



**Town of Ridgefield**  
**Board of Selectman Budget Meeting Minutes**  
**UNAPPROVED**  
**March 1, 2022 at 7.00pm**

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

**Present:** Rudy Marconi, Maureen Kozlark, Sean Connelly, Bob Hebert, Barbara Manners

**1. Graveyard Restoration – Budget**

Tom McManus from the Graveyard Restoration Committee provided a presentation on their proposed budget. The increase is a result of the addition of the Branchville Cemetery, the work the Committee has been doing to clean up Maple Shade Cemetery, tree removal, pruning, and rising prices of lawn care. There were about 30 trees removed from Maple Shade this year.

The Committee is funding what they can from plot sales and is looking for a more reliable source of income to help with upkeep and tree removal costs. M. Kozlark pointed out the Board has consistently approved less money than the Committee requests each year and asked if they are playing catch up with maintenance because of this.

B. Manners asked if any revenue is received for caring for the plots and if there is potential to charge annually for perpetual care.

R. Marconi commented that a payment was received from FEMA that could be transferred to the Tree Warden. Some of this money could be used for tree removal in the graveyards. The topic will be added to the agenda for the next BOS meeting.

The Board asked questions about the number of Committee members, their responsibilities, if there are volunteers that could help, and what are the biggest challenges the Committee faces.

**2. Ridgefield Arts Council & ECDC – Joint Presentation**

Liz Durkin, Development Director at the Ridgefield Playhouse, read a statement from Playhouse Director Allison Stockel who was not able to attend the meeting. The statement emphasized the importance of the arts in Ridgefield and talked about the many people and organizations who helped to put this town on the map as a destination for Arts & Culture. In her letter, A. Stockel asks the Town to acknowledge the numerous volunteers, hours spent and hard work put in by allocating ARPA funds to help them continue forward with their mission to keep Ridgefield a destination town.

R. Marconi clarified that tonight is a budget meeting and the allocation of ARPA funds will be discussed in a separate meeting and voted on at a Town Meeting.

ACT Artistic Director Dan Levine, 35 Oscaletta Road, read a statement he wrote that stressed the significance of the arts in Ridgefield, highlighting the number of visitors and new residents the arts community attracts. Ridgefield is the first municipality in the state to become a designated cultural district. D. Levine also talked about the struggles, revenue loss and great measures that all of the arts organizations took to survive during the pandemic. In his final comments, D. Levine petitioned for the allocation of ARPA funds to the Ridgefield Arts Council.

Alex Fischetti, 25 Gilbert Street, spoke about the impact his job at the Ridgefield Playhouse has had on his life and the reasons it is important to continue to support the arts.

Ridgefield Arts Council Chair Colleen Cash and ECDC Chair Glori Norwitt collaborated on a budget presentation for the Board. C. Cash talked about pre-pandemic data and the many reasons that 10% of the ARPA funds should go to supporting Arts & Culture in Ridgefield. The Arts organizations suffered significant revenue loss during the pandemic and are running into new infrastructure costs, such as HVAC systems, that are needed to get attendance back to full capacity.

G. Norwitt mentioned a Fairfield County Study that shows that on average roughly \$34 above ticket price per person is spent on amenities such food, drinks, shopping and lodging.

The ECDC and the Arts Council are working together to find the synergies between the arts and local businesses and promote them in a way to draw in visitors and revenue.

R. Marconi asked if all of the organizations have been covered. C. Cash said they have a solid start and if the Board decides to entertain the idea, the Council will make sure everyone is included.

B. Hebert asked if there were any venues that were not affected as much by the pandemic that might need less help. The response was that assigning the money to the operating budget will allow for each organization to determine the best use of the funds for their establishment.

G. Norwitt and C. Cash talked about the impressive measures that organizations took to keep customers engaged through online programs during the pandemic. C. Cash pointed out that the online programs were a life raft but not a replacement for in person events.

There was a discussion about limitations for use of ARPA funds. R. Marconi explained that there is little guidance for acceptable uses of the funds and that the municipalities are taking extra caution when allocating them. There will be more discussion on ARPA funds and allowed uses in future meetings. All monies must be allocated by December 2024

and spent by December 2025.

The ECDC presented three other requests for use of ARPA funds.

The first request is for money to build public bathrooms in Ballard Park, update the lighting for nighttime use of the park, and build a better stage.

The next item on the list is broadband. Bob Knight, ECDC member, spoke in detail about the need for updating broadband throughout town and stressed the importance of the development of a fiber optic network that would expand to all corners of town. B. Knight went through the presentation with the Board, detailing the process for the updates. The ECDC is requesting \$50,000 to be used for a feasibility/engineering study in order to create a plan for building the network. B. Knight was asked to expand on the purpose and details of the feasibility study, the advantages of municipal gain, and the results from the internet service survey that residents recently took. On average, Ridgefielders rate their internet service as a D+. B. Knight also talked about the pros and cons of four different models: Open Access, Private Sector, Single Internet Service Provider (ISP), and Single ISP by Private Sector.

The final request was for marketing in town. Small businesses have complained that it is very hard to promote a business in Ridgefield. The ECDC is working to create one marketing plan for the Town and is asking for \$40,000 to help. There was a discussion about the current issues with advertising businesses, how the new plan would help and what the ongoing costs would be.

G. Norwitt presented the proposed ECDC budget request of \$150,000. The money would go toward an Economic Director who would help with economic development. The ECDC has many ideas for growing the Town economically, but because the Committee is made up of volunteers with full time jobs they lack the time and man power to take action. Some of these ideas include sending letters/surveys to all new residents, providing tourist information to some of the businesses, talking with businesses to help them grow and find where stimulation is needed, starting a Ridgefield jobs Facebook page, and creating guides with information on why businesses should move to Ridgefield and how to get started. There was a discussion about the importance of helping new merchants with the process of starting their business in Ridgefield.

Jonathan Winn, ECDC member, commented on content strategy and the need for people to be able to self-qualify their business before reaching out to the ECDC for the final steps.

B. Manners left the meeting at 9:00pm.

### 3. Budget Overview

**B. Hebert motioned to approve the proposed debt service budget for the fiscal year 2023 of \$8,265,705. S. Connelly second the motion. Motion carries 4-0.**

K. Redmond commented that the debt service is an estimated number this year because 2021 has not been bonded yet.

There was a discussion about how and when to vote on the allocation of ARPA funds and how to keep it as simple as possible. It was recently announced that 90 million dollars of ARPA funds will be made available for HVAC upgrades in public schools in the state of CT. R. Marconi commented that they should apply for the grant when it becomes available.

There was a review of the proposed Board of Education budget that will be presented at tomorrow night's meeting. Some of the topics discussed were asbestos removal, network infrastructure, LED and auditorium upgrades, and the kitchen equipment replacement program.

The Board talked about the budget requests from the ECDC and if an Economic Director is a priority. The updates in Ballard Park, broadband and money toward marketing were all requests for ARPA funding, which will be a separate conversation.

The Board also discussed the budget requests from the Graveyard Committee, Conservation Commission and RACE. There is the possibility to reduce health insurance costs, which could be used toward RACE's request for a Recycling Coordinator. The Nip Bottle Surcharge will generate revenue that could also be used toward salary for that position. The Board talked about the different options for funding the Recycling Coordinator, how much they should commit to funding and the pros and cons of moving forward with hiring one.

R. Marconi proposed pulling some money from Town Aide (?) Road fund to put into the budget for the roads to keep that number down.

K. Redmond adjusted the numbers with the proposed modifications to figure out the new budget.

B. Hebert commented that he is in support of the Budget approval, however is not in support of hiring the Recycling Coordinator at this time.

The Board discussed various budget items including requests from the Highway Department, Parks & Rec, and Facilities/Safety & Purchasing and looked for possible reductions.

R. Marconi passed out comparisons of salaries for the Tax Collector and Town Clerk for

the Board to review.

**4. Possible Capital/Operating Budget Vote**

**S. Connelly moved to approve the Operating Budget \$40,818,807 for the Town. M. Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 4-0.**

**M. Kozlark moved to approve \$1,750,183 to allocate with ARPA funds. B. Hebert second the motion. Motion carries 4-0.**

**M. Kozlark motioned to adjourn the March 1 BOS meeting at 10:54pm. B. Hebert second the motion. Motion carries 4-0.**