and urged a no vote. The plan lacks wisdom of the crowd. 11,000 square feet is far from good for the current enrollment. ERMS is operating at 51%; why not use ERMS space or 90 East Ridge Road space and relocate the BOE offices to ERMS or 60 Grove Street? Additionally, the lease requires the Town to get approval from the landlord for improvements.

-Matt Blumrich, 76 Florida Hill Road, stated his son is a graduate of the A school and he received a terrible education. The teachers are volunteers. This sounds attractive but does not solve the fundamental problem—the AHS must be located on the RHS campus. I am voting no.

-Aimee Cohen, 76 Florida Hill Road, agreed with both previous speakers. The AHS never met the needs of alternative students—most students are bright but have undiagnosed issues. There is a lack of quality and inclusion. Alternative high schools are set up to warehouse the problem students.

-Jennifer Brackenwagen, Pin Pack Road, stated we need a permanent solution. This would be for 10 years only.

-Andrew Okrongly, Tanglewood Court, is a member of the Board of Finance but is not representing the BOF, stated he grew up here and he supports the lease. He is aware of the financial repercussions but the financial rationale is strong; outplacement is very costly.

-Melissa Ettere, 27 Pheasant Lane, encouraged all to vote yes.

-Brooklyn Ettere, 27 Pheasant Lane, encouraged all to vote yes.

-Dave Griffin, 16 Ashbee Lane, stated that he taught at the AHS and no teachers were forced to work there; they love those kids.

-Kirk Carr, 62 Prospect Ridge, clarified that we are here tonight to approve the lease—not to approve the use of this space for the AHS and transition program. Permits will have to be issued by the Planning & Zoning Commission etc. This plan is fatally flawed—it is not consistent with the 2020 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), it is within 1000-feet of a shooting range, and the building improvements will be over \$4 million. Vote against this.

Mr. Carr made a motion to table this item and refer it back to the Board of Selectmen for a referendum; Jacquelyn Rostow, 8 Abbot Avenue, seconded it.

-Sarah Hanley, 19 Clearview Drive, stated this is the time to address this issue. Vote in support.

Moderator Ed Tyrrell asked Mr. Carr to repeat his motion, after which time R. Marconi provided a point of order--he was advised by Town Counsel that this did not require a referendum and that a Town Meeting is the correct place to decide this matter.

Mr. Tyrrell then called for a vote on the motion to table the matter. Approximately 20 people voted "Aye" and the rest of the attendees voted "Nay". The "Nay" votes carried and the motion was denied.

-Mike Rettger, 25 Fairview Avenue, also BOF member but speaking personally, stated this space is good planning and when looking at the cost of the buildout, amortized over a 10-year period, we will realize a net savings, and urge you to vote in favor.

-John Wilson, 120 Prospect Street, 29-year resident and all four children attended Ridgefield Public Schools. In retirement, I began driving for the transition program. I work with people that work with these students, and they operate out of a one-room building and share one dilapidated bathroom. 20 students and 8 teachers—we need to do something now. I urge you to vote yes.

-Joe Shapiro, 73 Blackman Road, BOF member but speaking personally, some questions were asked at the public hearing and some of the questions haven't been addressed. This is an excellent investment. Having experience negotiating leases, I don't see anything of concern and support this lease.

-Lisa Ternullo, 66 Grove Street, stated the programs are valuable, but the space is inadequate. I do not support.

-Chris Murray, Selectperson, stated he voted for Mr. Carr's motion to table the discussion because he wants more time to review the buildout costs. I am fully supportive of what is going on here. This is a process question. Stated he is looking out for taxpayers.

-Betsy Reid, 132 Great Hill Road, works at the Historical Society and is currently working with transition student. We can do better for these students and we need to do it now.

-Bob Opotzner, 44 East Farm Lane, former BOE member, stated facilities do matter as does dollars and cents do, too. We need alternative education for good reasons. We should vote yes tonight.

-Andrew Sternlieb, 62 Ridgecrest Road, I urge you to support the alternative high school. We are in violation of numerous federal laws. We owe it to these students. Vote yes.

-Seth Kinnes, 5 Pump Lane, I have four children; the oldest is in the RISE program and therefore he will likely be in the transition program. I urge you to support this lease.

-Cynthia Bachman, 25 Pound Street, my son just graduated from the transition program. He spoke at the public hearing and shared that there are skunks at the trailer. This may not be a perfect solution, but it is the solution that is needed now. Vote yes.

-Dawn Marie Callahan, 56 Ridgewood Road, stated she is an education advocate and is concerned about kicking the can down the road. It is not perfect, but our kids deserve better than what they have. I support this lease.

-Michael Brown, 302 Old Branchville Road, has two kids at RHS. Came to this for the schoolhouse lease—a one-room schoolhouse and our children today are in a one-room schoolhouse. I support this lease.

-Katie Sherman, 383 Ridgebury Road, works with people with different abilities; they deserve better. As a privileged community, we owe it to them. These children need this and I urge you to support it.

Mr. Tyrrell called for a vote on the motion to approve the resolution. The "Aye" votes carried overwhelmingly (approximately 30 people voted "Nay"; the motion was approved.

Selectperson Rudy Marconi moved and Carolyn Tyrrell, 17 Pond Road, seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:07 pm. Motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Wendy Gannon Lionetti, Town Clerk