

BOARD of SELECTMEN REGULAR & BUDGET MEETING
FEBRUARY 3, 2016 – 7:30 P.M.

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM

REVISED/APPROVED MINUTES

These minutes are a general summary of the Board of Selectmen & Budget Meeting and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.

In attendance: R. Marconi, R. Hebert, M. Kozlark, B. Manners, R. Zemo

Agenda

1. Public Comment
2. Tree Committee Interview: Conte Guzman
3. Building Code Board of Appeals Reappointment: Paul J. Payne, Jr.
4. Brief Discussion of Downtown Survey
5. TOD Grant Resolution
6. Selectman's Report
7. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 12/7/15 Special, 1/20/16

Budget Meeting Agenda

1. Library Budget
2. MLIF Community Grant Discussion
3. General Budget Discussion

R. Marconi called the BOS Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

1. Public Comment – There were no comments from the public.

2. Tree Committee Interview: Conte Guzman

Ms. Guzman came forward to introduce herself to the BOS and express her interest in serving on the Tree Committee. R. Marconi read the email she submitted. She grew up in northern California and is interested in learning about the New England flora which is very different from the California greenery. She retired in 2010 and moved to Ridgefield to be near a daughter in South Salem. She has done some volunteer work at the Ridgefield Library and is involved in several classes at Founders Hall. Ms. Guzman feels she has the time and the interest in serving on the Tree Committee.

M. Kozlark asked Ms. Guzman if there is anything else that attracted her to the Tree Committee besides the opportunity to learn about New England trees, their names, history and maintenance needs.

Ms. Guzman indicated that she is an enthusiastic learner and wants to give back to the community. R. Marconi suggested that she attend a meeting of the Tree Committee and also meet with John Pinchbeck to see if she is still interested. She is also welcome to look at other committees as well. She should call Wendy for the Tree Committee's meeting schedule. Ms. Guzman should then email R. Marconi and let the BOS know if her interest is still as strong or if there is another committee with a vacancy that would also be of interest. Thank you to Ms. Guzman for coming forward.

3. Building Code Board of Appeals Reappointment: Paul J. Payne, Jr.

Paul Payne stated how he was sorry that he did not attend the previous BOS Meeting. He hadn't realized that he was to appear before the BOS to confirm his interest in being reappointed. R. Marconi asked if the Building Code Board of Appeals is busy. The answer is no – there is seldom a need for an appeal to be heard. Sometimes there is a disagreement between a Town of Ridgefield building official and a contractor but it can usually be worked out between the two individuals without the need for an official appeal. Mr. Payne is a building official for the Town of New Canaan. He filled in when there was a need in their Building Department in 2008 and has been there ever since. He was also a full-time Fire Marshall.

M. Kozlark moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to reappoint Paul Payne for an additional five-year term on the Building Code Board of Appeals. Motion passed 5-0.

4. Brief Discussion of Downtown Survey

R. Marconi announced that a meeting has been scheduled for February 29, 6:30 p.m., in the 2nd Floor Conference Room. Penny Wickey and Laure Aubuchon, of SCRE Advisors, Real Estate Solutions, will review their survey and the Retail Economic Development Plan they have developed for the Town of Ridgefield. Invited to attend are the BOS, P&Z, the Economic Development Commission, and The Downtown Merchant's Group. This will be a roundtable presentation where those in attendance can hear the results of the survey and hopefully move forward with some of the presented ideas. It is not a meeting to do official business nor take any specific action, but is an information session for those in attendance. R. Marconi stated that he hadn't planned on having the meeting be open to the general public nor is this conference room large enough to hold a big group. M. Kozlark and B. Manners expressed the need to hold such a meeting in a large room in case there may be some of the public in attendance. The press may well be there and light food will be served. R. Marconi will check into the availability of a larger venue such as one of the Library meeting rooms.

R. Marconi stated there is a need to focus more on The Parking Authority. Employees need to park more on the outer perimeter of the Town Center. The goal is to try to solve the parking situation without the necessity of building a garage. The survey indicated that the public does not want a garage. 383 people took the survey. Some thought this was not a large enough sampling of the residents of the Town.

S. Zemo stated parking is a primary challenge. The study was done in August which is not a good time to be looking at the parking situation. Many people are away in August. The demand for parking in August is not what it is in other times of the year. What about the idea of having a "short-term" committee with five members study the parking situation and make suggestions accordingly. R. Marconi stated how such a "short-term" committee would be in conflict with The Parking Authority.

5. TOD Grant Resolution

There are no sidewalks in the Branchville area and therefore no pedestrians. For Branchville to become vibrant, there needs to be a plan to develop a feeling of community, a way to walk from one shop location to another. This grant is for up to \$1 million and more.

R. Hebert moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to authorize submission of the Branchville TOD Infrastructure Improvements, Phase 1 in accordance with the Responsible Growth and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Grant Request for Applications, and to authorize Rudy Marconi, First Selectman, to sign the grant application and to sign any other documents associated with administering the grant, if awarded. Motion passed 5-0.

6. Selectman's Report

- R. Marconi read the letter from Betty Brosius indicating her plan to retire at the end of July 2016. This letter provides for notice of six months.
- Reminder of Public Hearing scheduled for Saturday, 2/6/16 at 10:00 a.m. – Town Hall Large Conference Room, to hear comments from the public regarding walking/biking trails.
- Parks & Rec has met with the Ryan Adams family about their request to name the Shadow Lake Ballfield after their son. S. Zemo reported that Parks & Rec will continue to work with the family to come up with a suitable memorial for their son. Parks & Rec has a clear concise policy about not naming playing fields in town after individuals. This policy has been in effect since 1993.
- B. Manners shared her experience with the Fire Department's fund raising through phone solicitation and then offering to come to the resident's home to pick up a check. She does not like the idea of anyone coming to her door or other doors in town. R. Marconi indicated that he will meet with Rick Lawlor, President of the Fire Department's Union. They are hiring a company to do the fund raising. The individual coming to one's door is not a fire fighter and thus will not be in uniform, which is all the more a reason that this is not a good practice.

7. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 12/7/15 Special, 1/20/16

M. Kozlark moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve as written the minutes of the Board of Selectmen Meeting on December 7, 2015. Motion passed 5-0.

R. Hebert moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the Board of Selectmen Meeting on January 20, 2016. Motion passed 5-0.

The regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen was completed at 8:10 p.m. They BOS then turned to the Budget Agenda.

1. Library Budget

Kevin Redmond, Director of Finance, Marc Colomaria, President of the Library Board, and Gary Rapp, Treasurer, came forward to discuss the Library's plans for 2016/2017. They reported that this has been a record-breaking year for the Library with 28,000 visits – 9,000 more than last year. Residents borrowed each an average of 13 items this past year. Each resident visited the Library 10.7 x during this past year. The national average is 4 visits/year.

The Library fiscal-year 2017 budget is at \$1.88 million reflecting an increase of 2.5%. The increase is mainly due to health care costs and an increase in salaries – up about \$58,000 or 3% across the board. Their headcount is flat as they have been managing with current staffing. They feel they are managing their expenses to help meet their budget demands and that this is a presentation of a “lean and tight” budget.

Regarding service contracts on the building – much was under warranty last year. They have decided to not renew contracts but instead manage the maintenance themselves. They feel they are saving about \$20,000 year by doing this – repair costs are up but the costs for contracts are down.

Their big fund raiser is the Spring Gala, from which they expect to generate \$26,000 – increase of 7.6%. Special events are other fund raisers and development refers to individual donations.

The Library is are now looking into the possibility of charging for some events. B. Manners indicated that she does not think that State laws allow the Library to charge. Asst. Director, Mary Rindfleisch indicated that B. Manners is correct in that the Library cannot charge for basics. The Library is attempting to determine what services should always be free and what services/events are the people willing to pay for. Mary referred to Bob Whitton who is also on the Library Board. He has been working on programming. Some programs attract a lot of people and other times there are a lot of “no-show’s”. For the programs expecting a very high turnout, they will charge a \$5 registration fee for which those in attendance will get a \$5 coupon to use toward purchase of the book being discussed. B. Manners asked if the Library has checked with other municipalities as to what services they can charge for and others for which they cannot charge. She wonders about the legality of charging for a lecture. Mary responded that the Library is trying different models and seeing what works. This year the Library earned about \$11,000 as a US Passport Agent whereas last year they earned \$3025.

Does the Library use a third party broker for instance in the purchase of their electricity? Certain choices have to be for renewable energy. This year’s budget includes \$20,000 for a consulting fee. This consultant is to help with the Library’s relationship with their donors and endowment raising. Their endowment has increased by 4.5%.

R. Hebert inquired about new technology – new software for \$60-70,000?

M. Colomaria commented on their 1/x request to hire a search firm to help the Library find a new Director. Chris Nolan has been with the Ridgefield Library for 18 years and will be leaving at the end of 2016. They have assembled a Search Committee. The Committee has determined that there is no internal candidate. They have looked at other libraries and have come up with ten applicant possibilities. Seven towns used search firms and three that did not have the help of a search firm have had to rehire. Why not manage this process at the Board level and locate someone with Library experience? Mary stated how it is better to hire someone who has grown up in the “Library culture”. Chris Nolan had had other library experience before coming to Ridgefield. M. Kozlark commented on the estimated recruiting costs – amount requested is \$40,000. M. Colomaria indicated that a separate committee is handling the possible hiring of a search firm. Is it a retainer or contingency firm? He is not sure. \$15,000 is earmarked for relocation costs. M. Kozlark stated how the hiring of search firm is a perfect use for their endowment fund.

What about capital expenses? They are estimating a cost of \$45,000 for new website design costs. It has been seven years since they last designed their website. Technology since then has changed substantially. There are ongoing charges for updates and higher operating costs. R. Hebert stated how the Town of Ridgefield had looked into the redesign of their website and the estimate was for only \$10,000. Gary responded that the reason for the greater cost is because of the complexity of the Library’s website – they need mobile access, are involved with social media, process inter-library loans, etc. M. Kozlark asked where they are in his process. Have they gone out to bid? Is there something available for less than \$45,000? R. Marconi stated how the BOS will be

reviewing the budget requests again the first week in March. Could they have something together by March 6 or 7 to present to the BOS? S. Zemo suggested budget containment on this web design issue. The BOS could approve a specific amount and if the cost is greater than that number, then the Library would be responsible for the increased cost. Maybe this is a project that should wait for the new Director for his/her input.

MLIF Community Grant Discussion – Barbara Hartman came forward to discuss this issue representing the Mamasasco Lake Association. This is a 501c3 organization completely staffed by volunteers. There is no paid staff. They received no donation from the Town of Ridgefield last year to help with the treatment for the algae and weeds in the lake. From July to October the lake was closed as it was not safe for swimming. The algae build up could be fatal to small children.

The Committee has contacted John Frey, Ridgefield's representative to Hartford, to get DEP and State of CT help. There has never been State help forthcoming with maintenance of Lake Mamasasco nor assistance with the algae pollution problem. The Committee hired a firm for \$27,000 to treat the lake. There was no money available from the Town of Ridgefield so the residents did their own fundraising. They have a \$13,000 deficit and are now seeking assistance for help with the lake pollution problem for this coming summer. They are attempting to raise dollars by assessing everyone \$2/ft. for their feet of lake frontage. The Town of Ridgefield owns 1,068 feet of frontage on Lake Mamasasco.

M. Kozlark has been the BOS rep to the Mamasasco Association. This would be their second year of not getting a grant. Last summer there was no rain and it is a very shallow lake. The water just kept getting warmer and the algae kept growing. Yes, it is a dying lake but it has been dying for many years. Ms. Hartman is asking the BOS if at all possible to reinstate their community grant. Their request was for \$10,000 but even \$6,000 would be helpful.

General Budget Discussion

R. Hebert inquired as to the objective of the BOS. Representatives from the various departments keep coming in and making their requests. Do we have a goal? Zero growth? We are looking at contracted amounts, benefits like health insurance, grants and other costs. How do we make our decisions?

R. Marconi replied that by March 1st, we will know what the BOE's numbers are. These numbers will then give us an idea as to what our mill rate will be. We pass on the BOE's capital requests. We make a non-binding recommendation combining their numbers with debt service. We figure what the impact will be. We look at the bottom line – the mill rate.

R. Marconi stated how unemployment is not done. Think our unemployment number is at about 4%. There are people in our community who are still in trouble. Foreclosing is still going on. Are we really doing better?

M. Kozlark asked what do we hear from the State? What impact is the State going to have on our local communities? Put in our budget what we can afford and not what we want. R. Marconi responded that our goal is to get under 2%. M. Kozlark commented on the positive thinking of our residents. Our Town is still passing our budget votes and keeping our tax rate moderate.

B. Manners stated how she feels that there are certain options that can be added back. Every department person that comes in and does their presentation is passionate about their needs. We have to be the advocates for the whole Town. Nobody is making unreasonable requests. R.

Hebert responded how he feels very uncomfortable “picking and choosing”. He feels that he needs guidelines. How is what he chooses going to pass?

K. Redmond responded how our initial goal was to be under 2.5%. We have now brought it down to 2%. S. Zemo stated how under 2% is good. What percent of that is our contractual obligations - ones that we cannot change? How much decision-making can we really do? We can look carefully at the community grants. We own property on Lake Mamanasco, but should money be spent on other lakes as well? Should we get rid of community grants? This is the smallest little piece of our budget and we are deliberating so over the community grants process. R. Hebert asked what is our policy for grants? B. Manners stated how these people do wonderful programs. We’d have to have a budget three times larger to cover the services these people do. R. Hebert stated how we really need guidelines on how we can make these decisions. R. Marconi stated how we used to ask Social Services to do a review of those receiving grants.

S. Zemo asked what is our policy on new personnel? R. Marconi stated how we reviewed what we do to help people keep their jobs. What do we feel comfortable with bringing to the people of Ridgefield? The starting point is where the budget should be. Is this a request that is a “has to have” or a “like to have”. Is this a fair budget for your department? What are we charging the taxpayer for your department? S. Zemo responded by saying that we are “in the trenches”. We are dealing with all these departments. For example, we need a report on all the roads that need repairs and this report needs to be updated every year. We need an up-to-date list of the quality of all the roads from the Highway Department.

B. Manners moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Meeting & Budget Meeting at 10:10 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet L. Johnson