

# TOWN of RIDGEFIELD BOARD of SELECTMEN BUDGET MEETING – MARCH 10, 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  
K. Redmond, Director of Finance

### Agenda

1. Possible Capital/Operating Budget Vote
2. Possible Non-binding Recommendation on Board of Education Budget to Board of Finance

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

#### 1. Possible Capital/Operating Budget Vote

R. Marconi reported on a letter he received from Police Chief Roche in response to the BOS's question regarding overtime and what is generating it. A reply was also received from Peter Hill with a breakdown of the cost of reclaiming Haviland Rd. - \$950,000 for the paving and \$150,000 for drainage repairs. P. Hill indicated that \$59,500 could be covered out of the Highway Department's proposed budget.

#### Review of Capital Expenditures

K. Redmond reported that the current number is \$3,627,401 for Capital which includes removal of the proposed pavilion and the canine vehicle plus the trade-in's. This number does not include Haviland Rd. expenditures nor the energy study. Regarding Tiger Hollow, R. Marconi indicated that he had not invited them in as part of the budget meetings. They have their own special revenue account established by the donor. That account is to cover turf replacement when needed.

#### Parks & Rec

Parks & Rec numbers for SprayBay are still part of the total. \$52,000 for the Pavilion has been removed; the ADA entrance, truck with plow, field conditioner and Yanity concrete safety improvements are still "in". P. Kearns responded that they are at the \$15,000 level for Spray Bay fund raising. They have really halted their efforts until they know if they will receive Town support for one-half (\$167,500) of the cost of \$335,000. P. Roche stated that they have done a break-even analysis. A. Bodner stated that Parks & Rec needs to find ways to raise revenue. If SprayBay could make a profit, then this expenditure could be looked at differently. What if the Town were to contribute \$100,000 and Parks & Rec were to raise the balance? R. Marconi expressed his concern about the BOS and BOF approving this expenditure in this economy where everything else is being "cut to the bone". To even spend \$100,000 on SprayBay at this time, how will the public look at this? P. Kearns responded that Parks & Rec feels that their revenue will be positively impacted by SprayBay. D. Masters stated that their proposed public/private partnership for SprayBay is very important. For the Town to contribute \$100,000 is more likely, but she does not feel that this is the year for this expenditure. The likely benefit will be two-years out. B. Manners indicated that if we put it to the voters regarding the \$100,000 for SprayBay, they need to realize that nothing will be spent until the entire cost of \$335,000 is raised. A. Bodner stated that one has to expand in order to expand revenue, but he cannot see spending the dollars this year unless for sure this project will generate revenue. P. Kearns responded that it is hard to define exact numbers at this time. They have already committed to raise an annual \$30,000, which is a good estimate. SprayBay will be an asset. This is Parks

& Rec's #1 priority even to the exclusion of all other capital expenditures for this year. R. Marconi asked how can Parks & Rec forego all other expenditures when the repairs at Yanity are a safety issue? P. Roche responded that they would do a cheaper repair realizing that it will not be a long-lasting solution.

B. Manners stated how she respects Parks & Rec tremendously – they provide services for not much. R. Marconi responded that he feels they need to keep the Yanity repairs and the ADA project, but he is not sure the voters will realize SprayBay is a serious revenue generator. D. Masters feels that maybe this isn't the year to do this. B. Manners, A. Bodner, and R. Marconi are in agreement to put the question to the voters for a \$100,000 contribution from the town for SprayBay. M. Kozlark says no. All are in agreement to defer the expenditure for the plow truck until next year and keep in the field conditioner, the ADA expenditure, and repair of the basketball and tennis courts for \$30,000. The total for Parks & Rec is \$161,600.

### Police Department

The BOS questions the expenditure for the new radio dispatch system until the question about regional dispatching is determined. The State is favoring municipal regionalization of expenditures. Danbury has asked Ridgefield to join their dispatch system. Ridgefield hopes to have the 911 calls forwarded back to Ridgefield for dispatch of their vehicles accordingly. This procedure is not yet determined. The State would no longer cover the cost for 911 calls. Ridgefield hopes our dispatch equipment will last for one more year. The canine vehicle has been deferred. The new total is \$145,600.

### Fire Department

New Engine #1 for \$575,000 – current one is over ten years old

New Ambulance to replace one of the oldest ones - \$185,000

SCBA – breathing apparatus equipment - \$60,471

Ambulance stretcher (special stretcher with hydraulic support) - \$31,000 (purchasing this with the Frasi money)

Total = \$814,971

Chief Buford has requested that Engine #1 become a tanker – a new tanker is scheduled for 2013/14.

### Public Works

Asphalt Recycler - \$55,000

3 new plows - \$28,500

Rebuild Grader - \$40,000

Replace Loader - \$148,000 (less trade-in \$8,000)

1 Mack Dump Truck - \$175,000

1 Small Dump Truck with plow - \$60,000

Service Truck Utility Body - \$48,000

Drainage - \$150,000 and Repaving - \$900,000

Request from P. Hill re Haviland Rd. - \$278,237 add to the \$900,000 to hire outside contractor

B. Manners indicated that P. Hill feels the \$900,000 amount is OK. D. Masters stated how the Highway Dept. has a finite staff and this is a window of opportunity to get more roadwork done. There is also the cost of oil factor. A. Bodner stated how an analysis needs to be done of the roads – longevity and how many miles of road need to be redone each year. We need a definite plan.

### Engineering

Venus Building Interior – \$40,000, Bathroom upstairs (only one bathroom upstairs currently), carpet and ceiling tiles, painting

Fire House - \$20,000, general repairs including replacement of Station #2 roof

Teen Center - \$20,000, general repairs, painting and new furnace

Sidewalk improvements – (annual LOCIP grant dollars - \$150,000)

Tree replacements – J. Pinchbeck

Took out Maintenance Vehicle replacement – currently rotating vehicles through various depts.

Total = \$135,000

### Education

Asbestos removal

Energy study – definitely redo of all the lighting - \$1.5 million between the schools and the Town buildings – insulation and weatherization plus small projects if any dollars left. M. Kozlark inquired about the payback timeframe – J. Palermo, Chairperson of the Energy Study responded that the payback should be 5 years instead of the 6.5 previously stated.

R. Marconi commented on the fence for the ball field as requested by the neighbors – will ask the neighbors to pass on the fence and give a release. The Branchville Civic Assoc. owns the ball field property and leases it to the Town of Ridgefield for \$1/year.

R. Marconi reported on letter received from Bob Knight, Chairman of the Economic Development Commission (EDC). The EDC would like to do an additional study on the Branchville area; they would like to build a Main Street for Branchville that is not Route 7 to allow for shopping and parking, etc. They would like to apply for a \$25,000 grant from the State for this and thus need \$25,000 from the Town. The EDC is looking into whether the Branchville area owners would contribute one-half of the \$25,000 (\$12,500). In order to apply for funds from the State, they need to have a study first and report the results. We have already filed an “Intent to File” to hold our spot for the grant. It was agreed that the Town should go ahead with the grant request now.

**Andy Bodner moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to present to the Board of Finance a Town Capital Budget for Fiscal Year 2011-2012 of proposed expenditures totaling \$5,098,371. Motion passed 5-0.**

### Review of Town Operating Expenditures

Andy Bodner and D. Masters reported on their discussion earlier in the day. The budget started with a 3% increase which was already lean. We want to keep the mill rate down and build on our partnership with the schools. They put together a statement to start this evening’s conversation with the goal of a 2% increase. B. Manners expressed her agreement with their statements about unemployment and how even those who have found employment have found jobs at a lower pay than previous. The increase is now down to 2.17% which is almost a point lower than the starting point of 3%. M. Kozlark asked why 2%? What does that do to the mill rate? One should not budget in a vacuum to a number. There will be other CT state taxes in today’s world for our residents to deal with. R. Marconi expressed concern about cutting the BOS budget this much. There is no room whatsoever for the unexpected. We do not know what the BOF will do. If they lower our budget even further, we will have to look at lay-off’s. B. Manners pointed out how in February we were down to 2.58% and we started out with 3.13%. She does not think we can really go lower. We would have to make additional cuts to get down to 2%. R. Marconi presented a new list of cuts – down to \$188,000. Dave Campbell has indicated a number of +\$8,000 for pension realignment for elected officials. R. Marconi commented on possible monies from the State. They are doubling the conveyance tax which will cover the loss from the MM&E tax no longer available to the municipalities. Parks & Rec can check on a loader rental – checking on the welder for safety. B. Manners willing to go to 2.17% but doesn’t want to go lower than that. 2.16% is a reduction of \$130,000. A. Bodner stated how is in favor of 2%; we are at risk nevertheless. We have protected public safety but have gutted any of the soft quality-of- life items.

List of proposed cuts for 3/10/11 totaling \$188,000:

Founder's Hall	\$10,000
Salaries	\$30,000
Branchville	\$ 5,000
Legal	\$30,000
Self-Insurance	\$20,000
Library	\$30,000
Fire	\$ 5,000
Parks & Rec	\$30,000
Road Sweeping	\$ 8,000
Police, Fire, Highway	\$15,000
Highway (vehicle parts)	\$ 5,000

**A. Bodner moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to present to the Board of Finance a Town Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2011-2012 with a proposed 2% increase. Motion passed 3-2. M. Kozlark and B. Manners voted no.**

2. Possible Non-binding Recommendation on Board of Education Budget to BOF

R. Marconi opened the discussion on the Board of Education Budget. He stated how he is not in agreement that if the Town does a 2% increase that the BOE has to do a 2% increase also. These are different issues. We need to be very careful with education, which is very important to this town. We do not want to erode our index of equity of our homes. We have to take into account that the State will be increasing both the sales and income tax rates for our residents. Debbie Low, Superintendent of School, stated how budget considerations begin in the fall. Reports are made and cuts are made. They tried a roll-over budget and most line items are reduced or flat. M. Kozlark emphasized the need to be judicious about what we do with the BOE budget. To get 2% would require about \$700,000 in reductions. What would the mill rate be if the BOE is at 2.5% and the Town is at 2%? K. Redmond responded that the mill rate is set by the Board of Finance.

R. Marconi indicated that he would prefer to not support too serious a cut at this time, but would rather that the BOE makes the cut.

Peter Fifario????, 255 West Lane, requested that the residents have the opportunity to vote on the BOE budget with any further cuts.

Ed Tyrrell, Pond Rd., stated that if the Fire, Police and Ambulance are at a 2% increase, then the schools should not have a higher budget.

Paul & Irene Sutherland, Mimosa Ct., stated how the BOE came up with as tight a budget as possible and the contingency was taken out. Any further cuts would degrade education.

Terry Lassiter, Powdermaker Dr., stated that a 2% increase for the schools is "crazy". You just cannot cut language and the arts.

Jay D'Orso, Sycamore Lane, stated that a 2.9% increase is a "lean, mean" budget. The BOE budget should go to ballot as it is. The schools will start to erode if the budget is chopped down to a 2% number.

D. Masters emphasized how she supports education, but all revenue cannot come out of the property tax. We have to find other sources of revenue. Everything cannot be funded back to the taxpayer. Ridgefield will never have a huge corporate base.

B. Manners stated how foundations are provided by citizens who choose to donate. Homeowners do not choose taxes. Social services in Ridgefield are the result of donations.

Keith Miller pointed out that the increase in the budget is because of increases for wages and benefits. Is it OK with negotiated contracts to be +2 ½%?

B. Manners responded by asking if all wants are necessary? We have been cutting the Town budget ever since the bundle. She feels we have reached the bottom level for providing safety. Yes, there is a contractual obligation for the BOE to honor. Every year the BOE returns dollars to the Town to the general fund because of a surplus. Why not leave these extra dollars to us now?

Cathy McGerald, Ramapoo Rd., stated that we have experts in education in Ridgefield; let us trust what they say.

**B. Manners moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to present to the Board of Finance the Board of Selectmen's non-binding recommendation for the proposed Board of Education Budget for Fiscal Year 2011-2012 with a reduction from a 2.9% increase to a 2.49% increase which would necessitate a reduction of \$321,914 in expenditures. Motion passed 3-2. A. Bodner and D. Masters voted no.**

**M. Kozlark moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Budget Meeting at 10:17 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson