

BOARD of SELECTMEN SPECIAL MEETING – MAY 20, 2008

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 6:00 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 (arrived at 6:05 pm) , D. Masters, J. Plock,
J. Wahlberg

Agenda

Discuss & Finalize Budget

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

R. Marconi asked J. Wahlberg to review the budget cuts made by the Board of Selectmen after the referendum was defeated.

J. Wahlberg read off the list of budget reductions, beginning with the Capital Project Financing -cut by \$100,000 (police cars cut \$50,000, computers cut by \$40,000, doors cut by \$10,000).

\$25,000 Senior Tax Credit Reduction. R. Marconi clarified that the Board discussed a freeze but voted to cut the increase in half. Instead of a \$37 increase it will be \$18.50.

\$5,000 Selectman's Office

\$5,000 Central Administration

\$5,000 Tax Collector

\$1,540 Conservation

\$5,000 Town Insurance – liability

\$1,590 Memorial Day

\$100 Historic District

\$930 Cemetery

\$2,500 Youth Service Bureau

\$4,800 HART

\$10,000 Founders Hall

\$5,000 300th Anniversary

\$2,500 Dream Home Association

\$10,000 Golf Course

\$25,000 Parks and Recreation

\$9,569 Tree Warden

\$15,000 Police

\$10,000 Fire

\$4,200 Parking Authority

\$5,000 Highway

\$5,000 Town Utilities - Solid Waste

\$5,000 The Barn

\$32,000 Library

\$1,000 Welcome to Ridgefield

\$2,000 School Buildings (engineering Department)

Total cuts are \$297,729. R. Marconi noted that when the Board made the original cuts, the total amount was slightly over \$300,000. Does the Board want to consider cutting anything else back to bring the number up to \$300,000? D. Masters and B. Manners stated no. J. Plock believes there will be more cuts to come and there will be more work to be done. The budget went down so strongly and there was such a mandate by the voters, that these cuts will not be enough. Thinks that their mandate was stronger than this and that is why she is pessimistic.

B. Manners stated the capital is now out of the budget. Each year we under-cut the budget; we have needs that are barely addressed. To be able to provide the kind of service that people ask for is difficult with a decreased budget. On the Town side of the budget, there is nothing left except people. In many cases we don't have extra people. I hope that those who sat through our budget meetings will share with their friends about what they witnessed. We have cut this budget thoroughly.

R. Marconi stated that he doesn't know if the budget vote is an indication that we have to cut the budget back to bare bones. Oil was at \$100/barrel when the budget was done. Goldman Sachs forecasted oil to reach \$148/barrel in six months. The advice was to just pay the market, ride with it and do the best you can. Do we now add another \$200,000 and cut \$200,000 to cover that? These are severe cuts—I hope the people of the community realize the serious work that's been done.

J. Plock heard that people don't want services cut, but at a certain point, service will be affected.

B. Manners stated that when you don't maintain things, in the end they cost far more. Items must be repaired and fixed when they haven't been maintained. It is penny wise and pound foolish.

D. Masters motioned to send the recommended Town Operating budget of \$30,540,762, reflecting a cut of \$297,729, and increase request of 4.56%--this does not include debt service--to the Board of Finance. B. Manners seconded the motion.

J. Berendsen Hill clarified that the Board of Selectmen voted at their last meeting to reduce the Capital Finance Projects by \$100,000 so it should not be included in this motion.

D. Masters withdrew the originally stated motion. B. Manners withdrew her second.

D. Masters motioned to send the recommended Town Operating budget of \$30,540,762, reflecting a cut of \$197,729, in addition to the previously voted upon \$100,000 at the May 15 meeting and increase request of 4.56%--this does not include debt service; it remains at \$14,168,611--to the Board of Finance. B. Manners seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0.

Phil Bauman, Keeler Drive, questioned the senior tax cut. It was his understanding that people would not be affected by the cuts, but this will affect seniors. R. Marconi clarified that the people that were referred to are employees. Cuts in the budget will no doubt affect people.

J. Berendsen-Hill mentioned that the senior tax credit is currently \$1,011.

Mike Hagan stated that the attitude of taxpayers is very poor. People are afraid and he does not think that the numbers put forth will be enough to pass this budget.

R. Marconi stated the Board is aware of the increasing cost of food, oil, etc. We worked very hard to get the budget to where it is; if the people feel that the cuts are not enough, they will let us know.

A. Bodner asked whether the debt service will be touched? Can the Golf Course or Parks & Recreation raise their revenue? R. Marconi stated that is not the purview of the Board of Selectmen. A. Bodner agrees that we cannot provide the level of services if more cuts are made. I don't think we can shave these numbers any more and continue to provide the services the residents have come to know.

Keith Miller stated the Board of Education voted to expedite to close-out of the building projects.

Board of Education budget was discussed; Keith Miller joined the Board of Selectmen. The Board of Education has identified \$1,069,300 in reductions. \$338,000 of that will go to offset the increased costs in oil, diesel, and summer special education placement. \$561,000 will go to a reduction of the \$76.7 million dollar budget. The total is \$949,000. Also voted to work expeditiously close out master building projects close out and get our money from the State of CT—think it's about \$2.5-2.8 million. Also voted to request that the Branchville boiler be re-visited by the voters.

Mr. Miller went through a list of many other reductions, resulting in the total of \$561,000. After all reductions were made, the Board of Education challenged the superintendent, understanding that many people are struggling. However, there is a price to pay. Other suggested cuts were listed should the budget vote fail; not met with interest or joy. These

include: eliminate administrative positions, eliminating all after-school programs—athletic programs: hockey, basketball, wrestling, skiing, saving \$227,000. 6th grade language instruction, increasing class sizes for the advanced placement. These are “level 2” cuts. Board did not come to any agreement with liking or approving these cuts.

J. Plock motioned, D. Masters seconded the motion to send the non-binding recommendation of the Board of Education budget in the amount of \$76,261,068 to the Board of Finance. Motion carries 5-0.

Jan Rifkinson asked about the state bond reimbursement for the Master Building Committee projects. Is this a true bond? J. Wahlberg replied that the bond money being held by the State of CT and will be returned to us when the projects are closed out.

A. Bodner stated he was uncomfortable recommending this budget because he was just given the numbers at the meeting. R. Marconi stated that this is the process as stated in the Charter. It is a non-binding recommendation to the Board of Finance.

D. Masters motioned to send the Branchville Boiler to the Board of Finance to look at the item. J. Plock also stated that there were so many capital items that were very urgent. A. Bodner seconded the motion. After much discussion, motion carried 5-0.

D. Masters discussed the importance of the building and keeping it up and running. If school was ever closed, it is a town building and would be put to use. We can't let it run down. It would still need to be heated. If it breaks down in the winter, it will cost more money to repair and replace.

B. Manners stated that there were some other very important items in the capital budget. However, can't see taking a risk and having to close school and replace the boiler in a rush. Things are not usually done well when rushed.

John Katz stated this item is like a golf course buried in a budget; it will pay back dividends.

R. Marconi had conversation with bond counsel clarifying the charter and budget next steps. The May 27 Town Meeting will be adjourned to June 3 at East Ridge Middle School and there will be one voting place. There will be no absentee ballots because the statute is silent on absentee ballots on town meetings. However, there is “curbside service” for those who cannot walk into the building. They can drive to the curb, have someone who is with them get out and go into the building and return with someone from the voting poll will approach them and get their identification and then go back and get a ballot for them to use to cast their vote and that ballot will be brought to the machine and they can cast their vote this way. This has been approved by bond counsel and the State Election's office.

J. Plock moved to reconsider the vote that was voted on last Thursday, D. Masters seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

J. Plock moved to rescind the original motion that set the Town Meeting and Referendum, D. Masters seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

J. Plock moved to call for the Town Meeting to take place at 7:30 at VP School on the 27th of May at which time it will be adjourned to Tuesday, June 3 at ERMS at 6:00 in the morning and will stay open for the voting until 8:00 at night, D. Masters seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Phil Bauman suggested that notices be put up at the other voting locations--Yaniv Gym and Scotts Ridge Middle School—informing voters that there is only one voting location which is East Ridge Middle School. J. Plock and R. Marconi stated this is a very good idea.

J. Rifkinsen asked what new information was received from the last meeting that clarified the Charter? R. Marconi responded that bond counsel explained the process stated in the charter.

B. Serfilippi stated the explanatory text issued to all voters when Town approved the new Charter stated “if referendum does not pass budget, subsequent approval need only be at a Town Meeting.”

A. Bodner moved to adjourn meeting; D. Masters seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Gannon Lionetti