

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – CITIZENS COMMITTEE MEETING

OCTOBER 26, 2015 – 7:30 p.m.

AMENDED/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.
Rebecca Augur of Milone & MacBroom

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Public Comment
3. Review Charrette Output and Next Steps
4. Communication Plan for Next Survey
5. Review Minutes from October 15 Meeting
6. Next Steps
7. Adjourn

Call to Order - D. Larson called the Citizen's Committee Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Public Comment – There were no comments from the public.

Review Charrette Output and Next Steps

Rebecca started off the discussion of the Charrette. Overall, it went well! The crowd was primarily an older group. The general “take-away” was that commercial development is lower on the list. Difficult to ascertain what attracted the most attention. There was a mix of people who would like more of the same kind of housing. Others asked why does something need to be done now or even in the next few years. There was a sense that we have the property and let's not rush into any specific use at this time.

Where do we go from here? We need to get the count from the survey and share it with the public. How do we work on the trail concept? We need to give info and the facts to the public. The purpose of the first Charrette is to gather ideas. Now we can focus on what we heard.

D. Larson asked the Committee members to share their “impressions” from the Charrette.

D. Daughters stated how he heard the term – “multi-generational” community. He heard these words four or five times and from both old and young people. He hadn't heard this term previously. Shouldn't what we do be available year-round? What about the

proposed museum, underground parking? Seven to ten times he heard that we have a lot of empty commercial space in Ridgefield.

E. Burns stated how the terms retail and commercial space are used interchangeably. There is not currently much empty retail space on Main Street.

There was a lot of talk about walking and biking trails – let’s leave the property as open space. S. Zemo and Charter Homes will provide a tax base. Pointing out foreseen tax revenue is one way to present projects that will cost dollars to develop. T. O’Connor indicated that he senses that money is not important. We have already received part of our original cost of the property thru the Charter Homes and Zemo sales. D. Daughters stated how the Charrette was focused on what to do with the property and not on dollars. J. Zawacki stated how she feel residents are still thinking about what is going to come “out of my pocket”? E. Burns expressed the need for free-flowing ideas for the property and not focus on the costs for this first round of talks. D. Larson stated that he feels we do need to clarify costs. Financing is a secondary condition. What do we expect the Town to spend on development of the property?

E. Burns indicated that we have already sold off some of the property to Charter Homes. This will result in an issue about “not in my back yard”. Access from Sunset Lane is an important issue, and everyone talked about traffic and how this is a big problem in town.

J. Zawacki stated how at the beginning of the meeting, the participants began by listing wants. By the end of the meeting, they were talking about generating revenue. They found themselves broadening their thought process.

E. Tyrrell stated how he does not feel that way about the Charrette. He thought participants did not have at all ideas about what they want for the property.

Andy Behymer commented on the “pickle ball” suggestions. They were not thinking at all long-term.

M. Miller stated how she feels that some people did come to the Charrette with specific ideas in mind – not “let’s get creative”. There were people in her group that were very interested in a Sendak Museum and others were interested in the P. Johnson Building. These were people her age and older. We need to make sure that the second survey connects to different groups in town. We did hear, “no more athletic fields”. Some people came to the Charrette with extreme views of what they want – they feel very strong about their views.

Rebecca stated how it is difficult to portray a street-level plan with an aerial view. It is difficult to visualize the height of an office building, for example.

T. O’Connor stated how he was surprised when he heard several conversations about possible residential development of the property. Can we design something that will

fulfill our needs? People want to live near the downtown. We need to do some work now on this idea.

What about the use of space for fire/police headquarters? Rebecca stated how we need to think about all these options and then go back with a couple of ideas that might really work. We want to narrow down the options and get the “correct mixture”. The survey worked but it was open-ended.

D. Larson commented on the request for housing for the elderly. Would that be better along Route 7 and not on this property? The municipal building option – not much excitement about it, but we will need to address this need sometime. What we do on this property should not be in conflict with Main Street – like an outdoor theatre. People said we need a pool as Barlow is too small. We need additional tennis and soccer fields. We need to build on our strengths.

Becky Mucchetti, Chairman of Planning & Zoning was in the audience. She stated how P&Z is talking about developing an affordable housing plan. Bob Hebert of the Housing Authority came and spoke to P&Z. There is a long waiting list for Ballard Green. Representative Frye is speaking to P&Z tomorrow and he is on the State Housing Committee. P&Z currently has a building request for Maplewood, a memory-care facility to be on Route 35. D. Larson responded how our Committee needs to do some research and outreach before going down any specific paths.

T. O’Connor stated how neither retail nor commercial makes sense. At one time there were apartments upstairs on Main Street above the retail establishments on the ground floor. The current office space on Main Street could be located elsewhere.

J. Zawacki stated how many people in her Charrette group felt that development of the property does not need to happen right now. We need to look at what our “wish list” would cost. E. Tyrrell stated how he heard participants say how the property should be left as open space. Do not do anything at this time. A. Behymer asked if some of the property were to be used for ballfields at this time, would it be available at a later date for some other use? No – once a ballfield, it would probably stay as a ballfield.

D. Daughters asked who in town can we go to find out how much of the town-owned land is buildable? It would be helpful to know what land the Town of Ridgefield owns. This is information that Betty Brosius, Director of Planning, could provide. A lot of the Town-owned land is wetlands and/or is not a flat piece of property. We need to be smart about what we recommend. We do not want to propose something for this property that could be located somewhere else. Let’s refine our thinking. Let’s meet with people in town who know what we currently have or what is being planned. Let’s “dig down” before we schedule another survey.

M. Miller stated how there is an inventory of all town-owned land. Most of it is not suitable for development. A lot of property could be used for a walking trail when it is not suitable for other uses.

D. Larson suggested a list of whom we need to meet with and get input from:
Conservation Commission – has a rotating chairman – E. Burns will contact
Susie Baker

Paul Roche, Director of Parks & Recreation

Betty Brosius, Director of Planning

Bob Hebert re affordable housing and Dave Goldenberg

Rebecca suggested also meeting with the head of the Board of Realtors. We need to develop a question list for each. Maybe it would be helpful to meet with the Maplewood people. Betty Brosius could tell us about Maplewood's plans.

Rebecca stated how M&M had prepared a Police/Fire study in 2008 and that is available for the Committee to review. We will decide after the Committee reviews this study if we want to meet with the Police and/or Fire Commission. We want to look twenty-years ahead and not locate anything on our site that might not be an appropriate location going forward.

M. Miller will get an update from the Sendak Museum Committee.

J. Zawack will get info from the WPCA for any issues, anything we might be doing that might impact them.

D. Larson will contact those that our entire committee needs to meet and hear what they have to say – Betty Brosius, Bob Hebert, Paul Roche. Possible meeting dates are November 2, 16 and 23rd.

Several noted that 56% from the survey said it was important to get our dollars back from the initial purchase of the property. If the property is developed with commercial and/or residential development, we will get dollars back. E. Burns stated how we do not want to bring in any developer, not even Charter Homes. This would give the public the wrong impression as to our focus. D. Larson will ask R. Marconi to tell us what additional plans Charter Homes has in mind.

Paul Roche and Barbara Manners are very interested in an outdoor stage. E. Burns suggested parking on the grass like at Tanglewood. We wouldn't want to create a paved parking area for 500 cars. Ballard Park has many restrictions on its use.

Communication Plan for Next Survey

T. O'Connor inquired about posting on the Web Page the themes discussed at The Charrette. We indicated at The Charrette that we would provide feedback to the public shortly. D. Larson will follow up with this. We will want to push the second charrette back to the end of November or even into January. We will also need to schedule the second survey following our "research" findings. We will review the Communication Plan for the next survey at a later date.

Review Minutes from October 15 Meeting

The minutes of the October 15, 2015 Citizen's Committee Meeting were approved as amended.

Adjourn

L. Hanley moved and E. Tyrrell seconded a motion to adjourn the Schlumberger Citizen's Committee Meeting at 9:25 p.m. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson