

PUBLIC HEARING & BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING – 12/13/06

VETERAN’S PARK SCHOOL AUDITORIUM – 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

Public Hearing

Notice is hereby given that a Public Hearing will be held on December 13, 2006, 7:30 P.M., at the Veteran’s Park School Auditorium, 8 Governor Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut to discuss the following items:

- 1) Proposed lease between the Town of Ridgefield and Hearts & Minds Music LLC at the Venus Building, 90 East Ridge, Ridgefield, CT.
- 2) Parks & Recreation New Field Development Plan.

Board of Selectmen Meeting Agenda

- 1) Presentation of Costs Associated with Student Resource Officer – Chief Ligi
- 2) Ridgefield Arts Council Interviews: Isaac Hirt-Manheimer, Ruth Wilder Feldman
- 3) 2007 Ambulance Rates
- 4) STEAP Grant Resolution
- 5) Golf Director Contract Review
- 6) Approval of Meeting Minutes: 11/29
- 7) Selectman’s Report
- 8) Possible Executive Session: Discussion of Air Age

R. Marconi called the Public Hearing to order at 7:34 p.m.

- 1) Proposed Lease between the Town of Ridgefield and Hearts & Minds Music LLC at the Venus Building, 90 East Ridge, Ridgefield, CT

Copies of the lease have been available at the Office of the First Selectman at Town Hall and were available at the front of the Veteran’s Park School Auditorium. R. Marconi opened the meeting for comments from the public. There were no comments.

- 2) Parks & Recreation New Field Development Plan

1. Copies of the plan have been available at the Office of the First Selectman at Town Hall and were available at the front of the Veteran’s Park School Auditorium. Phil Kearns, Chairman of Parks & Recreation came forward to present 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 have requested 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.

If this proposal is not approved, it is felt that some of the fields will become un-useable and some of the sports programs will have to be limited in size.

J. Plock inquired as to when were pre-school age children added to the school-age totals? The response was that the athletic programs have not been restricted to a minimum age. As a result, some pre-school programs have been initiated.

The Public Hearing was open for comments from the public.

John McGerrity, Ivy Hill Rd. – indicated that his house is adjacent to the Onalfo Field. He does not oppose the proposal, but wants to stress the problems residents have with irrigation problem areas. The water drainage continues to get worse. Parks & Recreation have worked on the drainage, but an engineering study should be done to fully assess the problem.

Paul Roche, Director of Parks & Recreation – indicated that this drainage problem has been looked at and talked about. They are aware of the problem.

Wayne Tinker, Shady Lane – is responsible for maintenance of the fields for Parks & Recreation. He feels that by putting in a turf field, the water drainage can be controlled. Construction will be done in a manner to solve the drainage problem.

William Osgood, Ivy Hill Rd. – feels that this proposal should not be part of the regular Town budget, but a separate agenda item with a vote from the residents. “Wants” include a fire station, the police station, a new library building, and highway requests. The residents need to be aware of all the requests.

Marty Heiser, Spectacle Lane – commented on how the Scotts Ridge Middle School synthetic field is great. It is safer, multi-purpose, usable in all seasons, and environmental friendly with no pesticides.

Roy Messing, Silver Spring Rd. – is President of SCORE, a non-profit volunteer organization which sponsors the Ridgefield soccer teams. 3,000 children participate in soccer in the fall with 600 volunteers. SCORE is in favor of the Parks & Recreation proposed field development. Soccer enrollment continues to increase and they are feeling the “pinch” of the lack of an increased number of available fields. SCORE has contributed in the past to the maintenance of the fields and has agreed to raise the fee to play.

Paul Roberts, Topstone Rd. – is the Director of the Referees for the Soccer Club of Ridgefield. He is involved in referee training and the referees, in turn, decide if the field is usable. The quality of the fields has declined in the last six years since Mr. Roberts moved to Ridgefield. He is very familiar with the quality of the fields as he is out running the fields with the referees. The poor quality of the fields increases the risk and liability to the Town.

Joe Mirra, Kimberly Ct. – is currently President of American Youth Football, the successor to Pop Warner Football. Cheerleader squads are also part of the American Youth Football program. For them, the improvement of Onalfo Field will provide the most return as three playing fields will be the result. Football is very hard on the fields. At East Ridge there is a safety problem with the sprinkler heads sticking up. They would like to have this field lighted as well.

Marty Carbone, Armand Rd. – is active with Ridgefield Youth Lacrosse and also serves on the Fields Committee. There is absolutely a safety issue with kindergarten and high schoolers using the same fields at the same time. Sometimes there are six teams working out on one football field. This is not safe. It is also a competitive issue. Ridgefield cannot compete with other towns in Fairfield County when they cannot have an entire field to themselves for practice times.

Matt Burns, Wooster St. – is a high school administrator in another town. He coaches soccer, basketball, lacrosse in Ridgefield and is concerned about teaching the kids to do things the right way. Youth sports play a real role bringing kids together and parents together as well. Kids no longer just go “out to play”. The return will be worth the dollars spent on this field development plan.

Bruce Yen – serves as President of the Little League. The Little League wholeheartedly supports this initiative. Many organizations have given donations in the past to help with the fields and

upgrade existing facilities. Little League has helped with fencing as well. Land is not available for new fields. This proposal will take an existing field and expand the usage, which is great!

Jon Chase, Crescent Dr. – serves as Vice Chairman of Parks and Recreation, recalls the discussion regarding the use of a turf field at Scotts Ridge. The turf field is not just used for youth activities, but is used as a school field as well. It is important for East Ridge to have field facilities equal to those at Scotts Ridge – the south side of town to have the same quality of fields as the north side of town.

John Nichols, Washington Rd. – agrees with this plan, but even this is a short-term plan. What is going to happen in five years? Other fields will need to be replaced as well. The town needs to have a long-range plan. He suggests that some improvements be made each year.

Kenny Corso, Riverside Dr. - indicated that he works with the soccer organization and was responsible for starting the pre-kindergarten soccer program. He has also been involved in reviewing the loss of playing time on the various fields.

Wayne Tinker spoke again and reviewed the history of Ridgefield adding the different fields over the years. No longer can they put down pre-emergence for crabgrass nor can they use fungicides. This is going to add to the cost of maintenance of these fields. He has worked on the fields for Ridgefield for the past thirty years. Last year they had a thatch problem. The cost of maintaining these grass fields is going to go up in the years ahead.

R. Marconi asked for a count in support of the field development proposal. Approximately 80 were in favor and 2 against. The Public Hearing was closed at 8:45 p.m.

Board of Selectmen Meeting

1. Presentation of Costs Associated with Student Resource Officer – Chief Ligi

The Board of Education has requested reinstatement of the Student Resource Officer (SRO) at Ridgefield High School as soon as possible. Chief Ligi came forward to present the Police Department’s research on the costs associated with making this SRO happen. Major John Roche and two Commission members have helped work on this. They project at least \$3,000 of overtime will be needed for the current budget year. Chief Ligi stressed the importance of commitment for this SRO past the short term. They cannot pull an officer “out of the mix” without providing a replacement. In their new budget, they will be asking for the hiring of three new officers – one for the high school, one to cover the two middle schools and the elementary schools, and the third officer to add to the shifts. The Board of Education supports an officer at the middle and elementary schools as well but they have not indicated that payment for such would be out of the education budget.

Chief Ligi indicated that it takes a nine-month window when hiring a new officer from the time of hire to having the officer “up and running”. To have an SRO in the high school by February, the hiring process needs to be started now. He is requesting that a new officer be hired April 1st, which will enable an officer be permanently in the high school when school starts in the fall. The Police Department will staff the SRO for the balance of this school year thru overtime by other officers covering for the officer taken “out of the mix”. They currently have several officers out for workman’s compensation injuries, and in February, March and April, 16 officers are scheduled for recertification training, which is required every three years. The Police Academy starts May

29. Thus, by hiring a new officer April 1st, the individual can be on board to start the academy. A. Bodner stated that the hiring of a new officer costs approximately \$75,000/year.

Chief Ligi pointed out that last time the SRO was paid thru the Board of Education budget for ten months and by the BOS budget for the two summer months. Benefits were paid by the BSO budget. If the SRO is paid for by the BOS budget, then the Board of Education would have to justify “why” if they want to again no longer support the SRO position. The Board of Education cannot cut the SRO position for budget reasons if they are not paying for the position. The Board of Education has indicated that they are in favor of a second SRO to cover the middle and elementary schools, but have not to date indicated a willingness to support this position financially. Chief Ligi pointed out that a seasoned officer who wants to fill the SRO position will be the most successful. D. Masters inquired about the possibility of hiring an officer who has already attended the academy and has experience elsewhere in another community. Chief Ligi agreed that finding such an officer would be ideal and they will advertise for such. A. Bodner stated that if an allocation of costs be split between the Board of Education budget and the Town budget, then the cost of benefits for the SRO should be allocated as well.

J. Plock indicated concern for the Police Department’s request for the hiring of a third officer if the SRO officers are paid out of the Town budget. Chief Ligi pointed out that the “nature of policing” has changed. There is now identity theft and internet problems. Ridgefield has their bicycle program to be staffed, etc.

D. Masters inquired as to the status of the use of Zeus the police dog in the schools. Chief Ligi responded that Zeus is scheduled to walk thru the high school on a random unannounced schedule starting immediately, and he would like this program to be available to the middle schools as well.

A. Bodner commented on how the Board of Education has hired a security consultant. Has this individual contacted the Police Department? Chief Ligi indicated that to date he has not been contacted by this consultant.

Chief Ligi pointed out that the SRO will need a work space in the high school which will provide the officer with privacy when speaking with students individually or in a small group. He also pointed out that Officer Luis is the only current officer in Ridgefield trained to be a Student Resource Officer.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to authorize the Police Department to hire one additional officer to start April 1, 2007, which will be provided for in the 2007 budget (not specific as to whether the Board of Education budget or the Town budget or an allocation from each), to ensure coverage for the Student Resource Officer (SRO) program at Ridgefield High School. In the interim, the Police Department will staff the Student Resource Officer program at the high school as soon as possible, hopefully in January/February 2007. Motion passed 5-0.

R. Marconi requested to J. Wahlberg, Town Controller, that there be a separate accounting for SRO costs, a separate budget item. School security numbers (school buildings and school grounds) should be kept separately from public safety (fire and police).

2. Ridgefield Arts Council Interviews: Isaac Hirt-Manheimer, Ruth Wilder Feldman

Isaac Hirt-Manheimer came forward to present his candidacy to fill one of the vacancies on the Ridgefield Arts Council. R. Marconi read the email received from Mr. Hirt-Manheimer. A. Bodner commented on Isaac's qualifications and D. Masters indicated how Ridgefield would be honored to have Isaac as an active member of the Arts Council. **J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to appoint Isaac Hirt-Manheimer to fill one of the vacancies on the Ridgefield Arts Council for a two-year term. Motion passed 5-0.**

Ruth Feldman came forward to present her candidacy to fill one of the other vacancies on the Arts Council. R. Marconi read the December 7th letter received from Ms. Feldman with her resume attached. She indicated that she has a "passion for the arts", although not an artist herself. She has much experience as a project organizer and would welcome working on the 2008 Ridgefield anniversary celebration. D. Masters commented on the need for a "project person" like Ms. Feldman. Ridgefield needs a comprehensive Arts Council calendar. Ms. Feldman's skills would be most helpful with both the calendar and the anniversary celebration. **B. Manners moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to appoint Ruth Wilder Feldman to fill one of the vacancies on the Ridgefield Arts Council for a two-year term. Motion passed 5-0.**

3. 2007 Ambulance Rates

R. Marconi received a December 6, 2006 letter from R. John Mannuzza, Assistant Controller for the Town of Ridgefield, requesting the Board of Selectmen's approval to implement the new ambulance rates for 2007. The Town of Ridgefield has utilized the 'statewide rates' for at least the past seven years. The advantages include reasonable cost recovery, adequate annual adjustment for increases, and simplified review by State agency of Ridgefield's rate increase application. J. Wahlberg indicated that most residents have insurance coverage for ambulance costs. **J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve the implementation of the new ambulance rates as specified in the CT. Department of Public Health "Statewide Rate Schedule for 2007", as requested by R. John Mannuzza, Assistant Controller for the Town of Ridgefield. Motion passed 5-0.**

4. STEAP Grant Resolution

B. Manners moved and J. Plock seconded a motion to authorize R. Marconi, First Selectman representing the Town of Ridgefield, to sign the STEAP Grant Resolution, requesting \$250,000 from the State of Connecticut to undertake the Route 35 Streetscape Project. Motion passed 5-0.

5. Golf Director Contract Review

The renewal employment contract for Frank Sergiovanni, Director of Golf, for the Ridgefield Golf Course, was passed out to the Board of Selectmen at their last meeting for their review. A. Bodner inquired as to how does payment for the Golf Director in Ridgefield compare to payment at other municipal courses? R. Marconi indicated that Mr. Sergiovanni's salary is below the mid-point, but he does earn additional income from the proceeds of the ProShop and from giving golf lessons as well. He does receive family healthcare benefits from the Town of Ridgefield. Ed Tyrrell, a member of the Golf Committee, commented, "Frank is absolutely the best!" **J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve the employment contract of Frank Sergiovanni as Director of Golf for the period January 1, 2007 thru December 31, 2008. Motion passed 5-0.**

6. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 11/29

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to table Agenda Item #6, Approval of Meeting Minutes: 11/29/06 to the January 10, 2007 BOS Meeting. Motion passed 5-0.

7. Selectman's Report

- Jay Saks has resigned both from the Golf Committee and as Chairman, effective December 15, due to his inability to work his schedule to attend meetings. R. Marconi read the letter received from Mr. Saks. R. Marconi will send a letter to Jay thanking him for his five years of dedication to the Golf Committee.
- The American Youth Football cheerleaders won the "National Champs" award in Tampa recently for ten year olds, 4th and 5th graders. They will parade down Main Street on Sunday, December 17 at 1:00 p.m.
- January 10 BOS meeting will include a Town Meeting on the Venus Building lease, annual committee reports, the Leery Building discussion, a return presentation by the Library Board regarding their proposed new building, and a proposed procedure for tax credits and adjustments with Jane Bernedston-Hill in attendance.
- Acre Lane project bids have been received with quite a spread. There is a lot of ledge. Aquarion did borings to check on the ledge.
- Requesting a report in January as to where at with the various school building projects. John Mannuzza will report on the monies remaining.
- A new attorney has been hired to negotiate with the Fire Department – Nan Saranne-Murray.
- Next step regarding the Parks & Recreation New Field Development Plan is to look over the proposed costs and see if some of the estimates can be reduced. Charlie Fisher will be providing input on this.

8. Possible Executive Session: Discussion of Air Age

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to recess the Board of Selectmen Meeting at 10:00 p.m. and go into Executive Session for a discussion of Air Age, with Attorney Adam Blank of Cohen & Wolfe in attendance. Motion passed 5-0.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to come out of Executive Session at 10:50 p.m. and adjourn the Board of Selectmen's Meeting. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson