

BOARD of SELECTMEN BUDGET MEETING – MARCH 6, 2008

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:00 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

- 7:00 Fire Department Budget
- 8:00 Board of Education Budget
- 9:00 Capital Budget Discussion
- 9:30 Non-binding Recommendation to Board of Finance

R. Marconi opened the meeting at 7:03 pm.

Fire Department –

Fire Chief Heather Burford began by reviewing the Operating Budget. Chief Burford explained that training requirements have gone up; when training, firefighters are paid at straight time (not time and 1/2). Because Assistant Fire Chief Kevin Tappe is a certified trainer, we are now able to offer this training in house.

A. Bodner asked if the two recently hired firefighters would offset the overtime. Chief Burford responded that any benefits of this sort have been offset by the recent retirement of two other firefighters, and once we are up to full staffing, we will get some relief.

Chief Burford continued to explain that we have been incurring costs due to building maintenance and we are fortunate that Kevin Tappe is very adept at handling small building repairs and issues as they arise.

Revenues are up in EMS billing because the call volume is up. R. Marconi and Chief Burford discussed negotiating the ambulance service billing contract; perhaps now is a good time because the ability to electronically capture the information makes the company's job much easier.

In reviewing fire inspection fees, it was determined that from 10/12/07 to 3/6/08, \$35,000 have been recognized after an expenditure of \$12,000. A result of having a separate person to conduct the inspections is that the Fire Marshall would then be able to focus on plans reviews, thereby averting issues in the preliminary stages. The annual cost to have a person run this

program is \$63,680 and the revenue generated from it is \$75-85,000. The current market conditions have not impacted the number of inspections; in fact, the number of inspections has increased. Would like a full-time fire inspector. Right now, Mickey comes in on his off days (after working 42 hours per week), so we pay him overtime for this job (at time and ½). This works out to be 13 hours per week at time and ½.

Capital projects were then discussed. There are five projects in the capital budget:

1—installation of showers in the women’s bathrooms (\$13,000)

2—pager replacement: would merge with the current system and have the ability to work with future system (\$19,000)

3—repair of dry hydrants and cisterns, 7 total. We are obligated to maintain them. (\$24,000)

Discussion of looking into asking contractors to oversee new hydrants for a period of 1-2 years ensued. Betty Brosius stated there aren’t many new subdivisions or developments proposed but P&Z can consider establishing this requirement.

4—firefighting gear, 36 sets, 8 volunteer & 28 career. Total cost is \$54,000 but the Town has a grant for \$32,000; total budget impact=\$22,500. Old gear will be rotated out in the future.

The Frazee Donation: Total amount donated was \$307,000, most of which went to purchase the new ambulance. \$135,000 remains. The following projects are requested with the remaining Frazee donation:

--hearing protection program

--gas meters

--cold water rescue suits

--EMS: mechanical units that perform CPR (“thumpers”). They are much more accurate.

Tanker Replacement

The request for \$380K is to replace a 23-year-old tanker, a mobile water source. This has an impact on our ISO rating. This is one of the two tankers the Fire Department has. It is a 1986, 2,500-gallon, manual transmission, single-axle tanker. The other tanker is a 2000, 2,600-gallon automatic transmission tanker. The average life of a tanker is 20 years. A new tanker would mean improved safety and it could be used in a dual capacity. Parts for the 1986 tanker are tough to get and the department is starting to see some age-related problems. Also, because it is a 26-ton vehicle, there is a fear that it is too heavy for local bridges. J. Plock inquired whether we can sell the 1986 tanker. Chief Burford responded yes, it is valued at approximately \$65K in the Midwest, where there is a demand for such a vehicle.

A. Bodner stated that at the end of the day, the tanker is more of an insurance policy and that it does not move very often. Can we get one more year out of it? Chief Burford stated that out of 85 staff, only four people know how to drive the vehicle. D. Masters stated that unless the transmission is going, why replace it? It has traveled these roads for 23 years, it is no more dangerous today than 10 years ago.

Chief Burford explained that in the past the department had 4 engines and 2 tankers; now they have only 3 engines and 2 tankers. This new tanker would be a replacement for the fourth engine. When asked about possibly replacing the transmission on the 1986 tanker with an automatic, Chief Burford responded that she contacted several companies and no one will touch the job; in addition, the price to re-chassis the vehicle was estimated at \$110K.

Board of Education

Deborah Low, Richard Steinhart, Sandi Rose, George Teri-Savage, Dan Carlin, and Kathy McGerald all came to the meeting to discuss the Board of Education budget.

J. Plock stated that this year's Board of Education budget reflected the best collaborative effort and openness in many years and commended those involved on a good job. R. Marconi said all Board of Selectmen were pleased with the Board of Education and would like to pass the operating budget on to the Board of Finance with one caveat: if the Board of Finance says the numbers are too high, the Board of Selectmen reserves the right to do this again.

J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to send a non-binding recommendation to the Board of Finance to approve the 5.54% increase in the Board of Education operating budget. Motion passed 5-0.

Discussion moved to the Board of Education capital budget. Items covered in the capital budget included asbestos abatement. Branchville's asbestos was "encapsulated" in 1995 because at the time, it was thought to be best to do this. Today, the tiles, mastic, and floor trim is completely removed. Farmingville's situation is the worst; the gym tiles continually pop up and the kitchen must be abated as well. The cost to replace the floor with rubber is \$35-40,000. The work will be done in phases with the first phase being completed in one summer. The four schools left to be abated are Veterans Park, Barlow Mountain, Farmingville, and Scotland. The total cost requested in this year's budget to abate Farmingville and Branchville is \$405K. All asbestos in the schools is monitored every six months.

The Branchville boiler is scheduled to be replaced; it is the original burner and exhaust hood and is very energy inefficient. VP is in dire need; will be done in the 09-10 budget year. Most energy money is spent at RHS because it has electric heat. The BOE would like to get a professional energy engineering person to assess our needs and investigate alternate energy sources to reduce energy consumption. \$100K has been put in the budget for this.

Total BOE Capital budget is \$896K.

School security line falls under public safety. This continues camera installation, visitor management system, buzzer system, door controls, and camera monitors.

J. Plock stated she recalls from her time on the BOE that the food service program was designed to be a self-sufficient program and that taxpayers would not have to pay to replace kitchen equipment. This was in response to the \$52K line item for freezer replacement.

The Board thanked all Board of Education members for their hard work on this years budget.

Betty Brosius, Director of Planning, and Becky Mucchetti, Chairman of Planning & Zoning, then joined the Board. The last Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) was in 1999 and it is mandated by the state to be updated every 10 years. If we fail to update the state can withhold discretionary funding. The updated POCD will cost less if we use Glenn Chalder and Planimetrics because they were responsible for the 1999 POCD. All boards will be asked for input when producing the new plan. Total cost is \$75K and 50% has been requested for this year (\$37,500) and the balance is requested in next year's budget.

At 9:15 pm the Board took a short break and returned at 9:20 pm.

J. Wahlberg continued with the Capital budget discussion. Main projects are the building expansion of the library, the Police Department expansion, and the Scotland/Barlow water main extension. R. Marconi is waiting to hear from the state regarding the low-interest loan for the water main extension. The Police Department revised numbers have come back from R. Zini and Charlie will review for value engineering to cut the number down.

Discussion moved on to bonding costs. 18 months of financing on \$4M reflects \$180K interest; would the Town consider adding the cost of interest into the total cost of the project? How will the Board of Finance do this? J. Wahlberg will ask the Board of Finance about this.

The Scotland-Barlow water main extension was discussed. The Town has been working to solve the water problem at the schools (high chloride count) for several years and has applied for a loan through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. The state OPM sent a letter requesting the Town reduce the size of the line to ensure there is no additional development. R. Marconi will be meeting with Aquarion Water next week along with Town Engineer Charlie Fisher and Fire Chief Heather Burford. Aquarion is resistant to additional hydrants in this area of Town.

Andrew Bodner asked if the Town had considered drilling a new well? R. Marconi responded that we have two wells currently, both bad, and we can spend \$15K to drill another one, but no guarantee that the water in the new location would not contain high chloride content. After some discussion, it was decided to pull the \$1.8M for the water main extension out of the capital expenditures for this year.

B. Manners discussed the library project; many people in support of the library project are here in the audience. She expressed appreciation for all the work that they have been doing and mentioned that she received approximately 100 emails in the past 24 hours, all in support of the

library expansion. Ms. Manners stated that her position is that the \$4M is not the problem. The problem lies with the operating costs. In three years, it will cost \$450K more. As a selectman, her primary responsibility is to the health and safety of residents. Emergency needs must be met and until they can be met, we have no business adding to the operating budget as such. She will recommend \$4M if the library will agree to freeze the operating budget. J. Plock agreed and further stated that it is unknown what future Board of Selectmen will decide and this Board of Selectmen cannot make a promise for a future Board of Selectmen.

Discussion then moved to the 1983 library agreement. R. Marconi stated that a specific percentage of the library budget number that the Town would support was not included in the agreement; it pertained to the 75 percent appointment on the library board that is approved by the First Selectman.

B. Manners suggested an endowment could be established to fund additional operating costs. If the expansion is approved, additional money will be needed to run the library.

J. Plock questioned the cost of \$750K for the façade. Why can't the new building be designed with the same character?

D. Masters pointed out that this is a concept plan and reminded everyone that it has not been through Planning & Zoning and the approval process. D. Masters further questioned who will pay for the 5.8 additional employees needed to run the library?

B. Manners stated she does not see the Town of Ridgefield picking up the cost of the operating budget; wants to see an agreement that the operating budget at this point is frozen.

Discussion then revolved around amending the 1983 agreement limiting any increases to CPI and associated expenses to expansion. J. Plock then questioned Chris Nolan whether she understands what the Board of Selectmen is saying. C. Nolan stated she thinks the Board of Selectmen wants this asset for the Town; renegotiating may push this off for quite some time. R. Marconi stated this is the only way the Board of Selectmen will agree to this. B. Manners wants a promise from the library that the Board of Selectmen will not be asked for additional operating expenses as a result of the expansion.

Andy Bodner stated we all share the same concerns. When we expand the Police Department, there are incremental costs associated with the expansion. There will be incremental costs to this project.

J. Plock stated we cannot guarantee or promise additional staff for the library; future boards may not agree with us. B. Manners sees our emergency services in dire need; our services are going down. R. Marconi requested B. Manners develop language for amendment to agreement and present to the Board at the Saturday morning meeting.

A question from a member of the audience was asked: Will you do that for every department project? B. Manners responded no. R. Marconi spoke about the history with budgets; recognizing that we have only allowed three new employees in all town departments over the past three years, it would be an insult to other town departments if we ok'd this.

Chris Nolan said that much money and work went into the new plan; there in the 9th hour we are being told otherwise. B. Manners suggested the plan can be changed from many entrances with one exit to many exits and one entrance in order to cut back on staff?

Discussion then moved on to Tiger Hollow. \$430K is for lights; private donations have raised \$335K of the cost and they are requesting \$95 from the Town. Approvals have been granted already for the lights. They will cut down on light pollution.

Phil Baumann asked how many projects have been put forth and passed at referendum without Planning & Zoning approval? D. Masters responded—many.

Discussion moved onto Public Works and roads. Budget is \$800K and this will cover 5 miles of roads. D. Masters would like to know how many more roads will \$1M cover? R. Marconi will ask Peter Hill for an inventory report of roads and when they were last done—primary, tertiary, and secondary. If we continue this way, the roads will deteriorate. We cannot continue to under fund the roads.

Why is IT department head salary so high? J. Wahlberg brought inventory of computers; Jay will copy and bring Saturday morning.

At 11 pm, J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded to adjourn; motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Wendy Gannon Lionetti