

Annual Budget Meeting May 3, 2010

The Annual Town Meeting of the Town of Ridgefield was held at Ridgefield Playhouse, 80 East Ridge on Monday, May 11, 2010 at 7:30 o'clock P.M. (E.D. T.)

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

Sharon Dornfeld was chosen and acted as Moderator.

The Town clerk read the Notice of the meeting and stated that said Notice signed by the Board of Selectmen had been posted on the Town signpost on April 28, 2010, and that a copy thereof had been published in the Ridgefield Press a newspaper of general circulation in said Town, in its issue of April 22, 2010.

The Moderator then explained that in accordance with Section 10-3 of the Town Charter, Items 1 through 9 on the call of the Annual Town Meeting would be voted upon at a referendum to be held on the date and at the hours to be determined by the Town Meeting.

The Moderator further stated that in accordance with Section 7-6 of the General Statutes of Connecticut, as amended, only an elector of the Town or a citizen of the United States of the age of eighteen years or more who, jointly or severally, was liable to the Town for taxes assessed against him based on an assessment of not less than \$1,000 on the last completed grand list of the Town or who would have been so liable if not entitled to an exemption as a blind person or as a veteran or as a parent or surviving spouse of a veteran would be entitled to vote at the referendum and that absentee ballots shall be available as provided by law at the Town Clerk's office during business hours.

First Selectman, Rudy Marconi, made a PowerPoint presentation on the Town Budget. (See attachment at end of meeting.) The highlights of his presentation were that the budget would increase 3% this year in town operations and 1.35% in school operations. The capital projects remain the same as last year at \$100,00 and there will be a slight decrease in debt service of 0.49%.

As per Charter, Mr. Marconi gave a "State of the Town." He reported that the major issue confronting the town is revenue. Interest income is low, building permits are slow, the housing market is slow, and conveyance taxes collected are meeting fiscal year 2010 projections, especially because of the sale of Copps Hill Plaza. He added that tax collections are holding their own, and Parks and Recreation's revenues are off, a decrease of about \$150,000. He stated that the good news is that Boehringer Ingelheim continues to build and is expanding, and the Schlumberger property is being discussed with many people interested in the property. The plans for a new library are going forward, but the date is not known. The Town has received over \$2,000,000 from the State for a water line to Barlow

Mtn./Scotland School, Farmingville Rd., and other energy projects. Overall, he reported that the Town is in pretty stable condition, and the finances are being watched carefully every week and month.

The next presentation was made by the Board of Education Finance Committee members; John Palermo, Amy Shinohara, and Debbie Low. Mr. Palermo gave an overview of the Board of Ed budget. The budget being proposed is \$7.7 million, 1.35% increase over prior budget. The major increase is in salaries, and health benefits are key. He also pointed out that the Board of Ed was in the process of an energy study, since half of the \$2.7 million in utilities and energy was for electricity in the high school. Mr. Palermo proceeded to give a PowerPoint presentation on the education budget. (See attachment at end of meeting.)

Debbie Low, Superintendent of Schools, spoke on the full day kindergarten, the largest initiative in terms of expense. She explained that it lays the foundation for basic skills not possible within the 2 hr., 46 minutes now given to kindergarten. Research shows that such a program takes advantage of early potential of the students, and it can identify early challenges facing children. She also stated that research shows that the full day kindergarten also establishes basic skills and social habits and attitudes to carry forward.

John Palermo reported that other towns in the area are bringing in budgets much higher than Ridgefield, and one reason is that the Board has tried to take out a lot of the cost of the system and infrastructure. Mr. Palermo said the 1.35% increase was the second smallest in thirty years. He said that the Board of Ed is trying to migrate to the HSA health benefit plan for all the bargaining units for next year.

Amy Shinohara presented some facts about the HSA (medical insurance plan) transition. She said that medical costs are \$11.3 million, which represents a decrease of \$200,000, down 1.7%. The Board of Ed has assumed a 30% migration to a HSA plan in its budget. Teachers are already attending meetings informing them. A consultant, who has been hired for Ridgefield, has successfully implemented the plan in other schools in CT. She stated that the plan has better benefits than the present PPO. (See Board of Education attachment.)

Peter Gomez, Board of Finance Chairman, reviewed the Board of Finance PowerPoint presentation. (See Board of Finance attachment.) Mr. Gomez reported that Ridgefield was among just 12 out of Connecticut's 169 towns that had an AAA bond rating from the big financial agencies. That is important, because we get attractive rates when we go out to borrow. He added that even though the Grand List went down in 2010, he expects it to go up in 2011. In conclusion, he said that it was the belief of the Board of Finance that the Town can have sustainable budgets and still provide quality services that the people expect.

Mrs. Dornfeld stated that there were two communications received from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance. (See communications attached.)The Moderator read the letter from the Board of Selectmen.

John Palermo moved, and it was seconded to receive, accept, and incorporate the letter of the Board of Selectmen into the minutes.

“Aye” votes unanimous, and the motion was approved.

The Moderator entertained a motion to waive the reading of the letter from the Board of Finance, since it was identical to the Board of Selectmen letter.

Di Masters, South Salem Rd. moved, John Noonan, North St. seconded to waive the reading of the Board of Finance letter.

“Aye” votes unanimous, and the reading was waived.

John Noonan moved, Di Masters seconded to receive, accept, and incorporate the letter from the Board of Finance into the minutes.

“Aye” votes unanimous, and the motion was approved.

The Moderator announced that the Board of Selectmen at their meeting of April 28th voted to move the questions to referendum and recommended that the First Selectman be authorized to call a referendum to consider the first nine resolutions on May 11th from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. at Yanity Gym.

A motion was made by Ed Tyrrell, Pond Rd. and seconded by Peter Gomez, Ashbee Lane to approve the date, time, and location of the referendum.

“Aye” votes unanimous, and the motion was approved.

The Moderator announced that there were ten resolutions before the meeting. The first nine would be discussed tonight and go to referendum, and the last one would be voted on tonight. The full text of each of the budget and resolutions were printed and made available to members of the public attending the meeting. The Moderator asked for a motion to waive the reading of the full texts of the resolutions.

Peter Gomes moved, Jill Bornstein, Branchville Rd. seconded to waive the reading.

Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous, and the reading was waived.

The Moderator stated that she would read each resolution and ask for discussion:

Item # 1: \$44,752,723 for Town expenditures.

Jerry Kiernan, Ascot Way, moved, Barbara Manners, Round Lake Rd. seconded.

Discussion: None

Item #2: \$77,807,680 for Board of Education expenditures.

Irene Burgess moved, John Palermo seconded .

Discussion:

Martin Heiser, 93 Spectacle La., expressed his appreciation to the teachers contract for coming in with a realistic salary request this year during tough economic times.

Stephen Cole, 638 Danbury Rd., opposed a full day kindergarten at a time when the town's economy is weak.

Gene Waradzin, 27 Marcadon Ave., opposed a full day kindergarten.

Bob Perry, 638 Danbury Rd., asked what is projected savings if the teachers switch to a HAS. John Palermo replied it would be \$75,000 per ten points times 3. He also explained the impact would be in the following years, not this year. Mr. Perry also asked about state aid.

Robert McDonald, 39 Aspen Ledges Rd. wants a 0% increase in the education budget.

John McNicholas, Old Washington Rd. commented on the \$143 million debt and wondered when the debt would be paid off. Kevin Redmond, Town Controller, said debt service costs were scheduled to continue going down, from \$13.8 million next year to \$13.4 million in 2012 to \$12.5 million in 2013.

Susan Pratt, 174 Bob Hill Rd., spoke in favor of the Board of Education budget.

Elaine Noonan, North St., spoke on the Town's debt.

Item #3, \$100,000 for purchase and/or lease of Police vehicles.

Ed Tyrrell moved, John Palermo seconded.

No discussion.

Item #4, \$126,000 For Various Town Building and Improvement Project.

Ed Tyrrell moved, Harvey Fraser, First La. Seconded.

No discussion.

Item #5, \$1,243,000 For Various Town Road and Infrastructure Improvements and Equipment.

Di Master moved, Andy Bodner seconded.

No discussion.

Item#6, \$380,000 for Replacement of the Branchville Elementary School Heat Plant.

Peter Gomez moved, John Palermo seconded

No discussion.

Item #7, \$163,000 for Resurfacing and Equipment for the Barlow Mountain Pool.

Barbara Dobbin moved, John Palermo seconded.

Discussion: Marty Heiser spoke in favor of the resolution.

Item #8, \$150,000 for sidewalk improvements.

Di Masters moved, Kitty Fischer seconded.

No discussion.

Item #9, \$100, for Asbestos Abatement at Farmingville School.

Peter Gomes moved, Amy Shinohara, 39 Richardson Dr. seconded.

No Discussion.

After the resolutions to be voted on at referendum were read and discussed, the Moderator read the following resolution to be voted on at this meeting:

“Resolution making appropriations aggregating \$715,810 for the acquisition of equipment and authorizing the issuance of \$715,810 bonds of the Town to meet said appropriations and pending the issuance thereof the making of temporary borrowings for such purpose.”

Ed Tyrrell moved, Barbara Manners seconded the resolution.

The Moderator then asked for a motion to vote on each capital item under \$100,000 individually, as per Charter.

Ed Tyrrell moved, Linda Lavalley seconded to vote separately on each item.

“Aye” votes unanimous.

Item #1: Police Dept.

Chief John Roche gave an explanation of the items requested.(See tape for details)

Equipment Replacements/Improvements \$53,700

Barbara Manners moved, John Palermo seconded.

Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous.

Item #2: Fire Dept.

Chief Burford gave an explanation of the items requested. (See tape for details)

Car 2(Assistant Chief Car) \$35,000

Barbara Manners moved, John Palermo seconded to approve.

Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous.

Firefighter Air Packs (SCBA) \$58,710
Barbara Manners moved, John Palermo seconded to approve.
Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous.

Item #3: Information Technology

Andrew Neblett, IT Director gave an explanation of the items need. (See tape for details)

Server/PC Software \$74,300
Barbara Manners moved, Andy Bodner seconded.
"Aye" votes unanimous.

Item #4: Highway Dept.

Peter Hill, Highway Supervisor gave an explanation of his request for the truck. (See tape for details)

Truck with Plow \$55,000
Barbara Manners moved, Di Masters seconded.
Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous.

Kitty Fisher, First Lane gave an explanation of the Mamasasco Lake request.

Mamasasco Lake \$30,000
Barbara Manners moved, Di Masters seconded.
Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous.

Item #5: Parks and Recreation:

The Moderator asked for a motion to vote on the items in two batches. Manners moved, John Palermo seconded.

"Aye" votes unanimous, and the motion passed.

Paul Roche, Parks & Recreation Director gave an explanation of his requests. (See tape for details)

Building-HVAC \$10,300
Building-Exterior Painting \$14,500
Truck with Plow \$70,000

Ed Tyrrell moved, Barbara Manners seconded to approve the items above.
"Aye" votes unanimous, and the items were approved.

Truck with Plow (1.5 ton) \$40,000
Ed Tyrrell moved, and it was seconded.
Vote: "Aye" votes carried. 1 Opposed.

Tony Steiger, Golf Course Superintendant, gave an explanation of his request. (See tape for details)

Golf course-Equipment Replacement \$45,000

Discussion: Jan Rifkinson, New Rd. and Barbara Smiel, Craigmoor Dr., questioned the need for all the trucks. Mr. Rifkinson also questioned the need of replacing the golf course equipment.

Ed Tyrell moved, Barbara Manners seconded to approve.

Vote: “Aye” votes carried, 1 opposed.

Item #6: Town Engineer

Charles Fisher, Town Engineer explained the request. (See tape for details)

Venus Building-Duel Fuel Furnace \$70,000

John Pinchbeck, Tree Warden explained his request. (See tape for details)

Tree Replacements \$35,000

No discussion.

Kitty Fischer moved, Jan Rifkinson seconded to approve.

Vote: “Aye votes carried, 1 opposed.

Item #7: Board of Education

Paul Roche, Parks & Recreation Director, explained the following requests.
(See tape for details)

School Building/Grounds	\$34,000
Truck with Plow	\$40,000
Tractor	\$34,500

Discussion: Jan Rifkinson, 169 New Rd., Linda Lavelle, 38 Aspen Ledges Rd., Barbara Smiel, Craigmoor Rd. all questioned the “trucks with plow.”

Barbara Manners moved, John Palermo seconded.

Vote: “Aye” votes carried, 1 Opposed.

Paul Roche, Parks & Recreation Director, explained the following request:
(See tape for details)

Ground Maintenance Equipment	\$16,300
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Discussion: Jan Rifkinson questioned who takes care of the school, and Linda Lavelle inquired as to how many tractors are owned by Parks & Recreation.

**Barbara Manners moved, and the motion was seconded to approve.
Vote: "Aye" votes carried. 1 Opposed.**

**The Moderator announced that since there was no other business to come before the meeting, she would entertain a motion to continue the meeting to the referendum. Ed Tyrrell moved, Jerry Kiernan seconded to continue the meeting to referendum on May 11th.
Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous, and the motion passed.**

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk