

BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING – JUNE 14, 2006

TOWN HALL/LOWER LEVEL CONFERENCE ROOM – 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, B. Manners, D. Masters, J. Plock

Special Town Meeting – 7:30 P.M.

Notice is hereby given that a Special Town Meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 14, 2006 at 7:30 P.M., Town Hall Lower Level Conference Room, 400 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT to consider and authorize the Town of Ridgefield to increase the appropriation for the 2006 pension contribution by \$150,000 from additional revenues received from the conveyance taxes.

Minutes of the Special Town Meeting under separate cover.

Agenda – Board of Selectmen Meeting (immediately following Town Meeting)

1. Economic Development Commission Interview (2): Scott Honore & Aaron Prills
2. Vendor Permit Application Interview – David J. Lanni, “David’s Wheel-E-Good Food”
3. Board of Education Lease Approval – Jay Wahlberg
4. Kids in Crisis Outreach Counselor
5. 3-Year Agreement to Allow Spring Mowing at McKeon Farm – George Orlan
6. Charter Revision Commission Report Discussion – Frank D’Ercole, Esq & David Grogins, Esq.
7. Tax Bills Under \$10 Send to Town Meeting
8. Possible Executive Session and Vote on SEIU Agreement

R. Marconi called the Board of Selectmen Meeting to order immediately following the Town Meeting.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to move Agenda Item #8 to #1 and to add a possible vote following a short Executive Session Meeting. Motion passed 5-0.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to recess the public session and go into Executive Session at 7:35 p.m., inviting Laurie Scholl, Director of Human Resources for the Town of Ridgefield, to attend. Motion passed 5-0.

R. Marconi called the Board of Selectmen Meeting back to order following the Executive Session Meeting.

1. Possible Vote on SEIU Agreement

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to accept the SEIU Agreement as discussed in the Executive Session. Motion passed 5-0.

2. Economic Development Commission Interview (2): Scott Honore & Aaron Prills

Scott Honore came forward to present himself to the BOS. R. Marconi read the May 22nd email received from Mr. Honore and summarized his resume detailing extensive IT consulting experience. He would like to help with the decision-making process so assist Ridgefield to build a better-focused Main Street, not just banks and realtors. People come to Ridgefield to shop and dine. J. Plock asked Mr. Honore what he thought should be the first focus of the Economic Development Commission. He replied that the Commission should look at what types of businesses are here now. Where are the vacancies? Main Street had more retail in the past. D. Masters replied that her vision is a little broader than Main Street. There is a need for “thinking out of the box”. What about the business climate in Connecticut? Would he be willing to tackle this? The answer was yes.

Mr. Bodner asked if he had any ideas in how to attract larger businesses to the area? Mr. Honore replied that the Commission should work with the Chamber of Commerce researching what types of companies would be attracted to this Ridgefield and then approach these companies. Mr. Honore feels he has the intellect and initiative to be an asset to the Commission.

Aaron Prills came forward to present himself to the BOS. R. Marconi read the letter received from Mr. Prills. He grew up in Glastonbury, CT and moved to Ridgefield in 2000. He indicated he would be proactive in putting in place an economic development plan. D. Masters asked what should be the first focus of the Commission? Mr. Prills replied that he feels the Commission should work with outside consultants, what type of companies would be the best suited to come to Ridgefield? A marketing plan should then be initiated seeking out those companies – not wait for them to come to Ridgefield first.

B. Manners inquired as to what did Mr. Prills think would be the strongest selling point to corporations? Mr. Prills replied that Ridgefield’s infrastructure would be appealing to newcomers – restaurants, available housing, not the traffic of New York, possible tax breaks. A. Bodner inquired as to his availability time-wise. Mr. Prills indicated that he works out of Stamford, and when he does travel, it is to New York or Boston for the day.

3. Vendor Permit Application Interview – David J. Lanni, “David’s Wheel-E-Good Food” – Mr. Lanni came forward to introduce himself to the BOS . He wishes to sell fresh, cooked-to-order meals (i.e., burgers, chicken wings, chicken tenders, breakfast egg sandwiches), pre-packaged candies, cookies, chips, yogurts and soft drinks – all from his mobile kitchen. He likes to sell at large events such as horse shows, concerts, car shows, film shoots. He has been a Ridgefield resident since 2002. Mr. Lanni already has a vendor permit to operate in Westchester County. He is not looking for a permanent location, but did comment on the possibility of one spot on Route 7 across from Days Inn. R. Marconi pointed out that Mr. Lanni has passed the police check, Dept. of Public Health check and also that of the fire marshal. **J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve for one year from this date, June 14, 2006, the Vendor Application as requested by David J. Lanni for “David’s Wheel-E-Good Food”. Motion passed 5-0.**
4. Board of Education Lease Approval – Jay Wahlberg – J. Wahlberg and Donna Case came forward to discuss the “Resolution Approving a Tax-Exempt Equipment Lease/Purchase Agreement for Computer Equipment and Related Infrastructure for the Board of Education”. J. Wahlberg pointed out that this is a tax-exempt lease purchase and thus needs to be approved by the Board of

Selectmen, the Board of Finance, and then to a Town Meeting. This lease is already part of the budget.

B. Manners moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to send to the Board of Finance for their approval and then to a Public Hearing and a Town Meeting the resolution for a tax-exempt equipment lease/purchase agreement for computer equipment and related infrastructure for the Board of Education, with total lease payments not to exceed \$450,000. Motion passed 5-0.

5. Kids in Crisis Outreach Counselor – Denise Qualey, Tracy Duva-Ganino, Leslie Boissy, and Michael Ferguson came forward to meet with the Board of Selectmen regarding the Kids in Crisis Outreach Program, which is currently part-time at East Ridge Middle School and full-time at Ridgefield High School. Denise Qualey is the Executive Director and Leslie Boissy is the Outreach Counselor at the High School. They are advocating for the need for this program and would like to expand to Scotts Ridge as well. The dilemma is funding. They do receive town funding, seek grants and do fund-raising as well, but this is a constant challenge. They would like to create a situation in which they are not chasing dollars each year and would like to provide stability to their staff. Their focus is to reach the kids “who slip thru the cracks”. They are located right in the school buildings. R. Marconi shared the letters of support for the Kids in Crisis program received from Sharon Windisch and Gail Baker, Ridgefield High School Nurses, Frank Ciancio, Counselor at Ridgefield High School, Ruth Leibowitz, Co-Chair of the Ridgefield Youth Commission, Joan Voss, Director of Ridgefield Alternative High School, Maggie Meriwether, Ridgefield High School Health Teacher, and Thomas McMorran, Assistant Principal of Ridgefield High School.

Mr. Wahlberg suggested utilizing fund balance to do a community grant after July 1, 2006. They are already receiving \$34,000 in town allocated funding for fiscal year 2007. Why is Kids in Crisis funded independently of the school budget? The philosophy is for their director and counselors to not be school employees, the youth view it as more confidential, Kids in Crisis counselors are “full-time kid counselors”, totally dedicated to the youth. The program was piloted in Westport. The New Canaan program is fully funded by the town. They were previously in Stamford, but Stamford cut funds from their health budget.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve an allocation of \$35,000 out of 2006 fund balance and forward this request to the Board of Finance as financial assistance to the outreach program, “Kids in Crisis”. Motion passed 5-0. D. Masters indicated that she would personally go to the Board of Finance to lobby for approval of this request.

6. 3-Year Agreement to Allow Spring Mowing at McKeon Farmm – George Orlan
R. Marconi indicated that he wished to take this item off the agenda, but he did wish to get approval to get the grass cut prior to the “March to Victory” weekend, June 30 thru July 2, 2006.
B. Manners moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to permit Kevin Dumont to mow Ridgebury Meadow property prior to the “March to Victory” weekend, June 30 thru July 2, 2006. Motion passed 5-0.
7. Charter Revision Commission Report Discussion – Frank D’Ercole, Esq. & David Grogins, Esq.

Attorneys Frank D’Ercole, Bond Counsel from the firm Robinson & Cole, and David Grogins, Town Counsel, came forward to discuss the Charter Revisions Commission Report. They were present to provide counsel to the Board of Selectmen prior to the Board’s submission of their

response to the Charter Revision Commission's Report, which is due by June 20, 2006. The Board is to review the recommendations made in the Report and write back to the Commission. The Commission's final report to the BOS is due back from the Commission on or before July 20th.

Section 3-5, Petitioned Town Meetings - This Section is recommending a "tiered approach" for presentation of petitions to call for a Town Meeting. D. Grogins commented that he feels this is an "ill-founded attempt to modify". It only confuses. He feels it would be a mistake to adopt Section 3-5. Mr. D'Ercole stated that there are various ways to get to a Town Meeting under this charter and under general statutes and they are all confused. One hundred signatures on a petition is not enough for a 26,000 population town with approximately 15,000 voters. B. Manners pointed out that if Board of Finance approval is necessary before an issue can go to a town meeting, this process negates the power of the petitioner. A petitioner wants to get a sense of the community. A town meeting could be called by the Board of Selectmen on the recommendation of the Board of Finance. A. Bodner pointed out that he sees several issues. A very low threshold can call for a town meeting, which may well in turn have small attendance. Only the Board of Finance can say no. This whole issue needs much more work. He suggests asking for clarification. One hundred signatures on a petition is too low a number. Barbara Serfilippi, Ridgefield Town Clerk, and Cynthia Bruno, Registrar of Voters, were invited to the table to participate in the discussion. They had sent a letter expressing their concern about this proposed section change. They suggest adopting the existing protocol stated in the Connecticut state statutes which call for 200 signatures on a petition. R. Marconi read their June 13 letter.

R. Marconi indicated that he feels that no BOS or Board of Finance should be able to prevent a town meeting and a vote on an issue. The town meeting should be the ultimate decision-maker. This issue needs to be clarified. A. Bodner indicated that he does not want to see one interest group after another come to a town meeting and push something that is against the decision of the elected boards. Mr. D'Ercole indicated that he has not seen this happen, but it could. He referred to the September 2005 letter from his firm. He feels there has been mixing of financial decisions from policy decisions. Something should not be approved without knowing how it is going to be paid for. Do we want town meetings to be petition-called at all?

B. Manners suggested that the request be sent to the Charter Revision Commission for clarification and simplification of Sections 3-5, 3-6, and 10-4. Mr. D'Ercole and Mr. Grogins can help out this this. D. Grogins pointed out that R. Marconi is raising the question as to whether any appropriation outside of the budget above a certain amount should go to a referendum? There needs to be a section in the charter on how to adopt a budget and the approval process. B. Manners suggested a changed provision that increases the number of petitioners needed to call a town meeting, and pointed out that the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen can currently make a recommendation that will stop the process. R. Marconi indicated that the Boards should approve the desire of the public.

Legal help is needed to resolve the wording more than decide what the policy should be. D. Masters would like the wording to include increased numbers to sign the petition and not have numbers of signatures as an issue, and is against the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen preventing the desire of the petitioners for a town meeting. B. Manners agreed that she would like to see the required number of signatures increased. Simplicity to a two-tier structure is desired. She thinks the 40% turnout for a vote is too large a number. J. Plock inquired if a two-thirds vote is what is needed at a town meeting to go to a referendum. Mr. D'Ercole responded that 40% is a

high number. It was agreed that the counsel will work on the wording and email BOS members their suggestion.

Section 4-5, Eligibility for election to town offices is OK.

Section 4-7, Vacancies; elective board, offices and commissions. This rewriting has changed the wording too much. The BOS prefers the original wording. It was agreed to send this Section back to the Commission for new language.

Sections 10-2 and 10-3, There is a contradiction in the proposed charter between Sections 10-2 and 10-3 in the preparation of the budget. The issue is the calling-in of individual departments to meet with the Board of Selectmen or the Board of Finance but not meet with both Boards. The Board of Finance should not have to go thru the whole budget process with individual departments all over again. R. Marconi indicated that the BOS does not want to look at individual line items in the Board of Education budget, but just want to know what the totals are, what is the cost, etc.

R. Marconi indicating that the new charter wording really negates a town meeting that cannot vote on anything. He would prefer to go the other way and have small capital questions voted upon at a town meeting. He does not like the system of “lumping” items on the referendum, resulting in one item bringing everything else down in the referendum question. He would like the town meeting to have some “muscle” and vote on small capital questions.

Section 10-2, General powers and duties of the Board of Finance. D. Masters inquired as to how does this work if the BOS has advisory power on the Board of Education budget? The BOS will look at overall numbers and not individual items. The BOS will be discussing the Board of Education budget and how it combines with the town budget and then make a recommendation to the Board of Finance.

J. Plock stated that she feels that Paragraph 6 of Section 10-3 must be re-worded to have votes at a town meeting if possible on capital expenditures of under \$50,000. The wording needs to say “held within” three weeks. A recessed Town Meeting can be properly called as part of a previous meeting and do not need to repeat the public notice process again. If something fails, that town meeting could continue. The education and town budgets should be subject to referendum, and other subjects can be voted upon by a town meeting. The goal is to try to fix procedural problems with the current budget system as dictated by the current charter.

It was agreed to send back to the Charter Commission a request for the BOS to have a four-year term.

Mr. D’Ercole requested that the Charter Commission refer again to his firm’s September 30th letter, and clarify “special” appropriations being met bonds and unencumbered fund balance. The confusion about Section 10-4 applies to bonds and it is not meant to be that way. Bonds and notes should not have to go to a referendum, but should be able to have a referendum if want to. This wording needs clarification. In the past, anything over \$3 million had to go to a referendum. This could be changed back so that nothing on a town meeting vote has to go to a referendum; calling for a referendum could be at the discretion of the Board of Selectmen. Everything has been going to the Board of Finance. The charter should set it up the way we want the process to function and should be written accordingly in clear language. Uniformity and consistency is needed. If Section 10-4 is left the way it is, the Board of Finance would be able to block anything. Does the Board of Finance have to approve all items of capital expenditure? This has been a constant reoccurring

issue. Mr. D’Ercole feels the September 30th letter makes this issue clearer. This issue needs to be studied – does the Board of Finance have the right to stop the will of the people and override the decision of the elected officials?

It was agreed that another meeting is needed to review the Charter Commission report. June 19, 10:00 a.m., Town Hall Lower Conference Room was set for the meeting.

8. Tax Bills Under \$10 Send to Town Meeting – This is requested by Jane Berendsen-Hill, Tax Collector in her June 9, memo. State statute provides for the optional waiver of property tax under twenty-five dollars. “Any municipality may waive any property tax due in an amount less than twenty-five dollars by action of its legislative body before the date such tax is due”. On the Grand List of 2004, Ridgefield had 827 bills of less than \$10 for a total revenue of \$3,748. It costs much more to collect than the revenue generated. **J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to set a Town Meeting on June 28, 2006, 7:30 p.m., Town Hall Lower Conference Room, Ridgefield, CT for the purpose of waiving all property tax bills of less than \$10 on the Grand List of 2005. Motion passed 5-0.**

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Meeting at 10:45 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson