

## **Annual Town Meeting May 2, 2016**

The Annual Town Meeting of the Town of Ridgefield was held at the Ridgefield Playhouse, 80 East Ridge, Ridgefield, Connecticut on Monday, May 4, 2016 at 7:30 P.M. (E.D.T.).

The meeting was called to order by Rudy Marconi, First Selectman.

Maureen Kozlark made a motion, and it was seconded by Barbara Manners to appoint Sharon Dornfeld as Moderator. **Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and Ms. Dornfeld was chosen Moderator.**

The Moderator announced that copies of the notice of the meeting and the resolutions were located in the back of the auditorium. She then asked for a motion to waive the reading of both. (See full resolutions at end of meeting minutes)

Richard Vazzana, 16 Lynch Brook Lane, made the motion, and it was seconded by Michael Burke. **No discussion.**

The Moderator explained that in accordance with Section 10-1 of the Town Charter, Items 1 thru 7 on the notice would be voted upon at the Referendum on May 10th but there could be discussion on them tonight. Item #8, Capital Items under \$100,000 would be voted on tonight.

The Moderator further stated that in accordance with the General Statutes, two categories of voters are allowed. One is an elector of the Town, a registered voter, and the other is a citizen who is 18 years of age who owns property over \$1,000.

She requested that the communications from the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance be incorporated in the minutes of the meeting. (See letters at end of meeting minutes)

Mr. Marconi gave a slide presentation on the Town Budget. (See copy of slide presentation at end of meeting minutes) He commented that there is a proposed 2% increase in the Town's budget. The main thing proposed is to go to an eight man crew at the firehouse in January. The reason for the proposal is because the call volume has increased and there is not enough manpower. Right now there is a six man minimum. The program would add no new personnel and would be accomplished with overtime, at a cost of \$132,000 for half a year.

In the area of employee benefits and pensions he reported that all unions have gone to defined contributions. The actuary tables did not result in an impact they thought, but they are now beginning to see savings now.

He also explained that the Town has paid down \$9,000,000 a year in debt service, and the Town is retiring the debt on schedule and at a good rate. By 2020-2021 fiscal years we will be down to the \$50,000,000 level.

Mr. Marconi reported that because of a mild winter, the dollar amount was put back to \$1,875,000, the level it had been before. Also, there is \$385,000 in state aid money that must be used on roads. This usually goes for snowplowing, but since it wasn't needed this year, it will go for paving projects. Mr. Marconi spoke about the addition of \$75,000 for ADA, because the town has to be more focused on ADA in town and school buildings.

After he explained each section on the capital improvements, he summed up that \$2,580,519 was the total.

Mr. Marconi stated that the fund balance is at 9%, rated somewhere near the bottom of other towns around us, but the rating bureaus say that Ridgefield manages to its plan, and that's what they want to see. They feel 9% is a good number. He also reported that the estimated surplus for the fiscal year ended 2016 is \$1,120,000.

Karen Baldwin, Superintendant of Schools, gave a presentation on the education budget. (See copy of slide presentation at end of meeting minutes) She emphasized that it is critical that all children should exit the school system with communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration skills. She emphasized that we need highly skilled children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Board of Education started out with an increase of more than 6%, but after the Board of Finance cut them back by \$625,000, it is down to 4.99% (4.3 million). The total education budget is \$90,374,229. The major expenditure for the Board of Ed budget is for salaries and benefits. Employee benefits total \$17,239,512. Ms. Baldwin discussed the items on the pie chart for expenditures; certified salaries makeup 50% of the budget, non-certified, 12%, and employee benefits 19%.

Ms. Baldwin focused a great deal on improving special education, stating they are understaffed. She mentioned that there will be a reduction of six elementary school teachers. One of the advancements is that they will be moving teacher-based leadership in English and math to administrator-based leadership in English and math. She also spoke of the SAT tests, which colleges look at scored on a 200 to 800 scale. A 2015 chart of scores showed 78% of Ridgefield children scoring above 500 in reading and writing SATs, and 82% over 500 in math. But there were considerable numbers of students in the 400-490 range, 71 kids in reading and writing, and 51 in math. The Board is really concerned about the number of children in that 400-500 area.

Ms. Baldwin also showed a chart listing the town wide average scores for each of the seven school systems in the District Reference Group A, or DRG-A, that the state puts Ridgefield in. For all three test areas, reading, writing, and math, Ridgefield ranked sixth of the seven districts, with scores below the DRG average. She stated the following continuous improvement initiatives: K-12 curriculum revision, continued training in responsive classroom class management techniques, job-embedded professional learning for teachers, digital learning, and assistive technology.

Ms. Baldwin explained the \$625,000 in reductions made: changes in health insurance and employee benefits, three classroom contingency teachers, putting off building projects, electric savings at Farmingville School because of solar energy, and teacher positions.

Ms. Baldwin emphasized that the Board of Education wants to promote educating all children.

The Moderator then asked David Ulmer, Chairman of the Board of Finance to give his presentation. (See copy of slide presentation at end of meeting minutes)

Mr. Ulmer pointed out that the annual employment rate is down to 3.9%. It was over 6% in the depth of the recession. Foreclosures were down to 15 last year. The median household income for 2014 was \$147,614, but has remained flat over the last couple of years. The social services and food stamp services are up, and there is still need in the town. In the last five years, the Grand List has not been over 1%. The mill rate will increase 2.63% for the budget year 2017. He reported that the town has done an exceptionally good job in keeping spending increases below 2% in the last seven years. He urged everyone to support the budget.

The Moderator then introduced entertained asked for a motion to waive the reading of the following budget resolutions and complete copies of the resolutions were printed and made available to members of the public attending. Ed Tyrrell made a motion to waive the reading of the full texts, and it was seconded by Barbara Manners.

**Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the motion passed.**

The Moderator read the following resolutions:

1. Resolution for Question # 1 of Legal Notice, \$46,763,858 for Town expenditures (Consisting of Town operating expenditures of \$34,703,538 and debt service of \$12,060,320 on both Town and Education capital projects) for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2016 and ending June 30, 2017.

Maureen Kozlark made a motion to accept, and it was seconded by Ed Tyrrell.

**No discussion.**

2. Resolution for Question #2 of Notice, \$90,374,229 for Board of Education expenditures.

Frances Walton made a motion to accept, Scott Mason seconded.

**Discussion:**

John Early, 92 Fieldcrest Dr., expressed his opinion that the Board of Ed's increase is excessive, especially since the number of students is down. He made a motion to reduce the amount of \$90,374,229 to 85,000,000. Jan Rifkinson, New Rd. seconded the motion. Four other speakers, Steven Cole, Jan Rifkinson, Elisabeth Maurer, and Ed Tyrrell supported the proposed cut. Michael Taylor and Rayda Krell were opposed to the cut.

**Vote:** The Moderator then called for a voice vote. To be clear, the Moderator asked for a vote by holding up paper ballots. **It was then clear that the “Nay” votes won, and the amendment was defeated.**

3. Resolution #3 of Notice, \$1,875,000 for the planning, design, acquisition and construction of various town road and infrastructure improvements (including \$75,000 for ADA) for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2016 and ending June 30 2017. Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, and it was seconded by Maureen Kozlark.

**No discussion.**

4. Resolution #4 of Legal Notice, \$2,000,000 for the planning, design, acquisition and construction of Phase I of the Branchville Transit Oriented Development Study, \$548,000 for the planning, design, acquisition and construction of a Prospect Ridge Parking area and \$150,000 for planning, design, acquisition and construction of sidewalk improvements and authorizing the issuance of \$2,698,000 bonds of the town to meet said appropriation and pending the issuance thereof the making of temporary borrowings for such purpose (provided that the bonds shall be reduced by the amount of any state grants received for such purpose and it is anticipated that grants will cover all expenditures under the appropriation) Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, Maureen Kozlark seconded.

**Discussion:** Elizabeth Maurer inquired about receiving the grants and Chris McMullen asked about sidewalk improvements. Mr. Marconi addressed both the inquiries.

5. Resolution #5 of Legal Notice, appropriating \$187,033 for the design and acquisition of a highway Mack truck, \$138,000 for the design and acquisition of a mowing tractor for town roads, \$83,000 for the design and acquisition of a backhoe, and \$225,000 for refurbishment of engine #3 and authorizing the issuance of \$633,033 bonds of the town to meet said appropriation and pending the issuance thereof the making of temporary borrowings for such purpose. Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, and Maureen Kozlark seconded.

**Discussion:** Jan Rifkinson inquired about the Mack truck.

6. Resolution #6 of the Legal Notice, appropriating \$62,500 for the design and acquisition of the Venus building windows, \$46,000 for the design and acquisition of highway garage 1 floor repairs, and \$87,000 for the design and acquisition of East Ridge Middle School roof repairs and authorizing the issuance of \$195,500 bonds of the town to meet said appropriation and pending the issuance thereof the making of temporary borrowings for such purpose. Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, and it was seconded by Scott Mason.

**No discussion**

7. Resolution #7 of Legal Notice, appropriating \$355,282 for the planning, design, acquisition and construction of school energy conservation measures (which is expected to result in \$92,405 of incentive savings) and \$453,886 for school

portion of the public safety radio system and authorizing the issuance of \$809,168 bonds of the town to meet said appropriation and pending the issuance thereof the making of temporary borrowings for such purpose. Michael Taylor made a motion to approve, Frances Walton seconded.

**Discussion:** John Early asked about the incentive and Chris McQuilken spoke on the radio system.

After the bond proposed bond resolutions were discussed, the Moderator announced that the 23 capital items under \$100,000 totaling \$942,818 would be discussed and voted on tonight. The Moderator read the following:

“Resolution making appropriations aggregating \$942,818 for the planning, design and acquisition of various public improvements and equipment and authorizing the issuance of \$942,818 bonds of the town to meet said appropriations and pending the issuance thereof the making of temporary borrowings for such purpose.” (See attached list)

Rich Vazzano, 16 Lynchbrook Lane, made a motion to approve all the items, and it was seconded by Simon Baldwin. The Moderator then opened the floor for any discussion. The following spoke on the various items:

Jan Rifkin, New Rd., the VMWare Server Center  
Chris McQuilken, the Golf Course and Lake Mamasasco  
Rayda Krell, the Lounsbury House Chair Lift/Stairwell

After discussion ended, the Moderator asked for a vote to approve and accept all the items under \$100,000.

**Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous.**

Mrs. Dornfeld entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting in accordance with the Board of Selectmen’s recommendation for a paper ballot vote for resolutions 1 through 7 as per notice of meeting for a referendum to be held on May 10, 2016 between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. at the Yanity Gym and to be reconvened at Town Hall to consider and act upon a tax levy.

Maureen Kozlark made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and it was seconded by a member of the audience.

**Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous and the meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Serfilippi, Town clerk

### **Reconvened Annual Town Meeting May 10, 2016**

The meeting was called to order by the First Selectman, Rudy Marconi, at 9:00 P.M. in the large conference room of Town Hall. He announced that the first order of business was to elect a Moderator. Barbara Serfilippi made a motion to appoint Jane Berendsen-Hill, and it was seconded by Hope Wise.

**Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and Ms. Berendsen-Hill was elected Moderator.**

The Moderator asked the Head Moderator of the Budget Referendum to read the results. Neil Flanagan, Head Moderator, announced that all the items on the referendum read the results and all the questions were approved. (See attached results page). A total of 2,821 people voted.

Ms. Hill asked for a motion to recess the meeting in order that the Board of Finance could meet for the purpose of setting the mill rate. Barbara Serfilippi made the motion, and it was seconded.

**Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the meeting recessed.**

After the recess, the Moderator called the meeting back to order, and the Chairman of the Board of Finance, David Ulmer, announced that the Board of Finance voted to set the **mill rate at 26.69.**

Being no further business, the Moderator asked for a motion to adjourn. Rudy Marconi made the motion, and Barbara Serfilippi seconded.

**Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the meeting adjourned at 9:07 P.M.**

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk

