

BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING – APRIL 7, 2004

TOWN HALL/LOWER LEVEL CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:30 P.M.

APPROVED MINUTES

These are a general summary of the meeting and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.

In attendance: R. Marconi, B. Manners, J. Plock, P. Yanity, S. Zemo

AGENDA

1. Ridgefield resident, Nick Percival, to address Board on animals.
2. Nels Berg: Project Manager's Report and approval of transfers
3. Parks & Recreation Center Building Project Final Report: Chuck Trado, David Thaxter
4. Youth Commission Vacancy interviews/possible appointments: Dr. Richard Salwen and students: Mei Loo, Lorenzo Katin-Grazzini, Megan Windisch, Patricia Schwarz.
5. Veteran's Tax Credit
6. Finance: Budget Discussion
7. Building Department Permit Fee Structure Discussion and possible action
8. Town Vehicle Use Policy Discussion and possible action
9. Designation of April as Fair Housing Month
10. First Selectman's Report
11. Approval of Meeting Minutes: March 1, 2, 3, 4, 2004.
12. Possible vote to go into Executive Session for discussion of land acquisition.

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

1. Nick Percival – Address on Animals – R. Marconi introduced Nick Percival who has expressed a desire to address the BOS re “Treatment of Animals in Ridgefield”, and specifically treatment of dogs shut in cars on hot days. Mr. Percival has been a resident of Ridgefield for 30+ years. The State statute mandates the canine officer to take action only if the dog is “in distress”. Ridgefield can enact a more compassionate ordinance and provide for action to be taken before signs of distress. When the animal displays distress, it is often already too late for assistance to be totally beneficial to the animal. Mr. Percival suggests that parking officers be given pro-active training and the ability to provide aid to animals locked in cars. It would be beneficial for the town of Ridgefield to be known as an “animal protection town”. Individual citizens would feel less reluctant to report animals in possible distress if the town has a policy regarding aid to animals. Mr. Percival also suggested a name change for the Canine Control Officer. He feels the name should be changed to Canine Welfare and Control.

J. Plock suggested articles in the press regarding safe treatment of animals relative to the change in weather temperatures.

Mr. Marconi thanked Mr. Percival for raising awareness and will pass his message on to the Parking Authority.

2. Nels Berg – Project Manager’s Report and Possible Transfers – Paul Anderson also came forward with Mr. Berg to discuss the various school building projects. Most of the projects are winding down. It is at times like this that problems requiring a lot of attention come to the forefront. Basically, only the High School has major work still going on. Water quality in the schools is an issue. Aquarian’s report was received today. State statute require continued posting of excessive lead levels in the water at the High School. A one-time reading was high, but one such reading requires posting. Scotts Ridge and Barlow remain on bottled water until the end of the school year. Remediation steps are being undertaken, but “there is no danger from the water supply to anyone at the schools”. Both Paul Anderson and Mr. Marconi pointed out how school water quality has become a national issue because of the water lines problems with the D.C. schools.

R. Marconi expressed the desire to close out all possible projects and return fund balances to the General Fund in an attempt to lower the possible mill rate increase. Most punch items were completed over the spring break for Ridgebury Elementary School. Financial close out is nearing completion. Anticipated funds remaining at project conclusion will be approximately \$230,000. An approved Certificate of Occupancy is needed.

Mr. Berg has received a long list of “wish items” not previously provided for. He is working on prioritizing that list. O&G is preparing their list as is the Board of Education. Mr. Berg will do a reconciliation of “the lists”, keeping in mind expenses incurred that have not yet been paid.

There is a new system of testing for chlorides 2x/month. If the water problems cannot be solved, connection will have to be made to the main town water line. There was extensive use of salt for snow and ice removal and not as much sand as a desire to prevent tracking of sand into the newly completed buildings. As a result there is an increase in salt in the water system.

Fund Transfer - J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to approve the transfer of \$52,884.18 in surplus technical funding from the Barlow Mountain Elementary Fund to the East Ridge Middle School Fund for remaining technology purchases at ERMS. Motion passed 5-0.

3. Parks & Recreation Center Building Project Final Report – R. Marconi introduced Chuck Trado, David Thaxter, and Thomas McLemore representing the Building

Project Committee. **J. Plock moved and S. Zemo seconded a motion to accept the final report of the Parks & Recreation Center Building Committee with thanks and gratitude for a job well done, and to agree to their request to dissolve the Building Committee and move the remaining \$52,912 into an escrow account to cover any remaining building project issues. Motion passed 5-0.** This escrow account can only be used for any outstanding issues at the Parks & Recreation Center Building.

A.J. DiMattia, Old Branchville Road – inquired about mold remediation; why was this a problem with new construction? The building was not properly waterproofed, the extent of the water problem was not anticipated, and proper mechanical systems were not available to solve the problem. Remediation measures have been undertaken and have been successful in solving the problem.

The Committee stressed the need for maintenance procedures for this new Recreation Center. The systems are much more sophisticated. Filters have to be changed, maintenance systems are controlled by computers. The town needs to have qualified people in charge. Maintenance is going to be an “on-going” issue. Mr. Berg pointed out that the building was occupied earlier than ideal in order to accommodate the school building schedule. Fine tuning of the systems has had to be done following occupancy rather than previously.

4. Youth Commission Vacancy Interviews/Possible Appointments – **J. Plock moved and S. Zemo seconded a motion to postpone #4 on the agenda – Youth Commission Vacancy Interviews/Possible Appointments until the next Board of Selectmen Meeting, April 21, 2004. Motion passed 5-0.**

5. Veteran’s Tax Credit – Al Garzi, Tax Assessor, was present to continue the discussion of a proposed revision of the Veteran’s Tax Credit. Changes have been made in the State statute allowing for a tax credit of \$10,000 in assessed value or a decrease in the tax bill of \$10,000. Income limits are \$56,000/year for a married couple and \$51,000 for a single applicant. Mr. Garzi has worked up some numbers to present to the Board of Selectmen. Ridgefield currently has 1147 veterans as residents. The worst case scenario would cost the town an additional \$210,000 in tax credit if all veterans qualified. Mr. Garzi knows that 75 veterans would qualify based on current tax credit applicants. Approximately \$50,000 would be the amount credited on 2004 assessments with the impact being felt in 2005. Ridgefield’s previous Veteran’s Tax Credit was enacted in 1983 but was not created as an ordinance. It would be preferable to have the new tax credit be in the form of an ordinance. To do this, the tax credit would be presented at a Public Hearing followed by a Town Meeting. Mr. Garzi will have a draft ordinance ready for the June 2 BOS Meeting with income limits set at \$45,000 for a single applicant and \$50,000 if married. The credit would be off the property’s assessment. Individuals who would not qualify for the new tax credit could still receive \$1,000 from the Town and \$500. from the State as they currently do.

R. Marconi reported on the Boehringer Ingleheim tax credit situation. The state credit for machinery and equipment was originally 100% back to the town, and 80% when the agreement was made with Boehringer. The amount returned from the State is now 78%. The town has until June 30 to invoice the individual corporations for the difference. Danbury has invoiced their corporations for the 22%. P. Yanity inquired as to the public relations impact of invoicing for this amount. Mr. Garzi reported that about \$160,000 would be the amount for which Ridgefield would invoice. We can invoice for the full 22% or a lesser amount if we so desire or even not at all. It was the concensus that the tax payers would want the Town to send the invoices. Mr. Garzi is going to check with other towns to see if and how they are doing this billing. It was agreed that if this billing is done, it should be done in a very professional manner with an accompanying letter.

6. Budget Discussion – There was a concensus that the proposed increase in the mill rate to 9.58% is too high. R. Marconi reviewed possible changes to help reduce the possible mill rate, possible changes to reduce the debt service number, proposed increases in building department fees, commented on how the Grand List went up approximately the same as it did in the previous year, and reviewed the budget worksheets. Substantial changes need to be made in order to have a large effect on the mill rate.

J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve the proposed budget subject to agreement between the Board of Education and the Board of Finance and contingent upon acceptance of all areas of the budget package including \$200,000 of this year’s budget surplus and \$230,000 from the building project put back into the General Fund and \$750,000 transferred back into capital projects resulting in a mill rate increase of approximately 7.1 to 7.2%. Motion passed 5-0. Any reduction in the Board of Selectman’s portion of the budget would have to be returned to the Board of Selectman for approval.

7. Building Department Permit Fee Structure Discussion – R. Marconi reviewed the proposal submitted by Bill Reynolds, Building Official, requesting adoption of a new Building Department Permit Fee schedule. This will make Ridgefield more comparable to other towns relative to fees charged. Ridgefield has been the lowest in and around Fairfield County. P. Yanity stressed that this is a user fee, another way of taxing our own residents. He wants to be sure that it is a “reasonable” fee structure. **J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve the revised Building Department Permit Fee schedule as recommended by Ridgefield’s Building Official, Bill Reynolds, effective May 1, 2004. Motion passed 5-0.**
8. Town Vehicle Use Policy Discussion – Laurie Scholl, Director of Human Resources, presented the latest draft of a proposed Town Vehicle Usage Policy. Discussion centered upon Part II, B – “The Town vehicle should be used out of

the Town for official Town business only.” Ms. Scholl has researched personnel files relative to offer letters containing clauses relative to the use of a Town vehicle and has prepared a list of those whose offer letters contain such a clause. There are a significant number of employees whose files do not mention use of a vehicle. This is an issue that needs clarification and a set policy.

There are 29 Town vehicles. 6 cars are for the Fire Department (3 for paid personnel and 3 for volunteers). 11 are approved to go out of town (This includes the 6 Fire vehicles). 16 or 18 (2 are pick-up vehicles belonging to the Board of Education) are vehicles for which determination needs to be made as to how they should be used. Need to look carefully at “past practice”. The only individual belonging to a union who has use of a vehicle is the Fire Marshall. There are some positions whereby the individual needs to be available for call – Health, Sanitarian, Engikneer, Assessor, Golf Superintendent. P. Yanity suggested that these positions have a vehicle available to take home only in the winter. J. Plock suggested that the preferred Town Vehicle Usage Policy be adopted and then “grandfather” in those individuals who currently have vehicle usage privileges. When such positions become open for re-employment, then the vehicle usage is eliminated or do a charge of mileage to and from home. The ability to take a car to and from home is a fringe benefit and should be taxed as such. S. Zemo stressed that the use of a Town vehicle is a significant perk and to change such would impact greatly a family budget. Phil Bauman suggested a phase-out period off perhaps five years. This would give an employee the opportunity to plan for the increase in transportation costs. Another idea is to start charging for gas now and then a phase-out of the ability to take a vehicle to and from home within five years.

9. Designation of April as Fair Housing Month – Mr. Marconi read the Fair Housing Notice. This is an annual procedure and such a resolution has to be adopted in order for the Town to be eligible for grant dollars. **J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to designate April as Fair Housing Month, 2004. Motion passed 5-0.**

10. First Selectman’s Report –

- R. Marconi reviewed his work with the HRRRA (Housatonic Resource Recovery Authority). He is currently serving as Chairman, and there is a need for member towns to do some interim funding. Ridgefield has 11 votes based on population and their share is \$2,351. **J. Plock moved and S. Zemo seconded a motion to approve Ridgefield’s share of interim funding to HRRRA (Housatonic Resource Recovery Authority) in the amount of \$2,351. Motion passed 5-0.**
- Reminder of the Ridgebury School Dedication – April 26, 2:00 p.m.

11. Approval of Meeting Minutes - J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to postpone approval of meeting minutes: March 1, 2, 3, 4, 2004 until the next Board of Selectmen Meeting, April 21, 2004. Motion passed 5-0.

J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to adjourn the public session of the Board of Selectmen Meeting at 10:40 p.m. and go into Executive Session for discussion of land acquisition. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson