

**APPROVED  
BOARD OF FINANCE MINUTES  
THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2008**

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A budget deliberations meeting of the Board of Finance was held on Tuesday, April 1, 2008 in the lower conference room in Town Hall at 7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Marty Heiser, Chairman, Kevin Walsh, Vice Chairman  
Dave Ulmer, Peter Gomez, and Robert Cascella  
Town Officials: Rudy Marconi, First Selectman; Jay Wahlberg, Controller  
John Mannuzza, Assistant Controller; Police Chief Ligi;  
Charlie Fisher, Town Engineer  
Guests: Deborah Low, Superintendent of Schools, Dan Carlin, Business Manager;  
Keith Miller, Chairman, Board of Education

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Mr. Heiser called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

**BUDGET DISCUSSION WITH BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Mr. Heiser commented from last night sense of harmony, cooperation and mutual respect. Mr. Miller brought a chart showing a decade of school budgets, first column requested, second column approved and in every year but one, it was reduced. Commenting that, in prior years, the BOE had produced its budget without consulting with the BOS and BOF before hand. This year the BOE consulted with the BOS and the BOF and knew what was "in the cookie jar" prior to preparing its budget. The result was the lowest suggested increase in a decade at 5.54%. He said the BOE was frugal, but has achieved the objectives that it set out for itself, because we responded to the guidance that we sat down and worked and developed in conjunction with the BOS and the BOF. It is my "fervent prayer" that the BOF approve what we have put before you.

Deborah Low, Superintendant of Schools, said that in an effort to achieve better collaboration and communication, the BOE is putting together a planning process that will enable it to be more predictable and will have a logical cycle to it and establishes priorities that the BOE votes on in September and October so there are no surprises and last minutes wishes. This year's priorities were modest. With priorities in place ahead of the budget process, the administration has a blue print for the budget and it's easier to construct.

Health benefits came in relatively low.

Upward pressure on the budget that looked for offsets and tried to show it in the technology piece last night.

Mr. Heiser said that (looking for and identifying offsets) was the most encouraging part of the BOE's presentation and last night's Public Hearing. He said he could not recall a budget presentation where the thought of having savings was presented.

Mr. Ulmer asked about Special Education mandates set by the State, where are we on those mandates, where do we stand now, how does the future look with respect to personnel.

Calling it "a very tricky area", Mr. Miller said that Ridgefield got a clean bill of health when the State came through and did a review. Sixty districts did not get a clean bill of health, Ridgefield did.

Ms. Low added that accurately predicting special education costs for  $\pm$  600 students is very difficult because it is all about the individual student. Parent's rights and the potential for litigation when parents are not satisfied with the school's decision regarding their child(ren) were discussed.

Mr. Miller said that another area being pushed is co-teaching and tutoring all of the staff. He called in a complicated but beneficial task. Mr. Cascella asked for clarification. Ms. Low explained that there are particular strategies and methodologies being taught to all teachers so that they will better understand everybody's needs and be able to make **modifications** for special needs students that will accommodate those students' special needs and stay in a regular classroom or "the least restrictive environment".

Mr. Ulmer asked about the dollar implications of some of the initiatives identified by the BOE, and how far is the BOE through those initiatives at this time. Specifically, Mr. Ulmer asked if this were the last year of adding math paraprofessionals. Ms. Low answered: "Yes."

Mr. Ulmer then asked about the Contingency Fund, saying there are a couple of ways to look at it.

Mr. Miller said it was a misnomer. Given the enrollment, the BOE thinks it is three classes of twenty-four kids in each class. We know that when you look at the aggregate, we end up with 3 to 5 teachers. We do not know what their assignments will be but we do know we will need to have them.

4-1-08 Peter Gomez arrived about 8:15 p.m.

Mr. Ulmer stated that contingency dollars had never, ever been used, because of the offsets (older, higher paid teachers retiring and being replaced by less experienced, lower salary grade teachers) He complimented the BOE on the transparency in the budget and added that the salary account always has a surplus. Mr. Ulmer then asked if the BOE had a program to reduce energy consumption.

Mr. Carlin said so much depends on the weather. This year's consumption is very good. We are about \$160k over budget.

Mr. Ulmer noted that the decreased consumption was based off a base year two years ago.

Mr. Carlin said the base year of 2005/2006. "We are budgeting 2008/2009 consumption based on 2007/2008."

Mr. Miller added that the budget forecast assumes \$2.85 a gallon for fuel. The current lock in price is \$3.10, which would put the BOE \$50k in the hole.

Mr. Ulmer stated that enrollment at the elementary schools decreased by forty-one (41) students this year. A general discussion of forecasting birthrates and the resultant enrollment numbers ensued. Mr. Ulmer remarked that, when Ridgefield expanded its schools, the cost per

student went up (\$14.2k per student), not down, and wondered how the declining enrollment would affect cost per student, referencing industrial standards that look at productivity.  
(Gomez arrives)

Ms. Low commented that the decreased enrollment has resulted in a 2.8 staff reduction.

Mr. Cascella asked about the school building closeouts. Mr. Miller responded by talking about the noisy ventilators at the East Ridge Middle School and a long list of items at the High School and wondered how these things could be closed out, saying the status quo might not meet the ed spec. Ms. Low said that the Master Building Committee has to vote on it. Mr. Marconi said that the Master Building Committee has not decided if it wants to pursue a legal action against the vendor for the East Ridge ventilators. Mr. Ulmer said that the lost interest on the \$3MM of State reimbursements was what concerned the BOF.

Mr. Heiser added: "It would be good to just draw this to a close and accept the buildings as they are and try to work around it."

Mr. Gomez said there is an opportunity for learning from this experience as far as how we manage building projects and that is doing a post mortem on how we negotiate with contractors. He recommended establishing a protocol eliminating a no-fault contract. Mr. Marconi said that the State DOT dictates construction management and the State dictates that low bids must be accepted. He added that three to six months after the project starts, the low-bid contractor is out of business.

Mr. Walsh complimented the BOE on its budget data and the presentation thereof saying it was the best job he has seen in three years on the BOF. He asked what the BOE thought was the district's greatest fiscal challenge. Mr. Miller answered: 1) special education; 2) health care; and 3) contract negotiations. Mr. Walsh then asked for the single greatest non-fiscal challenge, "something that keeps you awake at night". Ms. Low responded that she thought the quality of staff development has a long way to go; that Ridgefield is ahead in technology and has a quality curriculum and that some classes are too large. She added that the staff support that is needed is not there, especially at the elementary level in terms of resources for classroom teachers and curriculum support.

Mr. Walsh then asked if the High School accreditation was at risk. Mr. Miller and Ms. Low answered "No" in unison. Among Connecticut schools, sixteen (16) silver awards were received (one of which went to Ridgefield); no schools received gold awards.

Mr. Walsh asked what the BOE attributed the decrease in energy consumption to. Mr. Miller said it was "a little here and a little there". Mr. Carlin said that the consulting firm the BOE hired is teaching them to look at things differently, and new boilers at two of the schools have helped.

Mr. Walsh asked about the increase in the cost of disability insurance and workmen's compensation costs. Mr. Carlin noted that workmen's compensation is experience based, and, if you look at disability with life insurance, it's fairly stable.

### **POLICE HEADQUARTERS DISCUSSION**

Police Chief, Richard Ligi; Major John Roche

Commissioners: Susan Craig; George Kain; Carl Lecher; Charles Knoche and Thomas Reynolds.

Richard A. Zini, Jr. Senior Architect with Doyle/Coffin Architecture;  
proposed budget for the Police Building expansion. Refer to proposal for budget details.

Chief Ligi recited a brief history of the current Police Headquarters which the department took over in 1976 for what was supposed to be twenty-five years. He outlined the available growth options as: 1) expansion of the current building; 2) tearing the current building down and building a new one on the current site; and 3) utilize the third floor more fully (this option was eliminated because the building's balloon construction will not support it. As of now, the headquarters building does not meet ADA Code; the air quality is poor, the roof leaks, there is no fire-prevention system, and it lacks bullet proof windows.

The building committee appointed by the BOS decided that the best solution would be an addition to and renovation of the existing building that would serve the department for the next fifteen years. A \$500,000.00 State grant related to the installation of the elevator is available.

Architect Rick Zini gave a summary of what has been done to date, i.e. the third floor study (@ \$32k); and the architects' engineering construction documents (@ \$420k). The \$420k was a separate referendum item. Mr. Heiser asked about previous studies and there was some agreement that some study was done in 2002/2003 with a cost of approximately \$70k. Chief Ligi pointed out how the proposed project is considerably less costly than what was previously proposed after the 2002/2003 study. Mr. Heiser established the point that, even if the voters do not approve the \$4.2MM project, the \$420k has been spent. Mr. Zini presented drawings that showed how the new construction would tie into the existing building and how the architects met the challenge of tying the two buildings together both physically and aesthetically. Mr. Zini said the department is operating with fifteen to twenty year old equipment. Chief Ligi added that they are no longer able to buy parts to make repairs on the existing equipment. Mr. Heiser asked if the cost of equipment upgrades was included in the \$4.2MM. Chief Ligi answered affirmatively.

Mr. Heiser asked for the grand total (dollars) for the project. Chief Ligi answered that \$4,250,000.00 has been budgeted by the BOS. That amount includes the interest on capital paid during construction. (\$180,000.00 cost of interest) Mr. Ulmer opined that the interest should not be capitalized. Mr. Marconi said: "it's up to you to remove it if you want."

Mr. Heiser asked how much of the \$4.2MM estimated construction cost was related to making the building compliant to current codes. Mr. Zini responded: "\$1.5MM". He added that the cost of equipment upgrades is also included in the \$4.2MM.

The present building is in a residential zone with a municipal use. Chief Ligi said the foot print for the new construction was set by the Zoning Board of Appeals which granted a special-exemption variance. The site work is minimal.

Mr. Gomez asked who owns the cell phone tower. Chief Ligi said that the Town owns it and leases it. Mr. Marconi added that the leases' expiration dates vary.

Mr. Gomez asked what the Police Department's total staff is. Chief Ligi responded that there are 43 officers, 3 civilian staff; 3 dispatchers and two part time custodians.

Mr. Gomez asked if the construction would be done on a no-fault contract and who would be responsible for negotiating the contract.

Mr. Marconi said: "we haven't gotten to an actual contract discussion, we're waiting to hear if the public approves it."

Mr. Gomez said: "let's go on the assumption that the project is approved."

Mr. Marconi said: it would be a g/c, a single bidder, not a c/m. He then looked to Mr. Zini to elaborate.

Mr. Zini: under a general construction contract under the AA document you can't have a no fault. If you do it as a general construction, the general contractor is responsible for the project for one year after the substantial completion date regardless whether his subs (subcontractors) are gone or not." He opined that competitive bidding would "drive these numbers even stronger" and that's the ideal situation. He added that a lot of restrictions could be written into the bid proposal regarding previous experience with similar projects, etc.

Mr. Ulmer asked how much of the \$4.2MM was contingency.

Mr. Zini: roughly 10% of the construction portion of the project.

Mr. Gomez wondered aloud about a twenty-year bond for a project with a fifteen-year life. Chief Ligi responded that it is very difficult to answer that concern today because of changes in technology, types of crime and policing.

Mr. Ulmer asked how many staff the new building would hold. Chief Ligi said it would hold sixty-five (65) officers between males and females.

Mr. Gomez spoke about: 1) desirability; 2) sustainability; and 3) affordability. Saying that he has seen the interior of the existing building, he would not argue that something has to be done. Affordability he said was shared by some extent with the BOF, but to a larger extent the voters. He asked what was Plan B in the event the project was voted down.

Mr. Marconi said Plan B is that we're stuck with what we've got right now, there is no alternate building project.

Mr. Ulmer asked if the project could be done for less than \$4.2MM.

Chief Ligi said part of the \$4.2MM is interest, part of it is for increased custodial hours during the construction phase (temporary additional hours, not additional staff) and part of it is updating their 1986 equipment.

Mr. Ulmer confirmed that the \$4.2MM includes furniture, fixtures and equipment. Mr. Marconi said there was nothing in the budget for a clerk of the works.

Mr. Cascella asked what the time line would be if the project is approved by the voters. Chief Ligi said he hoped they would break ground this year and finish in sixteen to eighteen months. Mr. Cascella asked if there was provisions in place within the \$4.2MM budget to handle potential problems such as power outages during construction. Mr. Zini answered that a

system is being created whereby the current systems keep operating while the new systems are being installed and then there will be a "cut over" period. "It's going to be tricky but we have definitely thought about it."

Mr. Walsh asked about the building committee. Chief Ligi responded that the BOS has authorized: Mr. Marconi, Major John Roche; Charlie Fisher; George Kain; Charles Lecher and Chief Ligi.

Mr. Walsh asked: "What's the deficiency in this project for the amount of money that's being spent?"

Chief Ligi: "The fact that the whole building will not be new. It's a compromise."

Chief Ligi: "I think this will accommodate what we are looking to do. It's a compromise. It's not 100% of everything we are asking for."

Mr. Gomez asked if any donations have been offered and if the Police Commission would consider naming rights for portions of the building. Chief Ligi answered that no donations have been offered. He added that there is an ethical connotation to naming rights which he doesn't like. Mr. Marconi said the BOS thought about that for Town Hall and decided it did not want to get into that at all.

The BOF reviewed other proposed capital projects in the Police Department's budget. The canine building improvements and equipments were discussed. Mr. Ulmer asked about the Department's operating budget, noting that most items currently in the proposed capital budget were put in operating last year.

### **BOE CAPITAL PROJECTS DISCUSSION**

The BOE and BOF discussed the need to replace some of the heating systems that are +40 years old. Branchville was named as the worst. The Barlow Mt. boiler runs year round because of the pool.

Regarding the close out of the school projects, Mr. Miller said the BOE will have to look at capital projects in the next year or two to address what has not been done by the vendors. There is currently about \$300k left in the building projects that might help address some of the projects.

### **CAPITAL BUDGET DISCUSSION WITH FIRE CHIEF**

The Board of Finance got a short lesson in cisterns, where they are located, how they are used and what happens when they leak. There are thirty-one cisterns in Town and six dry hydrants. The Fire Department has an annual program whereby it evaluates these. Last year it repaired two cisterns. Four cisterns and three dry hydrants are current not working. Sixty-six (66%) percent of the community is not covered by hydrants which moved the discussion to the need for the Tanker #10 replacement. Tanker #10 is actually in good shape and would continue to serve the community but for the fact that none of the volunteers are willing to learn how to drive it. The truck, which is thirty-three years old has thirty-five gears and, especially when full of water, is difficult to drive and maneuver on Ridgefield's winding roads. Tanker #10 is used only by the volunteers. The paid fire fighters are not responsible for it.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Heiser and seconded by Mr. Walsh to adjourn the meeting at 11:15 p.m. Vote, all in favor, unanimous. Motion carries.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Karen Rodgers  
Recording Secretary