

Annual Town Meeting May 4, 2009

The First Selectman, Rudy Marconi, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 7:35 P.M. at the Ridgefield Playhouse, 80 East Ridge.

The first item of business was to choose a Moderator. Di Masters moved, Barbara Manners seconded that Sharon Dornfeld be appointed Moderator.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous, and Sharon Dornfeld was elected Moderator.

Town Clerk, Barbara Serfilippi, read the Notice of the meeting that appears on page 166 and stated that said Notice, signed by the Board of Selectmen, had been posted on the Town Clerk's Notice Board on April 23, 2009, 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 23, 2009.

The Moderator then explained that in accordance with Section 10-3 of the Town Charter, Items 1 through 8 on the call of the Annual Town Meeting would only be discussed tonight, but voted upon at a referendum to be held on the date and at the hours to be determined by the Town Meeting. Item #9 would be discussed and voted on tonight.

The following communications from the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance were received, accepted and are incorporated in the minutes of the Meeting: (See copy of letters attached to minutes).

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, owns property assessed at over \$1,000 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.

The Moderator then introduced Rudy Marconi, First Selectman, who gave a presentation on the Town part of the budget. He stated that the Town part of the budget shows a full reduction of minus 1.03% from last year. Mr. Marconi gave a power point presentation. (See presentation attached to minutes).

Highlights of presentation on Town Operations.

- Salary increases: Reduced. Board of Selectmen agreed to salary freezes for all employees. Non-union agreed to freeze, three unions made concessions instead of a freeze, and one (Highway & Parks & Recreation) agreed to do nothing. There will be two layoffs in that union commencing June 1st.
- Community grants: Largest reduction. Reduced Hart Bus by \$50,000 by eliminating one bus.
- Ambulance billing: Reduced by \$67,000.
- Road sweeping: Reduced by \$58,000 as a result of using a new sand salt that doesn't leave sand on roads, thus allowing not have to sweep in the spring.
- Utilities and Vehicle Fuel: Major reduction. Contracted a few months ago for next year at reduced rate than what paid last year for fuel oil.

- Employee benefits: Increased. Going up at average rate of 10% a year, and Town will have to make adjustments on contracts, because Town unable to keep up with that increase.
- School buildings & Grounds: Increased \$14,255.
- Public debt decreased 2.04% as result of refunding old paper.

Mr. Marconi proceeded to the capital budget, and briefly explained each one. (See presentation attached to minutes.) He also stated that the Board of Education budget has increased 1%. In summary, he said the mill rate would increase .47% if the budget were approved.

The Moderator then opened the floor for questions from the audience:

Patrick Butler, 443 Barrack Hill Rd.: Questioned Town vehicle policy, health benefits for Town workers, Barlow/Scotland School wells, and building a new Police Station. He urged Selectmen not to do layoffs.

The Moderator then introduced Ms. Deborah Low, Superintendent of Schools. Ms. Low informed the audience that the budget process began in October. The preliminary budget came in January at a 2.645% increase, then after recommendations by Board of Selectmen and Finance boards, it was lowered to a 2.29% increase, further cut to a 2% increase, and then finally resulting in a 1% increase. The 1% increase was achieved by putting new staffing and significant costs on hold.

Highlights of the Board of Education presentation: (See power point presentation attached to minutes.)

- Teacher staffing was cut 4.4 and some classes may go over the traditional class size averages.
- Reductions were made in non-certified staffing, administrative costs, and contingency staffing.
- Athletic programs at the high school were cut \$40,000 and \$25,000 for club programs at the high school and middle school.
- Test materials and supplies were reduced. A significant amount was saved in energy costs, \$500,000.
- The special education program has children with needs that cannot be met at the district level and put in out of district schools, and it is anticipated that there will be less of them next year.
- Elementary school buses will pick up children in two phases. Will save several buses.
- Increase fees on “pay to play” grades 10-12, and increase fees on summer camps.
- Through the federal stimulus money for special education, \$250,000 can be taken out of operating budget and put into the grant.

Ms. Low referred to the pie chart, and stated that salary benefits were the biggest expense, especially a \$1,000,000 increase in health insurance. The other large savings was \$500,000 in bus expenses. Since 1977, 1% is the lowest increase in the Board of Education budget. She also stated that there are 5,400 students in nine schools, K-12.

The Moderator opened the floor for questions:

Alex Karsanidi,, 167 North Salem Rd., asked how sure was the \$250,000 for special education in the stimulus package. Ms. Low said it has been verified that they will receive \$1,000,000 over two years. The Board of Ed will spend about \$500,000 each year. She informed Mr. Karsanidi that the Board must be careful how they spend the money, because it is under scrutiny from the public and the state Board of Education. The Board will put new services under the stimulus package.

Jay D'Orso, 32 Sycamore La., questioned how the degree of reductions was mandated. Ms. Low answered that the Board of Selectmen made a non-binding recommendation, and the Board of Finance mandated the 1% increase. Mr. D'Orso asked that what in the future could the voters do during the process to express their concerns. Ms. Low suggested they attend the public hearings of the Board of Education, Board of Selectmen, and the Board of Finance.

The Moderator then introduced Marty Heiser, Chairman of the Board of Finance. Mr. Heiser complimented the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education on doing an incredible job on the budget. He reported that revenues were down \$1,000,000, and had never seen that before. He stated that the Town of Ridgefield would come in with a balanced budget and live within its means during the bad economic times.

Highlights of Board of Finance presentation (See power point presentation attached to minutes)

- Teacher salaries up over 3% last year, and medical benefits over 10% increase, averaging 5% in their pay
- Employee benefits up dramatically
- Union concessions and non-union salary freezes critical to budget
- Grand list not going up as fast as predicted
- Teachers and teacher's unions should continue talking to benefit fellow taxpayers.

The Moderator opened the floor for questions:

Stephen Cole, 638 Danbury Rd., as a substitute teacher and coach, expressed his disappointment in the elimination of six sports in the schools. He also as asked if the Town runs a surplus, can that money be put back into the sports programs eliminated. Marty Heiser, Board of Finance Chairman, felt that it couldn't be done, because the Board of Education has its own budget. Mr. Marconi agreed with Mr Heiser.

The Moderator read Resolution Item #1 of the call of the meeting, \$43,919,290 for Town Expenditures (excluding Board of Education and Capital and Non-Recurring Fund expenditures). John Katz, Ridgebury Rd., moved, Jan Rifkinson seconded. No discussion.

John Katz, Ridgebury Rd. moved to waive the reading of the entire resolutions, and Sue Fernandez, 115 Old Washington Rd., seconded. The Moderator announced that reading of the

resolutions 1-8 presented to the Town Meeting be waived, and the full text of the resolutions be available to those in attendance and be incorporated in the minutes of the meeting.

The Moderator asked for motion to approve Item #2, Board of Education budget. Bill Wyman moved, and it was seconded. No discussion

The Moderator asked for a motion to approve Item #3, \$100,000 for the purchase and/or lease of Police Vehicles. John Katz moved, Bob Cascella seconded. No discussion.

The Moderator asked for a motion to approve Item #4, \$375,000 for various Town building and improvement projects and equipment. Di Masters moved, Barbara Manners seconded. No discussion.

The Moderator asked for a motion to approve Item #5, \$1,110,000 for various Town road and infrastructure improvements. John Katz moved, Dom D'Addario seconded. No discussion.

The Moderator asked for a motion to approve Item #6, \$128,600 for vehicles and equipment. John Katz moved, Rob Dustin seconded. No discussion.

The Moderator asked for a motion to approve Item #7, \$577,000 for school improvement projects and equipment. Andy Bodner moved, John Palermo seconded. No discussion.

The Moderator asked for a motion to approve Item #8, \$717,000 for sidewalk and infrastructure improvements. Di Masters moved, Don Rommiser seconded. No discussion.

Mrs. Dornfeld entertained a motion to adjourn determination of Resolutions 1-8 to a paper ballot at a referendum to be held on Tuesday, May 12, 2009 between hours of 6 A.M. and 8 P.M. at Yanity Gym and to reconvene at Town Hall. Andy Bodner moved, but reminded the Moderator that there was no vote on waiving the reading of the resolutions. Andy Bodner then made his motion to adjourn to referendum with an amendment to waive the reading of the resolutions. John Palermo seconded Mr. Bodner's motion.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous.

The Moderator proceeded to read Item #9 of the Notice of the Meeting, to consider a resolution "Resolution Making Appropriations Aggregating \$320,885 For Various Improvement Projects And Equipment And Authorizing The Issuance Of \$320,885 Bonds of The Town To Meet Said Appropriations And Pending The Issuance Thereof The Making Of Temporary Borrowings For Such Purpose". John Katz moved, and it was seconded to approve the motion. Mrs. Dornfeld announced that each item under Item #9 would be voted on individually as follows:

Playhouse Ceiling, \$50,000:

John Katz moved, Di Masters seconded to approve:

Mr. Marconi explained that it was discovered that the trusses and support of the ceiling had dropped and needed to be repaired. It becomes a liability to the Town.

Patrick Butler, Barrack Hill Rd. inquired if the Playhouse was losing money. Mr. Marconi replied that the Playhouse was not in the business to make money. Since the Town owns the building, it still has to make structural repairs. The Town leases the building to the Playhouse for \$1 per year.

John Katz called the question, and John Palermo seconded it. The Moderator called for a show of hands, and 2/3 of the audience approved bringing it to a vote. The Moderator then called for a vote on the \$50,000 .

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

Town Hall Generator, \$40,000:

Mr. Marconi explained that the IT department for the Town is located in Town Hall. A year and half ago, Boehringer Ingelheim gave the Town a new generator. The auditors strongly recommended having a generator, because if there is a power outage, much information could get lost.

Stan Madaloni, Kendra Court, was concerned if we had offsite storage. Andrew Neblett, IT Director, assured him that we do backups, but not having a generator in a power outage could put the infrastructure at risk.

Discussion: Alex Karsanidi, North Salem Rd. asked what the life expectancy was. Mr. Marconi said it should last about twenty years.

Di Masters moved to approve, John Palermo seconded.

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

Firefighter Air Packs (SCBA), \$57,000:

Fire Chief Heather Burford explained that the present forty-one air packs are seven to twenty-one years old and not in compliance with 2007 standards. They are in need of repair. She is looking to replace ten of the oldest pack at \$5,700 per pack.

Discussion: None

John Katz moved, John Palermo seconded to approve the resolution.

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

EMS Cardiac Monitor, \$35,000

The Chief explained that these monitors are for pre-hospital use. The oldest in the department needs replacement. The life expectancy is eight to ten years.

Di Masters moved, John Palermo seconded to approve.

Discussion: None

Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous, and the resolution was approved.

Plan of Conservation & Development, \$37,500

Betty Brosius, Planning & Zoning Director, explained that the State requires an update every ten years. The latest plan was done in 1999. This is for the second half funding. If it is not done, the State will hold up on any funding or grants. The Plan is being done by a firm called Planometrics from Avon, CT.

Discussion: Sean Connolly, 550 Barrack Hill Rd. asked if the \$37,500 was for the consultant fee. Ms. Brosius replied that it represents 100% of the cost.

Di Masters moved, Jan Rifkinson seconded to approve the amount.

Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous, and the amount was approved.

Server/PC/Software, \$66,800

Andrew Neblett, IT Manager, explained that \$50,000 of the amount requested would replace the core server system. The “box” is outdated. The remaining \$16,800 will be used to upgrade an old server at the Police Dept.

Discussion: None

John Katz moved, and it was seconded to approve the amount.

Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous, and the amount was approved.

Purchase Order Software, \$34,585

Kevin Redmond, Finance Director, informed the audience that the Town does not have a purchase order system. Last year, the auditors required that the Town institute a purchase order system. There could be the risk of going over budget without one and having purchases made without authorization. The Board of Finance also supports it.

Discussion: None

John Katz moved, Bob Perry seconded to approve.

Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous, and the amount was approved.

The Moderator announced that the \$320,885 for various improvement projects and equipment had been approved.

The Moderator asked if there was any other business to be brought before the Town Meeting.

John Katz moved, John Palermo seconded to adjourn the meeting.

Vote: “Aye” votes unanimous, and the meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk

