

**APPROVED BOARD OF FINANCE MINUTES – BUDGET DELIBERATIONS
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6, 2016**

A budget deliberations meeting of the Board of Finance was held on Wednesday, April 6, 2016 in the large conference room in Town Hall at 7:30 p.m.

Members Present: David Ulmer, Chairman; Paul Sutherland, Vice Chairman; Marty Heiser, Jessica Mancini; and Michael Raduazzo

Town Officials: Rudy Marconi, First Selectman; Maureen Kozlark, Selectman; Kevin Redmond, Controller; Paul Hendrickson, BOE Business Director; Dr. Robert Miller, BOE Technology Director; Kevin Tappe, Fire Chief

BOE: Fran Walton, Chairman; Karen Sulzinsky; Michael Taylor; David Cordisco
Sharon D’Orso;

A G E N D A

Follow up BOS Item

Capital Projects

General Discussion

Motion

Additional Items

Board of Selectmen’s Budget

General Discussion

Motion

Board of Education’s Budget

General Discussion

Motion

Debt Service

Use of Fund Balance

Resulting Mill Rate based on Approved Motions

Mr. Ulmer called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

FOLLOW UP ON BOS ITEM

Mr. Sutherland asked Fire Chief Tappe about the 6-man versus 8-man teams, having the extra two men on “call-out” instead of full-time on station. Chief Tappe said it would adversely affect response time, that only a few firemen live in Ridgefield, and Department would not be able to cover the calls and would still have to rely on mutual aid. Mr. Sutherland then asked about hiring additional firemen to cover the 8-man shifts. Chief Tappe and First Selectman Rudy Marconi both blanched, saying it would require hiring six new people at approximately \$85k per fireman. The system as proposed eliminates the cost of benefits that would be necessary with new hires.

CAPITAL PROJECTS

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Mr. Heiser stated that he is inclined to vote on what the BOS passed on to us.

Mr. Ulmer said the expectation from the public is that the BOF will ask the hard questions. It is a responsibility that we have under the Charter.

Ms. Mancini said she paid attention to how the priorities were managed, grouping them into wants versus needs, i.e. a pavilion versus a sewer. She opined that Dr. Miller's technology infrastructure failure could be catastrophic.

Mr. Sutherland endorsed the BOS's recommendation to keep capital projects to \$2.77MM annually, more or less... "whether or not the mix is something that we feel comfortable with.

Mr. Heiser: "The BOS asked the BOE to prioritize and the BOS chose the two top ones (capital projects) @ \$809,168.00. I challenge them (BOE) to try and find that money (\$125k to re-sleeve the main waste drain line at RHS) within their budget."

Mr. Sutherland concurred with Mr. Heiser regarding the \$125k to re-sleeve the main waste drain line at RHS, adding that it would be prudent to pay for it now. "In addition I would like to take a serious look at the two projects related to WIFI and hardware infrastructure and see if one or both should be sent back to the BOS. Infrastructure is extremely important. This country finds it easy to put it off." Mr. Sutherland went on saying that he understood Dr. Miller to say the hardware (capital budget item #6 reduced to \$224k) was more important from a reliability standpoint and could cause a catastrophic failure. The \$92k return on the energy conservation measures should be considered in the total capital request and should be used as a reduction in the BOE's capital budget.

Mr. Raduazzo agreed with Mr. Sutherland regarding the hardware infrastructure capital request, calling it a catastrophe waiting to happen. He recalled the e-mail system failure several years ago with knocked out the system for a month and cost a lot of money to repair. The pavilion could be pushed off a year. The baseball netting that would hopefully protect Chefs Warehouse employees cars from damage could be replaced by having the cars park elsewhere, or maybe by a fence.

Mr. Ulmer made and Mr. Sutherland seconded a motion to approve \$2,580,519.00 of capital projects (the BOS's recommendation less \$25k (baseball netting); \$73k (library website); and \$30k (rec. center pavilion) = \$128k total).

Vote: 4-1. Mr. Heiser opposed. Motion **APPROVED.**

General Government	\$ 188,500.00
Public Recreation	
Community Golf Course	\$ 123,500.00
Parks & Recreation	\$ 283,100.00
Public Safety	
Police	\$ 25,000.00
Fire	\$ 297,426.00

Public Works	
Highway	\$ 421,925.00
Engineering	\$ 431,900.00
Education	
Board of Education	\$ 809,168.00
	\$ 2,580,519.00

Mr. Heiser expressed his disapproval of the BOF's reductions to the proposed capital budget.

Mr. Ulmer stated that he voted to delete the three items (pavilion, netting, library) because the projects lacked relative merit given other requests which were approved or postponed by the BOS.

Mr. Ulmer regarding the baseball netting: The problem should have been seen earlier. Three cases totaling \$1,900.00 versus bonding \$73k over twenty years which would cost more than \$100k. A 60' net over 120' of distance. Is this a judicious use of money? If the occurrences increase, we can review this and look at it again.

Mr. Marconi responded to Mr. Ulmer's comments saying it is not just a matter of money. Chefs Warehouse is a major tenant paying \$400k annually in rent, which could go higher. They have asked us to address the problem. They are fed up. I want it on the record that we are not turning our noses up at a very important tenant. I will let the tenant know that we are going to address it.

Mr. Ulmer: We (BOF) are, by Charter, the final arbiter on capital. Section 10-1 of the Charter (as revised last time around) states: "The Board of Finance may eliminate any proposed capital item, reduce any proposed capital item, and, with the concurrence of the Board of Selectmen, may increase any capital item."

Mr. Sutherland made and Ms. Mancini seconded a motion to approve the Board of Education's proposed Technology Infrastructure Replacement capital request at \$224k (adjusted amount) recommending that it go back to the Board of Selectmen for its approval, based on the information that the BOF received from the BOE administration.

Vote: 3-2. Mr. Ulmer and Mr. Heiser opposed. Motion **APPROVED**.

Mr. Marconi and Ms. Kozlark sought clarification regarding the \$92k rebate on the \$355,282.00 energy conservation capital request, asking if the net amount will be known to the public.

BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S BUDGET

Mr. Sutherland said the BOS is doing an extraordinary job of keeping their budget under control, not just this year, but previous years. Not to say it's as tight as it could be. He noted the \$350k in pension savings that we will not have in future years. Mr. Sutherland noted the "difficult decision for the voters because we have had very low mill rate increases for the last few years and no matter what we do this year it will not be as low." In light of that, I don't think we can approve it (BOS's proposed budget) as they sent it to us.

Mr. Sutherland made and Mr. Ulmer seconded a motion to reduce the proposed Board of Selectman's budget by \$40,000.00 from \$34,743,538.00 to \$34,703,538.00.

Vote: 5-0. Motion **APPROVED**.

Mr. Marconi: "I don't know where it is going to come from, but we may have to cut out the eight man minimum at the Fire Department." Mr. Marconi expressed his disappointment saying that the BOS really "scrubs" the budget requests and brings the BOF a lean budget, not a budget that has been padded in anticipation of BOF cuts.

Mr. Heiser made and Mr. Raduazzo seconded a motion to approve the Town's proposed budget for Roads in the amount of \$1,875,000.00.

Vote: 5-0. Motion **APPROVED**.

BOARD OF EDUCATION'S BUDGET

Mr. Sutherland complimented the full BOE and Dr. Baldwin for their efforts at reducing special education driven lawsuits and deciding that we are not doing as much as we should be doing if we keep getting into fights with parents. This budget shows Dr. Baldwin's effort to address that problem.

Mr. Heiser made and Mr. Ulmer seconded a motion to reduce the proposed Board of Education operating budget by \$625,000.00 based on declining head count and the lack of discussion regarding closing a school.

Vote: 5-0. Motion **APPROVED**.

Mr. Heiser: Since 2005 costs are up 41% and enrollment is down 18%, or 592 students. The school technology department has gone from two to ten people in the last few years. It needs some reining in. There is also the concern that the taxpayers may vote down a bigger increase.

Ms. Mancini: I agree with Marty (Mr. Heiser). We need to serve all taxpayers and find something that is sustainable.

Mr. Sutherland: I do not agree with Marty's reasoning, but there seems to be enough conservatism built in to the BOE budget so that the cut will not hurt the key goals that the BOE has outlined. It would be asking a lot of the voters to approve a substantial increase in the school budget and I don't want to risk the budget being voted down by the town. I don't want to scare people off with a large increase.

Fran Walton: I want to thank you. I respect your decision but I disagree. The cut introduces a large element of risk. There is extreme volatility in special education.

Mr. Ulmer: We are receptive as things happen.

Mr. Sutherland made and Ms. Mancini seconded a motion to approve the Debt Service amount of \$12,060,320.00.

Vote: 5-0. Motion **APPROVED**.

Mr. Marconi said he spoke with State Representative John Frey tonight about State strategy regarding ECS to Connecticut towns. The amount being discussed is \$909,040.00 which is 44% of the \$2.1MM that Ridgefield used to receive. Offsetting that is a sale tax sharing (MRSA) in the anticipated amount of \$738k.

Mr. Ulmer: "If we had voted last night, none of this would have been in the budget."

Mr. Marconi: The State "implementer" bill has all kinds of things in it. This is an election year and representatives will want to bring something home. The big cities are not getting cut. The State is incentivizing going to arbitration, because then they become exempt from the 2.5% cap on annual budget increases.

Mr. Ulmer made and Mr. Hesier seconded a motion to approve the use of Fund Balance in the amount of \$1,950,000.00 which would reduce the percent of fund balance to budget to 8.93%, reducing the mill rate increase from 4.26% to 2.63% making the mill rate 26.6937.

Vote: 5-0. Motion **APPROVED**.

Mr. Raduazzo said he cautiously optimistic about using the \$1.95MM.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Sutherland made and Mr. Heiser seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:54 p.m.

Vote: 5-0. Motion **APPROVED**.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Rodgers, Recording Secretary

