



Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectman Budget Meeting Minutes
UNAPPROVED
Feb 28, 2022 at 7.00pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi, Maureen Kozlark, Sean Connelly, Bob Hebert, Barbara Manners

1. Conservation Commission – Budget

Jim Coyle, Chair of the Conservation Commission, and Director of Finance Kevin Redmond presented details on the budget request for the Conservation Commission. J. Coyle talked about the need for more seasonal employees to help maintain the open spaces. Last year the Commission was able to find money to hire two additional employees, which worked out very well. Another big budget item increase is the updating of the Ridgefield National Resource Inventory Book, which involves field work and a variety of environmental tests. The Commission has recruited some volunteers to help, however there is still a cost associated with it.

R. Marconi asked if some of the trails and grounds budget could be reallocated to professional services since in the previous year all of the money allocated toward that budget was not actually used for the trails and grounds. J. Coyle pointed out that the Commission has the ability to move money from one cost center to another as needed. S. Connelly asked about the difference between the tasks for the volunteers and the tasks for the paid employees. J. Coyle provided more details on the jobs that the paid employees and volunteers perform. There was a discussion about how much the Commission pays employees from Parks and Rec when they need extra help and if there is a way to reduce that cost.

B. Hebert asked if there are any updates on the deed restrictions for the open space properties that the Town is interested in. J. Coyle will present more information at the March 16th BOS meeting.

2. RACE (Ridgefield Action Committee for the Environment) –Funds Request

RACE members Vincent Giordano, Tiffany Carlson and Dr. Ben Oko presented their budget plan to the Board. There is a new 5 cent surcharge that wholesalers will be required by the State to collect for every nip bottle that is sold. The money will go to the municipality in

which the retailer resides. The liquor store in Copps Hill alone has estimated to collect around \$2500 a year. RACE, along with the Energy Task force, recommends using this new revenue toward hiring a Recycling Coordinator. The Recycling Coordinator will help engage the Town in environmental measures that will reduce waste and save money. V. Giordano provided examples of how this can be done. There is a report called Annual Municipal Recycling that is required by state law which gives details on the recycling and waste costs of the town. Because the report that Ridgefield provides does not have a dedicated researcher, it is not as accurate as it could be. This is one reason to hire a Recycling Coordinator who can focus on gathering the metrics for the report and find the best ways to save money. T. Carlson talked about the time she spent volunteering at Veteran's Park School separating the recycling and food compost from the trash and the huge difference in waste reduction it made. The cost for the Recycling Coordinator would be offset by the savings the coordinator would find through different programs such as composting. T. Carlson talked about several of the programs that the HRRA offers that go unused due to the lack of knowledge about them.

B. Hebert asked what is the purpose of the new surcharge requirement on nip bottles. R. Marconi talked about the overall goal of the State which is to reduce the amount of solid waste going into the stream. There is a very strong environmental advocacy group that is pushing to expand the bottle bill and the nip surcharge program is their starting point. There was a discussion about the timing for hiring the Recycling Coordinator and the total estimated revenue for the Town from the nip bottle surcharge.

Mariah Hutchings Okrongly, Planning and Zoning Commission member, commented that decisions should be thought about from a POCD standpoint and that there is a potential revenue stream for selling compost. M. Hutchings asked why the Town is increasing the solid waste budget in schools when decreasing it could offset the cost of a Recycling Coordinator who could work with the schools on composting and creating revenue.

Mike?? asked if the Recycling Coordinator could be a shared position with another town. Dr. Oko commented that down the line that could be a possibility. There was a discussion about the training for the position and if there are potential candidates.

M. Kozlark commented that any of the Board members could to step in as the alternate rep for the HRRA. Currently R. Marconi is the rep and M. Kozlark is the alternate.

R. Marconi expanded on the HRRA responsibilities, the history of single stream recycling and the issues that it had presented in the past. The Board discussed the potential savings from different programs geared toward reducing our environmental impact. Solar panels, compost programs at the school, and reducing energy consumption using LED lighting were a few that were named.

Alice Dew, the new P&Z Director, sent an email with budget requests that included planet conservation, the affordable housing plan, the TOD at Branchville requiring a zone change, an updated GIS program, and certifications for the ZEO and P&Z Director. In her email A. Dew also suggested creating a new Assistant ZEO position and then combining the three current P&Z, Conservation Commission and Wetlands Board administrative jobs into one full time position. There was a discussion about the budget for the salaries for the Director of P&Z, ZEO and admin positions. The Board needs to discuss the idea in greater detail with P&Z Commission Chair Rob Hendrick, Conservation Commission Chair Jim Coyle, and Human Resource Director Laurie Fernandez.

3. Budget Overview

Kevin Redmond, Director of Finance, gave an overview of the budget changes since the January/February meetings. The changes that occurred were a decrease in roads, the PD restructure, and the addition of a firefighter to help alleviate the overtime costs.

There have been no applicants for the mechanic position, even after the CDL and EVT requirement was removed. The Board talked about the mechanic salary, the cost of outsourcing, different ideas to bring in candidates and the training involved.

There was a discussion about the idea of increasing the Town Clerk and Tax Collector salaries, and the reasons behind the changes in the education budget.

R. Marconi passed out the joint presentation from the Arts Council and ECDC that will be given at tomorrow night's meeting for the Board to review and talked briefly about proposed changes to the capital budget. There was a discussion about some of the ARPA requests that have been proposed, what the money can and cannot be used for and how to go about allocating the funds.

R. Marconi clarified that the budget meetings are for informational purposes only and that the Board will not be approving any requests at these meetings.

The Town Meetings that were originally scheduled for this week have been postponed because the language has not yet been received from Bond Council. The Board cannot move forward with meetings until the language has been received and advertised to the public.

4. Possible Capital/Operating Budget Vote

No votes were taken.

M. Kozlark moved to adjourn the February 28, 2022 BOS Budget Meeting at 9:45pm. B. Hebert second the motion. Motion carries 4-0. (B. Manners had already left the meeting).