

PUBLIC HEARING & BOS SPECIAL MEETING – AUGUST 11, 2010

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:00 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, D. Masters, J. Plock

Agenda (immediately following Public Hearing)

1. Approval of 2010-11 Approval of 2010-11 Deer Hunt Parcels
2. Set Special Town Meeting Date for Approval of Charter Revision Ballot Questions
3. Approval of Explanatory Text Availability
4. Refunding Resolution
5. Amendment to Deferred Compensation Plan Resolution
6. Goodwill Lease—Set Public Hearing and Special Town Meeting Dates
7. Possible Executive Session: Potential Property Purchase

Public Hearing

R. Marconi called the Public Hearing to order at 7:00 p.m.

R. Marconi introduced the members of Deer Committee who would give an overview of hunt: Chairman Tom Belote, Police Chief John Roche, and Hunt Master Stefano Zandri.

Tom Belote addressed residents giving a brief background beginning with the Deer Committee report. The hunt has been in effect for five years. Howard Kilpatrick from the State Department of Environmental Protection, in attendance, has advised the Deer Management Committee of the impact of the significant overpopulation of deer, including increased tick rate and associated diseases--factors that go into choice of sites for hunt. Neighbor concerns are taken into account when selecting sites. On every parcel that has been hunted thus far, people have requested that they come back. Six parcels were dropped this year; a total of 600 acres eliminated. Parcels picked up are significant and will be used for bow hunting. Stefano Zandri chose the sites because of the deer population and that they can be hunted safely. Poachers are very prevalent in Ridgefield; these are the hunters that have been found pulling dead deer off land in front of schoolchildren. Residents are encouraged to call Tom Belote, Chief Roche, or First Selectman's office if anything questionable is noticed.

Chief Roche addressed residents, explaining that he was an ex-officio member of Deer Committee and now sits on the Deer Management Implementation Committee at the recommendation of former Chief of Police Rich Ligi. Meetings are held first Thursday of every month in the small conference room of town hall. Hunters are chosen by a sub-committee; the interview process is involved. Proficiency must be proven to the Deer Management Implementation Committee before being accepted to enter the application process. Applications are then sent to Chief Roche and a background check is completed by the Police Department. Applications are then sent to the DEP for

fish & game violations. Then applicant interviews with the Committee and if approved, an ID is issued. Following that, a meeting then takes place covering the regulations of the hunt. A parking permit is issued to each hunter which must be displayed in hunter's vehicle. A safety course must be completed through the DEP. Lists of approved hunters are kept in the communications room at the Police Station for all officers' information. We currently have a roster of 30 hunters since inception but we are looking to decrease this number. We allow a maximum of two hunters per parcel.

A paper log is given to all hunters to be completed each day the hunter is on a parcel and will be turned in at the end of the season. All hunting is done from 12-15' tree stands, shooting down only. All stands are placed out of the line of sight from the public. A by-product of this hunt is that many deer poachers have been found and caught. All property to be hunted is clearly marked and signs are highly visible to anyone passing by. Before the hunt commences, a letter is sent to adjoining homeowners. Often the hunt master will go to neighborhoods door to door or to association meetings to educate homeowners. Bait stations are removed from the area after hunt season. Tom Belote is a designated DEP check station—hunter must appear before him to verify hunt and take for day. This is not an open hunt—very controlled. Many people have been turned away. No deer has ever been lost.

Stef Zandri, hunt master, addressed the residents, discussing the considerations that are used when choosing properties. He has hunted deer in Ridgefield for 30 years. Considerations are: 1—size of the parcel. Ridgefield has 20,000 acres of open space. Most properties range from 10 to 25 or 30 acres. This size is big enough to hunt safely. 2—geographical location. We are having hard time finding parcels in the southern part of town. 3—can we hunt this parcel safely? 80-90% of the parcels are archery only. 4—proximity to schools and houses. We cannot be closer than 1500' to a school. 5—amount of deer signs that are seen. It is difficult to find parcels that do not show visible deer signs. 6—accessibility to hunters. The best way is to reach out to homeowners for access. 7—trail systems; does it get a lot of use from a lot of people. We try to make sure proposed hunt areas have very little people movement on them.

Howard Kilpatrick, State DEP, spoke briefly stating the Town of Ridgefield goes way beyond in detail and diligence to create an effective, safe hunt.

R. Marconi stated that research has proven that Sturges Park has deed restriction and therefore cannot be used for hunting. The floor was then opened for residents' questions.

Will Murtough, 47 Pheasant Lane, stated he doesn't want to be considered as a NIMBY and recognizes the value of the deer hunt. His anger comes from the lack of communication within the community that this is going to effect. B. Manners' concern at the last Board of Selectmen meeting made this meeting tonight possible. Three meetings took place according to the Deer Management Implementation Committee, but I was unaware of the meetings. Where are the deer going to be taken out on Scoden Drive?

Sonya Girolamo, 56 Scoden Drive, asked about the deer removal point. She expressed concern that it not be at a bus stop.

Stefano Zandri stated that unless they access the area through private property allowing them access, the deer will be taken out through the well system area. He will make sure it is not at a bus stop.

Keith Namiot, 107 Scoden Drive, expressed concern about the parcel on Scoden because it is not as wide as it looks. As a hunter, he supports the program, but does have a concern with such a narrow parcel. He believes the hunters will take all precautions, but accidents do happen. Kids walk the property between Scoden & Pheasant. It is less than 500' wide. Massachusetts law states a safe distance is 500' from any dwelling and 500' from any road. The DMIC should exercise more prudence around the distance of the properties being hunted.

Heidi Namiot, 107 Scoden Drive, stated that she walks with her daughter during school hours. She spoke with Howard Kilpatrick this morning and finds a contradiction with his and Stefano Zandri's statements about deer's territory and the amount of property they traverse.

Howard Kilpatrick stated no setbacks are required with archery in CT. There have been only 2 archery accidents in the State of CT in past 20 years; it is a very safe form of hunting. The hunter is located in a tree stand and shoots down into ground.

Paul Abrahams, 30 Scoden Drive, questioned the timeline of this hunt. What is the long-term plan? Stressed species will extra pro-create. Would like an estimated timeline.

Howard Kilpatrick stated a 2009 survey showed 62 deer per square mile. The goal is 25 deer per square mile. We don't know where we are right now. Wilton began 4 yrs before Ridgefield and will continue hunting around the water aquifer areas because they are noticing underforest regeneration. This is a good sign.

Mark Grecco, Old Sib Road, asked will picture IDs be on the hunters? Chief Roche responded yes, the hunters are required to carry their ID; copies are also at the police station. Mr. Grecco asked are the hunters CT state residents? Stef Zandri responded that we tried to keep the initiative local, but the response from Ridgefield area hunters was not enough. New York and MA residents have come. Mr. Grecco asked about the NY special hunt—they are not baiting. Is it possible for us to have a successful hunt without bait stations? This does not seem very sporting. Tom Belote stated no—this is not a recreational hunt. This is most effective way to proceed. Mr. Grecco stated that the Conservation Commission has not shown that there is a severe ecological issue with the property. They state "no comment". This must be demonstrated when using bait according to SS 490. Howard Kilpatrick stated this law applies to sharpshooter permits with bait—not to archery. The State has made a finding that Zone 11 & Zone 12 do indeed show severe ecological damage.

William Osgood, 209 Ivy Hill Road, thanked the Deer Management Implementation Committee. There are too many deer. The Great Swamp area is clearly visible now due to the undergrowth and vegetation taken by the deer. He has had lyme disease 3 times.

Bernard Maher, 151 Lakeside Drive, is impressed with professionalism of the Deer Management Implementation Committee. He expressed extreme doubts whether what the DMIC is doing will accomplish anything at all. Went to the Department of Health website and gathered statistics—tick disease cases in 2006: 29; 2007-40; 2009-27. He shared the number of deer car strikes information from the Police Department—2005-64; 2006-57; 2007-50; 2008-49; 2009-60. We are accomplishing nothing to lessen the amount of car accidents. He shared statistics about the number of deer per square mile, counted via helicopter: 2006—29 (which was a decrease from 2003), 2009—30 (after 6 runs) in zone 11—biggest problem area in CT. 2010—60 deer per square mile (using factor of two). Howard Kilpatrick responded: did survey. Went from 3 surveys to 6 surveys.

Based on all published research, half the deer are missed so the factor of two were used. Need a reliable statistical tool.

R. Marconi stated that several years ago the DPH stopped requiring that labs report lyme disease information.

J. Plock stated that Ridgefield was number one in the State of CT with lyme disease cases.

Jennifer Reid, LDTE, stated the numbers are very poor—they are not reported with accuracy so we don't use the numbers. Only 10% of doctors even report the cases. Babesia and erlychiosis are not even reported; now the State DPH says we should not use the numbers to track the illnesses. The disease was discovered 35 years ago; we cannot expect four years of hunting to change dramatically. State statistics very poor representation of what is going on. Talk to your physicians and pay attention to what is going on.

George Trabell, 448 Limestone Rd, thanked the DMIC, not against the hunt. Question about the hunt—where is area? An area near my home has been a problem -- hunters have been seen and the area is surrounded by eight homes. Woke up one morning to a shot deer on the ground by my car.

Stef Zandri responded clarifying the area on Limestone Road. Specified times of hunt are outlined in a letter and will be posted on the Town website.

Cindy Bamback, Scoden Drive—are dates posted on The Ridgefield Press

Jennifer Midnan, Evergreen Place—support hunt, do not want it to happen on

Susan Gregacs, Shields Lane—read article in paper on DMIC, was under impression that hunt was a great success? Eliminating areas? Concerned about the use of bow and arrow. Find it cruel, they suffer and feel pain. If it is more efficient to use a gun, why are we using bows & arrows? Statistically I read that it takes approximately 15 minutes for an animal to die and it suffers.

Tom Belote stated we no longer live in an agricultural area; it is safer to use a bow. Our model has been adopted by Fairfield and Brookfield among other towns. We have not had an issue with suffering deer.

Bill Cahill, Old Trolley Road commended the DMIC to mitigate the risks; does not understand why we allow hunting after school when children are home. If we do it when they are home, there is a significant risk. Children traverse property from one neighborhood to another. I have been exposed to deer and other tick-borne illnesses, would risk that rather than the downside risk which is something that you cannot take back.

D. Masters asked for clarification on the number of sites. Last year the number of sites increased. Concerned about the number of sites—supports the hunt and the culling of the herd, but look at the sites of intrusion. Look at individual plots of intrusion—not the number of acres; the actual areas. There has been an increase in the scope of the hunt. Tom Belote stated we started out with only Hemlock, then second year went to 6 sites, third year went to 7, fourth year to 12 sites, this year remaining at 12 (13 till Sturges was dropped).

Steffi Jones, Branchville Road, For 49 years I have kept a record of wildflowers in my yard. You would be amazed at the number of wildflowers on the list that are no longer there any more. The number of bugs have decreased as well. Those are the things that don't get noticed. There are less deer this year due to the hunt, and consequently more trout lillies.

Keith Namiot, Scoden Drive, what will be done to address safety? Stef Zandri responded that his review of the property deems it is a safe site.

Will Murtough, Pheasant Drive is not comfortable with Stef Zandri's statement that he has walked the property; don't know whether I can trust his opinion.

Mary Belmont, Old Sib Road, abuts the New York property and has been in contact with Tom Belote. She is concerned about the mountain lakes property in New York because she walks the property a lot. She is grateful that the Town is using the Old Sib property because of the New York hunt. The deer will naturally come this way. Our family and dog have had lyme and erlichiosis. 4 out of 5 neighbors are in favor of the hunt. Although we feel bad about killing the deer, we know that there are very few birds etc. We appreciate the safety precautions and the way it is being handled.

Lynn Schneider, 4 Highview Drive, stated she hikes Hemlock Hills and Pierrepont state park every day. Personally afraid of going to Pierrepont because she is concerned that her dog will be mistaken for a deer by a hunter.

Jan Rifkinson, Highview Road—this has been a wonderful meeting. The dialogue between Board of Selectmen and the residents is impressive.

Susie Rabinowitz, 23 Lynchbrook Lane—her neighborhood was hunted last year. Nowhere in the process is there a group for consideration of the safety of our children. There needs to be an advocate for the children in this process. Failure of this is a problem. Tom Belote stated that the Lynchbrook site was hunted mornings only and the season has been reduced. Letters will be sent out to each abutting property owner regarding specifics of each hunt. Ms. Rabinowitz requested that the property hunted be posted in advance of the hunt.

Will Murtough requested reverse 911 system be used for the notification. R. Marconi responded we cannot use the system for this notification – there must be a life-threatening situation, according to Chief Roche.

Beverly Wolf, Scoden Drive asked if any Board member lives adjacent to any of the hunted properties. I walk every day on the road next to the spot that will be hunted at the crack of dawn—how can you guarantee my safety? It is dark when I walk. TB responded that we cannot hunt at those times according to state law. Question: why don't you know where the bus stops are? R. Marconi responded that is why we are here tonight—to hear ideas and suggestions. Which other area could hunters go to remove the deer?

Letters read into record: Barry Drayson from Lynchbrook area; Scott Persampieri, Evergreen Place; Bob and Pat Kralik, 25 Lynch Brook Lane;

Letters received but not read into record because the authors had an opportunity to speak at the Public Hearing: Beverly Wolf, Heidi & Keith Namiot, Mary Belmont

The Public Hearing was closed and the Board of Selectmen meeting was called to order by R. Marconi at 9:15 pm.

1. Approval of 2010-11 Deer Hunt Parcels

New parcels: Laurel Lane
 Limestone Road
 Linden Road
 Old Sib Road
 Old Trolley Road
 George Washington Highway/Scoden Road/Pheasant Drive

J. Plock commented that there are children in our town that cannot go to school because of lyme disease. As a point of clarification, this is why we got here in the first place. Many bad situations are result of poachers here in our town—our Deer Management Implementation Committee has addressed this issue also.

D. Masters stated that progress in culling the herd is being made; however, we're not going to eradicate lyme disease. Twelve individual parcels in town exceed my level of comfort because I know kids do like to play in winter or summer in the woods. We can successfully reduce the size of the herd with fewer parcels being hunted.

A. Bodner stated lyme disease is a serious health issue. Reducing it has significant impact to children and adults of Ridgefield and throughout the state. We appointed the Deer Management Implementation Committee with two charges—safety and effectiveness. We have seen nothing that questions the safety of the sites selected throughout the years of this hunt.

B. Manners thanked the Deer Management Implementation Committee for the presentation tonight. The distress experienced last year has been remedied by the holding of this meeting. The Board heard from residents on Old Trolley, Pheasant Lane, Scoden and B. Manners urged the Board to consider the comments of residents living in the more densely populated areas with many children, and stated that she is going to vote against all sites because she opposes hunting.

R. Marconi stated that the questions that residents have brought up are worthwhile—would the DMIC consider limiting the hunt to a.m. only? Is there some kind of compromise that can be made? Chief Roche stated no. Stef stated that a compromise would be delaying the hunt until November 1, lessening the length of the hunt.

D. Masters stated that policies and procedures must be reviewed. Between DMIC, Conservation Commission, and then the Board of Selectmen there is a gap in procedures that are taking place. Should we be looking more closely at these policies and procedures?

B. Manners stated that the main concern is that people have adequate notice. Maybe townspeople should be having public notice in the process. R. Marconi stated that when he asked the Conservation Commission to hold a public hearing, he was told it is not their charge in the process—just to approve or not approve the DMIC's proposed parcels.

R. Marconi read the Conservation Commission's criteria for review: a) studying deeds to see if hunting is prohibited and b) evaluating the impact of closing a site to the public, which is balanced against the purpose of the hunt, i.e., to reduce the deer population in Ridgefield. Recommendations include increasing the number of Deer Management Implementation Committee members—appears too few causing a burden on active members; creating a paid seasonal position to oversee.

J. Plock stated that the timing is wrong. A. Bodner stated we should be doing this earlier to allow public time to comment and have more input. Tom Belote suggested DMIC hold public hearings with residents which will be publicized on all local media. This would be helpful in decision making about proposed sites.

R. Marconi asked again about limiting site to am only? Stef Zandri stated that the afternoon hunt is very important. The most desolate area (300-400 feet away) will be chosen, he will work with the neighbors, learn the bus schedule so that deer will not be removed when the children are near.

R. Marconi suggested holding a meeting in November with DMIC, Conservation Commission and the Board of Selectmen to discuss a new procedure. An assessment will be done to determine success measurement and future planning. This can be a third party assessment, such as Howard Kilpatrick.

A. Bodner moved to approve the plan of hunting the 10 parcels as presented and the Old Trolley and George Washington Highway/Scoden Road/Pheasant Drive parcels from 11/1/10 - 1/31/11 only; J. Plock seconded. The motion passed 3-2 (D. Masters and B. Manners were opposed).

2. Set STM Date for Approval of Charter Revision Ballot Questions—

Q#2—change “individual” to “operating”

Q#3—“making proposed amendments other than technical changes which alter the call of the meeting?”

Q#5—AB states it is not clear enough—R. Marconi will discuss with Town Counsel and Town Clerk possibly revising this question

Q#9—add “s” to Registrar

J. Plock moved to approve the ballot questions as modified; BM seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

J. Plock moved to set a Special Town Meeting date of September 1 for approval of the Charter Revision ballot questions; B. Manners seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

3. Approval of Explanatory Text Availability

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded the motion to approve the explanatory text. Motion carried 5-0.

4. Refunding Resolution

The Town will save approximately \$1.5M with this refunding of old paper. The Town has up to \$35M available to be rolled over right now. We are trying to lower the interest rate.

D. Masters moved and J. Plock seconded the motion to waive the reading of the resolution. Motion carried 5-0.

**J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to approve the resolution.
Motion carried 5-0.**

5. Amendment to Deferred Compensation Plan Resolution

R. Marconi stated this item was moved to the September 1 meeting agenda.

6. Goodwill Lease—Set Public Hearing and Special Town Meeting Dates

J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to set a Public Hearing date of September 1 and a Special Town Meeting date of September 22 to discuss the Goodwill Lease. Motion carried 5-0.

7. Possible Exec Session—Potential Property Purchase

R. Marconi stated that because no information was received on this item, it will not be discussed tonight.

J. Plock moved, B. Manners seconded the motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen special meeting at 10:43 pm. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Wendy Gannon Lionetti