

BOARD of SELECTMEN SPECIAL MEETING – MAY 15, 2008

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 8:30 A.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, B. Serfilippi, L. Scholl

Agenda

8:30 Budget Discussion

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 8:30 am.

Discussion began with establishing a target number of amount to be cut from budget. It was determined that between \$300,000 and \$400,000 would be appropriate.

B. Manners stated that some departments are more important than others and therefore we cannot make cuts across the board. The recreation areas are not as essential as fire and police departments. She suggested Town Hall changing hours to four days per week to save on heating and electricity, shortening the hours of the recreation center, closing the library two mornings per week. We must look at who is unionized and who is not if we decide to pursue.

D. Masters asked about cutting the building department hours considering the fact that building construction is down.

B. Manners suggested freezing the senior tax credit and keep last year's credit instead of increasing it this year.

R. Marconi mentioned that the bonding part of the budget will not be coming back to the voters and that was a large part of the budget. Thinks that voters do not want personnel cut from the budget. The senior tax credit would be a serious cut; people expect and plan on it; would rather see that cut in round 2 of cuts.

Keith Miller asked about the capital reserve. Can it be used for routine replacement if a boiler failed or there were some other large problem? R. Marconi responded that would be a Board of Finance decision.

R. Marconi mentioned that the Board may want to increase the contingency due to the cost of oil and the impact on the current budget. He will meet with John Mannuzza and discuss it to take it into consideration for next year.

J. Plock voiced her agreement with B. Manners suggestion of freezing the senior tax credit at this year's level. D. Masters and R. Marconi disagreed stating that we can "park this idea" and see where we are after going through the budget cuts.

J. Plock suggested taking \$100k from capital financing.

A. Bodner stated the budget process is flawed. Capital items to run departments, such as police cars, and Highway trucks, should be part of their operating budget, not capital. These are the tools needed to run and service the department.

Discussion moved on to the Barlow pool and whether to close it. The cost to run it is \$80k, but it is a revenue generator. If it is eliminated, the mill rate is not affected. The same is true with the golf course.

Capital Project Financing was then discussed. Total budget is \$304k and covers computer replacement \$60k, network upgrade \$40k, GIS \$40k, rec center truck \$32k, 3 police cruisers \$76k and one unmarked leased vehicle \$17k, loader \$, and door replacement at schools \$.

B. Manners suggested taking \$40k out of information services. J. Plock and D. Masters agreed; A. Bodner stated he is not qualified to make this decision and is not comfortable with the cut to which R. Marconi agreed. R. Marconi stated that the GIS program, while important, is not as important as other IT needs. It was decided that \$40k would be cut from Information Technology and Andrew Neblett of the Information Technology Department would have to decide from where to make the specific cuts.

R. Marconi stated that a staff meeting is scheduled for 11 am this morning and he will cover whatever is decided here at that meeting.

B. Manners suggested deferring the purchase of two police cruisers to eliminate \$50k from the budget; all agreed. It was decided to cut the door replacement at schools budget \$10k; all agreed. The total Capital Project Financing budget cut is \$100k. All agreed.

The Board then moved on to discussing the Operating budget. L. Scholl, Director of Human Resources, confirmed that the budget is based on an overall increase of 4 percent. If the non-union employees were brought down to a 3 percent increase, total amount saved would be \$4,000. R. Marconi does not want to penalize the non-union employees; their benefit package is not as good as union employees. L. Scholl stated union contracts average 3.8 percent.

A. Bodner suggested cutting memberships, such as CCM. R. Marconi countered that CCM is a valuable tool for researching important information.

J. Plock suggested cutting \$5k from the First Selectman's budget; all agreed.

All agreed to take \$5k out of Central Administration maintenance agreements account.

Tax Collector's budget was cut \$5k; all agreed. Conservation Commission budget was cut \$1,500; all agreed. Town Insurance was cut \$5k; all agreed.

Discussion ensued about employee taxes and insurance. L. Scholl will look into changing co-pays on medical insurance; R. Marconi disagreed, stating that would target non-union employees.

Commissions and Committees—it was suggested and all agreed to freeze all budgets to stay at the 2007-2008 budget levels. Total cut is \$3,120. Memorial Day cut \$1,590, the Historic District Commission was cut \$100, the Graveyard Committee was cut \$930, and the Youth Service Bureau was cut \$500. All Board members agreed to these cuts.

Community Grants:

HART, Mamasasco Lake Improvement Fund, The Women's Center, Volunteer Fire Department, Amos House, Chamber of Commerce, Meals on Wheels, 300th Anniversary—cut \$5k, Regional Mental Health, WeCahr, Danbury Regional, Ability Beyond Disability, Shelter of the Cross, Ann's Place, Norwalk River Watershed, Dream Homes—cut \$2,500, Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra, Founder's Hall—cut \$10k, RVNA—cut \$4,800. Total amount cut=\$22,300

B. Manners mentioned that now is the time to ask Founder's Hall to begin charging non-residents.

A. Bodner suggested rolling HART funding back to '07-'08 budget numbers and cutting Women's Center budget back too. John Katz of the Youth Service Bureau (YSB), was present in the audience and upon hearing this, stated that the YSB budget could take a \$2k cut, but don't take funding from Women's Center. This results in a total cut of \$2,500 for the YSB. It was agreed by Board members to leave the Women's Center funding alone. A. Bodner stated that he would rather cut community grants evenly instead of cutting some \$1,000 and others \$2,500 etc.

The HART bus was discussed. Social Services received \$7k in private donations so senior do not have to pay with a "fare box"—their rides are free.

If all community grant numbers were brought back to the '07-'08 numbers and Founder's Hall increased by \$10k instead of \$20, this would mean a total budget of \$22,763 for community grants (an 8.9 percent decrease). Adding \$2k back to HART would mean a total cut of \$7,300.

B. Manners stated the Board should look at cutting things that are not necessities, such as RSO, 300th Anniversary, etc. Cut the 300th another \$2,500=\$5k total.

At this time the total cut from the budget is \$97k.

Golf Course—the idea to roll back the golf cart path maintenance to last year's number was discussed. A. Bodner stated that looking at their total budget of \$1M, the Board should cut \$10k and they can decide specifically what to eliminate.

Parks & Recreation—A. Bodner stated they have a \$3M budget. J. Plock, D. Masters, B. Manners all agreed to take \$25k from non-revenue generating operations. K. Miller stated his concern on behalf of the Board of Education that Parks & Rec will say they don't have the funds to maintain the school grounds. A. Bodner suggested taking \$50k out of revenue or non-revenue generating items. Final decision was to take \$25k out to start and come back to it if necessary. All agreed.

Barlow Mountain Pool—D. Masters stated that if anything is done with this pool it should be done at a Special Town Meeting or a Public Meeting. Taxpayers need to know. Once it is cut, it won't come back and it is a revenue neutral budget item.

Tree Warden—it was decided by all to take \$10k out of this budget.

Police—This total budget is \$4.5M. B. Manners suggested taking DARE program out; R. Marconi countered this is irresponsible. It is the only program young students have. J. Plock suggested taking \$15k out of the budget and let them decide exactly what to cut. All agreed.

Fire—Take \$10k out of this budget and let them decide exactly what to cut. All agreed.

Highway—cut \$5k; all agreed.

Parking—cut \$4,200; all agreed.

D. Masters stated there is no money for the Venus building roof now. The Playhouse was going to do work, now they'll have to wait for their plans. R. Marconi stated that we'll have to do what we can with the money that we have.

A. Bodner stated the Town should think about selling the Venus building. R. Marconi stated maybe we will look at that another time; not today.

Town Utilities—cut \$5k from solid waste; all agreed. Solid waste fees increased 3.5% but Town also sees revenue from recycling. These revenues are used to cover the 3.5% increase in solid waste.

The Barn—cut \$5k; all agreed.

Library—D. Master suggested going back to the '07-'08 budget levels = \$64k.

Chris Nolan from the Library was present and stated if this cut is realized, the library would have to cut its hours of service. This cut is disproportionate to all other cuts. There are 1300 library users per day.

R. Marconi suggested cutting \$32k; all agreed. This reflects last year's budget numbers plus a 2% increase. B. Manners stated the library is not considered the same as police and fire.

Welcome to Ridgefield—cut \$1k; all agreed.

Heart and Hypertension—cannot cut; this is funding future liabilities.

Tiger Hollow—this account is a sinking fund that was established as part of the original agreement. Funds would be contributed for the building of Tiger Hollow only if the Town would promise an account that would be funded each year to cover replacement turf carpet. This is an agreement and funding cannot be reduced.

Contingency Line—discussion ensued about whether to increase this to cover potential shortfalls. D. Masters stated she would rather not pre-tax the taxpayers; just go to them when needed. R. Marconi stated we may not need it; why increase it? A. Bodner said he knows \$50k is not enough. The goal is to not have to go back to voters in the middle of the year; must decide that the budget as a whole is adequate. D. Masters stated contingency cannot be used for fallback on budget items that did not pass at the referendum.

At this point, \$177,029 has been cut from the budget. R. Marconi stated this is level 1 cuts; level 2 cuts will include personnel.

J. Plock suggested freezing the tax credit at this year's level and plan to restore the increases next year. R. Marconi stated the agreement made with AARP was to increase the senior tax credit by \$37 per household each year. Discussion ensued about increasing the tax credit by 50% (\$18 per household). This would cut \$25k from the budget. All agreed.

B. Manners asked about if Bond Counsel, Frank D'Ercole, advised whether we will go to referendum or Town Meeting for the revised budget. R. Marconi responded that Attorney D'Ercole stated that based on the revised charter, the revised budget would have to be sent to a Town Meeting for approval. B. Manners stated that perhaps the Town Meeting could be from 8 am until 8 pm at one polling place and votes could be cast all day long.

Jan Rifkinsen, a member of the 2005 Charter Revision Commission, was present at the meeting and stated that the charter does not lay out the details of the process following a failed budget referendum, leaving it open for interpretation. It should go to referendum; it's insane to go to a town meeting.

Phil Bauman, Keeler Road, said the intent was to go to referendum.

B. Manners moved to send the budget approved by the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance to a town meeting to be referred to a referendum. Discussion ensued about the process and the timeline of meetings. The referendum cannot occur any sooner than June 3, therefore the Town meeting must fall on May 27.

D. Masters moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to hold a Town Meeting for the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance approved budget on May 27 at Veteran's Park School at 7:30 pm and a Referendum on June 3, time and place of the Referendum to be set at the Town Meeting. Motion carried 5-0.

J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to cut \$100,000 from the Capital Financing budget. Motion carried 5-0.

J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to hold a Board of Selectmen Special meeting on May 20 at 6 pm to discuss the final budget recommendation. Motion carried 5-0.

J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Special meeting. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Gannon Lionetti