

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – CITIZENS COMMITTEE MEETING

DECEMBER 7, 2015

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

AMENDED/APPROVED MINUTES

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

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Public Comment
3. Cultural Concept Discussion
4. Second Survey Discussion
5. Calendar and Process for 2016
6. Approval of Minutes for the Oct. 15, Oct. 26 and Nov. 16
7. Next Steps
8. Adjourn

1. Call to Order - R. Larson called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.
2. Public Comment - There were no comments from the public.
3. Cultural Concept Discussion – Rebecca & Jason of M&M are putting together a map. They feel there is enough room on the property to do what we want to do; they think everything is going to fit.

T. O'Connor shared a list of bullet points – “Major Themes from the Survey, Charrette and the Committee’s Subsequent Study”.

T. O'Connor suggested demolition of the Sky Dome which would then leave enough room on the property to put up a small hotel. The Town could recoup some of the funds spent on the property; this might be another opportunity to consider.

E. Tyrrell stated how he is not in favor of a hotel. S. Zemo had considered a hotel on the property he purchased but there are zoning problems.

E. Burns indicated that there is lots of interest in the Philip Johnson Building and the auditorium. Taking down the Sky Dome is a possibility but it will cost a considerable amount to do so.

Andy Behymer reported that there was a bid to take down the Sky Dome for \$200,000 but that was in conjunction with other projects as well. By taking the Sky Dome down by itself, the cost would probably be even more.

D. Daughters stated that he is not sure that we want to build a hotel. A suggested hotel was number 25 or 30 down on the survey. Why do we want to talk about taking down the Sky Dome with a possible cost to do so of up to \$300,000? T. O'Connor stated that this is just an idea that might make sense to consider.

It was agreed to review all the bullet points on T. O'Connor's list; a list he prepared to show what the Committee has learned. Agreement was reached on the 2nd, 4th, and 5th bullet points and these are to be shared with the public:

- Incorporate open space and walking and biking trails in almost any future use.
- A demand exists for certain athletic fields and other recreational facilities. However, the Schlumberger site is not well suited for the addition of such facilities. There are several locations within town, the Rec Center as an example, better suited to this use – tells why no athletic fields under consideration.
- No new retail uses on site. Would likely draw demand from Main Street retailers. Perhaps some limited office development may be warranted.

D. Daughters stated how there is a clear demand for elderly housing in town, but the committee has learned that affordable housing should consist of a minimum of 40 units, which is too much for the Schlumberger property. Perhaps we want to leave it open to the possibility of selling another two acres for increased Charter Homes development.

4. Second Survey Discussion – D. Daughters stated how he is upset with the survey draft. This is where we are in the process at this time? He feels the survey draft is “sub-par”. We have a lot of work to do. D. Larson responded that the survey needs to be much improved before we can think about sending it out. We cannot discuss the idea about a hotel until we know where we are space-wise.

L. Hanley indicated that she finds interesting the possibility of a theater company renting or purchasing the auditorium. R. Larson responded that there cannot be a dual process going on. He met on December 4, 2015, with First Selectman Rudy Marconi and shared the letter from Mr. Marconi serving as an understanding that the BOS will not be moving forward with any kind of agreement for the Philip Johnson Building or auditorium for some time now, contrary to what might have been written in the December 3, 2015 issue of The Ridgefield Press. The theater group toured the auditorium on November 23rd; a tour which R. Larson also attended. The letter from R. Marconi stated that “any decision to move forward will be made in concert with the recommendation of the 9-member committee.” R. Larson stated that he does not think the BOS is going to move ahead with any

plans for the property and/or buildings on the property until they get the final recommendation from our committee. We do not want to work hard for the next two to three months and then find out that the BOS has signed a contract. This also pertains to the Charter Group's interest in an additional ten acres.

What about the Sendak museum plans? Any use of the property/buildings will require parking, walkways, etc. Nothing is an independent decision. R. Marconi is well aware that there would be a problem to undercut what we decide we want to do with the property.

E. Burns stated how there is a lot in process. The theater group has connections to the Ridgefield Playhouse. M. Miller stated how it took years to get the Ridgefield Playhouse a reality. Anything cultural does not happen overnight.

E. Tyrrell stated that the draft of the second survey is far from what we expected to get from M&M. It needs a lot of "cleaning up". R. Larson suggested that the Committee go thru the survey draft page by page.

T. O'Connor suggested turning the narrative into bullet points – makes it more compelling! E. Tyrrell stated how he likes the narrative. He feels it is important to state right from the start in the narrative that 57% of the responses from the first survey want to get the dollars back that have been invested in the property. E. Burns suggested a short first paragraph and then go into bullet points. She stated how residents do not want non-development, but they do want "open space". D. Daughters suggested that there be a reduction in the amount of verbiage. He suggested that bullet points be inserted in some of the paragraphs. The citizens need to understand why some things are not in the survey that were mentioned in the first survey. E. Tyrrell was in agreement – the second survey has to be more specific. The first survey and charrette were more general. M. Miller expressed her frustration as we as a committee need to narrow down the choices and topics. It was agreed to go thru the second survey draft page-by-page.

Review of the Second Survey Draft –

- D. Daughters expressed support for the "Background on Property" page.
- "Fiscal Background" page – M. Miller expressed the need to give the total costs for the property as of the date of the survey – initial cost, carrying costs, maintenance costs, demolition costs, etc. The citizens need to know the exact numbers and the dollars earned from the sales to date. There is a shortfall of \$1.45 million, and give three options as to what the citizen wants done with this fiscal situation. Question #6, suggest taking out the word "additional". It was felt that #6 is a good question and an important consideration to bring out.
- "Cultural Option" page – It will probably be about eight years before anything can really be done with the property; thus, any quotes on dollar costs will be different in eight years. A parking lot could cost \$600,000 and an outdoor

theater about \$1.5 million. The public needs to understand that an outdoor stage would replace Ballard Park for outdoor concerts. T. O'Connor stated how we need to be very specific – make sure what we are proposing is thoughtful and complete. What about the possibility of a public/private partnership? Should we sell the land? M. Miller stated how the committee is to come up with the “best” use. After all our research, we are to say what we have come up with as the best direction based on our studies.

- “Municipal Option” page – T. O'Connor stated how the committee should present the best-case possible for municipal development. The suggestion is for a joint Police/Fire facility and not include Town Hall. M. Miller suggested, “Should we save some of the land for future municipal needs?” We need to show we are looking at everything. E. Burns stated the importance of showing a long-term plan. A. Behymer stated how there is the potential for some revenue by selling the current Police and Fire Dept. buildings but there is also the cost to renovate existing locations if that is the route decided upon.
 - “Limited Development Option” page - Question #9 focuses on how to get more dollars back. We can get additional revenue from development of the property and suggest office, hotel, town houses or condos or we could sell off an additional two acres. Perhaps these questions should be at the end of the survey after other opportunities have been presented. J. Zawacki is not happy with Question #10. What if the individual does not like any of these options? Questions 11-14 explain further Question #10. What is meant by “ownership housing units”? We need to be clearer about what type of housing we are talking about. We can say up front that the Committee has learned that apartment use is not good for density reasons.
 - “Land Bank Option” page – L. Hanley stated how anything to be done is so far out in time, that some individuals may feel it is not important to make a decision at this time.
 - “Preferences” page – The suggestion was made that there is also a cost to do nothing. Limited Development should be a separate option.
5. Calendar and Process for 2016 – R. Larson would like to move the meetings to the first Monday of each month since the conference rooms appear to be more readily available then. The schedule would be as follows:
- January 4 – Confirm survey is ready to launch and confirm communication plan. Survey to run potentially January 6-22.
 - February 1 – Review survey results with Rebecca and confirm second charrette format.
 - March 7 – Confirm we are ready for charrette, to be held the week before or after St. Patrick's Day.
 - April – No meeting as Rebecca compiles report
 - May 2 – Committee meeting to vote on recommendations to the BOS.

It was agreed that a better setting is needed for the second charrette. If break into groups, then they should be smaller groups. Another thought is to have just one big room as will probably result in 50 people instead of 80. Usually a second survey gets fewer people involved and a smaller charrette as well. The meeting can cover the concepts that the committee wants to have presented and then the hope is for a group decision on those concepts. The Library may be a good location for one meeting room, but will not work for break-out groups. Once the survey comes back, we may have to rethink how the charrette should be structured. R. Larson will look into the availability of a Library room on a Tuesday or Thursday evening with the hope that the members of the BOS can attend. A school setting would be better for break-out sessions.

6. Approval of Minutes for Oct. 15, Oct. 26 and Nov. 16 Meetings – Approval of the minutes will be put off until a meeting at a later date
7. Next Steps - A short meeting will be held on December 14 to review again the plans for the second survey.
8. Adjourn - **E. Tyrrell moved and A. Behymer seconded a motion to adjourn the Citizen’s Committee meeting at 9:50 p.m. Motion approved by unanimous vote.**

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson