

**TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – CITIZENS COMMITTEE MEETING**

**JULY 20, 2015**

**APPROVED MINUTES**

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM, 400 MAIN STREET  
RIDGEFIELD, CT 06897

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

R. Larson called the meeting to order at 7:30, p.m.

**Public Comment** – There were no comments from the public.

**Dodson/Flinker** – Peter Flinker and Glenn Chalder came forward to represent their firm, Dodson/Flinker, and to answer questions and explain what would be their approach if selected as the consulting firm relative to the remaining Schlumberger property and the Philip Johnson structure.

Peter Flinker indicated that although they are a New England firm (located in rural western Massachusetts), they have been involved with projects across the U.S. They made the decision to not specialize and therefore have been involved with a variety of opportunities and challenges. They have been involved with the redo of the downtown of New Bedford, and the planning and economic development of Brattleboro, VT, and Hyannis, MA. These projects like many others have resulted in working with the Planning & Zoning Commission/Department of each community and the need to understand the economics of the region.

Glenn Chalder's company is Planimetrics and in this role, he becomes actively involved with zoning regulations. He worked on the Branchville Village plan in 1999 and how to make use of the wire mill facility and possible development of the Georgetown area. Mr. Chalder also recently worked on the sewer servicing area located in the center of Ridgefield and the sewer "right-sizing" for this area. He has worked closely with several Connecticut communities and is currently working on a Darien, CT project. He recognizes the importance of understanding the issues and selecting the appropriate strategies. He is glad to be asked back to Ridgefield for this current project.

Dick Larson stated how this project affects an important part of the town of Ridgefield. How do we generate an increase in interest in this topic in the community? What should be our approach? Mr. Flinker stated that It starts with the Committee with the scheduling of public workshops, the establishment of a website, the sending out of mailings. They can start out by attempting to generate interest in the immediate neighborhood; then communicating with Town staff and Town officials, and then reaching out to the public at large. In New Bedford, they utilized a Facebook page. The web is a useful tool and it

is also important to have public record of what we are trying to do. All towns are different. Sometimes we put up signage, hang banners and send out email blasts. Mr Chalder responded that citizens have to know what is the reason to come to a meeting/gathering? In our most recent Ridgefield project, we scheduled a meeting in the community center, which is important when dealing with town-wide community issues. We want people to care about the issue – to get excited. We need to identify the underlying issues that people in town are concerned about.

D. Daughters asked Mr. Flinker and Mr. Chalder how much do they know about what people in the town value and not-value? What do you think we should do with the Schlumberger property? They responded that the buildings are very run-down and are in a landscape-like setting. There are many big trees. Location-wise, it is near the center of town. How do we make this property fit into the Town's needs?

E. Burns pointed out how all but three buildings will be coming down. It is important that the consulting firm knows this. Mr. Flinker and Mr. Chalder commented on how it is a unique site and includes the presence of many large boulders. P. Flinker stated how many office parks are currently struggling. The focus is that workers want to be located in the center of town. They want to be able to walk somewhere at lunch time. It is important to understand the opportunities and constraints of this setting.

L. Hanlely pointed out how the Sendak Committee is adding something for us to also take into consideration. P. Flinker responded that a museum on the site would provide an important anchor and lots of opportunities. G. Chalder stated how he works with Planning & Zoning in a community to understand the pro's and con's and move ahead with strategic thinking.

T. O'Connor asked for more comments about consensus-building. P. Flinker and G. Chalder responded how we want to direct the conversation so that the participants will come to the point where we want to direct them to. We want dialogue moving toward a decision – a consensus-building tool. We want to show people that we hear what they want to say. We record the input. We want the participants to know that we want to apply what they have told us. As a firm, we have adopted the consensus-building process and have found it to be most successful. Shared fact-finding is important. Compile all the info. There are always people in the room who are going to object; have them be part of the development process; be sure such people are present. They told about the recent project in Wellesley, MA for the use of some property the other side of the railroad track. They used “stickers” to represent various uses of the different parts of the 40-acre parcel. The stickers would be put in place on the diagram of the property and then moved or crossed off. Such a tool might be helpful for this Ridgefield project.

D. Daughters asked who in Wellesley did they really “touch”. Mr. Flinker responded that they started out working with the town leaders and then developed consensus from the community as a whole. Did they have input on the neighborhood? Yes, they did reach out to the neighborhoods of the town. They held a series of small group meetings and

obtained consensus from each small group before moving to the next. The consensus process seeks commonality.

D. Larson stated how everyone may not agree but everyone has participated. Decision-making can result thru this process.

E. Burns asked how does one get people to think long-term? What are the potential future alternatives? Mr. Flinker responded that it requires thinking outside just a linear line.

D. Larson inquired about the use of a website. What needs to be done to get input from the community? The development of a Facebook page for just this project needs to be developed. Need a “catchy” website to generate interest.

D. Larson asked P. Flinker and G. Chalder about their schedule going forward. August and September can be busy months. The goal would be to be able to report back to the public in October. In September, people come back into the community and want to know what is happening. These next two months are a good time to work on this project. Time off for the holidays provides the time for the community to process information. This timetable should work out well.

This portion of the meeting was closed at 8:30 p.m. The Committee thanked Peter Flinker and Glenn Chalder for their input and time.

**Yale Urban Design Workshop** - Allan Plattus and Andrei Harwell came forward at 8:45 p.m. to express their interest in being selected for this project with the Schlumberger property. Dr. Plattus did all of the speaking. He explained how they are not the “usual design firm”. Most of their work is for public clients such as communities like Ridgefield. For-profit design firms sometimes ask them to work with them and these projects can be at nearby locations, throughout CT and around the world. They are a stand-alone facility up the street from the School of Architecture. Dr. Plattus is a professor at Yale. They are a small operation with special resources available at demand and have worked on hundreds of projects over the years. They are often asked to come into projects at this stage like where Ridgefield is now - not sure what the next steps should be. They help communities focus on what they would like to pursue.

Dr. Plattus shared illustrations from a couple of recent projects. They were brought into the New London, CT project after the bitter eminent domain court fight. There was much bitterness. Part of their assignment was to reopen dialogue where residents could get back to work and start to again move forward. Many community meetings were held. Most of the work their firm does is grounded in serious community involvement. They work with Planning & Zoning, public agencies, town meetings, etc. They use design ways to consensus a community. They have worked not only with New London, but designed a Heritage Park for Groton and have been hired by Fischer’s Island to do a plan for them as well as they are losing their year-round population.

D. Larson stated that there is only mild interest in this project in Ridgefield. It is going to take effort to get the town engaged. Dr. Plattus responded how their firm does the right kind of publicity. They organize an event or two – not demanding, but offer some excitement. They aim to get the people talking positively. Sometimes communities get “hung up” about specific uses too early. We attempt to get people asking what will the site look like thirty years from now. We bring in criteria for getting to specific uses. The challenge is reaching out to people

D. Daughters asked Prof. Plattus if he and Andrei had walked thru the property which they have. When they walked thru the property, what did they think about, what came to their mind? Their immediate impression was that the property is somewhat related to the center of town. Dunbarton Oaks in Georgetown came to mind where the building is related to the landscaping. When the three buildings are taken down, the property will open up all the more. Whatever is done should relate to the landscaping for a park-like feeling.

D. Daughters stated how Prof. Plattus has talked about his “day job”. How does he intermingle with the towns as he does his “day job”? The response was that as a non-profit, one can afford to work deliberately on other projects. When they do projects, they determine if there is a date deadline, a political situation or otherwise. Is there some areas we need to move ahead on faster? Once we know that, we will set a timetable with a deadline in mind.

D. Larson asked about the use of other resources at Yale. Prof. Plattus responded that he would like to bring in someone from the Forestry School for consulting on grading issues, water run-off issues, etc. – are there any limits for architectural development? What kind of building materials should be used to tie in with this kind of landscape in a sustainable responsible way? The first step is to get ideas for uses of the property. They have lots of time in the summer. They have to manage their time more efficiently when school is in session. They can use concentrated periods of time which can be very effective. They can host meetings in New Haven as well. They can get students involved in the fall. They like to have students follow the whole project – the history of the project. They will set up a grid when working with the property. They like to get a “feeling” as to the dominant options for the project. They “see themselves on a site” – as they want to visualize in a more detailed way how a site should evolve. They initially develop relationships with the individuals in town who “do care”. The hope is to get these people excited about the project and they in turn will bring in more people. We have to develop “real questions”.

E. Burns asked if they have any thoughts about utilizing an on-line survey? Prof. Plattus responded that for a survey to be effective, one has to have questions that will result in useable answers. It is best to elicit comments from people. Have to have “real” questions.

D. Larson asked for their thoughts about a timeframe. The response was that at the end of the day, they are designers and not developers. What are the desirable characteristics for the property that will result in the overall feeling they are attempting to develop..

L. Hanley asked how they would go about establishing a website? Prof. Plattus responded that Yale Urban Design Workshop has a website and/or they can suggest display material to be used on the Town of Ridgefield website. They can strategize as to what will be the best way.

D. Daughters stated how it is very important for the Committee to come up with “a vision”. Prof. Plattus said they will be taking this vision very literally. We want to show someone a picture of what should happen. A picture will get the enthusiasm at a much different level. We might even need to develop an alternative vision. The question is how can we make something that will bring us together as a community on this project?

The Committee thanked Allan Plattus and Andrei Harwell for their input and time.

### **Easement**

A letter has been prepared to be sent to Planning & Zoning relative to the Police Commission’s recommendation to restrict the easement granted to the town in the Charter Group Partners Purchase Agreement to emergency traffic only. The easement which provides vehicular access from Sunset Lane to the 30-acre parcel known as “Parcel A”, contains no such restriction. The Citizens Committee would like for the easement to remain unrestricted at this time, and thus the letter to P&Z.

E. Tyrrell asked why P&Z is involved? E. Burns and J. Zawacki noted that closing one of the exits at night, cutting thru is not allowed. Some people went out on Old Quarry and others went out on Sunset Lane.

E. Burns stated how the Citizen’s Committee has no idea at all at this time as to what is to be done with the 30-acre parcel. It is shortsighted to restrict the easement at this time We do not know the big picture yet.

**Linda Hanley moved and Ed Tyrrell seconded a motion to send the attached letter (re: #2015-041-PR-SP, Charter Group Partners) to Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission requesting that the Sunset Lane easement remain unrestricted at this time. Motion passed 8-0. (Attachment 1)**

**Maintenance** – E. Burns expressed concern about the maintenance of the grounds and the building. The air conditioner and junk needs to be removed. There is no power in the auditorium. The grass needs to be cut at least at the entrances. The building has been left to disrepair for the past eight years. D. Larson will follow up with R. Marconi, First Selectman.

The next meeting dates are July 27 and August 24. D. Daughters is away in August. An extra meeting was also agreed on August 31 to get ready for possible public forum.

**E. Burns moved and E. Tyrrell seconded a motion to adjourn the Citizen's Committee Meeting at 9:55 p.m. Motion passed 8-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson

## Attachment 1

July 20, 2015

Ms. Rebecca Mucchetti, Chairman  
Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission  
400 Main Street  
Ridgefield CT 06877

re: #2015-041-PR-SP, Charter Group Partners

Dear Ms. Mucchetti:

At its July 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, The Schlumberger Citizens Committee reviewed the Police Commission's recommendation to restrict the easement granted to the town in the Charter Group Partners Purchase Agreement to emergency traffic only. The easement, which provides vehicular access from Sunset Lane to the 30-acre parcel known as "Parcel A", contains no such restriction.

Easement language in the Charter Group Partners Purchase Agreement:

"1(a) Subject to a driveway and utility easement thirty-five (35) feet in width in favor of Parcel A running from Sunset Lane to the southerly boundary of Parcel A, the westerly most boundary line..."

Following our discussion, the Citizens Committee voted 8 to 0 to recommend to the Planning and Zoning Commission that the **easement remain unrestricted** at this time. Our reasons are as follows:

- Since the easement is a benefit to Parcel A, such a restriction will diminish its utility and value.
  
- There is no need to limit the easement to emergency use only for the current development application since there is no proposal before you for Parcel A, a town-owned property for which our Committee is in the early stages of considering future uses. In fact,

any proposal for Parcel A is many years away – the site remediation will take several years, and any land use proposals, either from our Committee and/or the Sendak Museum exploratory group, would be subject to Board of Selectmen approval, town meeting or referendum approval, followed by consideration by the Planning & Zoning Commission.

- There was no traffic study presented at the July 7<sup>th</sup> public hearing that specifically addressed the recommendation to restrict the current driveway easement to emergency use.
- Good planning practices would suggest that the uses, if any, proposed for Parcel A should be known before eliminating access from Sunset Lane. At that time, a traffic study of the entire 40-acre property could be conducted, (including the two driveways on Old Quarry Road and the driveway to Sunset Lane) and such a restriction, if necessary, could then be considered.

For these reasons, the Schlumberger Citizens Committee believes that the Planning and Zoning Commission should not include restricting the easement to emergency use as a condition of approval in the above-referenced application. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this application.

Sincerely,

Dick Larson  
Chairman, Schlumberger Citizens  
Committee