



Town of Ridgefield Board of Finance Budget Deliberations

Approved Meeting Minutes

Thursday May 21, 2020

I. Call to order

D. Ulmer called to order the Board of Finance Budget meeting at 7:00 PM May 21, 2020 via Zoom due to recent Coronavirus. Board Members D. Ulmer, G. Kabasakalian, M. Rettger A. Freidenrich, K. Ogden present.

II. Tonight's meeting will consist of a discussion by the BOF in regards to the budget. Capital will be discussed at a later date due to a potential new request. The meeting will be held later next week to approve Capital. This doesn't have any effect on the fiscal 21 budget. A BOE surplus account will also be discussed next week.

Discussion for tonight:

1. Collection rate set by the BOF.
2. Other revenues in the budget.
3. Motion and vote on the BOS budget.
4. BOE budget
5. Use of fund balance.

Collection rate-this has always been 98.7%, generally met and sometimes exceeded. Taxes are the biggest item. The BOS has taken the Governor's options for a short-term relief. Either defer taxes 3 months or taxes charged at a lower interest rate. Residents can choose either one. The difficulty in paying taxes will affect the mill rate. A motion to accept the BOS recommendation at 98% by M. Rettger, seconded by G. Kabasakalian. All in favor.

Other Revenues-We've received information and forecasts from Parks & Rec and Treasurer on interest income and permitting for conveyance, ambulance, rentals and revenue from the state. In the model now is \$1.293 million. Adjustments have rental income down \$175,000, golf down \$50,000, Parks and Rec down by \$250,000. Conveyance numbers are hoping to be stronger. The golf course director feels strong about the upcoming season. The golf course is booked. The variance in golf is the weather. Conveyance has been "perky." People from New York are showing

an interest in moving out of the city and to the suburbs. Hopeful but cautious with the conveyance tax. Parks & Rec camp will not be able to take as many campers this year as in the past. The Parks & Rec director will follow guidelines by the state. He feels they will come close to projection in relation to other camps. Regarding Chef's Warehouse, they've asked for a concession; defer rent at a 2% rate paying back over 12-18 months. They took on an additional 6000 square feet and the rent doesn't kick in until the CO is issued. Hopeful that business will pick up with restaurants re-opening. Children's Corner is not open now. They're in communication with the town and having a conference call this week to discuss options. Negotiations are taking place and they anticipate re-opening in September. Motion to approve \$13,036,039 as total other revenue in fiscal 20-21 by D. Ulmer, seconded by A. Freidenrich. 4-1 in favor, opposed by K. Ogden.

BOS Budget-At \$38,777,553, at 1.2% increase, \$358,083 reduction in roads. \$84,000 cut in sinking fund of reassessing properties. Reduction in sinking fund to be made up over next few years or we can delay the evaluation. Change is \$84,000. Will make an effort to reduce all around cost. We're allowed to delay re-assessment. Ridgefield reassesses every 5 years and can ask for an additional year due to Coronavirus. Motion for 1.2% increase by A. Freidenrich, seconded by G. Kabasakalian. All in favor.

BOE Budget and Use of fund balance (combined)-BOS non-binding recommendation is 1.5% to BOE and a fund balance reduction of 8.29% of proposed budget to achieve 0% tax increase. General discussion by Dr. DaSilva shares her level of confidence in the ability of the BOE to contribute another \$300,000 in estimated budget savings this year. In the event the sprinklers shift to Capital, then that number can increase further. Negotiations with First Student bus company have not been finalized.

D. Ulmer, BOF Chair: A petition that the BOE should be at 2.96% level has over 1000 signatures. About 200 emails received as to why 2.96 is appropriate. Approximately 50-60 emails received about going in the direction of the BOS suggestion and a 0-mill rate. Unemployment rate is high in town right now. Approximately 1200-1300 residents are out of work with a 13-14% unemployment rate. The town includes approximately 5000 students and approximately 7000 residents not employed. There's an impact on all including students and Seniors. People are getting financial help from the Government and PPP program for business owners as well as the Ridgefield Cares program. We need to balance the pain in the town with the mill rate.

A Freidenrich thanks the BOE for advocating for students and finding ways of bringing money back to the town. The process is frustrating due to COVID 19. She's concerned with the limitations COVID 19 is putting on the residents who can't pay their tax bill on time and/or in full. Primary responsibility of the BOF is to maintain the town's fiscal condition. Comfortable with a suggestion of 1.5 - 1.7 on schools and 8.2-8.5 for fund balance.

K. Ogden-all are impacted by and share pride of the schools. She moved to Ridgefield in part because of the schools. There is a difficulty in raises going to public school professionals. She was troubled by Dr. DaSilva's comment that teachers and administrators are not in a position to forego raises. Comfortable with suggestion of 1 to 2 to BOE and not below 8.5 for fund balance.

M. Rettger-Concerned where the economy is and where it's going. Stimulus money has been important to helping the economy. The last recession had a 7% unemployment rate; we're currently at 13-14%. The economy is much worse than 10 years ago and is subject to risk. Business' have been effected and is concerned with a tax change to the community. Asked to be thoughtful about the fund balance and is comfortable with not going below 8%. The BOS is the policy making board. He's comfortable with the BOS non-binding recommendation and also taking a portion of funds to be a part of the reserve fund. At the end of the day our job is prudent action in regards to the town finances. We have a very strong infrastructure in town.

G. Kabasakalian-Thanks the BOS and BOE for their work. He grew up in town and is troubled mostly by the lost revenue. Ridgefield hasn't seen this kind of lost income. There are serious challenges ahead of us. He's learned that nothing is permanent and things will change for the better. Supported BOS 1.5% suggestion for BOE.

Dr. DaSilva-if all goes well with the sprinklers, the BOE anticipates an additional \$250,000 more to allocate to town. COVID 19 expenses will be hard for the schools and town to absorb. We may need to go through the fund balance for these expenses.

R. Marconi- he believes and stands up for town employees. The town hasn't hired new and has outsourced where possible. Laid off 7 employees last year. The BOS will take a different look at how we handle employees and bring on more in Fire Dept, Police and Highway employees. The employees on the town side are not getting a fair shake.

Final-BOE budget at \$99,912,151 an increase of 1.75% or \$1,718,391 vs. FY20 and use of \$3,500,000 from fund balance (leaving approximately 8.29% of the FY21 budget) to achieve a mill rate increase of 0.0% vs FY 20. Motion to approve by M. Rettger, seconded by A. Freidenrich. All in favor.

*Legislature allowed BOE to keep up to 2% surplus for following year in agreement with the BOF. BOF to put parameters on use of surplus funds. BOF could approve and direct funds to be used for specific purpose.

IV. Adjournment-motion to adjourn at 9:25 pm by A. Freidenrich, seconded by K. Ogden. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Mia Belanger

*Thank you to Andrew Neblett for facilitating.