



Town of Ridgefield

Special Board of Selectman Special Meeting Minutes - APPROVED

May 27, 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.

1. Public Comment

RM asked if there was any Public comment

1 public comment: the public should be allowed to comment on the availability of drive through service in Ridgefield.

Since this is not a subject being discussed at this meeting and full context for this comment is unknown, the meeting moved to the next agenda item.

2. Appoint Ridgefield Poet Laureate: Barbara Jennes

RM asked Brenda McKinley (BM) for some background information.

BM: Apoet laureate is a 3 yr commitment, the position should use the power of poetry to bring the community together, the application asked candidates for background, what they could contribute to the community.

The Poet laureate nominated by the committee is a Barb Jennes. She's already done a Social media campaign with compassionate Ridgefield - haiku hunt, poetry readings. She's a retired teacher, she has a poetry program at library and Aldrich museum encouraging all ages. The most meaningful group she leads is 'Poetry on a path', which is a supportive compassionate group with great participation.

RM read the press release regarding Barbara Jennes' nomination.

The board congratulated Barbara, some asked Barbara questions.

MK: Are you going to document events, and create a collection of all your work?

BJ: I am creating a web page with everything on it, I post daily on Facebook, I journal daily events. All information will be on the website when it is finished.

SC: What you think you can accomplish to get our youth excited about poetry?
BJ: I have worked with teens for years, using different methods of gaining their interest. I hope to get to where the kids are rather than them coming to me. I also hope to get adults more interested.
RM: Can we link to your website to our town website?
BJ: That would be a good thing to do.
BH: You are the first Poet Laureate appointed in Ridgefield, it is a great honor to have you.
BM: Congratulations, I look forward to hearing a lot more, and having poetry readings.
BJ: There is a poetry reading [July 2](#) at the library, and through the theatre barn there are upcoming teen events.

Motion to appoint Barbara Jennis as Ridgefield Poet Laureate for a 3 year term running April 2020- April 2023

MK made the motion, SC seconded the motion.

Vote was: 5-0 Motion carries.

3. Vendor Permit renewals:

a. Zawack Shack

Greg Zawacki (GZ) and Joan Zawacki (JZ) - Business been good, we started late this year because of covid, every year it gets busier.

RM: Covid protocols are required.

GZ: We are contactless. We clean regularly.

BM: Are your customers wearing masks as they approach you.

GZ: 70:30 split

JZ: We hand masks out to our customers. And explain to them how to get them. We use disposable gloves, swap gloves a lot, sanitize in between customers.

RM: Do you serve them if they don't have a mask.

Joan: No, we hand them a mask.

MK: Can you quantify last year compared to this year.

GZ: We are busier because we are outside, people feel more comfortable, we have contactless payment too.

BH: Can you give us a sense of what your customers feel about open.

GZ: People are anxious to reopen but others are anxious that protocols are strictly because they are scared.

SC: how long have you been in business, relationship between Joan and Greg

GZ: 10th year in this spot, 12th year doing this type of work, my sister works with me now while she studies.

Motion to renew Zawack Shack license for another year.

BH Made the motion. RM: Abiding by all covid protocols. BM second the motion

Vote was: 5-0 Motion carries.

4. RPAC Gives – Request to be a part of Friends of Ridgefield

RM: Read DeeDee Colabella's (DC) letter introducing Arpac Gives

DC: We support individual artists in expanding their base, we give scholarships, we want to support large scale town wide art events and support other nonprofits in town with funds raised. We are spearheading a Bow Wow Art Dog fundraiser – one fiberglass dog per artist, painted, displayed in town, then auctioned at Aldrich, the money to support the Guild, the Aldrich and Roar.

RM asked about the formation of the RPAC board of directors for filing for a 501C3

Brooke H: We have a BOD of 5 members and 4 officers in place who (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer), 2 officers are also on the board.

BM: You only need a min of 3 BOD: 2 inside, 1 outside.

MK: Is ARPAC and ARPAC Gives the same thing?

DD: We have our ARPAC Studio above 850degrees at 424R, and our ARPAC Gallery on 410Main Street, these are our for profit businesses; then we have ARPAC Gives, which is not for profit.

MK: I am concerned there will be confusion.

DD: There is confusion, we are working on the messaging to differentiate, both for profit businesses are integral to each other, and then there's the nonprofit to fund raise to support new artists, and all link in to each other. We support the working artist fully.

MK: So donations will come in from raising funds to give scholarships but then you have the other businesses, it should be a different name.

SC: It could be an ethical issue, money coming in to the not for profit, would be going to fund the artist, but then the artist would spend it at the ARPAC for profit Art studio.

DD: Our overall mission is to help the overall artist from school all the way through, they can use the funds at ARPAC, but there are many other places they could use the money. We are not trying to raise money in order to survive.

MK: The Arts Council already raises money for artists, could you not join forces with them, instead of establishing another not for profit for the arts, that would dilute the money raising effort.

DD: I don't know about their efforts or if they are a town appointed board.

RM: They are

DD: I am not opposed to joining them.

BM: RPAC always stood for Ridgefield Performing Art Center, but I let that lapse.

DD: Our gallery and branding will catch and make it plain as to what we are.

We have been open since July, we need time for recognition.

DD: I have spoken to Mark Meachem when coming up with this idea, I haven't seen any large scale fund raising efforts by the Arts Council, I have seen grant applications, I am not opposed to partnering with them but I want to have large town wide art events, I want our town to be an art destination, it's good for business.

BM: We should hold off, you could join with the Arts Council.

MK: If you join the Arts Council you would not have to create another 501C3.

DD: Arts council represent all forms of art, performing arts especially but I'd like to see more of the visual arts in this town.

BM: Performing arts are strong in this town but the Guild of Artists is interested in visual arts representation in this town

MK: we could facilitate a conversation between Arts Council, Guild of Artists and RPAC.

RM: Arts council co-ordinates events in town, but not coordinating fund raising events.
RPAC has a place in this town with regards to fund raising for artists.
DD: We are encouraged by your enthusiasm.
BH: I have a concern with the name. There is confusion.
DD: We used the name for transparency but I would be open to changing the name.
RM: We will revisit this next month.

5. Appointments:

a. Parks and Recreation Commission: Peter Nichols

Phil Kearns of the Parks and Recreation Commission and Peter Nichols join the meeting

RM: Read Peter Nichols letter to request appointment.

RM: Read PK letter supporting PN appointment.

BM: it would be great if the Conservation commission and the Parks and Recreation Commission worked together.

PK: We do work together on a lot of areas and PN's appointment would greatly enhance that work.

MK: Was there advertising for this position?

it was not clear if this position was advertised to all residents and the decision was taken to first advertise for other applicants before approving Peter

PK: A would urge you to complete the interview with PN now.

SC: Stated that he is impressed with PN background.

BH: I have no questions.

RM: Advertising usually does happen but I feel uneasy going against a recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Commission.

MK: Asked PN what he feel he wants to look at besides the trails.

PN: I have no areas I would like to change; I am happy with how they are run.

RM: We will place an advertisement to see if there is interest. We will delay filling this vacancy until next month.

6. POCD Adoption

We have Rebecca Muchetti (Chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Richard Baldelli (RB, Director, Planning and Zoning), Karen Martin (Planning)

Rebecca: We have statutory obligation to update the Plan of Conservation and Development every 10 years, due date is July 13, 2020. We have been planning for 2 years, we have received input from the community, all boards and commissions and WestCOG, we are delighted to present to BOS.

Karen: We got great feedback from WestCOG. We are now presenting our POCD to the BOS for review, comments, feedback and a letter of support. Our

consultant couldn't make it tonight but any feedback we could repeat to him.

RB: We have had multiple public sessions. Our final public hearing is on June 16.

RM: Are drive through's part of the POCD?

Rebecca: No, the town has a policy that isn't in favor of drive through's, but we have a discussion about drive through's on June 9.

BM: Is there anything in the POCD to change or add in light of a pandemic hitting Ridgefield again?

RB: That comes down to regulations. We have flexibility to help our businesses.

MK: Q to modify or us agreeing?

RM: Us agree, unless there's an error that was missed.

SC: I have nothing to add, I support bringing this to the June 16 meeting.

BH: Did WestCOG have any changes or additions?

Karen: WestCOG gave us positive feedback, they had nothing to add.

BH: I have nothing to add, it is a good document and I support presenting this at the June hearing.

RM: The Historical Society have received a \$50,000 grant to review Main Street because of the Battle of Ridgefield and the remains of soldiers found. How does that affect P&Z?

RB: Nothing in the Zoning regulations prohibit anything that they come up with to commemorate this finding.

RM: a vote is needed to approve this. Any more questions

Motion to Adopt the new POCD

BH: motion to approve

BM: seconds

Vote is: 5-0. Motion carries.

7. a. Possible Capital Request From BOE – Repair of Sprinkler System at RHS

Kevin Redmond and Joe Morritz are on the meeting to discuss this.

RM: 800 issues found within the Sprinkler System needing to be addressed. BOE approved \$494,320 to fix the system. Pipes with thinner wall were to code and were used but the code has changed to a thicker walled pipe is now required. The BOE hired R.J.Daily to start on the work. We need to approve these funds.

BH: My calculations do not add up to the amount asked, what is the difference?

JM: There are 2 hydrants that do not work that need to be replaced at \$25,000 per hydrant.

BH: Was this put out to bid?

JM: M.J.Daily is on the list of approved State contractors and this qualifies for an emergency repair.

RM: There is work that has to get done now. While M.J Daly have opened everything up now, they may as well fix it all.

BH: We knew about this a year ago, this coming up at the 11th hour is concerning. There are a lot of exclusions to the contract, what kind of liability exposure do we have and should we put in a contingency in case they run over?

JM: We can do a lot of work in house, I'm not concerned with them running over.

BH: We were told last week that this was being handled out of BOE operating budget and the amount was \$250,000. Then they found a mechanism to have us recind our recommendation and approve this. Will the previously budgeted amount come back to the town when we approve this extra \$494,320?

JM: With the school being closed, it is a great time to do this now. It is a 12 week project and will be complete by the time school starts.

KR: I assume the \$250,000 would come back to the town as an additional surplus.

RM: Is this the \$250,000 that was offered back to the town in the last meeting?

MK: Dawn is not recognizing this money as usable. This savings is in their budget.

BH: They were going to use \$250,000 to do this, now there is an additional amount, how will this be handled? They have a \$100,000,000 budget and yet we are still running onto emergencies like this.

MK: Joe is has been on your plate for a while, BOE have known about this for a long time.

JM: I have been handling it out of my operating budget for years but now that all these faults have come up, they are extra.

BH: Why wasn't this brought up in the capital expenditure meeting?

RM: They are still waiting on complete reports.

JM: Inspection didn't start until April 15, after the capital budget meetings.

RM: In 2003 when the building was build, the low code pipe was used because low bid was chosen, but what we see now is that the fittings are not agreeing with one another, causing the problem, but there was an appearance of an issue back in 2003 even though it passed inspection back then.

Dawn Norton, Business Manager for Ridgefield Public Schools joined the meeting.

SC: For the funds originally from operating that were going to be used for this project, but now must come out of Capital expenditure, what happens to the operating funds? Does that go back into the general fund as unused funds?

DN: We could have it as part of the funds coming back to the town.

BH: That is \$800,000 savings due to school closure, \$300,000 found in the meeting on May 20th, and \$250,000 last week and now this \$250,000 = \$1,550,000 coming back to the town?

MK: You are still negotiating with First Student?

DN: 89% is being negotiated of the \$1,200,000, 56% of their calculation was for drivers and benefits

MK: But the drivers don't want to come back because they make more on

unemployment from the state. (DN concurred). You got the bid in April, why was this number never brought to us in Capital?

JM: The inspection was in April, only last week did we get the final number.

MK: The town charter allows for emergency expenditure.

RM: \$250,000 was to address the Fire Marshall's concerns, then we moved into the budget, now there is decision to fix everything now and not delay till later.

BH: I have no further questions. I am concerned at not having this large project out to bid and not having a contingency on it. What does this extra amount do to our debt service?

KR: It will affect our debt service.

RM: We still have 2 buildings of over 100 years old to renovate, which is a major expenditure. We can put things off, but we will pay for it sooner or later.

Motion to rescind the capital budget recommendation to the BOF for FY2021 of \$7,237,306.

BM made motion, SC seconded.

Vote was: 5-0. Motion carries

KR: The new capital amount to approve is \$7,731,626

Motion to approve revised capital budget for FY 2021 of \$7,731,626

BM made the motion, SC seconded the motion.

Vote was: 5-0. Motion carries.

Discussion regarding First Student contract: payments made so far, new contract negotiations, payments still to be made

b. General Discussion

Discussion regarding the accounts put through the treasurer in the past few weeks. The auditor's response is that those accounts are not General Fund accounts. They are Trust accounts – these accounts hold funds for someone else.

RM: The concern has been that the Student Activity account has had little activity. If the historical research finds it is not within general accounting principles that that account should be turned over to the state. If we appoint a committee to research this.

MK: I am concerned about a sizeable amounts in a dormant account. At BOE meeting there was a concern by a board member regarding these funds but there was no traction from the rest of the board on this. The superintendent said they would look at it during the summer. But I think it would be a positive step to make sure we are all on the same page with regards to the funds in these accounts.

BM: A committee would be better than paying someone from the outside. There

are years of boxes to go though, those are all billable hours.

SC: I support a committee

BH: I would like to hear from Kevin what he thinks of a committee as opposed to going to an outside company.

KR: Appointing a committee to find where the funds come from would save costs. Using an outside company could cost up to \$50,000.

RM: Should we recommend this to the BOF, since this is their mandate?

MK: The athletics fund account worries me the most.

BH: We have been asking the BOE to sort out all these accounts for a long time, now would be a good opportunity to review the best practices and protocols regarding use of these accounts so that we don't have this problem again in the future.

Motion to draft a letter to the BOF to request a committee to review all these accounts.

MK made the motion, BH seconded the motion.

Vote was: 5-0. Motion carries

8. Minutes Approval: 2/5/2020

MK: These minutes had a couple of corrections – on page 5.

RM: P&Z approved the Turner Road improvement. We had questions regarding this contract which were never answered to date.

MK: Discussion with the Fire Department regarding applying for a grant for the new ladder for the fire truck. Chief Meyers assured us that the grant writing was on schedule.

RM: They have asked New Milford for help with the grant writing since they have written and received a grant for a fire truck ladder before.

Motion to approve minutes from 2/5/2020 as modified

BH made the motion.

BM seconded the motion.

Vote was: 4-0, 1 (Sean Connelly abstained)

9. Superintendent Susie da Silva joined the Zoom meeting

SdS: At the BOE we have decided to discuss the accounts, to investigate and try to understand how these accounts are run. We wanted to use an independent auditor to look at the original sources, protocols and best practices, financial reports, how to ensure transparency going forwards. It is of great concern that these are dormant accounts and what the original source of money was.

MK: I am happy to hear that you have started this process. Can you appreciate

that we want to first get a fresh set of eyes on it in-house: the BOE, BOF, BOS, before going to auditors. I'd rather not spend the money on someone looking through boxes, I'd rather we have volunteers look through boxes and get the information to present to auditors.

The discussion continued surrounding these accounts and the need to be transparent, get clear answers and put in place best practices going forward.

RM thanked everyone for their contributions.

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:20 pm

RM made the motion

BH seconded the motion

Vote was: 5-0. Motion carries.