

**Town of Ridgefield**  
**Board of Selectmen Budget Meeting**

Wednesday, March 6, 2019 – 7:30pm  
Town Hall Large Conference Room  
400 Main Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut

**UNREVISED/UNAPPROVED MINUTES**

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These minutes are a general summary of the meeting and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.

**Agenda**

1. Public Comment
2. Re-Appointment Request:
  - a. John Kukulka – Ridgefield Housing Authority
3. Selectman's Report
4. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 2/4/19, 2/5/19, 2/6/19, 2/7/19, 2/22/19
5. Budget Discussion
  - a. BOS Capital-Vote/Approval
  - b. Non-binding BOE Recommendation to the BOF
  - c. BOS Operating-Vote/Approval

**In attendance:** R. Marconi, B. Hebert, M. Kozlark, S. Zemo, B. Manners

**R. Marconi called the 3/6/19 Board of Selectmen meeting to order at 7:30PM.**

1. Public Comment

**No Comment**

2. Re-Appointment Request:

- a. John Kukulka – Ridgefield Housing Authority

-John Kukulka applied for re-appointment on the Ridgefield Housing Committee for the term 11/1/18 through 10/31/23. He had perfect attendance in 2018. He remarked the overall troubles with some of their major projects are over, and that things are more even-keeled. He reflected on various difficulties the RHA had been experiencing with The Meadows project. J. Kukulka also mentioned there aren't any operations grants, only project-based funds, which is problematic to the financial portion of maintaining the property. The Meadows project was especially difficult because of financing problems.

-B. Hebert asked J. Kukulka as to what he and the RHA see as the biggest difficulties.

-J. Kukulka responded there is a need to increase the amount of affordable housing projects in the Town. He added The Meadows was very financially vulnerable, and it was difficult to break even with the expenses. He also said there was never any money generated off of it. When thinking about moving forward with the property, he stated the need to keep expenses down. J. Kukulka also mentioned that refinancing is not a rational option to solve the financial problems of The Meadows at this time.

-R. Marconi mentioned the unknown future of the Mark Nolan property that was built in 1990. J. Kukulka added it is a project-based section 8 property, meaning that the section 8 status only applies to the building and there is no voucher applicable for other properties.

-R. Marconi asked as to what happens when the section 8 agreement with the government expires. J. Kukulka said the government would have to reactivate the property's section 8 status.

-R. Marconi said he spoke to Mark Nolan. He added there will most likely be more conversations regarding the property.

**S. Zemo moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to reappoint John Kukulka to the Ridgefield Housing Authority. Motion carried 5-0.**

### **3. Selectman's Report**

-R. Marconi pointed out there are hand-outs made available to the BOS regarding the Southport information.

-R. Marconi said the next POCD planning meeting is April 2, 2019.

-R. Marconi said he recently attended a Public Hearing regarding tolls in CT. He said it is his understanding the government is possibly going to rewrite the bill after the large amount of public concern. R. Marconi had testified on the behalf of COST, The Council of Small Towns. He said there were a lot of questions for the Commissioner of Transportation, the OPM Secretary, and the Commissioner of the DCED. He also stated it seems there is probably more support than opposition on the matter. There is a proposal to provide CT residents a 30% discount and a 20% discount for commuters.

-B. Hebert asked R. Marconi about the Automobile tax. R. Marconi mentioned that every municipality is in opposition to it.

-R. Marconi mentioned environmental talks about the possibility of eliminating plastic bags from stores. He also mentioned Westport has already eliminated plastic bags from their stores.

-R. Marconi stated in relation to the recycling efforts there is a current cost of \$65 per ton for recycled goods.

-R. Marconi said that the goal is to minimize the cost to the residents.

### **4. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 2/4/19, 2/5/19, 2/6/19, 2/7/19, 2/22/19**

**B. Hebert moved and M. Kozlark seconded the motion to approve the 2/22/19 Special BOS meeting minutes as modified. Motion carried 4-1.**

**B. Hebert moved and M. Kozlark seconded the motion to revisit the 2/4/19, 2/5/19, 2/6/19, and 2/7/19 BOS Budget meeting minutes on 3/20/19. Motion carried 4-1.**

### **5. Budget Discussion**

R. Marconi referenced some hand-outs made available to the BOS.

Hand-out 1:

-Hand-out 1 was in regards to the Southport Associates' estimate for the Rec center roof repairs and the possibility of a conversion into 2 smaller units. Southport Associates, an engineering company, recommended that 2 units would be better than one. It is estimated to cost the original \$320,000 amount plus an additional \$125,000, not including the cost for removal. The company stated that if the problem is not addressed there will be an estimated \$15,000 to \$20,000 cost for repairs per year.

-R. Marconi reminded the BOS of the promising nature of the Eversource grants in regards to this project. He then added It will have to be put on hold for a future budget.

Hand-out 2: Teacher retirement

-CCM Average Teacher pensionable salary in Ridgefield was calculated to be approximately \$93,000.

-The numbers were possibly calculated by taking the certified payroll number and divided it by the number of certified positions.

-M. Kozlark expressed her disbelief when looking at the lower salary numbers in surrounding towns like Weston. Many were in agreement as to the complete accuracy of the salary calculations.

-R. Marconi said it is a median number and not a regular average.

-R. Marconi said the median state-wide average for teacher salary is around \$78,000.

Hand-out 3:

-Hand-out 3 is a correspondence from Dawn Norton, Business Manager for the BOE, to Kevin Redmond, Director of the Board of Finance, regarding the amount of the total BOE budget request minus the cost of the BOE Special Ed budget, which equates about a million-dollar increase. R. Marconi stated there would be a 3.09% increase.

Hand-out 4: Debt Service

-R. Marconi said the Fire Dept. and the Police Dept. are now budgeted to receive \$20 million. There is also a plan to put in a new sewer system at estimated \$8 million cost in 2021.

a. BOS Capital-Vote/Approval

-Kevin Redmond sat at the BOS table to further discuss the Town Budget. He said the capital budget is currently at \$4.5 million.

-S. Zemo and M. Kozlark discussed the future of the bathroom repairs at the Rec center. It was decided to leave the amount in the budget for capital. S. Zemo said he feels the insurance and Eversource money should cover a significant amount of the cost.

-The cost for refinishing the gym floor was determined to be \$56,000. It was advised to do a full replacement due to the unsafe buckling of the boards. It is the hope of the BOS the insurance will cover at least some of the cost for the replacement. There is an additional \$10,000 deductible. R. Marconi estimated the possibility of a 46% cost coverage from obtaining an Eversource grant.

-Also added to capital is \$390,000 for the lights in Branchville.

-K. Redmond stated all unused portions of the finalized capital amount will be returned to the capital account.

**S. Zemo moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to approve the capital request as presented by Kevin Redmond in the amount of \$4,525,570. Motion carried 5-0.**

b. Non-binding BOE Recommendation to the BOF

-R. Marconi made reference the BOE's 3.6% increase request. He added the ideal amount is a 2.5% increase.

-R. Marconi stated the BOS had the option of changing the BOE budget from a 3.09% increase to a 2.5% increase, which would cut \$460,000.

-B. Hebert said the budget request is higher than expected and higher than he thinks the Town can afford. He would like to give the BOE and the Superintendent the opportunity to find the efficiencies to make the budget better. He supports an increase in the budget to fit contractual items but not so much for the other line items. He is confident that \$460,000 worth of efficiencies can be found to make all non-contractual line items flat.

-R. Marconi said we should address the non-binding BOE recommendation and send a note to the BOF about the BOS's concern for the \$460,000 increase for non-contractual line items.

-R. Marconi stated they are looking at a 3.14% mill rate increase.

-Examples of the contractual obligations include: transportation and the Special Ed program

-Examples of non-contractual items include: the repairs (flooring, bathrooms), staffing (administration and personnel), which would equate to the \$460,000.

-S. Zemo feels comfortable with the 3.6% increase. He is concerned about the lower-than-normal real estate numbers and the chance for an even lower school enrollment that would result from it.

-B. Manners said positions have been eliminated and cuts have been made to many departments in an attempt to help keep from increasing taxes. She is in agreement of cutting the \$460,000 to keep the budget flat.

-B. Hebert stated the mill rate would increase by 2.80% after the change.

**M. Kozlark moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to approve a non-binding BOE recommendation to the BOF in the amount of \$97,963,760. Motion carried 4-1.**

There were a few comments when the motion was passed:

-Ed Tyrrell, of 17 Pond Rd., expressed his concern for the eliminated positions and jobs. He also emphasized that there is a flat Town budget. E. Tyrrell added that the BOS has contractual police, fire, Town Hall, and Highway obligations but fell short of their obligatory responsibilities to the BOE.

-Fran Walton of the BOE said that eliminated positions will affect cost size and classroom size. She added that over the past 8 years the number of elementary teachers was reduced from 112 to 100. She also expressed a concern for the way this will affect the students and the classroom.

-Greg Kabasakalian, of 2 Washington Ave., said he is insulted by the \$98 million budget for the BOE. He said this is going to affect the housing values, the number of houses sold in Town, and is overall a very discouraging move for the prosperity of the Town.

c. BOS Operating-Vote/Approval

-The BOS began to discuss the \$10,000 possible salary increase for the First Selectman. R. Marconi stated he is recusing himself from the conversation.

-S. Zemo said the Town had a zero budget with it in the budget.

-B. Hebert was under the impression that it was taken out at yesterday's meeting.

-B. Manners expressed her desire to address the longevity pay instead of the addition of the \$10,000 salary increase.

-B. Hebert said that he was under the impression that the BOS didn't want to increase the salary because it is uncertain as to who will be the next First Selectman and their overall work ethic. He added that this is not a good financial time for the Town.

-R. Marconi requested that the topic be dropped for the purpose of moving forward with the budget deliberations.

**M. Kozlark moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve a debt service of \$11,315,116 for the 2019-2020 fiscal year. Motion carried 5-0.**

**B. Manners moved and B. Hebert seconded the motion to approve the budget at \$38,318,807 for the 2019-2020 budget year. Motion carried 5-0.**

-B. Hebert stated the new mill rate is now a 2.79% increase after changes.

**M. Kozlark moved and R. Marconi seconded the motion to adjourn the 3/6/19 BOS meeting at 9:39PM. Motion carried 5-0.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Lisa M. Ackerly