

TOWN of RIDGEFIELD – BOARD OF SELECTMEN SPECIAL MEETING
JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF FINANCE & POLICE COMMISSION
MARCH 6, 2017

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 6:00 P.M.

APPROVED MINUTES

These minutes are a general summary of the public hearing and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.

In attendance:

Board of Selectmen: Rudy Marconi, Bob Hebert, Maureen Kozlark, Barbara Manners, Steve Zemo

Board of Finance: Dave Ulmer, Sean Connelly, Marty Heiser, Michael Raduazzo

Board of Police Commissioners: Joe Savino, Marcie Coffin, George Kain, Charles Knoche, Tom Reynolds

Police Chief John Roche

Fire Chief Jerry Meyers

Agenda

1. Police Station and Associated Costs in the 2021 Budget

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

He explained the reason for the meeting—the Police have \$90,000 in the 2018-19 budget for an update of their building study, Fire Department has \$45,000 in the 2017-18 budget for a study of their building. Let's take a step back and do our due diligence about the future of the two departments. Do we want a public safety building?

Dave Ulmer stated we have this in our capital plan; as long as we keep paying down our debt, we are in good shape.

M. Kozlark stated when the vote was taken on new police station, it was very clear that the residents did not want a new building.

Police Commissioner J. Savino stated the Police have come in with a 1% increase in this year's budget. We have looked at all the options for the future of the police station—siting, central dispatch—we think that investing in the police building is a really good option. Our research shows that surrounding Towns keep fire and police separate.

Police Commissioner Marcie Coffin stated that the costs of moving the technical apparatus is quite expensive.

R. Hebert asked if the two studies requested in the respective budgets are the best use of taxpayer dollars? Several smaller towns are combining their dispatch. Our emergency response is changing—it is mostly EMS, not structure fires. Do we take the money that we've allocated for the studies and be more strategic? We all agree that both fire and police are desperately in need of updated facilities. We must ask all questions—cost, safety, efficiency.

R. Marconi asked does it make sense to put more money into the existing building? Does it work for modern-day police work?

Former Police Commissioner Carl Lecher stated there is a \$4 or \$5 million difference between working with the existing building or building a new one.

S. Zemo stated we need to commission one comprehensive study so that we can be sure that the path that we choose is the most efficient one. There will be many residents that will insist on this.

Police Commissioner Tom Reynolds stated that no town in Fairfield County has a combined dispatch. The Fire Department and Police Department do totally different things.

Chief Roche stated that a central dispatch study was done in 1998-99. At that time it was proposed to construct an addition to the side of the police station. The cost would be \$23M. Further studies were done; one of the sites studied was the Schlumberger property. The study concluded that the best option would be to knock down and rebuild the police station building where it stands on East Ridge.

M. Kozlark asked why not have a central dispatch? Chief Roche stated there are many sensitive, confidential issues that we deal with. Many people are reticent to come to the police station and we have to meet them somewhere else.

B. Hebert—can this concern be addressed architecturally? S. Zemo stated this could be designed with a duplex complex in mind.

Chief Roche responded that it is best kept separate due to privacy and security.

B. Manners asked the Chief have you ever visited any shared facilities? The answer is no. I have spoken with other departments and have found that a shared facility is uncommon. A shared campus is common; not a shared facility.

Board of Finance member Marty Heiser stated the police don't want this and the firefighters don't want to go down to the Schlumberger property—they like their in-town location. Our 3/6/17 BOS special mtg minutes appvd, Page 2 of 3

crime rate is the lowest rate in the state; they are doing a good job in the building right now. Is there a need for this? What would it cost? The good news is that we have the property (SLG) and there is room to finance and interest rates are low.

R. Marconi stated that we want to do our due diligence and bring to the people something that we are positive about—we do not want to repeat what happened in 2010.

B. Hebert stated that we know that we need both an updated police department and an updated fire department; we are taking a step back and asking whether we are on the right path? The last study was done 16 or 17 years ago. Policing and firefighting has changed over the years.

Board of Finance member Mike Raduazzo stated that the pros and cons need to be laid out and brought back to the Police and Fire Commission and the residents of the Town.

Police Commissioner Charles Knoche asked whether we know the cost for the study--\$45k for the fire dept.

Sean Connelly stated something has to be done; we have to go back to the Town and when we do, we better have done our due diligence.

B. Hebert stated that the Police Commission has looked at this through the eyes of the police department; we are looking at this through the eyes of the community as a whole.

B. Manners stated that it isn't only site and cost that needs to be considered here—we must consider what the Town residents want. I am not so sure a study isn't the right way to go. Maybe we ask the public the question.

The public will look to the experts for the answer—the firefighters and police officers themselves. S. Zemo stated that we need to be so keenly aware of dollars in the next few years (reference the Governor's budget). Our goal was to communicate this with all those around the table. We want a comprehensive plan so the taxpayers know what to expect.

B. Hebert stated the Schlumberger Citizens Committee was very successful and the Town Meeting last week for the two leases at the property was overwhelmingly successful because of the work they did. We're looking for that added level of information so that we can have the best police and fire services in the state.

Discussion ensued about access to the property on Old Quarry Road (the former Schlumberger property). This is a concern—but something that the study would reveal.

M. Kozlark moved and B. Manners seconded the motion to adjourn the special meeting at 6:59 pm. Motion carried 5-0.