



MINUTES

Ridgefield Conservation Commission

Town Hall Annex, 66 Prospect Street

Ridgefield, CT 06877

(203) 431-2713 • conservation@ridgefieldct.gov

Meeting October 20, 2025 at 7PM

Present: Roberta Barbieri Jana Hogan Erik Keller Jean Linville
 Anthony Markert Pete Nichols Matt Sharp Allan Welby

Absent: Jim Coyle, Jack Kace, Jim Liptack

UPON motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Barbieri) and carried, it was RESOLVED to add the item New Business to the agenda under item 4.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

UPON motion duly made (Sharp), seconded (Nichols) and carried, it was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of October 6, 2025 be approved and filed in Town Hall. Linville abstained.

2. McKeon Farm Presentation “Past, Present, Future”

Mr. Keller provided an overview of the McKeon Farm property, the TOR acquired 43 acres in 2002 for \$3.4 million through state grants and private donations. There are specific deed restrictive covenants, which require the property to remain in its natural open space condition, allowing limited agricultural uses, trails, required mowing once a year, and maintenance of stone walls, while prohibiting new buildings, motorized vehicles, and recreation facilities.

Mr. Keller highlighted RCC improvements, including fencing, stone wall restoration, invasive species removal, installation of a water well and electrical service, trail and signage maintenance, and the addition of a maintenance shed and expanded parking. He reviewed past and current uses, such as Hans Cattle, Henny Penny Farm (2015–2025), Cornerstone Gardens, and current tenants including Chestnut Tree Farm (Mr. Hulnick was able to provide a summary of this project), the farm tool museum, pollinator garden, walking trail, apple orchard, and purple martin nesting sites (the most in the state of CT).

The RCC invited discussion on future uses of the McKeon Farm property, noting that with the departure of Henny Penny Farm and Cornerstone Gardens, the Commission will now be responsible for ongoing maintenance (Mr. Sharp estimated that mowing of these additional areas could cost approximately \$10,000). Emphasis was placed on adhering to the deed restrictions, exploring potential new agricultural tenants (Ms. Linville mentioned that Dina Brewster of Henny Penny Farm had walked the property and noted that fencing would be a limiting factor for any future agricultural tenants), and advancing the proposed native grassland restoration project for Ridgebury Pasture 2. The RCC clarified that funds received through the annual appeal are restricted to the purchase of open space and cannot be used for the maintenance or upkeep of existing open space properties. Olivia, an intern from Henny Penny Farm, explained that portable fencing is feasible and can be set up with minimal time and effort. Ms. Robbins added that she has been in discussion with a veterinarian who may have access to potential tenants interested in a conservation grazing program, which would involve moving animals among open spaces to help control invasive species.

Mr. Welby presented his pilot project to restore 3.6 acres of McKeon Farm’s Ridgebury Pasture 2 into a native grassland, addressing the scarcity of this critical habitat in Connecticut. The project will remove invasive grasses and replant with a native prairie seed mix provided and installed with assistance from the CT DEEP. Once established, the grassland will provide vital habitat for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife, improve water quality, and enhance biodiversity and community education. Initial costs include herbicide treatment (\$2,700–\$4,320) and seed (\$727), with minimal long-term maintenance anticipated. If successful, the RCC may expand the restoration to other McKeon pastures.

In her letter, farmer Dina Brewster urges the RCC to reject the proposed use of glyphosate at McKeon Farm. She argues that applying synthetic herbicides would permanently prevent the land from being used for organic agriculture and break its legacy of chemical-free stewardship. Brewster advocates for alternative, regenerative approaches, such as conservation grazing, that enhance biodiversity without chemicals. She emphasizes the importance of developing a broader, community-driven plan for McKeon Farm’s future and maintaining Ridgefield’s leadership in sustainable land management. Ms. Snow also mentioned work on a pollinator garden with little knowledge did seem to work through tilling the soil as an option.

The RCC noted that the public has expressed strong support for maintaining animals at McKeon Farm, and incorporating livestock or conservation grazing into future plans would be a valued benefit to the town. It was emphasized that the discussion is not a question of choosing between agriculture or meadow, but rather how to integrate both, alongside other ongoing projects such as the chestnut trees, purple martin program, and restoration of the apple orchard. The RCC will begin exploring implementation options at the next meeting, including opportunities to engage more volunteers and potentially establish an additional stewards’ group to support these efforts.

3. Probable Open Space Violation at Palmer Court

Mr. Keller reported everything is coming to a conclusion on this action and more to come at the next meeting.

4. Annual Appeal

The annual appeal brochure is almost ready to be mailed out. The RCC is looking towards venue options and speakers as well honor volunteers that have helped out this year.

5. New Business

Mr. Nichols reported the riding lawn mower engine has been replaced and is back at the barn, ready for use. The RCC will contact the company responsible to winterize the irrigation and have that scheduled.

6. MEETINGS FOR ATTENDANCE

P&Z

October 21 – Linville

November 5 – Nichols

Ms. Linville will switch with Dr. Markert.

IWB

October 23 – Markert

November 13 – Welby

7. CHAIRMAN’S REMARKS

ADJOURNMENT UPON motion duly made, and carried, it was RESOLVED that the meeting adjourn at 8:44 PM.