

BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING – AUGUST 18, 2004

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

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, B. Manners, D. Masters, J. Plock, P. Yanity

AGENDA

1. Founders Hall Tax Abatement
2. Interview for vacancy on Arts Council: Tracy Dubbin
3. Interview for vacancy on the Affordable Housing Committee: Joanne Search
4. Interview for Parks & Recreation Commission: Barbara Dobbin
5. Interviews for Deer Committee: Gwen Thaxter, Rand Arrowitz, Peter Keeler, Tammy Conley, Sid Kelley, Helen Daly, John Borger, Tessa O'Regan
6. Finance: Transfers and Police Department Vehicle Budget Discussion
7. Reverse 911
8. Discussion on Public Hearing for Ridgefield Housing Authority-Ballard Green
9. Approval and Acceptance of Still Hollow Place
10. First Selectman's Report
11. Approval of meeting minutes: August 4, 2004

Vote to go into Executive Session for the purpose of:

1. Discussion of Highway Union Contract
2. Land Acquisition/Lease

Return to Public Session –

R. Marconi called the Board of Selectmen Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

1. **Founders Hall Tax Abatement** – Al Garzi, Assessor, presented the need for this tax abatement. Founders Hall failed to request a tax exemption between 9/1 and 11/1/03. This was during the time period when Founders Hall was opening and this tax exemption registration procedure was overlooked. Any abatement of taxes has to be approved by the BOS. Once Founders Hall qualifies for tax exemption with the Assessor's office, the exemption is valid for four years. **B. Manners moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to abate for the 2004/2005 tax year taxes on Founders Hall in the amount of \$40,430.92 as Founders Hall qualifies as a non-profit tax entity, exempt from property taxes. Motion passed 5-0.**

J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to add Tom Castellani's name to Agenda Item #5 – Interviews for the Deer Committee. Motion passed 5-0.

2. **Interview for Vacancy on Arts Council: Tracy Dubin** – Tracy Dubin presented her qualifications to the Board. She has been involved in theater arts for many years and holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Theater Management. She has worked in various capacities on Broadway and off-Broadway, including contracts, tickets, visa issues and other administrative responsibilities. She is especially interested in expanding the arts program to young children and bringing artists to the schools. She has not been responsible for grant writing, but is anxious to learn. R. Marconi read the Arts Council Charge and it was noted that the Charge needs to be updated. B. Manners will look into this. **J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to appoint Tracy Dubin to fill a vacancy on the Arts Council. Motion passed 5-0.**

3. **Interview for Vacancy on the Affordable Housing Committee: Joanne Search** – Joanne Search presented her qualifications and interest in serving on the Affordable Housing Committee. Ms. Search has been a Ridgefield resident for four years and responded to the advertisement in the paper. She has a desire to get involved in town issues although her background is not in this area; she is a mutual fund analyst. Ms. Search has attended three committee meetings and is especially interested in the senior market and the expansion of the accessory apartment market. Perhaps incentives for residents to provide accessory apartments would also help seniors to be able to stay in town and in their homes. Dr. Yanity and B. Manners pointed out the need for affordable housing for those who work in Ridgefield as well as for seniors. **J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to appoint Joanne Search to fill the vacancy on the Committee for Affordable Housing. Motion passed 5-0.**

4. **Interview for Parks and Recreation Commission: Barbara Dobbin** – Ms. Dobbin was advised to attend at least one Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. Ms. Dobbins was present at the BOS Meeting but in connection with a different topic.

5. **Interviews for Deer Committee: Gwen Thaxter, Rand Arrowitz, Peter Keeler, Tammy Conley, Sid Kelley, Helene Daly, John Borger, Tessa O'Regan and Tom Castellani** – Rand Arrowitz, Tammy Conley, and Helene Daly were not present.

Gwen Thaxter – came forward to meet the Board and expressed her interest in being on the Deer Committee. Ms. Thaxter has 20+ years of business and corporate experience. She feels she is experienced in looking at issues and helping a group come to a consensus. When asked if she thinks Ridgefield has a deer problem, Ms. Thaxter responded that she is not personally involved with the deer problem. She could go along with hunting if that is the decided-upon solution, but cannot comment further until she is part of the research and decision

making of the committee. She and her husband are avid gardeners. Her husband is currently on the Parks & Rec Commission. No one in her family has had Lyme Disease. She has had great success using an all natural spray on both her family and their pets.

Peter Keeler is currently a Town employee as Building Maintenance Supervisor. His family has been Ridgefield residents for about 300 years and he grew up on the family dairy farm in Ridgebury. He has been a shooter all of his life and is a graduate of the Colorado Gunsmithing School. He does not hunt at the present time, but is educated in gun and ballistics safety. He has seen a big difference in the deer population since he was a child in Ridgefield. Perhaps hunting the deer is the answer, but Mr. Keeler stated that he would go onto the committee with an open mind. He is concerned about the tick problem.

Di Masters shared her background as a child in the South with a father who was an active hunter. She understands how a hunter can have a real respect for wildlife. Her father was involved in hunting to clean up herds resulting in increased health for the deer.

Sid Kelley – is willing to be on the Deer Committee representing the Land Conservancy. He has been on the Conservancy for about 30 years and President of the Conservancy for the last 5 years. The Conservancy is a private open space committee responsible for 97 parcels of land in Ridgefield comprised of 630 acres. These parcels of land include natural woodlands, wetlands and some open meadows. The position of the Conservancy is on control of the problem, a balanced approach.

John Borger – presented his credentials for serving on the Deer Committee. Mr. Borger described himself as an avid outdoorsman, a hunter, a conservationist, and an environmentalist. He has been active in these issues since the first Earth Day in the 70's. Mr. Borger believes the deer herd has to be managed. He is open to all ideas. He grew up in Warren, Pennsylvania in “deer country”.

Tom Castellani – has lived in Ridgefield for 14 years. His property borders on ten acres of open space. A pharmacist by training, Mr. Castellani works in sales. He feels nature did not intend deer to live this way where their habitat is severely restricted. The paper read hunters versus non-hunters. He feels this is not the answer. Committee members need to come to the committee with open minds, not with a prejudiced approach. He does have a chemical background and could be helpful understanding pesticides, chemical contraceptives, etc., although he has not researched these controls to date.

Tessa O'Regan – expressed her interest in serving on the Deer Committee. Ms. Regan is an active member of the Caudatowa Garden Club. Through her husband, who is a doctor in town, she is acutely aware of the severity of the Lyme Disease problem. Ms. O'Regan pointed how the deer are consuming the natural

flora and fauna leaving space for the invasive plants to grow out of control. The deer do not seem to eat the invasive plants. She believes there is a strong need to assist in balancing the environment.

Mr. Marconi pointed out that a decision on the membership of the Deer Committee will be decided at the September 1st BOS Meeting. Additional interviews can be held on that date as well if additional residents wish to apply in writing expressing their interest and a desire to be interviewed..

Tom Falconieri, Limestone Rd. – expressed his concern in how the deer population doubles every two years. He feels contraception doesn't work. If the herd is not thinned, many of them are going to die. Hunting is the only solution.

6. **Finance: Transfers and Police Department Vehicle Budget Discussion** –

Present for the Police Department vehicle discussion were Jay Wahlberg, Town Controller, Police Chief Richard Ligi, Major John Roche, and Chairman of the Police Commission, George Kane.

Jay Wahlberg presented the Police Department's request to use unexpended funds for a Police lease car. This is to finance a lease replacement vehicle under its existing non-patrol program. The lease renewal was in the fiscal year 2004-2005 capital program; however, it was postponed for further explanation and then went unapproved. The lease vehicle renewal is needed to replace an existing vehicle coming off a 3-year lease arrangement.

B. Manners requested a review of the Police Department's vehicles. Chief Ligi responded:

Marked vehicles	8 Crown Victoria's	- Marked patrol cars
	1 Ford Explorer	
	1 Ford Expedition	
	1 Ford Explorer purchased with Federal Grant	DUI
	dollars 80% of cost	- used for drunk
	driver's patrol; equipped with a tape	recorder.

Total = 11 Marked Vehicles

Unmarked vehicles	2 Jeep Cherokees	Chief's & Major's cars
	1 Pacifica	Detective car
	1 Concorde	Detective car
	1 Ford Taurus	Uniform division unmarked –
		used for training and
		motor vehicle issues

Total = 5 Unmarked Vehicles

Motorcycle
Old ambulance

The leased vehicle under discussion is a Detective Bureau car which came up for replacement this year. Mr. Wahlberg pointed out that funding for this lease is available with automobile capital account unexpended funds – amount needed is \$13,948.76. Two vehicles are needed in the Detective Bureau as there are two detectives on duty per shift.

R. Marconi stressed the need to be very prudent with expenditures – is it possible to go with less expensive vehicles for the Police Department? Chief Ligi pointed out the need for front wheel drive and a heavy weight car as they are often operated above the speed limit. The two Cherokees are a standard model – only extras are power seat and an alarm system. Only Chrysler provides a one payment lease program – Chevrolet and Ford do not.

J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to approve the transfer of \$13,948.76 from unexpended non-bonded capital appropriations to finance a Police Department leased replacement vehicle under its existing non-patrol program. Motion passed 5-0.

Transfers – J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to hold a Town Meeting on September 1, 2004, to approve Department of Finance Memorandum #200502 to decrease Various Capital Funds of Closed Bonded Capital Projects in the amount of \$176,433 and transfer said funds to #10907-44900 for Debt Service Reduction. Motion passed 5-0.

J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to hold a Town Meeting on September 1, 2004 to approve Department of Finance Memorandum #200503 to decrease Various Capital Funds of Closed Bonded Capital Projects in the amount of \$81,612 and transfer said funds to #31095-44826 Capital Reserve Fund. Motion passed 5-0.

7. **Reverse 911** – Present to discuss their two years of research on this project were Police Chief Ligi, Fire Chief Yarrish and Police Major Roche. They have looked at many different options. It is felt that a Reverse 911 Call System would be much better than a siren system as residents would not know what the siren means. Each resident with a listed phone number would receive a voice mail message detailing the emergency. 12,000 residents can be notified within one hour. It is also possible to do a single neighborhood call which would be most effective in the case of a missing child, a water problem, etc. The initial call can be for a single neighborhood and then later widen the circle of those to be called, widening and widening the circle if need be. It could be used for cell phone numbers, but the cell phone number would have to be listed with the Town. The mass calling is one price and would be done from the corporation's phones. The single neighborhood calls can be done from the Ridgefield town phones. The company can handle more than one town's emergency calls at a time. The total cost for five years would be \$49,650, of which \$24,750 is the initial Town cost to purchase necessary hardware and software. Each mass calling would be \$3,000.

B. Manners inquired as to the availability of State dollars to pay for this. \$268,000 has been received from the State to spend on emergency needs. So far, Ridgefield has only purchased masks and gloves, emergency inoculation mandated needs and cots and blankets. Multi-year contract or single year contract – that is the choice. R. Marconi suggested a three-year contract:

\$30, 225 for the first year (includes 24,750 initial cost to purchase the hardware and software)
\$5,475 for each year – 2nd and 3rd year
Total = \$41,175 for 3 years

A.J.DiMattia, Old Branchville Rd. – inquired clarification as to what would be outsourced and what would be in-sourced? The Town is purchasing hardware to do what? What about tech support? The in-sourcing part would be to do local neighborhood calls. The outsourcing would be for Town-wide notification in case of an emergency. How can this system be kept current and state-of-the-art? The company will update the equipment 2x/year. How is the system administered? It will be part of emergency operations through the Fire Department. Tech support will provide training 2-3 days on-site and additional training off-site. A.J. DiMattia inquired as to the quantity of tech support? Is the number of hours spelled out in the contract? R. Marconi will obtain the answers to these questions.

Dom D’Addario, Tanton Hill Rd. – inquired as to the procedure if no one is home to receive the emergency call – recall is available.

A discussion then followed as to exactly what situations the neighborhood local calls should be used for. R. Marconi pointed out that Chiefs Yarrish & Ligi as well as the First Selectman, and possibly Police Lieutenants would be making such decisions – responsible individuals.

John Katz, Ridgebury Road - indicated concern over when and for what situations the local calling would be done – there should be controls set up ahead of time.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve a three-year contract with Avtex as detailed in the memo dated 2/16/04 pending approval by the First Selectman that Avtex will provide tech support at an appropriate level and a policy of usage is approved by the Board of Selectmen. Motion passed 4-0-1. B. Manners abstained.

8. **Discussion on Public Hearing for Ridgefield Housing Authority – Ballard Green** – The map detailing Ballard Green was reviewed indicating that there is land available for the proposed expansion of 12 units. **B. Manners moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to set a Public Hearing on September 1, 2004 for discussion of the Ridgefield Housing Authority’s proposed expansion of Ballard Green of an additional 12 units. Motion passed 5-0.** (Subsequently,

the Public Hearing had to be moved to September 22, 2004, to allow 15 days public notice.)

9. **Approval and Acceptance of Still Hollow Place** – R. Marconi read the August 10, 2004 memorandum from Charles Fisher relative to the completed approved construction of Still Hollow Place and the release of the remaining \$10,400.00 cash bond. **D. Masters moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to accept Still Hollow Place as complete and approved and authorize the release of the remaining \$10,400.00 cash bond. Motion passed 5-0.**

10. **First Selectman's Report** –

- **VNA Rental Space** - It was agreed at the last BOS Meeting that Board members would visit the VNA facility and look in particular at the space previously occupied by Alliance Foundation. It is proposed that this space be used as a Community Area for the Arts, with office space occupied by the Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra, the Arts Council, and the Ridgefield Playhouse. The Symphony could afford to pay rent for the space; the Arts Council cannot; and the Playhouse asserts that they cannot pay much for rent. A discussion followed focusing on how the rent for one organization should not be subsidized when other organizations pay more or in full. The VNA is also a non-profit organization assisting residents and they pay rent to the Town in the amount of \$9.12/sq.ft. The VNA is currently requesting that the Town take back some of their rental space also. Another organization that is looking for space is the Alcohol Substance Abuse Committee. They are applying for a grant that would pay for an Administrator. It would be best if their space is off-site from the Town Hall for privacy reasons. The Playhouse has requested that any new rental space be added to their current lease. It was agreed that the Arts does bring business to the community; there is a substantial return to the Town. It is beneficial for Ridgefield to be known as a community dedicated to the Arts.

J. Plock wondered if the Board of Education Office would have the space to also accommodate the Playhouse office. It was agreed that R. Marconi would write a letter requesting that the Board of Education look at their space utilization with a copy sent to Ken Freeston. This space could then be given to the Playhouse matching their current lease rate.

B. Manners commented on how it is a thrill to see the Playhouse success story. It was such a struggle to get it going.

The VNA receives a grant of \$40,000/year. The Symphony receives an annual check from the Town of \$500. D. Masters pointed out that not all the Town-owned space is of equal rental value. It was suggested that prior to the September 1 BOS Meeting, Board members walk to other Town-

owned locations for an overview of what is available as rental property. Perhaps a policy needs to be adopted for the Arts. R. Marconi closed the discussion by stating that he will ask the Board of Education about any possible square footage they may have available and that the BOS should review other buildings as well to get a complete picture of Town-owned rental space.

- BOS Members have received copies of the Annual Report.
- A Certificate of Excellence has been received for the fiscal year on reporting procedures. Thank you to Jay Wahlberg.
- Request Tom Belote appoint a Constable, Fish & Game

11. Approval of Meeting Minutes – August 4, 2004

J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to approve as amended the minutes of the August 4, 2004 Board of Selectmen Meeting. Motion passed 4-0-1. D. Masters could not vote as she was not yet sworn in as a Selectman on August 4.

J. Plock moved and P. Yanity seconded a motion to recess the public session of the BOS Meeting at 10:50 p.m. and go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussion of the Highway Union Contract with Laurie Scholl, Director of Human Resources, present for the contract discussion, and then following a discussion of a proposed land acquisition. Motion passed 5-0.

The Board of Selectmen came out of Executive Session at 11:09 p.m. and Mr. Marconi invited anyone who was in the lobby waiting and who so desired to come in to sit in the room, and he then reconvened the Board of Selectmen Meeting. **J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to approve the Highway Union Contract as discussed in Executive Session. Motion passed 5-0.**

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to go into a second Executive Session at 11:10 p.m. inviting Herman Cortes Barrios, Natalie Sweeney, Joseph Wolnick and Nathan Garf to join them to discuss a land agreement. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson