

Special Town Meeting November 7, 2011

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. in the East Ridge Middle School Auditorium for the purpose of discussing of the potential purchase and referendum on the Schlumberger property. Mr. Marconi stated that our Charter requires that whenever the Town purchases, sells, or leases any property there has to be a public hearing and a Town Meeting, and there has to be a minimum of 10 days separation between them. He also informed the audience that our environmental consultant Scott Bristol from Milone & MacBroom in Cheshire and David Grogins the Town Attorney were present to answer any questions.

Mr. Marconi read the legal notice of the meeting that appears on page 352.

The first item of business was to elect a Moderator. Di Masters moved, Dom D'Addario seconded to appoint Ed Tyrrell as Moderator.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous, and Mr. Tyrrell was elected Moderator.

The Moderator entertained a motion to appoint Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk, as secretary of the meeting. Di Masters moved, Paul Sutherland seconded to appoint Barbara Serfilippi as secretary.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous, and Ms. Serfilippi was appointed secretary.

Mr. Marconi presented a Power Point presentation on the property.

After the presentation, the Moderator opened the floor for discussion.

Ted Cleveland, 38 Shields La., voiced his desire to walk through the property. Mr. Marconi informed him that once the contracts were signed, he would like to give tours of the property.

Dom D'Addario, 8 Tanton Hill Rd., spoke in favor of the purchase and felt this was not an investment, but an insurance policy. He was concerned about what would happen if a developer bought it.

Michele Frenthrop, Casagmo, spoke in favor of the purchase, because her father worked there as research scientist and she felt it would be a wonderful place to be used for the arts or an art gallery.

Scott young, 51 Caudatowa Dr., asked what the interest rate was on the bonding. Mr. Marconi replied that it would be 3% over 20 yrs. He also inquired if there were any test wells on the property. Mr. Bristol the environmental consultant replied that there were 5 test wells, and our contract with Schlumberger states they will remove them.

Gene Wardazin, 27 Marcadon Ave. said that he was not against the purchase but wondered how long the property had been abandoned. Mr. Marconi replied that it had been vacant for 3 yrs. Mr. Wardazin was concerned as to why someone else had not bought the property. Mr. Marconi answered that it was probably due to the slumping real estate market conditions. Schlumberger began marketing the complex at \$20 million and turned down a local buyer offering \$12 million at one point. Now the asking price is down to \$9 million for a private buyer, but they are offering it to the Town for \$6 million. He thought it might be a tax write-off for the company. The Selectmen are asking voters for \$7 million, \$6 million purchase price and \$1 million for things like demolition, surveying, and legal cost. Mr. Marconi also stated that the contract wouldn't be binding on the town until voters approve it.

Mr. Wardazin also questioned a finance board member's statement he read, arguing that the \$7 million for Schlumberger could be added in without raising our \$99 million debt. Controller Kevin Redmond responded that the service on \$7 million is about \$465,000 a year. Mr. Marconi added that \$60,000-\$80,000 a year for minimal maintenance pushing the annual carrying cost over \$500,000.

John Rubin, 14 Pilgrim Hill Rd. inquired about carrying costs.

Mr. Tyrrell informed the audience that the carrying cost equates to about \$50 a year to individual taxpayers, but could vary with the relative value of each taxpayer's property.

Mr. Marconi stated that Selectmen plan to demolish most of Schlumberger's former research facilities, but they expect to retain a building designed by the renowned architect Philip Johnson, and also possibly the library building and auditorium. He also emphasized that the potential re-sale is by no means assured, but it could work out and help reduce costs. He then spoke about 10 acres off Sunset La. that seem good for residential use. Al Garzi, the Assessor, told him the residential land's value would vary with the number of housing units allowed, and it would be reasonable to expect the price to reflect \$100,000 per housing unit. 10 acres might bring \$2 million; 50 units, \$5 million. There are also 5 acres on the other side of Old Quarry Rd. which might be sold. Since the state affordable housing law can nullify most zoning rules, the Selectmen plan to limit development densities through deed restrictions before any resale. The Selectmen's main objective in buying the property is to avoid having a developer buy it and use the affordable housing law to force in a huge multi-family project. A developer could come away with 290 units.

Mr. Marconi further stated that the resale plans would depend on Schlumberger's environmental clean-up, and the state's approval of it. Two areas have known pollution. On the 10 acres near Sunset La. The toxic metal beryllium was found at a concentration greater than the government allows. It is in the soil, but hasn't affected the ground water. Within the area of the research buildings, there is an old oil tank leak. This has polluted ground water, complicating the cleanup. Schlumbergers cleanup must be with the oversight of the Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection. The cleanup of the beryllium could take up to 3 years based on the DEEP approval action. On the remaining 30 acres, including the leaking oil tank,

Schlumberger has to submit a plan for the clean-up and has 8 years to complete the clean-up to the state's satisfaction.

Mr. Marconi informed the audience that as for future municipal uses, the Town might keep some land to preserve this potential, but the Selectmen have no near-term plans for anything.

Ellen Burns, Great Hill Rd., Ridgefield Open Space Assn. member, voiced her support of the purchase.

Eric Carlson, 146 Peaceable St., asked if 290 living units approved by a developer, what would be the financial impact to the Town. Mr. Marconi answered that that greatest implication would be to our infrastructure, traffic, and schools.

Marion Roth, North Salem Rd. voiced her concern about buying the property without a clear plan. She felt it shouldn't be bought as a liability. Mr. Marconi responded that is why Milone & MacBroom was hired to come up with a plan.

Being no further discussion, the Moderator entertained a motion to adjourn. Jan Rifkinson moved, and it was seconded to adjourn the meeting.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk