

## **BOARD of SELECTMEN BUDGET MEETING – MARCH 8, 2011**

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:30 P.M.

### **REVISED/APPROVED MINUTES**

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

In attendance: R. Marconi, A. Bodner, M. Kozlark, B. Manners, D. Masters

Also present: K. Redmond, Director of Finance

### **Agenda**

1. Police Department Budget
2. Parks & Recreation Department Budget
3. General Budget Discussion
4. Possible Capital/Operating Budget Vote

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

#### **Police Department Budget**

The following individuals came forward to discuss the proposed Police Department Budget for Fiscal Year 2011-2012: Police Chief John Roche, Major Don McGran, Charles Knoche, Chairman, Police Commission, and Susan Craig, Police Commission.

The primary driver in this budget is the contractual salary increase. The bookkeeper's hours are being reduced. R. Marconi commented on the proposed increase in uniforms by \$3,000. This number needs to be brought back down to \$36,500. The reason given was that uniforms are more expensive when an officer first starts with the force. The department is down 10% in staffing currently. They are starting to see overtime costs. This trend is continuing and getting worse. There needs to be a minimum of three officers out on the road at any time. Bill Browning's positions and four other positions are open at this time. It takes one year for a new hire to be "up and running" with time off to attend the Police Academy, etc. A new hire needs to be CT certified to be fully useful right away. The Police Station needs to be converted to gas from oil in order have a reduction in utility costs.

The requested radio console system costing \$225,000 would be transferable to a new building. M. Kozlark asked if this expense could be spread out over two years? The response was that the current equipment is so very old – replacement parts are not available. The State of CT is promoting 911 regionalization. We will lose funding for the maintenance and upkeep of our 911 equipment. A totally regional dispatch system might result in a "black" Police Department in Ridgefield during the night hours. All calls would go to the regional center and that center would dispatch our officers. Instead, Ridgefield wants the 911 calls transferred back to Ridgefield for the local dispatch of vehicles. The State cannot close down our dispatch system, but they can stop the funding currently received. Each Town will get \$225,000 to prepare their system for transfer to a regional center. The Connecticut Chief's Association spoke up against this bill. At least three communities are needed for a regional center, and then the costs to run the center will be divided between the three participating towns. We are seeking an answer to our request to have the dispatched calls sent back to Ridgefield for local response.

#### **Public Works Budget Discussion**

Peter Hill, Mike Clarke, and Dave Buccitti came forward to discuss the Highway Department's budget requests for Fiscal Year 2011-2012. A. Bodner commented on the rising price of oil and how the Highway Department will come to a point where they can never catch up. P. Hill responded that the

Highway Department has to have more personnel. They have lost 2 more employees, and are down from 21 to 16 truck laborers. Last year, they repaved 5 miles of road costing \$800,000. This year's estimate is for 7 miles of repaving for a cost of \$900,000. The department does not have the manpower to do more repaving as the preparation involves brush cutting, drain cutting, repair of catch basins, and then back filling following the paving. There were several years when the department was able to repave 10 miles of road, but then the Highway Department had additional employees and asphalt was cheaper also. P. Hill pointed out that there is also a difference in the quality of the roads they are now doing – the Highway Department does an excellent job.

Andy Bodner stressed the need for a 10-year plan. They did a 10-year plan in 2007 which has not been adhered to. P. Hill responded that they now do a lot more with the construction of new catch basins, trimming, chipping, making stone filler. They now make much of their own material. There needs to be a reassessment of the plan at least every five years. P. Hill indicated that they could go out to bid – especially sub-contract some of the prep work. B. Manners stated that she was on the BOS when we initiated our paving plan. At that time we had more funds and the economy was in much better shape. As Mr. Hill has indicated, his department then had more people. We need to make sound long-term decisions. To have a more aggressive paving program, Mr. Hill needs more personnel. We need to make a plan that can be followed, a plan that is budgeted for. Could another two miles be done if we were to borrow Redding's paver? A road repaving lasts 8-12 years. Mr. Hill has his list of roads that need to be repaved and what repairs each road needs.

#### Parks & Recreation Department

Paul Roche, Director of Parks & Rec, Phil Kearns, Chairman of the Parks & Rec Commission, and Barbara Dobbin, Parks & Rec Commission member, came forward to discuss further their department's budget requests. SprayBay is their first priority followed by the  $\frac{3}{4}$  Truck with Plow for \$36,030.

What about the cracks in the tennis and basketball courts at Yanity Gym? The response was that these cracks need to be repaired every 3-4 years. They fill the cracks with a rubber-like fill and then a fiberglass cover patch. P. Roche indicated that the difference in cost between this way and a cheaper patch is \$6,000. They could do a treads-like surface, but this is even more expensive. The hope is by spending more for a better solution may result in a longer-lasting surface. A few years back, \$30,000 was spent on each court. \$30,000 every 3-4 years does add up. They have been able to repair the courts only every five years by filling the cracks with latex and then an overall cover.

R. Marconi indicated that his concern with SprayBay is how this proposal will be received by the public. It is a great asset for the public to use, but these are tough times. The SprayBay Committee will raise the total amount needed before any dollars are to be spent. They seek a guarantee from the BOS that if they raise \$167,500, the Town will also match with \$167,500. Parks & Rec feels that SprayBay will be a revenue-generating investment. M. Kozlark asked if it would be possible for the volunteers to raise a larger amount – more than the 50% requested? B. Manners asked if Parks & Rec has data on how those that charge for such a facility break even? The response is that users pay for membership to Parks & Rec and SprayBay is part of the Parks & Rec facilities.

Another issue is the neighbor-requested fence at the Branchville ball field. The cost of the fence would be \$11,500. Parks & Rec will make sure that the neighbors approve the plans for the fence. The Babe Ruth league has been asked to chip in for the cost of the fence, but this isn't really the league's responsibility. They are not a large league and they already contribute a great deal. R. Marconi will meet with the residents for their approval of the fence.

With regard to Parks & Rec's operating budget, they have reduced operations by 1.25% including a staff reduction. They have cut expenses significantly with their decrease in revenue. They cannot continue to operate without doing maintenance.

Parks & Rec is responsible for snow removal and grounds upkeep for the schools. They would like the costs involved turned over to the Board of Education budget. If these services were contracted out, the cost would be even more. The cost of snow removal for the Branchville Train Station parking lot will be transferred over to the Branchville account.

Andy Bodner asked for the Parks & Rec's criteria for starting a program. P. Kearns replied that sometimes a new program is initially unprofitable. It takes time to build up a program and have it realize a profit. They continually review their program offerings. They have five rooms in the Rec Center which are available for rentals. Their rental rate schedule differs for profit and non-profit renters. They also provide space for community service free of charge, such as for Blood Drives and fun nights for the schools. B. Dobbin stated how the renter is now responsible for setting up and taking down the room prior to and following the event. This is a much better arrangement and helps to keep the costs down.

D. Masters inquired if it is possible for Parks & Rec to charge the BOE for snow plowing? This would be a more equitable way. All the funds come out of the taxpayer's pocket, but Parks & Rec suffers from the misconception that they are losing money, whereas their maintenance costs for other facilities contribute greatly to their operating costs. It is not equitable for the Town to cover all the plowing costs for the schools. B. Dobbin agreed to look at this situation and come back with a proposal for next year's budget – not the one currently under discussion.

#### General Budget Discussion

K. Redmond indicated the Town budget is currently at a 3.13% increase, which doesn't include the following items: \$27,000 can be deducted from the Police Department budget; Parks & Rec can deduct \$10,000 for Branchville plowing; MIRMA (the original calculation didn't take into account the benefit of the actuarial numbers) for an additional deduction of \$29,000; \$63,000 can be picked up on the medical line. R. Marconi indicated that a number of items add up to \$10,000 in connection with central administration and personnel support with a reduction in technical training. Probate numbers are going to look high. All commissions and committees are the same as this current year's budget. Community grants all stay the same except for the Hart Bus and Founder's Hall. The Golf Course's numbers are flat. The Fire Department has reduced longevity according to L. Scholl with a -\$750. Overtime is brought up by \$10,000 to \$100,000.

K. Redmond indicated that fuel needs to be annualized year-to-date. He added an additional 25% and hopes to have leftover for about 4-5 months. If we lock in fuel at \$3.30/gallon, we will be short. R. Marconi responded that there are always things that come up which cannot be anticipated.

K. Redmond stated that he feels that the budget process has gotten tighter these past two years. Regarding FEMA dollars, we will probably receive about 75% of our requested amount of \$106,000, but this could still be awhile. We did meet the threshold to be accepted for the next steps. The estimated number is about \$75,000.

Highway Support Services are running under budget. Electricity is so far 64% of budget. Last year's numbers were about the same at this time. It appears that we are OK with this item. We have seen a big decrease with natural gas.

The Library has indicated that the employee hired to do fund raising has more than covered all expenses. D. Masters stressed how last year no one was to hire staff. If this individual was hired, it was outside of

the budget process and this hire has not been endorsed by the BOS. The minutes from last year's discussion of this subject are to be reviewed. The goal is to not touch any expenses from the Health, Safety and Welfare budget items. M. Kozlark expressed concern for how difficult it is for people to live thru these times. During such a time period, the residents need the library even more. She feels that cutting down the library's budget doesn't make sense. B. Manners is in agreement that these cuts are very unpleasant for all, but for the Library to be closed one or two morning/week should not adversely affect the Library's availability to Ridgefield residents.

R. Marconi indicated that earlier this day, the numbers were down to about 2.7 or 2.65%. About \$160,000 to \$170,000 has been cut. If the BOS cuts down about \$185,000 and the BOE comes down about \$400,000 with their insurance adjustment, the mill rate will be about a 2% increase. R. Marconi wants the BOS to review our budget carefully again and make sure our budget is the best we can do. A. Bodner stated how the only other option would be to reduce employee work hours. The Police will not replace their two retirees, no additional lifeguard for Parks & Rec, and other small savings will be realized as well. The EDC (Economic Development Commission) will respond to the questions from the BOS regarding what dollars they have received and what the monies have been used for to date.

**Andy Bodner moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to adjourn the BOS Budget Meeting at 11:10 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson