

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – BOARD of SELECTMEN
SPECIAL BUDGET MEETING – FEBRUARY 6, 2017

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

REVISED/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. General Budget Overview
2. Parks & Recreation Budget
3. Library Budget
4. General Budget Discussion

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

1. General Budget Overview

Kevin Redmond, Controller, came forward to provide a general budget overview. Town & roads budget is increasing at 3.5% before any changes are made. The Board of Education is estimated at 3%; debt service continues to decrease. This is a good trend.

Several departments requested additional personnel but those requests have been removed from the budget. Altogether, \$538,000 in personnel was removed from the proposed budget.

In order to achieve a maximum 2.5% increase, we must eliminate \$366,757 from the budget as it now stands. R. Marconi and K. Redmond met and came up with a list of proposed items to eliminate to deduct \$366,757 from the budget. The first item discussed is reduction in pension funding of \$30,000. S. Zemo asked what would the repercussions be? If we take out the \$30,000 we would remain flat as compared to last year—there would be no increase in funding the pension. R. Marconi stated that our auditor said our pension funding levels are the highest she has seen.

Two items proposed for reduction qualify as capital—the Scotts Ridge sinking fund is one. This could be reduced \$55,000. This fund will need to be replaced next year. The funding did not begin when Scotts Ridge was built, so we are a bit behind the curve in funding the

replacement. The field was estimated to last 12 years but the funding did not start at year one. Golf Course cart paving money is the other capital item that could be reduced. This has been a good program of replacing the paths but if we must reduce, we may want to look at cutting this back.

Are there positions that could be eliminated? The Fire Department could go from a 24-hour eight-man minimum to a 12-hour eight-man minimum. We made a commitment to the eight-man minimum through June.

R. Hebert asked what the total savings would be for position elimination? R. Marconi stated there are 2 or possibly 3 positions. There would be push-back from department heads. S. Zemo stated that we may need to be sensitive to the situation. R. Hebert asked can we do it through attrition? HR Director Laurie Fernandez may need to do an analysis.

We are looking at a 12.5% increase in the medical line—a \$470,000 increase; it will be tough to keep it at 12.5%. We may be able to get \$50,000 from this line; however, we probably will have to switch to another carrier.

We will not get a service contract with the new radio system—it's very expensive. Workers comp and liability insurance increase is an estimate—3.5% increase. We will have much clearer information closer to March.

The legal bills are budgeted well. We currently have a suit with Dr. Seeman, the former concessionaire at golf course. Three union contracts are up for negotiation this year.

2. Parks & Recreation Budget

Commissioners Phil Kearns, Barbara Dobbins, and Gina Carey were present with Parks & Recreation Director Paul Roche to discuss their budget. Commissioners Evie Bottali and David Shofi were in attendance in the audience.

Phil Kearns presented on behalf of Park & Rec; they are requesting a 3.61% increase. Revenue increased \$108,000. Historical total revenue is strong--\$784,000 over 5 years; \$500,000 from the prior July 2008 peak. When revenue increases, program expenses increase. We think the increase may flatten out next year. Switched to an all-inclusive model—fitness classes are no longer separate. Increases come from utilities (+\$5,182), field maintenance (+\$10,000), programs (+\$16,000), and salaries (+\$131,790). Areas that impact the budget--the new minimum wage increase; the reinstatement of the field maintenance position; increased summer camp and child care increased staffing in those areas; the existing staffing salary adjustment. 68% of staffing increases are from areas that generate business.

If a program is cut, revenue is cut. Last year 60% of revenue was from summer camp.

Capital—everything requested is related to maintenance. All equipment is on a 10-year replacement plan. All requested capital figures are quotes from suppliers. The ADA compliance request is \$21,300—we must replace the rec center pool lift and add a rail to be in compliance; the zero-entry pool is no longer adequate. A new path surface mat for Martin Park is necessary for access to changing rooms. Repair of the Parks & Rec Center playground (installed in 2005) is included. Field safety and fencing replacement – this is for Aldrich Park. The Governor Park tennis court is in need of re-surfacing. We have added money in the budget for ADA going forward. R. Marconi stated \$50,000 will be included in the budget to have a town-wide ADA assessment. This must be added into capital. The Commission for the Disabled and will be discussing this tomorrow night.

Emergency repairs to the Rec Center locker rooms total \$1,268,756. Parks & Rec used some capital money to have an engineering analysis to determine the source of the problems. The equipment in the fitness center continually rusted and it is due to air conditioning pulling moisture in; moisture is coming up through the tiles; this is a flaw in the design. Air quality testing has been done and it came out clean. The air ducts have been cleaned. We are meeting this week with the architect that did analysis to try to figure out what is going on. Some leaks must be fixed temporarily – water pipes were leaking. Water is leaking between the shower stalls. Phil Kearns distributed a report showing the moisture problem. Sheetrock installed originally was regular--not water resistant sheetrock. This is a work in progress and will have more information for the budget meeting in March, if not before.

B. Hebert asked if there is any liability on the part of the builder or would we look at insurance? R. Marconi stated it is worth asking – must do homework first.

S. Zemo asked where are we with the \$1,000,000 grant for the trail through the great swamp? R. Marconi stated that it is a grant through COG; this is not a Parks & Recreation grant.

R. Hebert asked Paul Roche—can you identify any areas where we are not operating as efficiently as possible? P. Roche responded that we are constantly looking at best practices of other facilities, feel as though all areas looked at routinely, reconfiguring front desk hours, etc. We try to pay attention to everything. Regarding maintenance, we looked at outsourcing SRMS and RHS, and found after analysis, determined that we are doing very well and it is a cost-efficient system. We regularly hold staff meetings and brainstorming sessions about cost savings, etc. Every staff member is invited to make suggestions; each person feels that they can make a difference.

3. Library Budget

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

D. Miller addressed the BOS, stating the contribution request is up 2.5% to \$1,933,000 for FY '18. This represents 70% of the total budget. The Library will have to raise the remaining \$800,000 through revenues and other contributions including \$450,000 in private fundraising. Two capital items have also been requested — website updates \$30,000 and ground improvements \$19,000.

G. Rapp reviewed the budget in detail. The Library has experienced several years of double digit increases; we are now seeing this flatten a little bit. As we look for money from the community, there is more competition for those dollars. We have begun to feel that a little bit. We can grow our book sales; our passport revenue has flattened out, which is consistent with the post office. We are looking at whether we can grow the program — provide photos perhaps? We have included an income challenge for ourselves; we have not had that in the past. We try to maintain a 4% withdrawal from the endowment; we bumped this up for this year — this is something that requires board approval. Salaries increased 1.8%. Building expenses are generally flat. Our electric contract expires in June. Can we piggyback with Town? We will be in touch with the Town Purchasing Director to explore this. We attempted to get out of our gas contract, but the penalty was too big. Some operating expenses have been eliminated. We have had problems with the HVAC system. R. Marconi asked whether insurance would cover it? This will be investigated. We eliminated some maintenance contracts. We are seeing an income/expense challenge of \$30,000. A line has been added for Brenda to get acclimated in the community. The collections line covers new books or electronic media and licensing fees — items that did not exist before.

G. Rapp stated he has been working on the Library budget for the past four years and this year is a challenging but achievable budget.

B. Hebert asked about achieving fairly significant staffing savings? G. Rapp responded that the staff line reflects the estimated number of staff that may leave — about \$20,000 worth of savings. The development consultant position has been eliminated. The accounting line came down because two accountants were working together briefly during the overlap (Molly McGeehin, previous accountant was working with the new accountant.)

The Library has two capital requests: grounds maintenance of \$19,000 which includes replacement of a stockade fence along the Main Street side of the property abutting the next-door neighbor, repair of a stone wall, and parking lot striping. R. Marconi stated the stone wall work may be piggybacked along with the Prospect Street and CVS entrance realignment. S. Zemo asked about whether shrubbery could be used instead of fencing? Dean Miller will investigate this. B. Hebert asked whether the Library puts the contract work out to bid every few years? The answer is yes, but will look further at this. Will the striping be done in conjunction with the Prospector? Dean Miller will look into this.

The other capital request is \$30,000 to update the website. This was requested last year at \$45,000 but was postponed until the new director was hired. The website was last updated in 2009. Access to technology is very popular. The technology committee has been looking at other library websites and researching options. They have no formal bids at this time but based on what they have seen, bids can be brought forward to the BOS by March. The state has hired a consultant to look at interlibrary loans—the system has changed.

R. Marconi asked whether ADA compliancy is being investigated for the new website? The answer is yes.

Brenda McKinley stated that the Ridgefield foot traffic is so much higher than Newtown. 272,000 people visit and 30,000 people attend programs. The community partnerships with the library is very impressive. This is an exceptional library and a great community.

G. Rapp stated technology has changed over the last five years; we go to the internet to access our library, and our website is cluttered and the information is not streamlined—it is difficult to find things. The website acts as a 24-hour, 7 day a week branch. The proposal to clean it up would be great.

Overall the Library is requesting a 2.5% increase from last year.

The Board of Selectmen thanked all Library board members and Library supporters.

4. General Budget Discussion

S. Zemo asked whether \$30,000 for the Library website design belongs in operating? Also—it seems quite high. Other Board members were in agreement with this statement.

Could Parks & Recreation generate more revenue other than increase programs? Yes, and they have—they restructured their fees. A big part of their revenue is camp and that demographic is shrinking.

B. Hebert stated Parks & Rec has pulled back their responsibilities (they no longer maintain the Ballard Green Housing grounds) as their numbers have decreased. Are there other ways that we can maximize their time? R. Marconi stated that eventually we may want to put recreation maintenance in with Highway and pull it out of Parks & Recreation. It would increase efficiencies—they are all in the same union. Pull away the Rec Center and have it as a standalone budget. If Hartford continues to put more and more on municipalities, we will have to look at seismic shifts such as this.

Police will be coming in tomorrow night; we should plan on having a conversation about their building. We must look ahead at what is best for the community; a shared public safety building is seeing much support. The Police Commission and the Chief are not in support. A decision will need to be made. B. Hebert stated the building is in much need of

repair. All BOS members stated they would like to tour the building. The Fire Department is working on their strategic plan. Both buildings—fire and police—are in need of an upgrade. Could we get prices on the three options—1) new public safety building, 2) upgrade each location separately, 3) do nothing. The Town property on South Street near the recycling center could possibly be used—three acres are there.

Will find out about ECS (\$571,000) and whether we get cut tomorrow. Anything that we currently get is subject to being cut.

M. Kozlark moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to adjourn the BOS special budget meeting at 9:47 pm. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Wendy Gannon Lionetti