



## **Town of Ridgefield**

### **Special Board of Selectman Special Meeting Minutes - APPROVED**

May 12, 2020 at 6.30pm via Zoom

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

**Present:** Rudy Marconi (RM), Bob Hebert (BH), Sean Connelly (SC), Barbara Manners (BM), Maureen Kozlark (MK), Kevin Redmond (KR)

Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 6.30pm. Mr Marconi thanked residents for the comments made during the public comment section of previous meetings and expressed awareness and appreciation for the online petition. This meeting will have no public comment section, only discussions to vote on agenda items.

#### **1) Vote on BOS FY2021 Operating Budget:**

Each board member was asked to weigh in on the discussions from previous meetings:

MK: Stated that negotiations of the budget were done before the pandemic hit, and that by end March everything had changed, new budget scenarios were presented using 4 different criteria and assumptions. Of the scenarios Mrs Kozlark strongly supports a 0% Mill Rate increase and is mindful of how much Fund Balance is used because going forward there may be a need to tap into additional Fund Balance.

BH: Supports a 0% Mill Rate increase. He stated that Town and School must work within the budget that supports minimal use of Fund Balance at this time because Fund Balance may be needed to fund Covid related expenses in the Fall.

BM: Supports a 0% Mill Rate increase and a Town Budget increase of 1.2% (scenario B). Ms Manners is hopeful unemployment will decrease as businesses reopen.

SC: Asked where the reductions were found to get to a 1.2% increase as opposed to a 1.5% increase in the town budget.

KR: Reductions came from Hypertension, Roads, Reassessment Funds, Personnel Funds.

RM: Commented on vacancies in personnel – 1 in the Police Department which is frozen, 1 in the Tax Collectors office which could be frozen, 3 in the Fire Department which could be covered by overtime allocations.

SC: Agreed that a 1.2% increase in the town budget was reasonable.

RM: Stated that getting to 1.2% increase required making cuts and decreasing funding that now needs to be found next year. He reiterated that last year's budget of a 0% increase required the elimination of 7 full time positions and that this year he is not prepared to eliminate jobs unless it is absolutely necessary; reductions needed for a 0% increase this year would need to be achieved without eliminating more jobs.

MK: Commented that the money for achieving a 0% increase could come from roads.

RM: Stated that the number 1 concern in town was the state of the roads, which is why roads were added to the capital budget.

SC: Stated that the new processes allow for more miles of road to be paved than in previous years even if the roads budget is reduced.

Barbara Manners made a motion to accept a 1.2% increase for a FY2021 operating budget of \$ 38,777,553.

Sean Connelly seconded the motion.

Rudy Marconi asked if there was any comment before a vote is taken.

BH: Asked about the Mill Rate.

RM: stated that the Mill Rate is determined by the BOE %, the collection rate, the use of Fund Balance, the non-tax revenue.

KR highlighted the reductions made to achieve the 1.2% budget increase as decided on in previous meetings.

BH: Asked if there was an agreement on minimal use of Fund Balance because of the expenses expected for Covid.

RM: Stated that Covid expenses are 75% covered by FEMA grants, which will come through in the next financial year.

BH: Stated that he wanted the BOS to agree as a board to recommend the use of Fund Balance to the BOF.

MK: What are Covid related expenses? Why would we expect to receive FEMA reimbursement?

RM: Any expenses above and beyond the normal expenses incurred by the town. We have never not received reimbursement before.

The discussion on use of Fund Balance:

BH: Does not want the budget propped up by using Fund Balance.

SC: We should use some Fund Balance but stay above 8% to keep a AAA rating.

BM: We should use some Fund Balance but stay above 8% to keep a AAA rating because the rating is based on the economic health of the community as a whole not just the Fund Balance.

MK: If the BOF applies Fund Balance to buy down budget increases then it is not being used for rainy days. We could be in lockdown again in the fall. It is unknown. We should use Fund Balance conservatively.

RM: Many communities may need to apply use of Fund Balance below their minimum use because of the pandemic, the rating agencies expect towns to use their fund balance at this time. Ridgefield manage our town to the Fund Balance, but with an affluent community and rating agencies expecting use of Fund Balance we will keep our current rating. If this pandemic comes back, we will be better prepared for it. We should use our Fund Balance while keeping above 8%; this gives us enough money left in Fund Balance to deal with future issues. We have created efficiencies in our budget last year and this year while maintaining a level of service expected by our community. I am in favor of a 1.2% budget increase.

The motion on the floor was:

**Motion to accept a 1.2% increase for a FY2021 operating budget of \$ 38,777,553.**

Barbara Manners made the motion. Sean Connelly seconded the motion.

**Vote was:** 4:1 (Opposed: Maureen Kozlark). Motion carries

## **2) Vote on BOE FY2021 Operating Budget as a non-binding recommendation**

Rudy Marconi summed up the discussed variables: Fund Balance at 8.19%, Town budget increase of 1.2%, Collection rate expected to be at 98%, brings the BOE to a 1.5% increase for a 0% Mill Rate increase.

RM: Recognized the return of \$800,000 from the BOE due to expenses not realized due to the schools closing.

SC: BOE looked through where they could make cuts, but remain on a 2.96% increase. More cuts will mean less teachers. 90% of the comments received from the public and a petition of 800 signatures urged us to accept the 2.96%. With a ½% increase in the Mill Rate we could achieve a 1.2% increase for the TOR, 2.5% increase for the BOE and \$3.5 million use of Fund Balance.

MK: The BOE are looking at \$2 million in raises at a time when unemployment is high. Pay increases at this time should be deferred and the money put towards the classrooms.

BM: If you take a 1.5% increase in BOE budget and add back \$800,000 of what they returned to the town, that would result in an effective 2.31% increase for BOE.

RM: We still don't have a good picture from the school accounts at this point – almost 5 weeks later. Savings could come from elsewhere but we don't know yet. We cannot afford to give \$800,000 back.

KR: \$800,000 is going into the Fund Balance to keep it above 8%.

RM: Using Fund Balance to a flat 8% would add money for budget use and there are other savings to realize because of the schools closing for the year. Increasing the Mill Rate at this time is not an option. A lot of people in the community are affected by unemployment, many of whom have never been unemployed in their entire lives. The BOE are an organized community encouraged to speak up, other residents do not speak out against the BOE for fear of reprisal. I support a 0% MILL Rate increase.

BM: I support 1.5% increase to the BOE budget. Though this is lower than I would like, the BOE should ask for supplemental changed and special appropriations based on the additional expenses they have because of Covid.

BH: Strongly opposed to an increase of 1.5% to BOE budget this year, stated that over the last 5 years the BOE has had budget increases totaling \$17 million, asks the BOE to defer pay increases in the face of this pandemic, stated that the BOE could cut line items from areas other than classroom, but that they choose to cut classroom spend. Bob supports a 1.2% increase in the BOE budget.

RM: Our schools are important to our town, and he supports them. Stated that additional savings realized from school closures could fund additional expenditure in FY2021 as well as BOE asking for a special appropriation of funds.

MK: I support a 1.5% increase in the BOE budget and hope the BOE will craft their budget to save programs.

SC: We spend less per student than other schools in our DRG. The cost of special education is increasing every year. Too many cuts would be needed to achieve 1.5%.

**Motion for a non-binding recommendation to the BOF for a 1.5% increase to the BOE budget for FY2021;** a value of \$99,666,666.

Maureen Kozlark made the motion. Barbara Manners seconded the motion.

**Vote was:** 4:1 (Opposed: Sean Connelly). Motion carries.

**Vote on Debt Service:**

Debt service went down this year. New Debt Service is \$10,816,865 for this year.

Motion was made by Sean Connelly, Motion was seconded by Maureen Kozlark.

**Vote was:** 5:0, all in favor. Motion carries

**3) Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Barbara Manners. Motion was seconded by Maureen Kozlark.

**Vote was:** 5:0, all in favor. Motion carries.