

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – CITIZENS COMMITTEE MEETING

JANUARY 4, 2016

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

APPROVED MINUTES

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

By Phone: Rebecca Augur of Milone & MacBroom

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Public Comments
3. Survey Finalization
4. Confirmation of Communication Plan
5. Calendar for 2016
6. Approval of Minutes for October 15, October 26, November 16, November 23, December 7, December 14
7. Next Steps
8. 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. Survey Finalization – R. Larson asked Rebecca to detail how the cost numbers were put together for the 2nd Survey. She indicated how she asked someone in her office who is not familiar with the Ridgefield project, to take the survey and share their impression, thoughts and suggestions.

The costing was done by taking the various features in the concept plan and estimating the cost for each, such as the walkways, bike paths, outdoor stage, etc. They then stated 10% either side of the estimated cost as the final cost could go either way – up or down from the estimate. The plans are very conceptual and the costs are truly just gross estimates and should not be presented as firm numbers.

D. Daughters commented on the cultural option. The cost estimate is between \$4.4 and \$5.3 million. If we were to estimate \$6 million – that is a lot of money and may turn people off when they see a number like that. R. Larson stated that a real engineering study would be necessary for any project. A project could not go

to a referendum vote without a detailed cost analysis. T. O'Connor stated how we do not have specific numbers to work with. Rebecca responded how they looked first at the biggest cost items – the asphalt, the outdoor stage, etc. R. Larson stated how we need to bring some economic reality to a project but at the same time not let these numbers distract from getting an opinion as to the desirability of the project. The municipal option would require a real study before any cost numbers can be available. D. Daughters stated how if we put a cost number on one of the options and not on the others, then the public will just want to land bank the property. The Landbank option requires the least amount of an investment. The cultural option will cost less than the municipal option. Rebecca suggested making it as simple as possible.

E. Burns stated how the public hopes we will put numbers on each option including how much each option will cost and what will be the return. People will not be happy with the survey if it is too vague. Do we really have the numbers to put out to the public? Rebecca suggested putting out one \$ sign, two \$\$ signs, etc. for the cost of each project rather than specific numbers. E. Tyrrell stated how if numbers are not assigned to each project, we will not get reliable feedback from the survey.

D. Daughters stated how we were considering five different options and we are not down to three options. Cost numbers could result in people making judgements that are not correct. The public would like a refined plan which would result in a more accurate judgement as to what is their preference for the property.

E. Burns and Rebecca stressed how this is a “planning study” It is too premature to put numbers on any of the projects. E. Tyrrell stated how the costs on any project are a real driver. We are narrowing down to the end of the survey process. For example, regrading is going to be a taxpayer cost. R. Larson stated how we have all the numbers we are going to get. M. Miller stated how the municipal options will be 100% on the backs of the taxpayers. The cultural option will not be. Individual people and/or groups, for instance, will get involved with development of the trails. If citizens want new trails, they are going to have to raise the dollars to pay for the investment. Therefore, the cultural option is not solely taxpayer dollars. We want the public to help make a choice. For instance, would you like Fire and Police together on the same piece of property? To not use the property and land bank it could also be a real choice. E. Burns stated how we can tell the public what choices we have investigated – what grants are available? Can we sell some of the existing property? Should we spend dollars for a new Police facility? There is no way we can incorporate all this in this 2nd survey. All we can do is quantify the dollars for each project and give each a cost range. Our charge is to do long-term planning. Our current Police and Fire facilities are clearly inadequate. We have a centrally-located piece of Town-owned property that could be used for this municipal purpose.

J. Zawacki stated how we should not put in any numbers in the 2nd Survey. The numbers are for a referendum. L. Hanley stated how any construction of a municipal facility is 8-20 years out. Any costs assigned to this project are not real numbers as costs will change over time. She would like to see the options worded simply – for instance, Municipal Option that is publicly funded.

E. Tyrrell moved and D. Daughters seconded a motion to use this wording in the Second Survey –

- Municipal Option – Most expensive costing tens of millions of dollars and pretty much all taxpayer funded;

- Cultural Option – Will cost several millions of dollars and will be paid for by a combination of private/public funding;

- Landbank Option – Will cost less than \$1 million.

Motion passed by unanimous vote.

What about the Financial Background info – Pages 3, 4 & 5 in the Second Survey? Rebecca stated how the individual who looked at the survey in her office found this wording to be confusing. Rebecca suggested that we clarify the dollar issues.

E. Tyrrell suggested that questions 1 and 2 be combined. R. Larson read how he had clarified the wording regarding the Financial Background info. A. Behymer stated how a resident either wants to get a return of the money invested in the property or they do not. That is what we want to know from the survey. E. Tyrrell stated how we need to address what we are losing in return of tax dollars on the property. We should be recovering that part of the sale. We need to state this. Rebecca asked about future tax dollars. We do not know the possible return on the Zemo property. We can estimate the return on the Charter Homes property. T. O'Connor stated how the Town invested in this piece of property. We paid for the property and now have costs to maintain it. Let's make it simple!

Rebecca stated how this 2nd survey leads up to our 2nd charrette. This is a design charrette. What should this property under consideration be used for? We do not want to get too detailed on the numbers and detract from the use concept. E. Tyrrell stressed the need for the public to be aware of the tax dollars that the property generated in the past and what tax dollars can be generated in the future.

E. Tyrrell moved and E. Burns seconded a motion to approve the proposed Financial Background wording on pages 3 and 4 of the Survey combining #1 and #2 to read:

“The Town can generate additional revenue from the property by selling land. Any such sales would generate not only sales proceeds but also future annual tax revenues.

The Town has already sold two parcels totaling \$5.6 million versus the \$7.0 million expenditure approved at referendum. The Town's total expenditure to date in the property are \$7.6 million primarily due to larger than expected

demolition costs. As a result of the sales completed to date, the Town has recovered all but \$2 million of its total expenditures in the property.

Going forward, the two parcels sold to date will generate tax revenue. The condominium/townhouse development is projected to generate \$475,000 annually upon its completion, and the second parcel will generate additional tax revenue once developed.

Should the Town sell a limited number of additional cares to generate additional income?"

Motion passed by unanimous vote.

The Committee then reviewed page-by-page the latest draft of the 2nd Survey.

Page 1 – Regarding the Sky Dome – add “or possible demolition”; Athletic Fields – put in “to control maintenance” instead of to reduce; Retail – change wording to read – “to negatively impact existing business centers”

Page 2 – Change to \$6 million in the first sentence; the last sentence in the second paragraph, change the number to \$5.5 million. A. Behymer suggested that a date be inserted as to when the photo was taken and also put X’s over where the buildings are gone.

Pages 3 & 4 – previously discussed.

Page 5 – add the words “low density” prior to development of the remaining useable 12 acres. Also leave in “apartments” as one of the options even though they would be more high density. E. Tyrrell stated the need to give all the options of generating the income.

Page 6 & 7 - Municipal option – it was suggested that the wording be simplified even more and eliminate the bullet points at the end. The second paragraph, change the second sentence to read, “To date, little of this work has been done. This question will help assess whether or not town residents view this municipal option as worthy of the work it requires to fully articulate its costs and benefits to the entire community.”

Page 8 – On the map there is no parking access to the Sky Dome, but there might not be a need for parking at that location either. Take out reference to a museum use. Need to plan for parking for the Police facility, auditorium use and visitors to Town Hall.

Page 10 – Change wording to walking/biking trails wherever used. The cost estimate for the Cultural Option would be several million.

Page 12 – Cost of Land Bank Option is less than \$1 million.

Page 13 – Change the ranking to a scale of 1-5. Rebecca indicated that a ranking provides better info.

E. Tyrrell moved and E. Burns seconded a motion to approve the wording of the 2nd Survey as amended and submit to Rebecca Augur for finalization. Agree to meet on Monday, January 11, if not happy with the final copy of the 2nd Survey. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

4. Confirmation of Communication Plan
E. Burns shared her draft for posters to advertise the 2nd Survey – “Vision for 30 Acres Final Survey – Please give us your opinions!” If the final draft of the 2nd Survey is approved this week, the survey dates will be January 11th to 27th. A few suggestions were made for wording changes on the poster.

The Communication Plan will be implemented by all the members of the Committee as it was for the 1st Survey. R. Larson will email to Committee members a sample of Language for Email to Town Organizations as he did for the 1st Survey.

5. Calendar for 2016

E. Tyrrell moved and M. Miller seconded a motion to hold the Schlumberger Citizen’s Committee meetings the 4th Monday of each month in 2016, starting on January 25, 2016. Motion passed by unanimous vote. (Note – the January 25th meeting may be moved to February 1st.)

6. Approval of Minutes for Oct. 15, Oct. 26, Nov. 16, Nov. 23, Dec. 7, Dec. 14

Andy Behymer moved and M. Miller seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the October 15, 2015, Schlumberger Citizen’s Committee Meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

E. Tyrrell moved and E. Burns seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the October 26, 2015, Schlumberger Citizen’s Committee Meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

E. Tyrrell moved and M. Miller seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the November 16, 2015, Schlumberger Citizen’s Committee Meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

7. Next Steps
R. Larson reported on his conversation with R. Marconi, First Selectman of the Town of Ridgefield.

The Sendak Foundation has indicated that they are no longer interested in the Philip Johnson Building as a possibility for a museum. They feel it no longer fits their needs. This will not really change the survey – will just take out any reference to the Sendak Foundation.

There is another company that has come forward and indicated interest in the Philip Johnson Building. They are a modern design firm and the owners live in a Philip Johnson house across the street from the Philip Johnson Glass House location in New Canaan. They have been interested in the Ridgefield location for some time and would be a small company headquartered in the building. They do not want the auditorium. They were about to sign for space somewhere else but will delay doing so if there is a possibility for them in the Ridgefield site. The theater group is still interested in the auditorium.

8. Adjourn

E. Tyrrell moved and L. Hanley seconded a motion to adjourn the Schlumberger Citizen's Committee Special Meeting at 9:50 p.m. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson