

PUBLIC HEARING & BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING – FEBRUARY 10, 2009

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

UNREVISED/UNAPPROVED MINUTES

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

BOS Members in attendance: R. Marconi, A. Bodner, B. Manners, D. Masters, J. Plock
Guests: Kevin Redmond, Controller; John Mannuzza, Asst. Controller

Agenda

1. 2009-2010 **Operating** Budget Discussion

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

Board members were given Ridgefield Roads booklets from the Highway Department and a package of information from Charlie Fisher, Town Engineer, about the Venus building roof.

Chief Roche has been asked to attend the 2/11/09 budget meeting.

The Board then began to look line by line at the proposed operating budget.

There is a \$350,000 place holder for the wells at Scotland-Barlow.

The Board began to discuss salaries.

All salaries reflect a 2.5% increase (all non-union positions—unions may be slightly different).

B. Manners suggested freezing salary increases at 0%--definitely management employees—to avoid layoffs.

Social Security went up 5.8% probably due to the cost of energy. See parents pulling kids out of private schools, more moving into public schools.

Deflation right now.

Di Masters suggested a furlough (Fridays or once a month)—don't know if that would have the needed impact. Paying attention to what California is doing.

What is the benefit of freezing salaries—it is approximately \$300,000—and if the unions don't take the decrease to get to that point, then they would remove positions to get to that point.

How will we serve the Town—fix things we need and be braced for the future when we get out of this mess.

Bob Godfrey spoke to area superintendents; deficit continues to grow over the next 2 years. To think that we can balance the budget without touching the schools is foolish. Our budget will have to factor that in. The Governor didn't cut municipalities in her proposed budget. There is \$1.265M in the stimulus package for Ridgefield. But the state may take advantage of that and further reduce our budget.

Leave salary alone for now, recognizing where it is.

2008-2009 Operating Expenses

Currently there is a \$1.1M hit to revenue. To address that, we have cut road sweeping, First Selectman's Office lost a part-time administrator. Discussion of HVCEO, CCM memberships took place; can't afford to drop—need regional planning agency. CCM is our formal lobbying group; helped win last year's fight to keep the conveyance tax. Provides research for us.

2008/09--\$266,724; 2009/10--\$260,000, reflecting a decrease.

Board of Finance is flat. Question was asked why there was no charge for Board of Finance meeting minutes. There is a charge of \$2,600 for printing. This is for the annual report.

Legal counsel--\$5,000/month for Cohen & Wolf. As of December we are at 45%; Labor is at 6%.

We haven't incurred much, but police contract could change that. B. Manners suggested re-bid for legal counsel. Jerry Gay, Purchasing Agent, has the bid all ready to go. J. Plock agreed.

A calendar of contracts (when they are up) should be given to Board members. Kevin will provide an offering memorandum for the refunding that will also contain this information; as soon as it is validated, it will be distributed. Contracts, major leases coming up—Children's Corner Day Care lease is up for renewal.

P&Z retainer at 50%

1.2% increase in operating for TOR if salaries are flat. It's driven by the pension, insurance, and a couple of other things that are unavoidable. GASBE 45; Med, dental \$400,000; phase in over 4-year period. Don't have to fund it, but liability is larger if you don't fund. This is assuming phasing it over four years. Take \$400,000; invest funds; \$80,000 this year, \$160,000 next year. Liability calculation is different if you fund it vs not funding it.

What is contingency fund? Used for three part-time employees that work through the Selectman's office. J. Plock stated the name of the account does not accurately reflect what the funds are used for. Maintenance agreement will be reduced by \$9,000. Postage at 20%; that line is usually hit by the Tax Collector's office and is seasonal. *Personnel* coming down by \$1,000. Should reward or thank employees.

Finance Administration: bring down from \$4,500 to \$3,000. Office supplies at 17%--this time last year 32%; bottled water is out—this was coming through this line.

Information Services: Andrew put together. Equipment maintenance will go up. Demanding job. Can Board of Education (Josh Smith) back him up? This would save on professional services. Our only backup to Andrew is professional services.

Registrars—there is a Democratic and Republican Registrar; no more assistants (positions were cut). Di Masters suggested bringing one back or asking for a volunteer from the senior community. Perhaps this person could receive a tax break for their volunteer hours. They experience seasonal peak busy times. Registrars have asked to keep the part-time seasonal position at \$9,000—Hope and Cindy would be sharing the position.

B. Manners if we could do the volunteer thing would they like that. Anything you need to know – computer system – save \$, consistency. Talk to Danbury; \$600 tax break.

Assessor's office went from \$352,700 to \$341,000. Decrease is due to layoffs and use of people from other offices. Six positions. Question was raised whether Registrar's office can do this

too? Currently, Assessors Office, Town Clerk, and Tax Collectors office are all covering each others' offices during busy times.

Board of Assessment Appeals \$10090; flat. Used office supplies of \$50; didn't use any money out of meeting minutes; cut \$500 out of mtg minutes.

Tax Collector: Jane is doing a great job. Office supplies last year was at 70%; this year it is at 9%. 2007/08 there were 4 people; 08/09 there are 3 people; overtime is cut in half.

Treasurer's Office is flat. *Town Clerk* – Barbara expects to see savings in records retention and we'll carry that through to next year. Overall decrease of \$6,000.

Planning & Zoning: Decrease due to personnel layoff from 4.5 to 3.5 employees. ZBA can be cut due to the decreased need to advertise; cut \$1,000. Revenue numbers should be checked.

Activity is off 36%. Minutes went from \$621 to \$250 due to the brevity of the meetings.

Building Administration: Reduced from 4 to 3 people.

Probate Court: this is up from \$3,700 to \$5,300. The Governor has eliminated some probate courts; would this affect us? Would we be combined with Redding? Cut this line back to \$4,800.

Conservation Commission: flat.

Risk Management: Liability numbers have not been received yet.

Health: We plugged in approximately 10%; we're waiting for the bids to come back. This is something we will be talking about. Don't know how successful we will be in discussing a Health Savings Account. For example, the first year the town would put in \$1500/employee and the employee would put in \$500. That determines your deductible and that's what brings the premium down. Each employee would get a charge card and use it every time you went to the doctor. Fully portable so if you leave the town, it goes with you. Problem arrives with people that want to go out of network. In network is much more affordable and once the \$2000 is reached, future visits are covered 100%. The reason it works is because people change their habits; if it is on your own credit card, people have a tendency to shop it more.

D. Masters discussed moving new employees or as contracts come up for renewal as a general practice move us away from defined contributions and toward defined benefits, freeing the Town from the yolk of funding pensions. R. Marconi stated that the Town has done that with the fire department with new employees going forward. We put in x amount of dollars for their benefit and it's their money and they invest it and it's not a defined benefit where we are responsible for a specific program or payout. Workman's Compensation—unemployment will go up.

Commissions and Committees—same, with exception of Cemetery Committee, and they went down, an approximate \$6,990 decrease. Economic Development Commission is kept at the same. The study is meant to be funded over two years. They still have money in this year's budget to fund half of it; if this doesn't get approved, they can't do the study. The EDC wanted to come in this week; put off till March. Money out of contingency for wells \$20,000, not enough for both the wells and the EDC study. There is a July 1 deadline on the Plan of Conservation & Development; the Economic Development Commission study will be included in the POCD; they need the final document ready by the deadline. Phasing over two budgets is

a liability. Public hearings must be held. J. Plock asked why the deadline—can we add the EDC study as an addendum to the POCD?

Health & Welfare—Department is down to three people, including administrator. They were at four people and one person retired; we did not fill that position. We are using some grant money to do restaurant inspections. Wild Ginger was closed again by the Health Department. Salary line for 4 people in 2008 was \$224,000; with 3 people it is now \$213,000.

HART bus will eliminate one of the two buses. There is a lot of idle time. The service provided will be good; not great. The Board would like to speak to Mary Ann about the buses—elderly and disable transportation. Total \$145,745. Wilton owns two mini buses with lifts; this is handled by Parks & Recreation. B. Manners expressed concern about the disabled getting to bus stops.

Public Recreation—Revenue is up on the Barlow Pool. Rec. Center schedule coordinator was laid off. *Golf Course*—Flat. Administration is down \$6,000 this year. On the expense side, the golf carts are slightly higher this year than the same time last year; 78% compared to 63%; this seems to be a timing thing. The carts are leased. Golf carts bring in about \$220,000. Superintendent & Director are both year round positions—not seasonal. Maintenance—adjustment for fuel oil. Lock in; need to be more aggressive. K. Redmond stated that there seems to be an opportunity with electric as well and will probably go out to bid on it. There was no small equipment line last year and now there is \$1,800. That is for six hand-held radios; this line was cut last year. Can they be passed down from another department, such as Fire? Two-way radios not this year. Resident rates went up 25% last year; no increase this year—rates will remain. J. Plock questioned overtime. The law states anything over 40 hours is overtime; employees work on weekends in the busy season. The restaurant is doing well. Golf Committee reported very few complaints; he pays fair market value rent.

J. Plock questioned part-time protection park rangers. It's \$4,000/month to keep it at this year's level, but Parks & Rec cut a lot out of this budget. Took out seasonal parks maintainer.

R. Marconi stated that the Board should get a good understanding of where the budget is right now, and then Thursday night review options. The question is going to be, do we cut to 0 and then the question will be where is the Board of Education budget. That will be a huge consideration because they are 66-67% of the budget. Discussion about the current BOE budget between 2.2 and 2.4%. K. Redmond and R. Marconi will meet with the BOE. It will be very tough to get down to 0%. What services will people be willing to do without?

B. Manners asked is it possible that field charges could go up for soccer, etc? D. Masters does not find it fair; services are so expensive as is. Especially if a family has several children involved in field sports. You have to stop hitting people up for money just for living here.

A. Bodner discussed Parks & Recreation—broken down into four or five different businesses. The Rec Center that should theoretically should carry itself or make some money; there are fields that are provided for the residents and their upkeep is split three ways each paying one third: the Town, the schools, and the third-party users. There is the maintenance of the school grounds that is in our budget but should be in the school's budget (\$185,950 of our budget—1¼% of our budget). And then the administrative part that runs all those. Discussion ensued

about the Barlow pool; if it breaks, who will pay? Cost/revenue; crack in the pool; J. Plock asked why not put a liner in it? Aquatics take it over or the schools?

Rec. Center building maintenance increased \$10,000. It is not from salaries. K. Redmond will find out why. R. Marconi suggested looking at all utilities!!! Programs—really go into it. Profitability? K. Redmond will meet with Parks & Rec to make sure all program costs are fully loaded. B. Manners should you be able to enjoy the benefit? Should it cost more? Level of service. Philosophical discussion ensued about the Rec Center.

J. Plock moved and A. Bodner seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Budget Meeting at 10:04 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Hollie Palochik