

BOARD of SELECTMEN SPECIAL MEETING
& PUBLIC HEARING – JUNE 7, 2006

Veteran’s Park School Auditorium, 8 Governor Street – 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, D. Masters, J. Plock

Absent: B. Manners

Board of Selectmen Special Meeting Agenda – 7:30 p.m.

1. Set Town Meeting Date for Pension Contribution Transfer
2. Economic Development Commission Interviews (2) – Alex Karsanidi, Sr., Robert Cascella
3. Selectman’s Report

Public Hearing Agenda – 8:00 p.m.

A Public Hearing of the Town of Ridgefield, Connecticut, will be held in the Auditorium of Veteran’s Park School, 8 Governor Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut, on Wednesday, June 7, 2006, 8:00 p.m., to receive public comment on the draft report of the Charter Revision Commission.

R. Marconi called the Special Meeting of the Board of Selectmen to order at 7:30 p.m.

1. Set Town Meeting Date for Pension Contribution Transfer – This request is because the funding of the Ridgefield Pension has not been funded at the recommended levels by the Town which created the rolling forward of pension contributions.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to set a Town Meeting for June 14, 2006, 7:30 P.M., Town Hall Lower Level Conference Room, for the purpose of approval of Department of Finance Memorandum #200602, requesting the transfer of Conveyance Taxes revenue in excess of estimates in the amount of \$150,000 with a corresponding increase in the Pension revenue estimate to cover the pension contribution shortfall. Motion passed 4-0.

2. Economic Development Commission Interviews (2) – Alex Karsanidi, Sr., and Robert Cascella – Approximately 8-10 applications have been received to date. Interviews will be held at BOS meetings with the Commission appointments probably to be made in July.

Alex Karsanidi, Sr. came forward to present his candidacy. He has been a Ridgefield resident for 21 years and an active volunteer in the Ridgefield Republican Party, a member of the Ridgefield Republican Town Committee, a Member of the Town of Ridgefield Municipal Building Committee, and an active participant in the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce and the Ridgefield Rotary Club. Mr. Karsanidi expressed his support for an independent Economic Development Commission separate from the Board of Selectmen. Such Commissions are currently active in some neighboring towns. The “timing is right” for Ridgefield to do likewise. Mr. Karsanidi has been in the insurance business for himself for the last twelve years. He would like to see development of the tax base brought to the top of the list. The Economic Commission would first

assess the assets Ridgefield has to offer – commercial space, tax abatement, etc, and then develop a marketing plan to take a proactive approach to attract new business and assist businesses currently in Ridgefield with their growth and expansion plans. D. Masters inquired about the Commission’s role as a liaison with consultants and working with local landlords on rent control issues. Mr. Karsanidi responded that this depends on the charge set for the Commission – marketing, attending trade meetings, coordination with the State and the Housatonic Valley Association, research what has already been done and move on from there.

Robert Cascella came forward to present his candidacy. Mr. Cascella moved to Ridgefield in 2004 from Newtown where he served as First Selectman from 1993 to 1997. He is currently SVP at Coldwell Banker Commercial Scalzo Group in Bethel. R. Marconi read the letter received from Mr. Cascella. Mr. Cascella reported that Newtown had hired a half-time individual who in-turn spent one-half of his time with Planning & Zoning and the other one-half on economic development. Economic development takes time and focus. It doesn’t just happen. J. Plock inquired as to what did Mr. Cascella think should be done first. He responded that Ridgefield needs to do an inventory – what is currently available, are there parcels that could be rezoned to commercial? D. Masters inquired as to what did he think should be the charge for the Economic Development Commission? Mr. Cascella replied that the Commission should report to the Board of Selectmen with a dotted line liaison to Planning & Zoning. They should have dialogue with the WPCA as sewage is a big part of any development. They should not be the negotiating party; that belongs to the BOS. The local Chamber of Commerce needs to be actively involved. R. Marconi asked how did Mr. Cascella see the market right now? He replied that some parts are hot, retail is strong, office market is very spotty, investment is hot. The good news is that Fairfield County is pretty much built out and investors are looking further out from NY.

3. Selectman’s Report –

- March to Victory is coming up. Keith Jones has again chaired the organization of a special historical commemoration event. Fireworks are scheduled at Ridgefield High School on July 4th.
- Library Capital Drive – Chris Nolan, Library Director, came forward to discuss. Peter Coffin recently elected Library Board Director, and the decision has been made to work on the Library’s capital drive. They will be coming to the BOS in the hope of seeking fifty percent support. The library needs to be expanded and updated, including a special teens’ space. If the building is once touched, they will then have to become ADA compliant. The library is a community asset that appeals to all ages. Expansion of the library should be a partnership with the BOS. J. Plock inquired as to the requested amount of support by the Town? \$10 million is the request, less than one-half of the amount that would be raised privately. The Library Board would like to get going on this project as soon as possible and would like to have a 2008 ground-breaking. They already have \$2 million set aside for the possible addition of 25,000 to 50,000 sq. feet. \$500,000 is available from the State in a special fund for libraries. Building costs continue to escalate and they feel that can save approximately \$1 million by starting to build sooner rather than later. J. Plock pointed out how both the Police and Fire Departments have been seeking new buildings and have been put off because of the school funding. A. Bodner pointed out that the cost seemed high per sq. ft. The Rec Center cost \$13.8 million for 52,000 sq. feet five years ago. R. Marconi indicated that the goal is to get the debt service down as it is still high. The consensus was “let’s get informed”.

- The Ridgefield Chorale has asked for use of one of the empty rooms on the 2nd floor of the Venus Building as a practice room for five months to prepare for their gala benefit on October 27, 2006, “Sophisticated...With a Twist” (SWAT). Use of the space would be restricted to after-business hours and weekends. It was agreed to let them use the space with the understanding that if the space has a possible renter, they will move out.

The business portion of the evening’s meeting was concluded at 7:50 p.m. with the Public Hearing scheduled to begin at 8:00 p.m.

Public Hearing

R. Marconi called the Public Hearing to order at 8:00 p.m. for the purpose of receiving public comment on the draft report of the Charter Revision Commission.

Mike Lordi, Lost Mine Place – regarding Section 10-3: Preparation of the budget for the coming fiscal year and levying of taxes. Mr. Lordi wanted clarification of how the Board of Selectmen would review the Board of Education budget. He feels this process would further politicize the budget process. The Board of Finance only should review the Board of Education budget. They are responsible for the financial status of the Town. The Board of Selectmen do not attend Board of Education meetings and thus will not have the complete picture prior to reviewing the Board of Education Budget. Mr. Lordi supports multi-year financial planning and would like to see a report that shows these numbers. This way a budget is a planning tool, not just numbers for a single year.

Mary Miller, Acre Lane – expressed opposition to the proposal to have the Board of Education budget reviewed by the Board of Selectmen. She recommends that this proposal be dropped, and does not see a problem with the procedure that is currently in place. The Board of Education currently provides a non-binding recommendation to the Board of Finance. The final word on the budgets belongs to the voters. She understands that the Board of Selectmen receive the criticism.

Steffie Jones, Branchville Road – regarding Section 3-5: Petitioned Town Meetings, and Section 3-15, Referendum (Deleted). Section 3-5 deletes Section 3-15. There is no mention of the appropriate subject matter for petitions to hold Town Meetings, only expenditures are mentioned. Some topics for Town Meetings do not involve expenditures. She does not think this proposal will work. She feels that anytime a petition is presented, it needs to be honored.

Tom Watson, Sharp Hill Lane – feels that the First Selectman is the CEO of the Town. Currently the BOS has no control over the total budget, which includes the portion submitted by the Board of Education. He feels that the BOS should have more authority than they currently have. The BOS should be responsible for understanding the town revenue, the income stream, etc.

John Noonan, North St. – feels that the elected Board of Selectmen should have mandatory control over the Board of Education budget. He would like to see reports that show this year’s budget, last year’s budget, etc., so that it is readily apparent what costs and allocations are going up and down. ¾’s of the taxes paid go to support the schools. This should be the responsibility of the elected officials. School spending is the only element of town spending that is not currently under BOS control.

Nancy Brandon, North Valley Rd. – indicated that she is against the changes in Section 10-3: Preparation of the budget for the coming fiscal year, and levying of taxes. She feels decisions should be made by the

voters and does not like that a Town Meeting shall not have the power to increase, decrease, eliminate, or create any budget or line item.

Kitty Fischer, Purse Lane – indicated that she has served on the Board of Education for eleven years. The Board of Education meets for many hours. They set goals and action plans, study education issues, etc. The BOS is not elected to know about education. An education budget is much more than a dollar amount. If the BOS members do not like the education budget numbers, they really do not have the background to make binding decisions about education matters.

Mary Pat Devine, Lakeside Dr. – expressed her desire to have a say in how Ridgefield’s government works. We currently have two budgets, an education budget and a Town budget. The Board of Finance reviews both and determines what the town can afford. She does not see anything wrong with the way the budget system functions currently.

John Katz, Ridgebury Rd. – commented on Section 4-7, the Filling of Boards and Commissions. The current charter provides for a Commission to vote for their own committee replacement in case of a resignation. Why should this be changed? R. Marconi indicated that this came about because currently cannot advertise for a replacement until the individual actually leaves. It would be preferable to select the replacement while the individual is still in the position. The wording of Section 4-7 will be reviewed.

James Carroll, Silver Spring Rd. – indicated support for the Board of Selectmen to have oversight over the Board of Education budget. He applauds the CRC as this is a big issue. No one currently questions “hard” the spending on education.

Phil Baumann, Keeler Dr. – commented on the subject of town meetings called by a petition. The number of people needed to petition is not stated. It needs to be stated how many signatures need to be submitted on other than financial matters as well. 40% of the electorate are needed for a proposal costing over \$500,000, no requirement if less. This needs to be looked at.

Section 4-9, Election of tax collector, treasurer and town clerk stating that an individual cannot hold two elected offices in the town. Can an individual hold one appointed and one elected position? This needs to be defined further.

Section 10-3, Mr. Baumann feels that it is good for the Board of Selectmen to review the School Board budget. He thinks it is fiscally responsible for the elected Board of Selectmen to be able to review all matters related to the fiscal health of the town. Line veto is not requested, but the BOS could have some input also before the budgets go before the voters.

Dom D’Addario, Tanton Hill Rd. – indicated that he is in favor of 10-3. When taxes go up, the BOS is blamed. 2/3rds of tax dollars go to the Board of Education. He feels the BOS should have a say over all fiscal matters. Another pair of eyes is helpful.

Glenn Cordelli, Blue Ridge Rd. – stated that he is a former Charter Revision Commission member, former Board of Education member and currently on the Board of Finance. He feels that the Board of Education and Board of Finance set targets and possible mill rate in early December. 10-3 strengthens the language of the Charter. 10-7 whereby the Board of Finance requests multi-year budgeting, will help the process. He supports having the Board of Education budget review moved to the Board of Selectmen. The BOS currently reviews the education capital budget. This proposal is referring to the education operation budget as well. This process will aid the purchasing power and process of the town.

Kitsy Snow, Snowberry Lane – referred to 10-3. BOS members need to attend Board of Education meetings to understand how education dollars are spent. Board of Education meetings are public.

Rob Miller, Acre Lane – pointed out that the Board of Education members put in many hours working on their budget. They will not be as willing to do this if the BOS vetoes their suggestions – the results of their labors.

Bob Opotzner, Farm Lane – Chairman of the Charter Revision Commission (CRC), feels that the Commission did not put in language to implement how the BOS members will effectuate the decision to review the Board of Education budget. BOS members will have to attend Board of Education meetings in order to understand what is going on behind the budget decisions. Arbitration and teacher tenure affect greatly the education budget.

Maureen Kozlark, O’Neill Ct. – does not feel that this area of the Charter needs to be changed. Checks and balances are already in place. Voters can vote yes or no. She also thinks the BOS should have a four-year term. A two-year term is divisive to the Town.

Steffi Jones, Branchville Rd. – indicated that she cannot understand why not lengthen the BOS terms to four years? This change should be made.

Tom Watson, Sharp Hill Lane – indicated a desire for the Board of Education to allow comments at the end of their meetings and not just at the beginning.

Phil Baumann, Keeler Dr. – asked how does the Board of Education come up with their “wish list” every year?

Becky Mucchetti Farmingville Rd. – served as the Vice Chairman of the previous Charter Revision Commission. She agrees that the BOS should have four-year terms.

R. Marconi indicated that to date ten emails had been received, nine expressing opposition to 10-3, and one in support. The review schedule of the report of the Charter Revision Commission is set by statute:

- Back to the CRC by June 20
- July 18, CRC final report to the BOS
- August 1, BOS approve or reject
- August 29, publish the charter
- November election, pass on to the voters

The Public Hearing was closed at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson