

# **TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – CITIZEN’S COMMITTEE MEETING**

**JULY 27, 2015**

## **APPROVED MINUTES**

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM, 400 MAIN STREET  
RIDGEFIELD, CT 06877

Present: R. Larson, A. Behymer, E. Burns, D. Daughters, L. Hanley, M. Miller, T. O’Connor, E. Tyrrell, J. Zawacki

### **Agenda**

1. Call to Order
  2. Public Comment
  3. Interview with Planning Consultant Candidate
  4. Selection of Planning Consultant
  5. Communications Strategy
  6. Review of Minutes from June 22 Meeting
  7. Next Steps – Jump-starting work with the Planning Consultant
  8. Adjourn
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1. Call to Order - R. Larson called the Citizen’s Committee Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.
  2. Public Comment – There were no comments from the public.
  3. Interview with Planning Consultant Candidate - Present from Milone and MacBroom (M&M) were Rebecca Augur, Scott Bristol and Jason Williams.

Rebecca Augur, Senior Planner, introduced herself and her firm to the Citizen’s Committee. M&M consists of a large group of skilled, talented individuals. They are one of the largest consulting firms in the northeast providing civil engineering, planning, landscape architecture and land survey. She passed out a booklet detailing the step-by-step procedure involved in a planning project. They have worked previously with Ridgefield’s Board of Education and have already done an analysis of the Schlumberger site. Page 3 of the booklet shows the team that would be involved in the Ridgefield project – a collaborative effort.

Jason Williams talked about how this is a community project – we need to pull in the community and get them excited and involved. He used as an example how their firm worked recently with the Norwalk community. They held an area meeting and got local businesses to provide “good food”. They presented an overall project summary and passed out different colored post-it’s and stars. They divided into even smaller groups and had individuals put their post-it’s on likes or

dislikes of the plan. They had large idea boards where M&M posted “likes”. The stars are for the ideas that the individuals were the most excited about. The participants can see how they as a community are developing planning ideas.

M&M worked on a downtown Shelton, CT study and provided graphics for visuals of what the downtown could look like. Much of the public cannot read architectural drawings and thus it is better to provide visuals that the public can understand. Sometimes they even break down into even smaller groups and do some sketching and then each group will present their sketches.

They did a port project in Rockport, MA. They created a conservancy and created a website as part of the planning process. One process is to have the community write out a headline for the paper of where they are headed. From the headlines, one can see where they are going. They can then put together an action plan to reach their goal. What about the potential costs? Costs can be part of the discussion from the onset. The public can then be led to realize that \$1 million doesn't really go very far.

In Mystic, CT they did a mobility study. The aquarium is on the north side of town and then the tourists have to drive down to the town center area and the Mystic Seaport is even further down the road. None of these areas are connected to one another. M&M set up five groups at each location talking to the visitors at each site and asking what changes/improvements they would like. This feedback was presented at a community discussion and drawings of possible changes were made to illustrate what could be done.

D. Larson asked about the possibility of the use of a survey and have surveys been helpful in the past? Rebecca stated how they prefer the use of an on-line survey, which is what they did in Hamden, CT. A survey on one's website results in more returns. Facebook can also be used. There are a variety of ways to “get the word out”. Different communities are different. D. Daughters asked Rebecca as to what does she think is a successful survey.

A survey should be general in nature – not too specific. The survey can help to get people excited about the project. It should not be too involved and a “big deal” to complete. Participants should be able to make comments and not just check off numbers 1-5. The survey should be open-ended.

The use of charrettes was discussed. M&M will bring in 4 to 5 staff people to work with the individual groups. Each group should not consist of more than ten participants. They will schedule open-house drop in's – try to make it as convenient as possible to get people out.

D. Larson commented on how this is a great piece of property. As a non-planner, he noticed all the ledge which limits basement-level construction, a building should not be too high and there are some other real limitations.

Jason Williams stated how he has walked the property three times and considered the use of the property for a municipal facility. What about a parking garage with a walk-out on the east and north sides? How can we use the topography to our advantage? How could we make use of a walk-out condition? What about central parking and central lighting for a municipal building?

What was his sense of the Philip Johnson building? Jason replied that he is not sure it is one of the best Philip Johnson buildings. It doesn't "shout out" to him as a really great structure. He has not been inside the auditorium.

D. Larson responded that it is a "given" – the Philip Johnson building is going to be there. Rebecca responded how the building should be used for a community function – a museum and keep the auditorium. It can be a place to go to for certain meetings/gatherings. What other enhancements should be on the site? D. Larson stated that we have to suggest ideas for the site in order to get public input. Rebecca responded that it is M&M's job to help come up with the ideas. In their booklet, "Options for Site", they have come up with many different uses at different locations – refurbished a state park, in Hamden made the property into a working farm, recreational uses, a corporate park like in Milford, the children's museum in Norwalk, a library in Farmington. Each building on the site could have a different type of architecture – keep the Philip Johnson building and learn from it about architecture. Could feature a colonial building, a historic building, a contemporary building. D. Larson asked how do you go about making an economic assessment? Rebecca responded that it is important to control the criteria; put down your goals and objectives and then prioritize them.

Scott Bristol stated how at M&M they are not just planners, but are designers. We know what the costs will be. We develop a matrix for criteria. Rebecca will be your contact person. D. Larson asked if they do a traffic assessment? Yes, they have a traffic assessment group in their firm.

M. Miller stated how we need to consider what do we want this property to provide for our children's children? It is not just for the current residents. We need to look ahead and make a long-term decision. Rebecca responded how this is all part of the planning process. We outline goals and objectives, we put out press releases, and we utilize the planning process to move the community ahead as to what to do with the property. We can let the public know we are planning for the next hundred years as we put on our master planning hat – what is the generations ahead going to need.

The Committee thanked the representatives from M&M for their presentation and insight as they left at 8:20 p.m.

#### 4. Selection of Planning Consultant -

E. Tyrrell stated how the presentations from all three firms were good. He was impressed with the Yale presentation but felt they may be less on outreach. We may well end up getting to the same end result from all of the three firms.

E. Burns indicated that she felt that all three of the firms are qualified. She is leaning toward the Yale group. The other two firms have already done work in Ridgefield. The Yale group would have “fresh eyes” and a different perspective. It will be to our advantage to have young smart Yale students involved. The professor is a very engaging guy.

D. Daughters stated how he loved the Yale professor with his vision and how he is a credible thinker, but he is a full-time professor and lives an hour away. The group that came in today consists of individuals who have already done a lot of thinking about the property. They have already started to conceptualize the property. He liked how this firm can really help us and they have the headcount in their firm to do so. They bring a lot to the table for \$32,000. They showed how they have a lot of expertise reaching out to the public.

L. Hanley stated how the professor was the only individual from Yale who spoke. We did not hear who the other individuals would be. How many others will have the expertise and the time as well?

J. Zawacki stated how she agrees with everyone on the Committee who has spoken so far. She liked the professor from Yale but he is not going to get us jump-started to do something. We are paying for his vision. Some of their tools may be very good for eliciting interest in good design concepts, but the group that was in today has a “leg up”. They have a phenomenal background and do know the property. This firm is looking at it as a progressive project.

Andy Behymer stated how the Yale firm is going to keep us at a high level. His vote goes to M&M. He was concerned about bringing in someone who knows the property, but that might be their strength.

T. O’Connor stated how the Yale presentation was great. He doesn’t favor Dodson/Flinker due to the need for three different consulting organizations. He likes the approach of M&M this evening.

D. Larson pointed out how there are two different groups – Dodson/Flinker and M&M have a similar approach. Yale is a different philosophical approach with the use of grad students. He had asked all three groups about the economics of the project. Allan Platus did not answer that. M&M responded more about economics. He asked all three firms about communication. Again, Allan Platus did not answer this. M&M is ahead with responses when all three firms were asked for the same information. M&M has put in more time on their presentation to us. It sounds as if we do not want to go ahead with Dodson/Flinker.

**E. Tyrrell moved and D. Daughters seconded a motion to no longer consider the firm Dodson/Flinker as a consulting firm choice. Motion passed 9-0.**

E. Burns stated how the Yale firm does similar things to M&M – a project like ours is what they do. D. Larson responded how M&M has building people on staff. He feels that with the Yale firm, we would have to do more work on the projects ourselves. It would also be more difficult to work with Yale because of their location and time schedule once school starts.

D. Daughters stated how Allan from Yale is a great thinker and visionary. He would love to have him on our team. We need to capture the imagination of this town. M&M will come up with crisp good ideas to help us do so.

M. Miller commented on how we need to get the community involved. She did not hear the Yale presentation. M&M has a lot of experience and a lot of good ideas. We need help from a firm like this to get the community on board.

Mr. Larson asked for public input at this point.

Becky Mucchetti, Chairman of Ridgefield P&Z, indicated that she has worked with a variety of groups. M&M is very creative. When they were asked to do an analysis, they did not just do what we asked them to do – they did more.

Chuck Hancock commented on how he was impressed with M&M's presentation tonight.

M. Miller indicated that we do not want a 15-year plan; we want a 50-year plan. Our criteria needs to be what is best for the town.

John Katz stated how he was impressed by M&M's presentation tonight. We need a vision and not an emphasis on bricks and mortar. The group this evening did emphasize a master plan and the community.

J. Zawacki stated how if we go back to our vision statement, M&M will help us get there.

**E. Tyrrell moved and D. Daughters seconded a motion to select the proposal from Milone and MacBroom (M&M) as the consulting firm to work with on the Schlumberger property project. Motion passed 8-1. E. Burns voted against.**

##### 5. Communications Strategy

It is possible to secure a list of the various organizations in town. M. Miller has experience in this in her work with the BOE in getting out the vote on a referendum and ways to reach out to the community. Suggest meetings at

different locations. The Library has a wonderful room for a community meeting – the Rec Center, Founder’s Hall. Can set up childcare at the Rec Center. Vary meeting times. Use Facebook, the press, message on-line. The PTA would send out weekly email blasts. We need to spend time with the planners and set up meeting times and places

D. Larson inquired if it is possible to secure the PTA contact list? We need to get the Board of Selectmen involved – how do we get people to town meetings. We need to sell what we are about. This is a project for the benefit of the town. Existing organizations have routine lines of communication that we need to tie into. A town-wide mailing is expensive.

D. Daughters pointed out how many of us on this committee have contacts with different groups in town. We need to try to leverage our ties with these organizations. What Ellen and Ed wrote recently was excellent. Mary will work with Linda and Dan on communication strategies and report back at our August 31<sup>st</sup> meeting.

6. Review of Minutes from June 22 Meeting -

**J. Zawacki moved and E. Tyrrell seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the June 22, 2015, Citizen’s Committee Meeting. Motion passed 9-0.**

7. Next Steps – Jump-starting Work with the Planning Consultant and update on other activities.

Joan will work with D. Larson as to what town committees to meet with first.

D. Larson reported on his meeting today with R. Marconi. There is a lot going on at the Philip Johnson site. The power lines are being connected between the Philip Johnson building and the auditorium. Oil tanks are being installed to provide heating and air conditioning. They hope to open up the auditorium for public use by the end of the year. They will fix it up for public use. They do plan to spruce up the landscaping around the auditorium in the spring.

J. Zawacki reported on the meeting today regarding the sewer line. There will be a gravity line from Quail Ridge for the new pump station. It runs along the ridge behind the trailer. Yes, this sewer line will run on the thirty-acre site. Will Charter Homes tie into this new line was asked? No. The Highway Department may tie in. This tie-in would be a town expenditure as this is a town department. The plant is a long way off and there are no numbers yet on the cost for that.

Is there anything Ed and Ellen should write for the press at this time? No, not yet was the response.

8. Adjourn -

**E. Tyrrell moved and A. Behymer seconded a motion to adjourn the Citizen's Committee Meeting at 9:17 p.m. Motion passed 9-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson