

BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING – AUGUST 3, 2011

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

APPROVED MINUTES

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

Absent: B. Manners, D. Masters

Agenda (*immediately following Special Town Meeting*)

1. Jesse Lee Tax Abatement Request: Al Garzi
2. Virginia Roebuck Lease Renewal: Virginia Roebuck
3. Ridgefield Arts Council Interview: Daniele Hampton
4. Economic Development Commission Interview: Arnold H. Light
5. Board of Ethics Alternate Position Interview: Gregory M. McLaughlin
6. Discussion of “Old Business, New Business” Agenda Items
7. Board of Education Computer Lease
8. Selectman’s Report
9. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 6/15/11 special, 7/13/11 special, 7/20/11 special, 7/20/11 Public Hearing & BOS Meeting

R. Marconi called the Board of Selectmen Meeting to order at 7:40 p.m., immediately following the Special Town Meeting.

1. Jesse Lee Tax Abatement Request: Al Garzi

Tax Assessor, Al Garzi, was not present. Jesse Lee Memorial United Methodist Church is seeking an abatement of \$869.69, which represents the portion of their Real Property Tax Bill attributable to the lease of 50 parking spaces to the State of Connecticut, Department of Transportation. R. Marconi read the June 29, 2011 letter received from the church’s treasurer, Virginia Konopka, regarding this abatement request. This is an abatement we have been granting since 2002. R. Marconi stated how the Town of Ridgefield gives the Boys & Girls Club a \$50,000 donation.

John Katz, Old Ridgebury Rd., asked if it is fair to provide them an abatement when other 501c organizations are not exempt? The church realizes approximately \$12,000 - \$13,000 in income from the State of CT and NY. The State of New York pays for 50% of the parking spaces. This is a free parking lot for the commuters. A. Bodner asked why is the church being assessed? Other churches make income from childcare facilities on their property and their taxes are not abated. J. Katz stated how the issue of fairness comes up here. How can we abate the taxes for one group and not for another?

Greg McLaughlin, Prospect St., asked if any other 501c’s are providing parking. The answer is no. The State of CT asked the church to do this, as well as the State of New York.

Barbara Sneed stated how she feels this is also an environmental issue. By providing free parking, additional traffic, about 50 cars, are kept off the roads. Agreements like this are what makes Ridgefield a great place to live. This is a cooperative effort with New York State. M. Kozlark suggested that Jesse Lee church be informed of this discussion. We can then abate one-half of the taxes next year and the additional one-half the following year – “wean them off the abatement”.

Andy Bodner suggested that a decision be deferred until the next BOS meeting. A detailed history of the abatement would be helpful, including the dollars received from NY and CT over this period of time. This issue will be revisited at the September 7 BOS Meeting, with Al Garzi and a representative from Jesse Lee invited to attend. Is the State of NY involved in repaving? Jesse Lee church does the plowing.

2. Virginia Roebuck Lease Renewal: Virginia Roebuck

This is the annual renewal of last year's four year lease with one year renewal.

Andy Bodner moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to approve the annual renewal of the lease of 298 square feet of space (Rooms 222A and 222C) on the second floor of the Richard E. Venus Building for Virginia Roebuck from September 1, 2011 through August 31, 2012. Motion passed 3-0.

3. Ridgefield Arts Council Interview: Daniele Hampton

Daniele Hampton came forward to express her interest in serving on the Ridgefield Arts Council. R. Marconi read the June 7th letter received from Ms. Hampton detailing her background in the arts. She has already started volunteering on two Arts Council committees and is "very anxious to get to work". She feels she brings to the Council experience in the arts as well as the business side of the arts. R. Marconi read a letter of support received from Alison Greeley, Chairman of the Arts Council. Both M. Kozlark and A. Bodner stated how Ms. Hampton would be a wonderful addition to the Council.

Andy Bodner moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to appoint Daniele Hampton to fill one of the vacancies on the Ridgefield Arts Council for a four-year term. Motion passed 3-0.

4. Economic Development Commission Interview: Arnold H. Light

Arnold Light came forward to express his interest in serving on the Economic Development Commission (EDC). He has previously met with R. Marconi in his office. He moved to Ridgefield three years ago this coming February. R. Marconi read the email received from Mr. Light. He knows Bobbie Knight from the Westchester Business Council and was invited by EDC Chairman, Mr. Knight to attend an EDC meeting.

Mr. Light was Founder and President of The Light Group, a 29-year old NY-based incentive marketing organization. In 2007, the business was merged into Fire Incentives and became The Fire Light Group specializing in reward marketing and communications, incentive travel, meeting planning, special event marketing and on-line merchandise programs as well as marketing consulting. Mr. Light consults on his own now. He enjoys Ridgefield Golf, and is a member of Founders Hall and the Senior Men's Club, and a supporter of The Ridgefield Symphony. Mr. Light commented on how economic development is the lifeline of a community like Ridgefield and helps to ease the burden on the residential property owners.

Andy Bodner welcomed Mr. Light to Ridgefield. M. Kozlark asked if he had any ideas or suggestions for the EDC right away? Mr. Light commented on the IWOW program – it is a great place to participate! He sees around town small parcels of business property for rent. Ridgefield has so much to offer. We need to promote ourselves to those in surrounding towns.

M. Kozlark moved and A. Bodner seconded a motion to appoint Arnold Light to fill one of the vacancies on the Economic Development Commission for a one-year term. Motion passed 3-0.

Bobby Knight came forward and invited participation in the 4:00 p.m., August 11 press conference relative to development of the Branchville area. Congressman Jim Hines will be present.

Volunteer Fire Department Request for Barn/Garage Water & Septic System Installation

Jim Sullivan, representative from the Volunteer Fire Department, came forward to seek BOS approval of the Volunteer Fire Department's request to install water and a septic system in their barn/garage. They want to finish the upstairs of the building and install a bathroom, which will require the installation of a well. Their plans have not yet been approved by the Health Department, but they are seeking first BOS permission to proceed, as they have a lease from the Town of Ridgefield.

Andy Bodner moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to approve the requested installation of a septic system and water for installation of an upstairs bathroom for the Volunteer Fire Department's barn/garage pending approval by the Health Department. Motion passed 3-0.

5. Board of Ethics Alternate Position Interview: Gregory M. McLaughlin

Mr. McLaughlin came forward to express his interest in serving on Ridgefield's Board of Ethics. R. Marconi read the July 7th email received from Mr. McLaughlin. He moved with his family to Ridgefield in 2005. Mr. McLaughlin is currently Counsel, Corporate Litigation for IBM in White Plains and has read about recent events with the Ethics Committee. He works with the current Chairman of the Ethics Committee, Bart Van de Weghe, but not in a reporting relationship. M. Kozlark asked if this would present a conflict of interest situation? Mr. McLaughlin said no and he would step aside if a conflict of interest should arise. A. Bodner commented on Mr. McLaughlin's "wonderful background".

Andy Bodner moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to appoint Gregory McLaughlin to fill the vacancy as Alternate on the Board of Ethics for a four-year term. Motion passed 3-0.

M. Kozlark moved and A. Bodner seconded a motion to move up on the evening's agenda to #6, consideration of the Board of Education Computer Lease. Motion passed 3-0.

6. Board of Education Computer Lease

Director of Finance, Kevin Redmond, and Paul Hendrickson, Business Manager for the Board of Education, came forward to discuss the proposed approval of the Computer Lease for the BOE. There were three bids, and J.P. Morgan submitted the winning bid of \$510,000.

R. Marconi inquired as to what percent of the total number of computers are replaced by the BOE every year. P. Hendrickson responded that he does not know the answer to that question. What happens to the outdated equipment that is replaced? The funding is not just for the replacement of computers, but includes the purchase of servers, projectors, software, etc. as well. A. Bodner stated that perhaps the old equipment may be compatible with the Town's needs in other departments. P. Hendrickson will look into what happens to the outdated equipment and report back to the BOS.

Andy Bodner moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to authorize the Town of Ridgefield to enter into the tax-exempt, three-year lease agreement to not exceed \$510,000, as requested by the Board of Education for computer equipment. Motion passed 3-0.

7. Discussion of "Old Business, New Business" Agenda Items

This is a follow-up to the discussion at the previous BOS meeting. M. Kozlark reported on the definition of "Old Business" from *Robert's Rules of Order*.

“Unfinished Business” refers to a subject that was discussed in the past and a conclusion and/or decision was not reached. The question is still pending for further discussion. The introduction of “New Business” does not restrict the amount of discussion on the new topic. M. Kozlark reported that the BOE may discuss “New Business” but does not take a vote on a new topic. There is no vote unless the topic is on the evening’s agenda.

Andy Bodner stated how the Board of Selectmen Meetings are governed by our Charter. Sometimes *Robert’s Rules* is not applicable to the BOS meetings. A BOS Meeting is a meeting of the Selectmen that the public can watch. A Town Meeting provides the forum for the public to speak. R. Marconi states how it is his policy for the public to contact his office about any topic and ask that such topic be placed on the agenda for a BOS Meeting. Under the Agenda Item – Selectman’s Report, he will often bring up different topics. One idea is to have “Public Comments” at the beginning of a BOS Meeting, but R. Marconi stated how he prefers to have topics on the agenda discussed first, and then comments be received from the public following the discussion.

Jan Rifkinson, New Rd., stated that the reason he requested discussion of this topic was because he feels that anything to encourage people to dialogue is helpful. It becomes part of the public record that a particular topic has come up. There has not been a formalized format for people to bring up a topic. This would formalize the procedure.

It was agreed to try a time for “Public Comment” at the beginning of the BOS Meeting and see how it goes.

8. Selectman’s Report

- Phone conversation with Moody’s today regarding our AAA rating. An email was received from Congressman Hine’s office on Friday regarding S&P’s downgrading of the U.S credit rating. An action is being taken by Moody’s to look at 160 municipalities (Ridgefield included) and has put these municipalities on “negative watch”. What is this all about? Director of Finance, Kevin Redmond, explained the action. Fairfield County towns were chosen for this action and not upstate municipalities. R. Marconi indicated that we will be undergoing a full credit review and show our linkage to state and federal aid. Most of our aid is through the Special Education Account. What would we do if that account is no longer available? R. Marconi stated that we would find a way to cover the loss. He feels that we are in a good position and our credit review will indicate our stability.

Jan Rifkinson, New Rd., asked if the State of CT needs dollars, could they push this need down to the municipalities to provide? R. Marconi responded that there are lots of questions. We expect Ridgefield’s credit review to go well. CT has less reserve than municipalities in other parts of the country.

Tax Collector, Jane Berendsen-Hill reported that property tax collections were the highest this July since 2006. Banks took charge last year and are not allowing property owners to not pay their taxes. More people are paying for the total year at one time. R. Marconi reported that we are looking forward to Boehringer Ingelheim’s construction of their new buildings. One such building was approved by Planning & Zoning the other evening. We are expecting \$600,000 to \$700,000 in building fees alone, and these amounts were not put into this year’s forecast. The good news is that the Boehringer Ingelheim projects seem to be moving along fine. The application for the grant relative to Branchville has been submitted. A decision should be reached by October or November.

- Energy update – CL&P did their inspection and gave verbal approval. The \$890,000 bid was received from NYCOMM and all reference checks came back A+.
- M. Kozlark asked for a list of Committees and their meeting times in case she wishes to attend. R. Marconi will provide but they are also listed on the Town’s website calendar. All meeting times are to be posted on the Town calendar.
- Andy Bodner commented on newspaper article indicating that “regionalization for emergency services has come and gone.” He knows there was a lot of “push back” from the Police Department. State funding was not available if we did not participate in the regionalization. R. Marconi responded that Wilton is currently Ridgefield’s back-up for 911 calls. We wanted to choose how we would regionalize. We have met with Westport, New Canaan, Wilton, Redding, Weston, and Easton. If we were to be put with Westport or Danbury, their call volumes are higher than ours. Regional dispatch would cost us \$294,000 and the call volumes are wrong. Our signal would come from Danbury. There was not enough savings for us to pursue. We need to be linked with a city our same size. It makes more sense to regionalize for Fire and EMS. Centralization is much easier to accomplish in this area. We may look at working with Wilton and New Canaan. Regionalization makes sense but only if it is done correctly. Our Police Department reacted very quickly against the proposal.
- Andy Bodner commented on how the dollars will be very tight for quite some time to come. The “new reality” is to look at flat or declining budgets in the next five years. We will have to look very carefully at all our expenditures. R. Marconi responded that the BOS does control the dollars of our town. We are very much aware and very concerned about our country’s debt. This is a long-term issue. The flow of grants and dollars from the Federal and State governments may well be eliminated. How is our municipality going to react? We need to look at our five-year forecast right now.

9. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 6/15/11 Special, 7/13/11 Special, 7/20/11 Special, 7/20/11 Public Hearing & Meeting

M. Kozlark moved and A. Bodner seconded a motion to approve as written the minutes of the June 15, 2011 Board of Selectmen Special Meeting. Motion passed 3-0.

A. Bodner moved and R. Marconi seconded a motion to approve as written the minutes of the July 13, 2011 Board of Selectmen Special Meeting. Motion passed 2-0-1. M. Kozlark abstained as she was not present at this meeting.

M. Kozlark moved and A. Bodner seconded a motion to approve as written the minutes of the July 20, 2011 Board of Selectmen Special Meeting. Motion passed 3-0.

A. Bodner moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the July 20, 2011 Public Hearing & Board of Selectmen Meeting. Motion passed 3-0.

A. Bodner moved and M. Kozlark seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Meeting at 9:35 p.m. Motion passed 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet L. Johnson