

BOARD OF SELECTMEN SPECIAL MEETING

MARCH 10, 2007 8:00 a.m.

Ridgefield Town Hall
Large Conference Room

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, Controller

AGENDA

8:00 Budget Deliberations

10:00 Budget Recommendation to Board of Finance

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 8:07 a.m.

Jay Wahlberg was asked to recap where the Board left off with the budget at the end of the prior night's meeting. Mr. Wahlberg explained that to achieve the goal of getting the budget to 5.5 percent increase, a total of \$136,000 would have to be cut from the current budget that reflects already imposed cuts. At the end of last night's meeting, a total of \$63,500 had been cut. These cuts include: the Fire Department recruit training, general liability insurance (cut \$10,000), Arts Council cut \$500, Tree Warden cut \$5,000, Police Department cut \$6,000, Rec Center cut \$5,000, Venus Building maintenance cut \$10,000, and transfers cut \$15,000 (reflecting \$5,000 bond cut, \$5,000 canine cut, and \$5,000 cut in reassessments). These cuts result in a 5.76 percent increase over last year's budget.

The Board continued to go through each line, looking for additional reductions where possible. The following items were reduced:

- Larvicide applications--\$1,000 cut
- Golf course telephone--\$500 cut
- Golf course fuel oil--\$1,000 cut
- Parking Authority--\$7,500 cut

The final operating budget number after the reductions is \$29,089,700. At this time, A. Bodner made a motion to pass on to the Board of Finance a Board of Selectmen budget increase of 5.74 percent (\$29,089,700). J. Plock seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Discussion ensued with a review of the Capital budget which was voted on March 9, 2007. The total amount requested was \$12,786,318. The total amount approved is \$3,275,052. Also approved is \$420,000 for architectural services for the renovation/addition of the police headquarters, to be listed as a separate question on the ballot; as well as \$1,475,000 for the reconstruction of Onalfo field, also to be listed as a separate question on the ballot.

With the Board of Selectmen budget increase of 5.74 percent and a Board of Education budget increase of 7.33 percent, the mill rate would increase 4.37 percent. The targeted mill rate increase for this year is between 3 and 3.5 percent.

R. Marconi reminded everyone to keep the total picture of the economic variables in mind when making this decision. The Governor's tax proposal, cost of electricity, social security, etc. all have great impact on the residents of this town. The Board of Education's "maintenance" budget is a 5.3 percent increase; a 5.87 percent increase coupled with the Town 5.74 percent increase would make the mill rate increase 3.38 percent.

A. Bodner suggested utilizing the Town fund balance in the amount of \$400,000 to bring the mill rate to 3 percent.

At this time, Andy Bodner made a motion to pass on to the Board of Finance a Board of Selectmen budget increase of 5.74 percent (\$29,089,700). Also in the motion was a non-binding recommendation to the Board of Finance of a 5.87 percent (\$72,683,233) budget increase for the Board of Education's 2008 fiscal year. Additionally, the Board of Selectmen asks the Board of Finance to consider an appropriation from Fund Balance of \$400,000, to keep a projected mill rate at 3 percent. Joan Plock seconded the motion.

R. Marconi then asked the public for brief comments.

Kitty Fisher: (member of the Board of Education), informed the Board of Selectmen that the administrators cut their budget before submitting to the BOE. Based on some comments that she heard, it seems as though the Board of Selectmen think that the budget has not been scrutinized and that is not the case. The administrators cut the budget \$2,000,000 before bringing it to the Board of Education. Additionally, the special education mandates costs will force us to cut costs elsewhere.

Kathy McGerald: (member of the Board of Education), stated that after listening to the 3/6/07 meeting tapes, is compelled to correct some misinformation that was shared. The Math paraprofessionals will not going to be phased because they assist the children. Some programs work their way out of the system, such as teachers teaching teachers. However, teachers

teaching students would not be worked out of the system and therefore must be accounted for in the budget. Also, we are not above average in the area of special education. Ridgefield is at 11 percent, while the state is at 12.5 percent.

Ken Freeston: (Superintendent of Schools), the budget has not increased 7 percent for three years.

Peter Gomez: (member of Board of Finance), we must look at the following items when considering the budget: revenue and the compounded annual growth rate, which is 1.3 percent increase per year or \$1,000,000 per year; the tax burden per capita—we are ranked #6 in the state; the rate of spending, (compounded) over the past 10 years, BOS has grown 4.9 percent and the BOE has grown 7 percent; and the fund balance—keep in mind that it has been built up just this past year (historically it has been low).

Mary Miller: We can skew numbers either way, to prove the point we want to make. There are 132 towns in Connecticut that have a higher mill rate; and there are 158 towns in CT that have a higher equalized tax rate for education. We need to focus on what we have here in our town.

J. Plock moved the question to suspend debate; then withdrew this.

Mike Lordi: I would not hide behind the term “nonbinding recommendation” when it impacts so many children. Also would like to know the reasoning behind the 3 percent.

Dave Landers: Would like the Board of Education to absorb the Pay to Play costs imposed on the families of the athletes; would like the gate receipts to be fully allocated to the Athletic Department for the 1,500 athletes at RHS.

Laura Day: Is troubled by the direction in which the town is moving. Economic development needs are not being met and we drive out economic development.

Ed Tyrrell: I applaud the Board of Selectmen making cuts in the budget. These are cuts that are needed. I have attended all Board of Selectmen budget meetings and there is nothing on the table.

Bob Opotzner: Attended some Board of Selectmen meetings and impressed by the BOS. If you recommend the \$1,000,000 cut on the BOE budget, this will have a steep impact on the athletics and education.

Dr. Ken Freeston: The BOE will not have a chance to present the full budget to everyone until May 7. Because this is a new process, perhaps we should be looking at this. Perhaps the BOS can make their non-binding recommendation to the BOF after the budget is presented May 7.

Mary Pat Devine: (former member Board of Education), Came late to meeting, can you explain the process by which you came to this number? Also, can the Atlantic bus settlement money go to the BOE budget?

R. Marconi replied that the Board of Finance would have to answer whether the bus settlement money can go to the BOE budget.

Bob Perry: 31-year resident; I fully support the motion on the table and applaud the fiscal responsibility the BOS has taken.

Gary Tiger (President & Athletic Director of Tiger Hollow): I support the elimination of Pay for Play and suggest the BOS reconsider the \$1M cut. This will mean cutting fundamentally important things in this town.

Kathy Reinert: Where is the breakdown for the BOE budget? As a voting member of this town, I would like to see the numbers, including the mandated items. Has the BOS seen these numbers?

Bill Donnelly: 5-year resident. Moved here because of schools and community. Athletics binds a community together. Suggests BOS rethink the blanket slash. Is the BOE frivolously spending? I don't know.

J. Plock reminded the Board of Selectmen that the BOE budget is \$4M higher than this year's budget and there is no increase in students expected.

Nancy Brandon: Would like to remind the Board that this cut will affect our kids.

Dave Ulmer (Board of Finance member): Today is the first time we are hearing about the state mandated items. Would like more information about this.

Ken Freeston: Explained that the lever expenditures are items that are not in the current year budget. All of special education is mandates. 80 percent of special education students must be included in classrooms. Mandates are not currently funded.

D. Masters expressed that she thought the maintenance number included mandates—i.e. items that must be included.

Susan Fernandez: I would like to suggest that you withdraw the motion. You are not fully informed about the BOE budget. This will affect my three children: one in elementary, one in middle, and one in high school.

John McNicholas: I would like to commend the BOS for the \$1M cut. I suggest cutting more--\$3-4M more. If we continue spending more and more, we will not be paying off our bond.

John Perry: I would like to clarify that we are not cutting the BOE budget, we are reducing the increase.

Kitsey Snow: It seems you don't know the details of the BOE budget. You should get mad at the state for their mandates.

Linda Mahr: I have been to the BOF, BOS, and BOE meetings and understand mandates. The BOS needs to understand what they are cutting from the BOE.

D. Masters suggested looking at a different number to cut. Maybe \$600,000? B. Manners stated it is not our job to look at line items, just the overall community. Each department came in with their budgets; let's stick with what we have done and the Board of Finance can take this into consideration in their review.

J. Plock explained that she does know how to read the BOE budget and in other towns they are coming in at 5 to 6 percent increase with the same state mandates. This is a \$4M increase over last year. I say we stay with our motion.

A. Bodner stated he is disappointed that the budget was not clear. Maybe there are hard mandates and soft mandates. He expressed appreciation for Dr. Freeston's explanation.

After discussion on the original motion, Rudy Marconi amended the motion to ask the Board of Finance to review with the Board of Education any mandates required by state statute that were not addressed in the Board of Selectmen approval and add required financial support needed for these mandates to the Board of Selectmen approval of 5.87 percent. This amendment was seconded by Barbara Manners. After discussion in which Mr. Marconi stated that a 2/3 majority was needed to pass the amendment, a vote was taken to approve the amendment and passed 5-0.

Subsequent to the passing of the previously mentioned amendment to the original motion, the Board voted on the new amended motion to approve a recommendation to the Board of Finance of a 5.87 percent budget increase. The now amended motion passed 5-0.

A. Bodner moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to adjourn meeting at 10:40 a.m. Motion carried 5-0.