

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING & BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING
NOVEMBER 15, 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

Notice is hereby given that a Special Town Meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 15, 2006, 7:30 P.M., Town Hall Lower Level Conference Room, 400 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT, to act on the acquisition of an easement to allow drainage onto private property from Cross Hill Road. (Minutes of the Special Town Meeting under separate cover.)

Board of Selectmen Meeting (immediately following Town Meeting)

1. Parks & Recreation New Field Development
2. Library Expansion
3. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 11/1/06
4. Selectman's Report
5. Possible executive Session to discuss property lease

R. Marconi called the Board of Selectmen Meeting to order at 7:40 p.m., immediately following the Special Town Meeting.

1. Parks & Recreation New Field Development – Phil Kearns, Chairman, and Paul Roche, Director of Parks & Rec came forward to present to the Board of Selectmen the Ridgefield Parks & Recreation Department presentation entitled, “A Field for the Future: Field Funding Request”. The focus of the presentation is to “correct a problem situation” – “This is a community-based need, not a want”. The Parks & Recreation Department are requesting the support of the Board of Selectmen and subsequently, the Board of Finance, to bring this proposal to the public in the current fiscal year for their decision and approval of town funding for field development. The five areas covered in the report include: 1) The Background and the Request, 2) The Facts: A Brief Situational Review, 3) Current Utilization: An Assessment, 4) The Proposed Solution and Rationale, and 5) The Budget Implications.

The potential base of users has increased 36% from 1995 to 2005. While school enrollment will continue to decline until 2010, this user base remains dramatically higher than in 1995 and 2000 (+28% vs. 1995). Ridgefield's playing fields are used by soccer, lacrosse, Little League, the Board of Education Athletic Department, and individual resident users. The student population has increased from 4,000 students in 1995 to 5,579 students currently. Ridgefield currently has 28 playing fields, which includes two turf fields – Tiger Hollow and Scotts Ridge Middle School. A survey has been conducted and Ridgefield's field resources are out of line with other towns.

The Parks & Recreation Department does have a field recovery program in place in an attempt to keep the fields in good shape, resting the fields somewhat, but the program is not enough. The drainage problem on some of the fields is compounding the situation. There are too many users currently on too few fields creating overuse and wear-out. Scheduling conflicts are the greatest in the fall and spring, which is also the best time to idle a field in an attempt to restore the grass cover. A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted by an outside consultant. The options are to curtail usage (which is not the goal of the Parks & Recreation Department) or increase the number of fields.

Since increasing field capacity is clearly needed and adding new fields in new locations is highly unlikely, the need is to increase utilization of current fields. It is felt that the best option is to take a large, multi-purpose field and increase it from a one-season to an all-season field by making it a turf field. Specifically, the recommendation is for expansion and turfing the East Ridge Phase II Field complex (Onalfo), and adding parking to facilitate usage, especially when Winter Garden is in use. Parks & Rec feels that this proposal meets all criteria (multi-season, multi-purpose, existing location, easier approval, neighbor acceptance, benefits multiple users, and relieves greatest pressure). This takes a one-season, two-field location and makes it a two-season, three-field location.

The budget recommendation estimates total cost of approximately \$2,300,000 (\$2,130,000 for the field and \$170,000 for parking). This cost if bonded over 20 years at 6% interest = \$190,000 yearly average. The largest user groups support field user fee increases of \$10.00 per child per sport per season which will equal \$55,000 per year, and a \$135,000 balance, one-third of a mill rate.

Andy Bodner asked what cut-backs are foreseen if this proposal is not approved? The response was that some of the fields will become un-useable and some of the sports programs will have to be limited in size.

D. Masters inquired about the addition of Shadow Lake as a playing field. It is a Little League field only. She also inquired about the 2010 foreseen drop in school enrollment which would in turn impact the usage of the playing fields. The response was that a downturn in enrollment is forecasted, but the numbers would still be above the 1995 numbers. Also, girls sports have more than doubled in size and the lacrosse program continues to grow significantly.

J. Plock requested a list of all of Ridgefield's fields. She also inquired if the elementary school fields are included in the current field count? The answer is yes.

R. Marconi indicated that Ridgefield's population is now approximately 24,400 with 5,579 school population. A greater percent of students are playing some sport. Ridgefield has had 28 fields since 1995, and these fields are not being maintained properly with adequate periods of rest for the sod.

D. Masters asked how many fields are needed in order to rest and restore current fields? Also – the big cost currently would be to solve the drainage problems.

J. Plock inquired as to a cost comparison between creating a new field as compared to a turf field. There is also a lot of new legislation regarding the use of pest controls. A turf field would eliminate this problem. Only a few fields in Ridgefield can be converted to turf fields as turf

cannot be installed over a septic field. By turfing the Onalfo field, the usage is doubled plus an increase in size which would result in three fields instead of two.

B. Manners suggested an increase of user fees to \$15.

Paul Roche pointed out that if the decision is made to go ahead with this proposal, plans and specs will have to be prepared prior to going out to bid. A gravel surface is being suggested for the parking lot and no lighting.

R. Marconi suggested that the Board of Selectmen “digest” the info, a Public Hearing be scheduled, and the Board of Finance be asked what they think about this proposal. The voters have been promised that the goal is to let the debt service come down. He indicated that he does not know how the voters will feel about this proposal. He asked Paul Roche about possible grants? Mr. Roche indicated that he is now on the Parks & Recreation Association Committee of the State Legislative Committee relative to grants and will know if there is any such dollars available. At the current time, there are no grants available. The LOCIP funds have been earmarked for parking lots and sidewalks.

A. Bodner indicated that he does recognize the difference between needs and wants. We should not let our current fields deteriorate. He does not know what the optimal decision is, but this is something that should be decided and not let to drag on. Turf on an existing field would be cheaper than enlarging a field as well.

J. Plock indicated a desire to know all the options. What are the consequences now about the reduced use of pesticides? The new legislation indicates that pesticides cannot be used on elementary school fields. Is this another reason for the installation of turf?

Paul Roche indicated that the Onalfo Field is the best site for development of a field to multi-use. Their goal is for this issue to be presented to the voters this fiscal year on a separate referendum.

D. Masters moved and A. Bodner seconded a motion to schedule a Public Hearing on December 13 at either Veterans Park Auditorium or East Ridge Auditorium (place to be announced) at 7:30 p.m. to discuss Parks & Recreation New Field Development. Motion passed 5-0. A variety of options are to be provided, including – the cost if the Onalfo Field is not expanded, the impact of the pesticides legislation long-term, and what is the cost for correcting the drainage situation and then re-seeding the field?

2. Library Expansion – Barbara Dobbin, Chairman of the Library Board, came forward to present the Library’s proposal for their new/expanded/renovated building. Also present were other Board members and Library staff, as well as Architect, Richard Mundy. This is a proposal for a “public/private partnership”. The estimated cost is \$18.1 million. They are seeking \$9 million from the Town of Ridgefield and \$9.1 million to be raised by the Library. They already have \$3.3 million. They will apply for a State of Connecticut construction grant and a Kresge grant. The proposed environmentally conscious features of the new building will permit application for Federal dollars as well. The Library will assume all the fiscal responsibility for the project.

How did the Library arrive at this point? They did a community needs assessment, a strategic plan, constructed a building program statement, hired an architect, and looked for a contractor. The goal is a 2009 opening date. This appearance before the Board of Selectmen is to advance the process. The demands on the library have grown. There is no shelf space to add anything more.

Since the addition to the building in 1984, all kinds of new media are now part of the library offering. 1100 people visit the Ridgefield library daily. There is a huge demand for children's programming. These programs are now offered by lottery. The original part of the current building was built in 1903. The current building has restricted sight lines. There is a need for a more open space building.

The proposed new building will provide:

- 1) Increased children's program area
- 2) Separation of teen and adult areas. There will be an area for middle school age children to do their homework and collaborate on school assignments with a book collection appropriate to this age group
- 3) Increase in meeting room space whereby two programs can be held concurrently. The current library is lacking in small meeting and study rooms.
- 4) Library on-line resources, computer lab, library resource center for computer instruction capability
- 5) The building will be ADA compliant, including handicapped access and space for wheelchair movement.
- 6) Increase in popular collections. The Friends of the Library will have a basement area for sorting and book storage in readiness for their book sales
- 7) Environmentally-conscious design of the facility, with freedom from dependence on fossil fuel and higher efficiency lighting

Building alternatives include: A 44,000 sq. ft. new construction whereby the Morris Building and the stone walls will remain intact for an estimated cost of \$14.3 million; or a renovation and new building of 29,000 sq. ft for \$13.8 million. New construction is the preferred alternative. The Webster Bank façade will be preserved. The proposal is for a \$9 million bond for 20 years at 6%. The bond cost will increase taxes 1% in the first year with monies due only to the Library. It is felt that there will be a significant savings in heating expenses, in spite of the 75% increase in building size. With the openness of the new design, staff will need to be increased by less than 10%. The proposal suggests operating from an alternative location while the new building is underway rather than from a location under construction. The cost to move to a temporary location is estimated at \$900,000.

The request is for BOS support and moving forward with the proposal for a Town vote.

J. Plock inquired as to how many of those who use the library are non-Ridgefielders? No charge can be made to anyone who resides in the State of Connecticut. Out-of-state users are charged a fee. They will get the exact numbers on this. A. Bodner requested the usage numbers from a "typical week" – what are the numbers for the various age brackets using the Library? Also – the income from Webster Bank will be lost. This amounts to about \$60,000. Mr. Bodner would like to see the projected cost numbers for the Library to operate while being under construction as compared to the cost of moving to an alternative temporary location.

It was agreed that Barbara Dobbin and the Library Board will continue to be in communication with the BOS and will return to the December 13 BOS Meeting for further discussion and answers to some of the questions raised this evening. A Public Hearing in January could then be scheduled if appropriate. R. Marconi pointed out that if this proposed building is projected for a twenty-year life, then the design should be such that changes could be made in twenty years and not a building that would be "knocked down again". What is needed is a natural growth space.

A. Bodner commented further regarding the proposals from the Library and Parks and Recreation. The Fire & Police Departments have needs as well. There has been talk about a Public Safety Administration Building, perhaps even at the Schlumberger location. It is his feeling that rather than making piecemeal decisions, all of these projects need to be considered together. The BOS does not want to continue to return to the public requesting approval for bonding for one project after another.

B. Manners indicated that the Webster Building had previously been discussed as a location for a children's library. This was not even discussed as a possibility this evening. She realizes that there is a need for increased space for children's programming. What would be the cost to redo the Webster Building? B. Dobbin replied that the cost to redo would be too much as the building is not "load bearing". A change of use requires that the building be changed to meet the requirements of new construction. B. Manners requested that the Webster Building be explored again with a children's library in mind. It would be helpful for the BOS to have this info as well.

Architect Richard Meany indicated that there are questions about taking down all of the current building and just leaving the Morris Building, but the purpose is having the Morris Building connecting to how the library "works" as a totality, not separate areas.

A. Bodner suggested that the BOS put down "on paper" what are the needs of the Town today – are we looking at everything? What are the priorities? What is the order in which funding needs to happen – Police & Fire?, the Library?, ballfields?.

D. Masters pointed out how the Library is a community asset. It is difficult to curtail the intellectual expansion of the community; but promises have been made to the Police Department as their building does need attention, and the Fire Department has a problem with fumes going into their building.

R. Marconi asked, "What are our priorities? What can wait for another day? What can wait five years, etc?" As we go forward in time, will library usage start to peak? Do we need to do as much as we are doing? Perhaps we should sit down with respective department heads and outline the needs for today and into the next five years, and beyond, if possible.

B. Manners indicated that a discussion about library usage trends was not part of the presentation today. The demand for specialized libraries is going down while the demand for community libraries is going up.

A. Bodner commented on how libraries are starting to redefine themselves; their mission changes as technology changes. We do not want to go ahead in a vacuum; we need to look at all the Town's needs before making any decisions.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 11/1/06

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the November 1, 2006 Board of Selectmen Meeting. Motion passed 4-0-1. B. Manners abstained as she was not present at the November 1 BOS Meeting.

4. Selectman's Report – R. Marconi had nothing to report.

5. Possible Executive Session to discuss property lease -

D. Masters moved and J. Plock seconded a motion for the Board of Selectmen to recess at 10:30 p.m. and go into Executive Session to discuss a property lease. Motion passed 5-0. The Board of Selectmen came out of Executive Session at 10:45 p.m.

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