



Town of Ridgefield Tri Board

Unapproved Meeting Minutes

Thursday April 23, 2020

I. Call to order

R. Marconi called to order the Tri Board meeting at 7:00 PM April 23, 2020 via Zoom due to recent Coronavirus. On April 1, 2020, the Board of Selectmen met to discuss the budget. It was important to review numbers. Tonight, starting by asking Kevin Redmond and Dawn Norton to give FY 20 update.

Kevin Redmond-On town side, deficit of \$600,000 by revenues. Unfavorable by \$1 million which is driven by Parks and Rec, golf and tenants rent. On expense side, favorable by \$775,000 by Parks and Rec and golf. Additional savings are in fuel and vacancies. \$375k forecasted for coronavirus. Assuming golf to be open May 1 but it may not be at the same level as in the past. Chef's Warehouse is asking for two-month time frame for payment to be made and Children's Corner has no revenue, asking for time to pay.

*At this time in the meeting a motion was made to change the agenda to allow Public Comments at the end. Motion by Sean Connelly, seconded by Amy Freidenrich. All in favor

Dawn Norton- Schools closed March 13, 2020 due to Coronavirus and distant learning was implemented. 98% of budget is within receipt of excess cost reimbursement. 60% of funds are salaries. Savings is due to school closures. 20% of the budget is in benefits. Board of Ed has worked with groups to understand the Cares Act regarding the Coronavirus. There are many open variables to forecast the future. When will schools re-open? What happens if we open too soon? Will we receive funding? The numbers are estimated. We're required to negotiate contracts and keep as many people off of unemployment as possible. All employees are still being paid and with benefits. Additional cleaning supplies, legal expenses, cleaning company hired for deep cleaning have been implemented. Some savings are still being negotiated. Savings have been in substitutes, OT and electricity. Special Ed, Special Ed transportation and Facilities for Maintenance are being watched. The estimated return is \$801,000 to the town depending on when schools re-open. Year end projections can change. Board of Ed is following all state requirements. Additional funding could be needed to accept students back into the buildings. We're tracking town generated expenses and FEMA. In regards to spring sports, the athletic fund is separate. All funds and

expenses are self-contained. Question asked if any refund policy is in place for fees? All spring sport fees will go back accordingly. Question asked if insurance can be re-negotiated. All policies are being reviewed for benefits per Rudy Marconi. Bus drivers are laid off at this time. Board of Ed pays the bus company from home to school expenses twice a year. First payment made in October 2019; second payment was due in March. That payment was pulled back due to no busing. Until negotiations are done, they were paid for transportation through March 12, 2020. The significant variable is will the schools re-open this school year? If schools open, teachers may not be comfortable going back which will require subs. Savings will be lost due to this as well as busing.

II. Review of FY 21 Budget-The scenarios with the pandemic raises questions. We could experience the possibility of diminishing tax payments. We need to keep an eye on the mill rate and the best that we can do for the town. Unemployment is expected to be higher than normal. The Coronavirus has had drastic implications. Scenarios have been laid out to possibly employ and not devastate budgets. We've experienced the loss of jobs, business' and lives. All factors are being considered. The Governor has orders that require municipalities to pass tax relief programs to tax payers. Either lower interest rate or defer payments 90 days with no interest. Both programs are available.

Per Dave Ulmer, Board of Finance, the board has not taken any action yet in previous meetings. There has been discussion on taking action to lower the collection rate. The "rainy day fund" is for unprecedented use. This is a time to use it. It is not meant for and not sufficient for catastrophes. The FY20 budget hasn't changed many parameters except Parks & Rec. Covering short falls prematurely would be a dis-service at this time.

Question was posed about Molly McGeehin's thoughts in regards to investments. Per Kevin Redmond, investments will be lower than presented in February.

AAA bond rating review with Moody's: In the past, Moody's has contacted us to not give a review without a plan to get the fund balance back up. They're concerned with the impact of the Coronavirus. When we dip below, we have to show a plan to bring numbers back and replenish the account.

Question posed-on investment, are we getting a return? We're sizing the impact of reduction in the pension funds. The market has quickly come back at times. The pension fund is almost 100% funded. We're in a better position than some other municipalities in relation to the pension.

In regards to loss revenue-Moody's report in revenues are not predictable. The lack of predictability in revenues is scary. We need to consider 25,000 residents in town and take care of them.

Question posed-what are other towns doing? Some have not adjusted their collection rate; some have moved it higher. Our collection rate has performed well over the years. 3% is a big number. 2-2.5% may be more accurate. This will have an impact on the budget.

Per Rudy Marconi-Ridgefield has maintained a strong collection rate. We didn't fall below budgeted numbers. Wilton Board of Finance requested zero and several percentage decreases. If we had to decrease the budget, where will the cuts be made?

Question posed if there was a hiring freeze in Ridgefield? Yes, but there are life guard positions available if pools open for the summer. Vacancies at the Police department are not being filled.

In regards to the "rainy day fund" we don't know how long this will go on and we don't want to drain it.

Dr. DaSilva-We're continuing to look to fill principal vacancies. Since children have been out of school, it's likely their academic needs will be different when they return. We expect that some kids will have gaps for being out of school for so long. We're sure to be planning as thoroughly as possible. Smaller class sizes may matter now for children more than in the past. Difficult decisions will need to be made. Request made to unions to begin considering options regarding pay increases. The challenge is to ensure maintaining normalcy for the children. There will be a challenge of returning regardless of when they return. Some challenges will be faced this summer with unpredictable pieces. The BOE is working hard to support the town.

Margaret Stamatis-There are 5000 students in our schools and everyone is affected by this pandemic. We need to avoid decisions made out of anxiety; decisions have long term consequences. We can't forget that the Coronavirus will change financials for the Board of Ed and for how long these effects will be felt. This could mean an increase in legal fees. Schools are planning how to safely attend in the Fall. This paves the way for innovations and causes us to think outside of the box and maintain a high level of education.

Rachel Ruggeri-Thanks the Board of Selectmen, Police, Fire and Medical workers. Teachers are our hero's and care for all of the children. She acknowledged Dr. DaSilva and the administration. The budget for 20-21 years meets the needs of our children and the value of class size is important. Schools should be safe and familiar. Continued support is important and attracts residents to the town. Do what's best for the children-programs, teachers, community etc.

Elizabeth Floegel-Supports the teachers and Dr. DaSilva. Supporting the families in financial need is important and we must be prepared for the worst-case scenario. We need clear direction to create efficiencies. Emotional support will be needed for the children who have been forced into transformation. She supports the Tri-Board's recommendations. We can't dramatically cut the budget. How can we meet needs in a fiscally responsible way?

Sean McEvoy-We need to look at all things that have been ignored over the years and realign schools and class sizes. Re-do from the ground up.

Jonathan Steckler-There are too many unknowns. We need to treat this appropriately; look for efficiencies everywhere.

Kathleen Holz-Need to have flexibility and trust educators. The children are our future and we need to support the community.

Dr. DaSilva-As of April 1, discussions have begun as to the future of the schools. We rely on the Cabinet for guidance. Discussion also on the process and pieces needed to be considered regarding the budget. The sum of perception is not easy. Some children will require more support than others. The emotional and academic aspects are measured differently. Grading practices were sent out today. The level of independence learning is evolving. Some kids are successful, some aren't, some have parents to guide them and some don't. It's very hard to measure academics at this time. We're relying on students to work independently. The children are doing well but the access isn't the same from home to home and grading is complex. The goal for students is to create supportive environments when they return to school.

III. Public Comments-

Ed Tyrrell-17 Pond Road Ridgefield. Please do everything possible for 0% increase.

Arlyn Kildoff-Reiterated regarding budget cuts to stay as far away from education as possible.

Elizabeth Karlan-Plead to keep cuts away from the schools. Maintain staffing in the schools and strive to maintain excellent schools. (Majority of this time was inaudible).

David Yolen-Schools have been working hard to maintain normalcy. Don't consider drastic measures.

Michael McNamara-Moved to Ridgefield for the schools. Worries about cutting funds and asks to keep cuts away from the classroom.

Ansela Rice-Echoed Dr. DaSilva. Students with special needs will need additional support. She hates to see kids lose the level of support they're used to. Keep cuts away from classrooms.

Jessica Carter-Leave the Board of Ed budget. Schools are the towns selling point. The spending per student is lower than other school districts.

Sarah Pettitt-Consider the children's emotions. Kids are well aware and scared at this time. They need consistency. Please consider this when considering budget cuts.

Mira Jensen-Thank you for your hard work. Support the BOE budget and consider the kids needs when going forward.

Shelly Terry-The work of our educators is what the students need going forward into society. This is an important lesson and a silver lining by investing in the students and schools. Support 3.96% budget.

*Thank you to Andrew for handling the public comments.

The current capital is 7.2 million, rates are good. 2.5 for Board of Ed and balance spread out over town needs; roads etc. The capital budget will be passed onto the BOF for approval. Thank you by Rudy Marconi for everyone's time tonight. Will do their best to pass a budget that's satisfying.

IV. Adjournment-motion to adjourn at 9:15 by Bob Hebert, seconded by Maureen Kozlark. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Mia Belanger