



Town of Ridgefield Board of Finance Budget Deliberations

Approved Meeting Minutes

Tuesday May 19, 2020

I. Call to order

D. Ulmer called to order the Board of Finance Budget meeting at 7:00 PM May 19, 2020 via Zoom due to recent Coronavirus. Board Members D. Ulmer, G. Kabasakalian, M. Rettger A. Freidenrich, K. Ogden present.

II. Tonight the BOS and BOF will discuss the BOS Capital and Operational budgets.

Operating Budget- Last year the BOS significantly restructured the budget with eliminating 7 positions. Roads are to be back filled. The town aid road tar money is allocated from states with \$380,000 annual to Ridgefield. We don't know what type of weather we'll have. This will cover us for storms, ice, supplies etc. The balance can be used for paving if not used for snow and ice removal. Balance currently about \$600,000. The 2020 town aid money recently came in and funds were released to us. Funds may not be received next year. A lack of funding will hurt if we have severe weather and a severe recession. Money can be used for parameters within the roads; sand, salt, plowing, paving etc. It's difficult to put number into the budget because we don't know if we'll get the money. Contracts are coming soon. 2.5% to budget for a contractual obligation. None exceed 2.5%.

Question posed by M. Rettger: Why is Social Security being budgeted higher than 2.5%? Reply by K. Redmond: Other increases are due to minimum wage, over-time. Contractual steps and contracts are included. Includes holiday, pay and over-time. Salary increases may be none next year. Will the town re-negotiate? When the recession hit, revenue meetings began. Unions were contacted and budgets discussed. Options are lay-offs, insurance concession or furloughs. We will look at scenarios if need be.

We've had years with high and low turnovers and times when jobs can be filled quickly or not. There are savings incurred when positions are vacant and not being replaced. Vacancies would generate over-time. Highway hasn't increased staff in years. More work for highway can be outsourced. In the past, several reorganizations and positions have been eliminated and reduced.

Worker's Comp going up 8.5%? The driver is the fact that we were under budget in the current year. The actual premium came in higher. 3.5% increase off the actual budget. In regards to revenue from Parks & Rec, camps open on June 29. The Boys & Girls club only offered a camp spot to those signed up for a full year. There has been a great reduction in the number of kids who can attend camp. The revenue will be impacted. We'll need to immediately adjust expenses when revenue is impacted.

We're locked in on electric, gas/diesel rates. The diesel has been purchased on behalf of the schools. Mitchell Oil negotiated with the town and pushed the contract out six months. We're very fortunate to keep the rates. Specific number or thought on COVID 19 expenses? We're tracking all COVID 19 related expenses based on FEMA requirements. We've always received what we've applied for and expenses have always been covered. This is tracked but not put into the budget as it's difficult to estimate the costs.

Is re-financing reflected in the budget? We did a bond issuance due to great rate environment. We have cash flow savings, interest on \$4.4 million, premium on \$4.4 million amortized. A slow reduction of debt services.

Increased IT maintenance? We've consolidated policy technology and moved things to IT bucket. There has been an increase in software packages and highway increase due to paving. Cyber insurance is part of our insurance package and is reviewed annually.

Rental income? - Dairy Land is Chef's Warehouse on the line item. Request from Chef's Warehouse for a 2-month consideration. The Children's Corner day care facility at Barlow Mountain to discuss current rental situation. No revenue at all, completely shut down. What's in the budget should cover us.

Capital—the Capital budget improvement plan for next year is covered by 20-year bonds. Highlights in regards to highway-2 trucks and a lift needed for safety reasons. The golf cart path expansion has a revenue connection. Parks and Rec has a request for a Toro mower. Town engineer-conducting village storm study and sidewalk improvements in town and at schools. Roofs, windows, Tiger Hollow track, police equipment included. Fire-ambulance rotation replacement needed. Library and schools need miscellaneous repairs which are education related. Capital plan includes repaving a number of tertiary roads as this work typically lasts 15-20 years. These roads connect the town and major streets. The town engineer has 9 projects up for bonding. Smaller projects will drop down in contingencies. These are just estimates. Contingencies are higher because these are just estimates. We'll avoid borrowing money for contingencies.

Track—The track must be done due to a ground settlement. The field isn't as necessary as the track at this time. The fields anticipated cost is several hundred thousand dollars. The track is in need of several repairs. Tiger Hollow will help with the cost of the field but not the track.

Rec Center-parking. Both Founders Hall and Rec Center are a success in the town. Currently looking for solution to parking problem. A possibility of adding 20 extra spots and another 30-40 near Founders Hall. Due to wetlands, project can't happen. A study will look into the site and

provide a master plan for parking. The facility was built with 199 spots; 200 or more would have required more approval. Different scenarios will be looked into.

Sidewalks need repair due to weather and materials used that cause deterioration. The sidewalks are impacted by winter conditions and need addressing due to liability.

LED-lighting project upgrades. A rebate is eligible from Eversource. LED lighting will create a long-term energy savings.

Technology-Battery backup is 20 minutes. Education upgrades require different networking needs. Possibility of purchasing Cisco equipment. The library technology update shows the server is the same age as the library and is in need of upgrade. The technology was purchased prior to the library expansion.

Education expenses-breakdown is done in their Capital review program A request to send the BOF back up material showing their needs.

Golf cart path-how critical is it for an expansion? The wettest areas are not paved. Carts can't go out after rain. The revenue component to this is that carts can only go out on certain days. 50% of greens fees are lost if carts aren't allowed out. It's critical this year depending on the weather. Carts were allowed out starting May 2. 2 players per group initially, then expanded to 4 players. Single riders only due to social distancing. Carts are currently running at full capacity and the demand for golf is high. The revenue will be where it's expected. The supply doesn't meet the demand for golf at this time.

R. Marconi-concerned about the state and how funds are allocated. Legislature seems to try to hang onto funding for muni's. Binding arbitration is an issue due to the wealth of a community. Overall, the state has been positive funding to us. We did receive CARES funding but no figure yet. The amounts are being passed out to towns and is based on Title 1 funding. Money goes straight to schools, not the town. The second round is coming. We're stabilized in what we've been getting from the state. The Revenue Committee consists of Treasurer, Tax Collector, Town Clerk and others and meets once per month. The departments prepare for upcoming budget. Numbers are estimates only. Conveyance looks conservative. The activity is still strong. Building permits down in fiscal 20. Per the building inspector, we're in good shape for 2021. Education is important and all opinions are respected. No one wants to take away from the students. We know it effects home values. The budget must be approached in a balanced way. There are costs associated with re-opening the schools. All variables are important. Initial non-binding on BOE budget of a 2% increase was reduced to 1.5%. This is an uncomfortable territory for all because we don't know the future. More questions need to be answered.

Maureen Kozlark-The schools are completely supported. The fund balance is for revenue loss not increased spending. A deferral or freeze on raises may be appropriate at this time.

Barbara Manners-Appreciates parents and their advocacy. Wants schools to thrive and maintain home values. Our job is to look after the welfare of the whole town. Trying to keep a flat mill rate

with help from the fund balance. We need to be realistic of what is good for the whole town. Comfortable with 1.5% BOE increase.

Bob Hebert-Hopefully this is short term pain but will have effects for long term. With the unknown, we don't know how to go about funding. Suggest to keep the fund balance above minimum. It's wise to have money in the fund balance for the unknowns. We're delaying the inevitable of raising taxes. People are leaving CT due to high taxes. We're not attracting big businesses. Students go to college and don't return to Ridgefield. CT doesn't have the jobs it once had. Supports 1.2% BOS budget increase and 1.5% BOE increase.

Sean Connelly-has kids in the school system. His concern is the experience for the children. We're in unprecedented times and kids don't need less support. A 1.5% budget will lead to a decline in what kids need. What will be the kids experience when they go back to school? More isolation? Temperature taking? A need to find a balance and keep the fund balance at 8%. We can't ignore a petition with almost 1000 signatures. There's an overwhelming number of people who support the budget. We can't ignore so many voices. Comfortably supports 2.5% BOE budget increase and 0.5% tax increase.

IV. Adjournment-motion to adjourn at 9:50 pm by A. Freidenrich, seconded by M. Rettger. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Mia Belanger

*Thank you to Andrew Neblett for facilitating.