

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – CITIZENS COMMITTEE MEETING

FEBRUARY 1, 2016

APPROVED Meeting Minutes

BOARD of EDUCATION CONFERENCE ROOM, TOWN HALL ANNEX
66 PROSPECT STREET, 400 MAIN STREET, RIDGEFIELD, CT 06877 – 7:30 P.M.

Present: R. Larson, A. Behymer, E. Burns, L. Hanley, T. O’Connor, E. Tyrrell, J. Zawacki (note – A. Behymer and E. Tyrrell came in at 7:55 – train delay)
Also present – Rebecca Augur of Milone & MacBroom

Absent: D. Daughters, M. Miller

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Public Comments
3. Review of Second Survey
4. Plan for Moving Forward to the Second Charrette
5. Approval of Minutes for Nov 23, Dec. 7, Dec. 14, Jan. 4
6. Next Steps
7. Adjourn

1. Call to Order – R. Larson called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

2. Public Comments – There were no comments from the public.

3. Review of Second Survey

The on-line survey was available for use from 1/8 thru 1/27. We received 892 responses. We received about 800 comments which indicates that residents are thinking about this project. We did expect fewer participants in the survey this second time around, which is normal. For a town the size of Ridgefield, 650 results on the second survey would be a good response, and we were above that.

Rebecca has put together a “report on the survey”, which she shared with the Committee. The first question was should the Town sell the property to realize a full return on the investment? 70% said no – we are already getting back sufficient funds.

Municipal Option – the majority prefer that the Fire Department, Police Department and Town Hall remain in their same location. A significant percent felt that a municipal facility is a viable use for the property but it is important to maintain the traffic situation around the site. In categorizing the comments about use of the property for a municipal facility, there was concern about this option

being too expensive and a resulting noise level from emergency vehicles. There was a suggestion that the Board of Education offices be moved to this site.

Cultural Option – 57% said this was a more viable option. In this way the property could be enjoyed by the greatest number of people. There is also a more reasonable cost involved to develop this option. Traffic could be maintained at a more reasonable flow on the roads leading to the site. Regarding the comments for this option, there was interest in keeping the Sendak museum and there was also the feeling that an amphitheater would be redundant to the current Ballard Park venue.

Land Bank Option – Not seen as the best long-term use, although it could offer reasonable uses of the property for the estimated cost involved to develop. Regarding comments concerning this option, there are those who like the addition of more hiking trails.

The overall ranking is the Cultural Option as #1. The Municipal Option is last but not by much compared to the Land Bank Option. If the decision is to not develop the Municipal Option at the current time because of the costs involved, the property could be land-banked until the Town is ready to earmark the funds needed for municipal development.

R. Larson asked if the Committee wants to develop some ideas to suggest to the 30% who indicated a desire to seek a greater return of the original investment.

There is talk about the possibility of turning the Philip Johnson Building back into an office building. Is there a use for the Sky Dome building? Could that be sold to someone? Additional town houses in the Charter Homes development would generate additional income. Shall we leave these ideas “on the table” for possible additional development? We can continue to recommend the commercial use of the Philip Johnson Building if that fits in with the Cultural Option. E. Burns stated how she is OK with these ideas being presented to the 30%, but what about parking and the traffic pattern? Lynda & Andy expressed support for these ideas as possibilities. E. Tyrrell stated how the Town would be lucky to have someone take the Philip Johnson Building “off our hands”, if we can find a buyer.

E. Burns commented on the Town’s receipt of insurance money on the Philip Johnson Building. A. Behymer stated how some of this money went for repairs and additional dollars went toward demolition costs. He thinks there is an unallocated portion of the insurance money left, but not a lot. If we want to preserve the Philip Johnson Building, then we need to stabilize the building. We do not want to add real estate to the list of what the Town of Ridgefield already owns and has to maintain.

The Charter Homes interest in additional property would result in more income. This is not an active proposal because the BOS wants to wait and see our final report. An additional two acres would be needed for Town houses on either side of the easement. This development would extend into the area set aside for parking in the Cultural Option and also possibly close to the stage. The thought is that these would be for eight age-restricted Town homes with a price similar to what is currently being built by Charter Homes. T. O'Connor suggested demolition of the Sky Dome and pushing the Cultural Option development. E. Tyrrell stated how the Committee should have thought of this option before the 2nd Survey. J. Zawacki asked, "What is our plan? Does it make sense to sell an additional two acres?"

R. Larson suggested that the topic of selling two acres be deferred for now. E. Burns moved and A. Behymer seconded a motion to defer conversation at this point regarding the sale of two acres that could be developed. The motion was passed with a vote of 5-2. L. Hanley then moved to rescind the motion. T. O'Connor seconded the motion to rescind. The motion to rescind was not passed with a vote of 4-3 (4 voted not to rescind and 3 voted yes to rescind).

E. Tyrrell commented about the contamination issue. Is that an issue for the whole 12 acres? We need to check on this. It could be 18 months or longer before the contamination question is settled. A. Behymer indicated that the contamination issue has been going to be settled for a long time and nothing has happened.

R. Larson stated how the Committee decided from the start to not bring in developers. Such individuals would have a vested interest and would be more interested in "developing" than in offering advice. R. Larson indicated that it is not our responsibility as the Citizens Committee to select a developer.

Sky Dome Building – There was one comment on the survey about using the Sky Dome Building as bathroom facilities if we were to put up an outdoor stage. This building could be left for development or it can always be torn down and something else put up on this property. A. Behymer stated how the Sky Dome is in an awkward place on the site. It is an "eyesore". Maybe we need to take another look at this building and its location. R. Larson will check on this.

4. Plan for Moving Forward to the Second Charrette

R. Larson stated how there are 300 emails which would be the starting point for responses. He passed out a table showing the "Comments by Classification". Comments can be grouped into 14 "buckets" and this chart shows how many comments were for each option – Municipal, Cultural, and Land Bank. Does the cultural option duplicate venues already in place? Does the outdoor stage duplicate the concert program in Ballard Park? It will take work to explain all our

responses. Some residents stated how they did not realize that there is a problem with the Police Station currently in use. Comments express the thoughts of the people as they went thru the survey.

R. Larson suggested several matters for which we need answers –

1) We need input from the Downtown Merchant's Association regarding parking needs for possibly a concert at the Schlumberger property instead of at Ballard Park.

2) In responding to the comments made on the 2nd survey, is there anything in particular we should talk about? Is there anything that should be added to the Land Bank Option or anything that should be added to the Cultural Option? We want to be able to say that we looked at all the comments.

3) L. Hanley suggested we look at possible traffic issues. T. O'Connor stated that the only way to really address possible traffic issues is to hire someone to do a quantitative traffic study. We could recommend in our report to the BOS that such a traffic study be completed. The parking lot for the Westport Playhouse holds 200 cars and has only one access in/out driveway. All the 200 cars clear out in about 15 minutes onto the Post Rd. without Police help. It doesn't appear the traffic situation for an outdoor theater would be an insurmountable problem. Fire trucks and ambulances would create a bigger problem and the access road would have to be improved. We may not want to suggest the Municipal Option in the charrette but there were some good comments made by the public.

4) E. Burns stated how the Committee has narrowed the choices down to the Cultural and Land Bank Options. Do we really need to hold a Charrette? Rebecca responded that we can instead hold an information meeting that will show how we arrived at these two options. We can show how we made the 2nd survey quite specific. How did we get our 34 options down to 3? Where did these 3 options come from? E. Tyrrell stated how we can show how Parks & Rec does not need the Schlumberger property for playing fields. Why are we not recommending the municipal option? We can clarify our responses to the comments and then go to our final recommendation, including an estimate of the costs involved. E. Tyrrell suggested a Public Hearing format for this information meeting with a report of our results and open to comments from the public. E. Burns stated how we do not need a group break-out format for this meeting. We can share the value of the comments submitted in the 2nd survey and the choices made to the various questions.

5. Approval of Minutes for Nov. 23, Dec. 7, Dec. 14, Jan. 4

E. Burns moved and J. Zawacki seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the November 12, 2015 Citizens Committee Meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

E. Burns moved and A. Behymer seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the December 7, 2015, Citizens Committee Meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

L. Hanley moved and A. Behymer seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the December 14, 2015, Citizens Committee Meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

J. Zawacki moved and L. Hanley seconded a motion to approve as written the minutes of the January 4, 2016, Citizens Committee Meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

6. Next Steps -

The next step is to do work on the comments. We need to have the review of all the comments completed by the end of February. We can hold the information meeting (public hearing) or whatever we want to call it in mid-April and make our recommendation to the BOS in mid-May.

E. Burns will check with the two trade associations – the Downtown Merchant’s Association and the Chamber of Commerce for their feedback. Will the Cultural Option significantly impact Main St. businesses?

T. O’Connor will review the Land Bank Option and look at modifying this option in keeping with the comments. We will not analyze the Municipal Option at this time – defer for now.

R. Larson will review the Cultural Option and the comments regarding that option. We want to be sure we are not duplicating services already available in Ridgefield. He will also check with the Police Commission for their feedback about possible traffic concerns. Our entire proposal needs an advocacy group. A. Behymer will develop some suggestions about costs – something “creative” about this topic. R. Larson will send out a spreadsheet relative to all the comments and specifically cost comments.

R. Larson stated how he is still not sure about the possibility of selling an additional two acres for Town House construction. He recommended that the Committee should develop additional facts about the location of the 2 acres and the likelihood that the 30 acres can be separated into parcels before the State contamination review is complete. We had a long discussion about this issue and voted 5-2 to not include this. J. Zawacki suggested that this be part of the Land Bank Option or should it also be part of the Cultural Option next to the outdoor theater? R. Larson will speak with D. Daughters and M. Miller about this issue as they were not present this evening. Regarding duplication of venues. D. Daughters and M. Miller can also look at the concerns about the Cultural Option impacting existing venues and organizations. Is this a significant concern?

The next meeting is scheduled for the 4th Monday in February – February 22nd at 7:30 p.m. – Town Hall Large Conference Room. R. Larson has delayed his trip to Florida and will be at the February 22nd meeting.

Our meeting in March is scheduled for March 28. The 2nd Charrette or Informational Meeting/Public Hearing will not be held in March but instead maybe one evening the week of April 18 at the Library.

7. Adjourn

E. Tyrrell moved and A. Behymer seconded a motion to adjourn the Citizens Committee Meeting at 9:50 p.m. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson