

BOARD of SELECTMEN BUDGET MEETING – FEBRUARY 14, 2008

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

REVISED/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, B. Manners, D. Masters, J. Plock, J. Wahlberg

Agenda

1. Discussion – Proposed Budget, Fiscal Year 2009 – review of proposed operating expenses.

R. Marconi called the BOS Budget Meeting to order at 7:40 following an Executive Committee Meeting.

R. Marconi moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to add to the evening’s agenda a discussion of the Community Golf Course Bridge Project regarding the need for a special appropriation from the Capital Reserve Fund. Motion passed 5-0.

The following individuals came forward to discuss the Community Golf Course bridge project: Tony Steger, Golf Course Superintendent; Frank Sergiovanni, Golf Director, and Ed Tyrrell, Golf Committee Chairman. J. Wahlberg presented a proposed appropriation from the Capital Reserve Fund to cover the estimated additional costs of up to \$111,000 to complete the bridge. The bridge is incurring these additional costs in connection with the pilings which had to be increased in length due to greater pond depths than those provided for in the estimate. It previously was determined that the depth to refusal for the timber pilings was less than ten feet. This number was used in the bid specification with a proviso that it was estimated that up to one-third of the pilings might exceed ten feet. The bridge is about half completed and the depth of the pilings in the ground has exceeded even their original conservative estimate. Almost all the pilings exceed 20 feet in length and require splicing pilings end-on-end and sealing the splice with a polymer coating. A few of the pilings have exceeded 40 feet.

Andy Bodner inquired as to why this additional cost should come from the capital reserve fund? J. Wahlberg indicated that this project fits the definition of the capital reserve fund – it is for a capital project. A. Bodner indicated that some of the money could also come from the fund balance. J. Wahlberg responded that monies could come from the fund balance as well. This would be a Board of Finance decision, but we can forward to them our discussion on this matter.

The Golf Committee has decided to raise the charge to \$25 for a resident’s round of golf. The charge was last raised to \$20 in 2004. They are going to leave the non-resident charge as it has been with the thought being that non-residents are more likely to go elsewhere if the charge is raised too much. Last year the Golf Club was up \$50,000 in revenue; they are hoping to raise an additional \$100,000 this year. It was agreed that the Golf Club is doing a good job in generating revenue. The Board of Finance will ask how the Golf Club is going to pay for this additional expense; J. Wahlberg will recommend using the Capital Reserve Fund. The goal is to have the bridge project complete and not delay the opening of the Golf Course around April 1st.

Jan Rifkinson asked if there is not any process to require accountability when making a bid? R. Marconi replied that they do check for any errors and/or omissions and that the company is being bonded within

their scope. It is good that the Golf Committee notified both the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen when they became aware of this problem and the resulting shortfall.

J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve the requested additional appropriation of up to \$111,000 as needed to complete the bridge project at the Community Golf Course, pending approval by the Board of Finance. Motion passed 5-0.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to set both a Public Hearing and a Town Meeting on March 5, 2008, 7:30 p.m., Town Hall Large Conference Room, regarding approval of the additional appropriation of up to \$111,000 as needed to complete the bridge project at the Community Golf Course, pending approval by the Board of Finance. Motion passed 5-0.

Budget Discussion – J. Wahlberg passed out the revised budget numbers from the previous night's meeting which reviewed proposed 2009 capital expenditures. The contingency fund was reduced to \$50,000 from \$100,000. The mill rate is down to 4.81%. J. Plock inquired as to the cuts needed to get the mill rate down to 3.5%? J. Wahlberg's response was \$1,350,000 in cuts to reach the 3.5 number.

Andy Bodner inquired as to the cost of bottled water for the school's use rather than running a water line? R. Marconi responded that the State will not allow the school to remain on bottled water. The school uses approximately 5-6,000 gallons/water – not a large number. The cost of a water treatment plant would be about \$300,000. Aquarian would operate the plant, but the resultant chlorides as a waste product is the problem. We could drill a new well and see how that water tests. The State would prefer that the school be on a public water supply. We now have two wells at two different locations, but the both have the same problem. The State only checks for chlorides when a new water supply is first started up. A. Bodner suggested obtaining another equipment quote or return to the State and ask for a waiver in order to use bottled water. B. Manners suggested drilling another well and see how it tests out. R. Marconi will speak with Aquarian and check on these other suggestions.

J. Plock suggested a separate referendum on capital items over \$1 million – the Library, the Police Station and the water line. The Spray Park needs to be postponed this year. It was agreed that the Board would like to see the Library presentation on their proposed redo/expansion, but they do not want to be rushed into making a decision. J. Plock stressed how the Police Department has asked for their new building long before the "school bundle". There is no way we can do all these projects at the same time. The Library is coming back with a very short timeframe – it is not good timing! D. Masters stressed the need to have projected operating numbers for the library in the years ahead with an increase in the facility's size and staff. What are their computer costs going to be?

J. Plock asked about the use of a non-binding Advisory Question presented to the voters. The residents need to know that as a Board we are looking at the "whole picture". We can say that we support the Library project so that they can work on their fundraising efforts – that will take time.

R. Marconi will check on the rules regarding holding a separate referendum vote at the time of a federal election. We would get clear direction from an Advisory Question in a May vote. J. Wahlberg pointed out that last year the wood chipper was put off as well as the generator for Town Hall. The Highway Department does have a generator. He did speak with Betty Brosius and \$75,000 divided between two years for the Conservation & Development Plan will be OK. The previous Plan redo/update cost \$40,000. J. Wahlberg will also provide the computer replacement report previously requested. Barlow Mt. Pool is now self-supporting. It is being actively used. The plan is to repair the bottom of the pool first and then later repair the mechanicals.

It was agreed at 9:05 p.m. to focus on Operating Budget requests. J. Wahlberg reviewed the “challenges” given to various departments. It is up to each department as to how they want to reduce their operating costs and meet their “challenge”. All new hires have been eliminated. The big increase is in fuel and utilities. Parks & Recreation is slated to increase one ½ person plus associated benefits. J. Wahlberg will check on this. The Internal Audit for \$50,000 was not done this year – can we therefore not allocate this amount for 2009? R. Marconi suggested that the Pension Committee attend an upcoming meeting to discuss as pensions are currently fully funded with an increase from 7 to 7.5%.

Andy Bodner raised two questions – Are we for sure receiving ECS funds, and is the Board of Finance going to dip into the fund balance?

R. Marconi suggested a hard look at the Town – is anything really hurting? What complaints are we hearing? We need to be very careful and monitor expenses closely. If we want to make improvements in the community, what is it that we want to do? J. Plock commented on the need on the north side of town when one has to wait for an ambulance from Danbury if our ambulance is in our town center. A. Bodner inquired as to the higher canine numbers? The reason is because the canine project was deficit funded from the start. If our Christmas decorative lights were replaced with the new type of bulbs, the electric cost would go down from \$40,000 to about \$300. Where else can savings be made? – diesel fuel for all the school buses; the cost estimate for the health plan is +10% - hopefully this will be lower; suggest a modest pension reduction; Dream Homes project in Danbury was supported last year thru our contingency fund – do we want to continue this?; need to come up with a point system to handle community grants – resident versus non-resident community focus; the Boys & Girls Club requested \$200,000 and we agreed on \$50,000, but they never really received this amount; another idea is a one-time gift instead as a community grant rather than a smaller amount each year.

Operating costs will be reviewed in more detail the first week of March when the various department/organizations meet with the BOS at their scheduled meeting times and report back as to where they are on their individual department “challenges”. Several comments were made relative to the numbers in Mr. Wahlberg’s latest “Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2009” booklet. Medical costs have risen \$500,000 in the last two years. The increase in costs for Memorial Day are due to the cost of the bands. The Ridgefield Arts Council requested number was reduced from \$7,750 to \$1,500. R. Marconi will send the Economic Development Council (ED) to schedule a meeting with the BOS whenever they have a priority. The Parks & Recreation Challenge is to reduce costs by \$43,000; the Police Headquarters Challenge is a requested reduction of \$44,000 in operating costs; the Fire Department Challenge is a reduction of \$57,000; the Highway Challenge is a reduction of \$96,000 – their fuel costs have already doubled.

The next budget meeting is Tuesday, February 19 at 6:30 to 8:00 p.m., Town Hall Large Conference Room with members of the Board of Finance, Board of Education and Board of Selectmen all in attendance.

J. Plock moved and A. Bodner seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Budget Meeting at 10:00 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson