

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – BOARD of SELECTMEN
BUDGET MEETING – FEBRUARY 5, 2018

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:00 P.M.

APPROVED MINUTES

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

In attendance: R. Marconi, R. Hebert, M. Kozlark, B. Manners, S. Zemo
 K. Redmond, Director of Finance

Agenda

1. Engineering Budget
2. Parks & Recreation Budget
3. Library Budget
4. Planning & Zoning Budget
5. General Budget Discussion

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm and with Director of Finance Kevin Redmond provided a brief overview of the BOS capital & operating budget to all. Town expenditures increase 2.37%; Town insurance and benefits increase 4%; the targeted increase is 2.5% based on the OPM letter. Residents will be feeling an impact next year due to the federal tax plan. Tax Assessor Al Garzi thinks we will see more people coming in to appeal their taxes. School operations are at 4.83% increase; with all that the mill rate increase will be at 4.05% without use of fund balance. Expect it to be a tough year—it is a Board of Finance decision whether to use fund balance.

Board of Finance policy is to stay between 8-9% fund balance. \$14.5M in fund balance at the close of the 2017 fiscal year. R. Marconi stated there is a question about whether the state will impose a consequence for exceeding 2.5% increase. We proceeded with the assumption that there is a 2.5% increase cap.

TAR (town aid roads) grant is still included in the state budget. Aside from this, the Town does not get much else. LOCIP, municipal revenue sharing is gone; educational cost sharing—we have been zeroed out. The original requests from Town Departments totaled \$37,501,885; this has been reduced to \$36,440,104.

R. Marconi read the letter he received from Vice President of the United States Michael Pence congratulating and cheering on Ridgefielder Tucker West at this year's Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

1. Engineering Budget

Town Engineer Charlie Fisher came forward to discuss the Engineering budget. Operating increased approximately 2%. C. Fisher is concerned about the basin testing account—this is a result of the change in the DEEP MS4 stormwater regulations. Much more data intensive work is required now. We must look for illegal discharges by reviewing every stormwater drain in the Town. A consultant investigates; takes samples, data is collected and then presented to DEEP. This identifies sources of pollution within the watershed. There are close to 4,000 catch basins. Inland Wetlands, P&Z, IWB all work together on this. M. Kozlark asked whether there is another person that could be doing this work rather than Charlie so he can do other more important things. C. Fisher delegates what he can to Jake Muller; much of this work requires his oversight and signing off.

The capital budget discussion followed. We are on a debt retirement program—hoping to achieve a level prior to the ‘bundle’ of 2001. With the bundle, we were at a high of \$140M; we are currently at \$65 or \$70M. At the end of fiscal year 2019 we will be at \$63M—the BOF bonded the bundle in ‘02-03. It was \$145M approximately at the start. We are retiring approximately \$9M per year and we add approximately \$5-8M per year. There is always an unanticipated project, such as the radio project. We try to stay at that \$2.75-3M run rate capital.

C. Fisher came in at \$1.4-1.5M; a few cuts had to be made. Specific projects include:

- Town Hall and Town Hall Annex window replacement—this will complete the window replacement project.

- Yanity Gym Roof replacement; Venus building roof repair (leak at Ridgefield Playhouse)

Next year the roof of the former nursery school at Yanity and the BOE air conditioning area roof will be repaired.

- Underground tank removal from Venus building—the tank is approximately 25 years old. The building is on natural gas now so the tank is no longer needed.

- Schlumberger Sky Dome building—new A/C system and roof replacement (\$175k); we hope to use this building for storage and free up the lower level of the Venus building which is where files and storage is currently located. B. Hebert asked whether it makes sense to make this the EOC? This is something to consider. Discussion ensued about whether it makes sense to keep this building? S. Zemo stated that it is a community asset. It would be a shame to tear it down.

Building exterior painting continues program that was started last year—Town Hall, Venus building and Yanity Gym. Currently, after going out to bid, contracts were signed and we are waiting for warmer weather for painting to begin at the Public Works complex and the Fire Department. The color is barn red, which was approved by the AAC (matches the Recycling Center). Perhaps the AAC would recommend another color for the doors to break up the monotone color?

M. Kozlark asked about asbestos removal—when will this end?? The program continues out to 2023. It can only be done during summer months when students are not in school. It has cost the Town over \$3M. It is a very expensive process and it must be done.

The village storm drainage study—Casagmo residents are getting an increase in stormwater due to increased building in the area. There are two large drainage basins that converge there. The study is split into two phases—gathering data such as size of piping, then taking the data and a methodology to address the problem. This is important for FEMA reimbursement, if we can show this in our capital plan.

Sidewalk improvements – we could not do this for the past two years (no LOCIP \$); intersection of Route 116 and Route 35 sidewalks; and the Prospect Street area that leads to the rail trail. We have applied for a grant (community connectivity grant) for New Street, but we have not heard from the state whether we have received the grant.

The new fuel depot officially opened up on Friday. LOTCIP state money was in last year's budget for a trail including a raised platform walk over the great swamp to tie it into the P&R path. This money has not been released to the Town as those transportation funds are frozen.

2. Parks & Recreation Budget

Commissioner Phil Kearns was present with Parks & Recreation Director Paul Roche to discuss their budget. Commissioners Evie Bottali and Barbara Dobbins were in attendance in the audience.

Phil Kearns presented on behalf of Park & Rec; a modest revenue increase is forecast (.49%). The expense increase requested is 1.42%.

Maintenance function (Town facilities and school grounds) is the main expense. There are services provided to the Town for activities for which there is no charge to the residents, such as the egg scramble, the Halloween walk, merchant window painting, to name a few. There are expenses associated with these services for which there is no revenue.

Revenue vs Budget; revenue is being kept flat for this year. The construction of the Route 35 bridge really hurt us this year. And looking forward, headwinds from the renovations is going to affect us; we are expecting this. The retirement of our director is also expected to have an impact. Total number of personnel will remain the same.

S. Zemo asked what are areas that are potential growth? Phil Kearns responded that a new swim lesson program has been added as a membership feature; we are responsive to our demanding clientele. Discussion ensued about a frequently requested pavilion. S. Zemo asked whether the pavilion would positively impact revenue? The answer is yes—exercise classes could be held outside; camp would be held in the pavilion in inclement weather, etc.

B. Hebert asked whether competition with local fitness center businesses impacts Parks & Rec business—the answer is yes, but we are not competing with these other businesses.

Capital—the original request was \$931,409; this has been reduced by the First Selectman to \$595,434.

ADA compliance--\$20,000

SRMS turf replacement \$247,200—will be almost 14 years overdue.

Parks & Rec Center Pool surface--\$98,000

Additional capital request: Ballard Park cameras—Parks & Rec worked with a local resident to obtain and install two cameras in the park on a trial basis. If the Town decides to purchase the system, the cost would be \$20,000.

Parks & Rec locker room repairs and renovation: \$149,000 is being requested as a placeholder; S. Zemo stated he is uncomfortable approving an additional \$149,000 before the bids are received.

B. Manners asked if there is an estimate of lost revenue as a result of the bridge? P. Kearns responded it is difficult to tell—the hope is that revenue comes back.

3. Library Budget

Brenda McKinley, Library Director, and Library Board members Gary Rapp and Dean Miller came forward to discuss the Library budget.

Brenda McKinley addressed the BOS; she has been the Librarian for one year. In FY 2016 the Library saw 260,000 visitors. Wireless use is a big draw; streaming video music; audio books; collaboration and community support is very important.

B. Hebert asked whether facility uses are revenue generating—Brenda replies yes, some are. If for-profits are using the library, the answer is yes.

B. McKinley stated we are faced with a challenge: appropriation is below our peer libraries and concerned that it is an unsustainable trend. Comparing ourselves to other towns, are we programmatically delivering? Compared to four similar towns, we are above average in programming, circulation number is close; we are above the four-library average in usage and visits. Source of info is the CT state library fiscal analysis, just released.

The biggest budget driver is the health care cost.

Gary Rapp discussed expenses—Head count is generally stable since 2009. Salaries (2.5% increase); benefits overall 14.1%; 401k plan—employees must be there for one year before they can participate—jumps 25% because of the people and the timing of their participation.

Operations up only 1%. Increase of 5% for collections—reflection of the licensing required for electronic media. Patrons want more of this. We will do a mid-year budget assessment; so far doing pretty well.

Income—the appeal in special events is up; there is a great deal of competition of other galas etc.; we must continue to try new and different things. Dean Miller stated that the great unknown is the impact of the new tax laws. It may factor into donors' giving decisions. Fine collection has been declining. Maybe because people are turning to digital books. Room rental, passport processing has stagnated a bit; we are looking at ways to turn this around. 5.5% increase initial request; we draw from our endowment; we try to keep at 4%--would have to increase to 4.5% and don't want to do that.

FY 2018 appropriation—without benefits and 401k, we would be at a 2.5% increase. R. Marconi stated that the benefits may reduce the overall by \$5,000. R. Marconi stated that the Town will have to think outside the box to come up with something that is sustainable. Discussion ensued about the broader problem of affordable healthcare.

Gary Rapp moved ahead to capital requests. As the building gets more mature, we must look at long-term capital plans. There are two items for the upcoming year—1) security system. We are looking at interior security; we now see weak spots after being in the building for a couple of years. Currently have cameras—R. Marconi asked whether they could be moved and alternated? They are looking for additional cameras. Received a \$22,000 quote from the company that did the initial installation. Could the company that Parks & Rec has worked with for the park be asked for quote?

Capital item 2) we must start a planned replacement schedule for computers. The equipment is purchased rather than leased; our IT guy will repurpose/rework the old and out of date computers. B. Manners asked whether any coordination can happen with the schools? Brenda mentioned we get good prices through library and education consortiums.

Gary Rapp mentioned two years out: we are looking at improved lighting; the fence on Main Street with neighbor that was postponed from last year; the Morris building is in need of re-bricking; book return equipment overhaul.

B. Hebert asked whether 94% of all Ridgefield households have library cards? Yes, this is correct.

4. Planning & Zoning Budget

P&Z Chairperson Becky Mucchetti, and Department Head Richard Baldelli spoke with the BOS about their budget request. Commission member Charles Robbins was present in the audience. Richard Baldelli explained the P&Z department was reconfigured last year. The request before the BOS is to increase by 8 hours one employee of the Office Administrator, making it a full-time position. It will come in at a 20% decrease in salaries in the department. The part-time

hours create holes in the department. In addition, in January, the P&Z and IWB increased their number of meetings per month to three from two. Also, the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) will be updated, increasing the workload. The increase would be \$8,638 without the benefits; the benefits would be an additional \$24,000. Becky Mucchetti stated the office administrator is much more than an administrative position. Keeping a statutory timeline is critical. The other two departments have a full-time administrator (Health and Building).

POCD funding is a necessary line item—state statutes require this. Becky Mucchetti stated P&Z/IWB is working with Charlie's office on the stormwater management matter.

5. General Budget Discussion

R. Marconi stated the general budget discussion took place at the beginning of the meeting. He reviewed the agendas of the upcoming meetings taking place later this week.

Discussion took place of possible consolidation with BOE and Town personnel in purchasing or finance. Why aren't we centralizing more non-educational functions? R. Marconi stated that Wilton has consolidated the accounting positions. Another discussion took place about regionalization.

Requests have been received from other departments for personnel—Highway and the Police Department, who will be coming before the BOS this week. Registrars and Social Services also asked for personnel but they will not be coming before the BOS this week.

R. Hebert stated he would be hard pressed to make non-binding recommendation to increase the BOE budget more than the Town budget.

The Town received a request from John Fenton, President of OWLS, to increase the senior tax credit program from \$1,048 to \$1,200. Currently this program costs the Town \$1.6M per year—1,500 participants. This program has not increased since 2010. R. Marconi suggested considering offering a tax freeze for residents 75 years or older—it would not be a deferral. This is allowed by statute and would encourage seniors to stay in town. R. Marconi suggested increasing the credit to \$1,065—this would impact the budget by an increase of approximately \$50,000.

Discussion ensued about personnel; R. Hebert stated the time has come to spend the time looking at policy changes—outside of budget season. Perhaps a 4-5 year overall plan to look at personnel placement changes.

M. Kozlark moved and B. Hebert seconded the motion to adjourn the BOS budget meeting at 10:29 pm. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Wendy Gannon Lionetti