

Annual Town Meeting May 7, 2018

The Annual Town Meeting of the Town of Ridgefield was held at the East Ridge Middle School, 10 East Ridge Rd., Ridgefield, Connecticut on Monday, May 7, 2018 at 7:30 P.M. (E.D.T.).

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman, called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. The audience then recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Marconi announced that the first order of business was to elect a Moderator. Amy Freidenrich made a motion, seconded by Sean Connelly to appoint Joe Walsh as Moderator. **Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and Mr. Walsh was appointed Moderator.**

The Moderator announced that the first order of business was to elect a secretary. The Moderator asked for a motion to appoint Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk. Becky Muccchetti made the motion, seconded by a member of the audience.

Vote: "Aye votes unanimous, motion passed.

Mr. Walsh explained that there will be nine resolutions to be addressed. The first eight will be discussed tonight and voted on at a referendum. The ninth resolution involving expenditures under \$100,000 will be voted on tonight. He announced that the referendum will be held on Tuesday, May 15, at Yanity Gym between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. Absentee ballots will be available starting tomorrow at 10:00 a.m. in the Town Clerk's Office.

The Moderator announced that the legal notice of the meeting was available in the lobby and in the Town Clerk's office. He then asked for a motion to waive the reading of the notice. James Keidel made the motion, seconded by Ed Tyrrell.

Vote: "Aye" vote unanimous and the motion was approved.

Mr. Walsh also stated that the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance had sent letters adopting nine resolutions. He asked for a motion to waive the reading of those letters. (See letters at end of meeting minutes) Andrew Neblett made the motion, seconded by a member of the audience.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the motion was approved.

The Moderator announced there will be three presentations. Rudy Marconi will give the State of the Town, Rob Miller, Acting Superintendent of Schools give an overview of Board of Education budget, followed by David Ulmer who will give the financial condition of the town.

Mr. Marconi gave an overview slide presentation on the Town Budget. (See copy of slide presentation at end of meeting minutes).

General Town Overview

2.49% increase in total town budget, \$931,419.

\$386,996 largest component of budget for salary and related items

Health insurance for employees large component of budget for both Town and Board of Ed, increases of 6% or 7%

Pension benefits down \$350,000, attributed to going from defined benefit to defined contribution.

Pie Chart-Largest percentage, 21%, for employee benefits

Debt service decreased by 4.22%

Roads/ADA Infrastructure \$1,840,000, decreased from over \$2,000,000. \$75,000 carved out of 2 million for ADA. ADA survey of Town properties today. Required by Justice Dept.

Capital Improvements,

Town Vehicles & Equipment total \$1,274,976.

Town Buildings & Equipment total \$1,960,551. Venus Building Reconfiguration, \$1,350,000, largest amount. Used to expand the Playhouse lobby. Board of Selectmen want to support Playhouse, because it is a large economic driver in the community. To do this must move Board of Education offices to area previously occupied by Visiting Nurse space, which has been vacant for a few years. Cost of renovating is \$1,350,000 amount. At same time, Chef's Warehouse will take an additional 10,000 sf on second floor. Additional revenue from Chefs Warehouse, approximately \$130,000 a year and additional revenue from Playhouse, approximately \$ 60,000 a year will have enough additional revenue to cover the cost of the debt service and, put some money in bank. No cost to the taxpayer. Chef's warehouse will do it, even if we do not do the Playhouse and the Board of Ed renovations.

Town Infrastructure, Engineering, \$987,250. Largest item under infrastructure is \$570,000 for a plan for a parking lot expansion on the current Governor St. parking lot. Expanded onto town property. Sixty-three spots, under \$10,000 a spot. Has to go through Planning & Zoning and Inlands Wetlands boards. Village storm drainage study needed because current drainage system over 300 yrs. old.

Board of Education, \$988,388.

Total Capital Improvements, \$5,211,165

Pie Chart shows 57% of capital projects goes for public works, and is the single question on the budget referendum that gets the most votes.

Debt Service

For the fiscal years 2018-2022, the debt service is coming down, as is the outstanding balance. In year 2022, the debt service jumps up about \$12,000,000. Two major projects, Police Station \$6,000,000 and sewer plant upgrade. It is mandatory for a 20 yr. upgrade on the sewer plant, by Dept. of Environmental Protection and Energy. In planning stages now. If have shovel in ground by July 2019, Town will qualify for a \$10,000,000 grant. If do not meet deadline, will lose grant. Hoping to bring to referendum in November.

Fund Balance, at 9.6%.

Asked bonding counsel if fund balance impacts bond rating and was told, that if as long as we manage to what policy is, no impact. They also look at how many times it takes to pass a budget referendum.

Summary

Total, 1.99% increase in town budget.

Mr. Marconi then discussed the local impact from the State budget.

Discussion:

Rich Fasanelli, 26 Gay Rd. suggested residents buy bonds directly from the Town. Kevin Redmond, Finance Director, said that the bonding goes out to the market. They are not available for the Town to sell.

Christopher Vahlsing, 382 North St., asked who takes care of the inside of the school buildings and who takes care of the outside.

Mr. Marconi replied that the Board of Ed takes care of the inside, and the Town maintains the outside.

Jan Rifkinson, 165 New Rd. asked what was the percentage of calls to EMS, not fire.

Mr. Marconi replied it was 66%.

Mr. Rifkinson suggested there should be a parking plan before a new parking lot is built.

Mr. Marconi stated that the Town is working on a plan now. Employees who work on the east side of Main St. will use the new parking lot. By the time it is built, a plan will be in place.

Mr. Rifkinson expressed his concern that agreements were not in place with Chef's Warehouse, the Playhouse, and Board of Ed to proceed with the Venus Building plan.

Mr. Marconi stated that everything was in place, as soon as the people approve the appropriation in the budget. The number would not have been put in the budget request unless estimates and architects had been consulted.

Mr. Marconi explained that the Playhouse and Chef's Warehouse will pay for their own expansions, but the Town will pay for the Board of Ed move.

Eric Scheck, 61 Rising Ridge Rd., spoke on the roads maintenance situation. He complained that in the 18 years he has lived there, the roads have been paved only once

in Twin Ridge, a development with 127 homes paying taxes. He wondered why it takes so long to have the roads paved and suggested that the highway department get more resources.

Mr. Marconi and Public Works Director Peter Hill said there are some 500 roads covering about 200 miles in town. The Town rebuilds about 10 miles a year. Mr. Hill said all the roads in Twin Ridge, except Rising Ridge Road, are scheduled for repaving next year. Mr. Scheck stated he did not understand the fundamental problem. Mr. Marconi replied that it was money.

Cocoa Baron, 51 Prospect Ridge, complained about the parking in Town.

John Devine, 86 Governor St., a member of the Economic and Community Development Committee supported the 63-space parking lot on Governor St.

Jessica Wilmot, 39 Pond Rd. a Parking Authority member and business owner urged the audience to approve the Governor St. parking lot expansion. She said that all the existing parking lots are full. She said that tenants around town have given out too many employee parking permits.

Janine Carboni, 262 Keeler Dr., asked what the process is if the Board of Ed budget is not passed.

Mr. Marconi answered that it would go back to the Board of Finance and they would rework the numbers. Dave Ulmer said by Charter, they have 3 weeks to do it in.

BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET

Fran Walton, Chairman of the Board of Education stated that \$95,000,000 school budget represents a \$2,366,454, or 2.55% increase from the current school budget of \$92,600. It is \$1,555,000 less than the school board's initial request for \$96,500,000.

Dr. Robert Miller, interim Superintendent, gave an overview and slide presentation on the Board of Education budget. (See copy of slide presentation at end of meeting minutes.)

80.41% of the school budget was for salaries and benefits for staff. 19.59% represents the remainder of the budget.

Transportation, \$5,618,984. Legally, through state law, the Board of Ed must provide transportation to and from school.

Project/Repairs/Maintenance, \$2,070,484.

Special Ed, \$2,243,682. Legally and morally responsible to provide education to individuals who need special education, inside the schools and sometimes outside the district.

Energy, \$2,070,484. Includes computers, lights, heating, etc.

Everything else, \$6,570,842, 7% of the budget. Textbooks, library books, supplies, paper, telephone services, security, hardware lease payments, service contracts, etc.

The following are increases in this year's budget: \$1,193,174, personnel contracts; \$744,000, special education; \$219,000 energy cost; \$157,279, transportation costs; \$104,749 digital learning, and \$103,024, employment benefits.

Dr. Miller spoke on the escalating health care costs. Staffing will be increased by 6.5 teachers.

DRG-A, per pupil expenditures of towns. The state compares Ridgefield to costs per student in the other eight towns ranged from a high of \$23,439 in Redding to a low of \$19,727 in Darien. Ridgefield was lowest, at \$17,653 per student.

Discussion:

Richard Fasanelli, 26 Gay Rd., wondered why there was no strategic plan for the town going forward five to ten years. Dr. Miller reported the Board of Ed has a strong partnership with the Town.

Jan Rifkinson, 165 New Rd., said a few years ago there was a big increase of 5-51/2% in special education to catch up, and asked Dr. Miller what the problem was getting control of special education. Dr. Miller replied that you cannot account for the number of students needing this service moving into town. He agreed that it was a serious problem.

A member of the audience was concerned about the impact a low ERG number. Dr. Miller reported that the factors determining the ERG are set by the state and he does not have access to it.

John Devine, 86 Governor St., asked why the Board of Ed does not give details in its budget, like the town. Dr. Miller replied that it was on the website and would be very costly, because there are over 100 pages.

Jonathan Seem, 5 Great Hill Rd., informed the audience that Ridgefield was ranked #4 in the state.

Board of Finance Presentation

The Board of Finance Chairman, David Ulmer, spoke on the budget finances. (See slide presentation at end of meeting.)

Mr. Ulmer reported the following: Unemployment is at 3.7%; foreclosures at 17 in 2017; median household income is \$145,902; Grand List growth, 0.829%. 1% growth for the last seven years.

This year's budget increase, 1.99%. Taxes are bearing the increase, not the state.

Moderator

The Moderator announced that eight resolutions will be voted on at the referendum. He read the following resolutions:

The Moderator read Resolution #1.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE RELATIVE TO THE APPROPRIATION OF \$47,520,368 FOR TOWN EXPENDITURES (CONSISTING OF TOWN OPERATING EXPENDITURES OF \$36,483,714 AND DEBT SERVICE OF \$11,036,654 ON BOTH TOWN AND EDUCATION CAPITAL PROJECTS) FOR THE FISCAL YEAR COMMENCING JULY 1, 2018 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2019 BE APPROVED.

Sean Connelly made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

No discussion.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous and the motion carried.

The Moderator read Resolution #2.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE RELATIVE TO THE APPROPRIATION OF \$95,000,000 FOR BOARD OF EDUCATION EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR COMMENCING JULY 1, 2018 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2019.

Sharon Dorso moved to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: Ed Tyrrell made a motion to reduce line item, 100.2300.1110.70.0.61., Superintendent of Schools, by \$33,303 seconded by Jan Rifkinson.

Mr. Tyrrell commented that the Superintendent's salary is \$100,000 greater than Mr. Marconi's salary. If we pass this motion, the Board of Education will still be able to pay the next Superintendent whatever they want after they perform their outstanding due diligence. They will simply have to transfer money from some other account to do that.

Stef Anderson, Barrack Hill Rd., said it was imperative to hire an excellent superintendent, so we can continue to get what we are getting in education. We have to offer a good salary.

Chris Vahlsing, 362 North St., supported increasing the salary.

The Moderator called for a vote on the motion made by Mr. Tyrrell.

Vote: "Opposed" votes carried, and the motion was not approved.

Mr. Tyrrell then made a motion to reduce line item 100.2800.2210.70.0.67.0000, Health Benefits.

He explained that the surpluses in that account average out to \$764,000 in each of the last 5 years. The surpluses exist only because the Board of Ed over-estimated this line in their budget submissions. He felt these over-estimations serve to create a slush fund to cover overruns in other areas.

Sandra Mahoney, Wild Turkey Court, stated that cutting budgeted amounts could lead to problems in union contracts. She objected to Mr. Tyrrell's reference to a slush fund.

No further discussion, the Moderator called for a vote by a show of ballots.

Vote: “Opposed” votes carried, and the motion was not approved.

Simon Walton, 32 Rolling Hill Rd., called the question and moved the resolution to a vote. It was seconded by a member of the audience. The Moderator called for discussion on the resolution.

Discussion: Ed Tyrrell stated he would have made motions to reduce the following three items from the Board of Ed budget: Business manager, \$35,227; Super Principals, \$388,000; and Settlement Costs, \$200,000.

Jan Rifkinson reminded the audience that they should not shut Mr. Tyrrell down, because it has been ruled by the Town Counsel that that Charter states the Annual Town Meeting can delete or decrease any line item in the budget.

The Moderator called for a vote.

Vote: The motion to call the question was approved by a vote of hands.

The Moderator then asked for a vote on Resolution #2.

Vote: Vote by show of hands approved resolution.

The Moderator read Resolution #3.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE RELATIVE TO THE APPROPRIATION OF \$1,840,000 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF VARIOUS TOWN ROAD AND INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDING \$75,000 FOR ADA) FOR THE FISCAL YEAR COMMENCING JULY 1, 2018 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2019.

Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.
No discussion.

Vote: Vote by show of hands approved the resolution.

The Moderator read Resolution #4

RESOLUTION APPROPRIATING \$1,350,000 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF VENUS BUILDING RECONFIGURATION IMPROVEMENTS AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$1,350,000 BONDS OF THE TOWN TO MEET SAID APPROPRIATION AND PENDING THE ISSUANCE THEREOF THE MAKING OF TEMPORARY BORROWINGS FOR SUCH PURPOSE.

Alex Harris made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: Ed Tyrrell thought it was a bad idea for to the reconfiguration of the Venus Building, especially the expansion of the Playhouse, and the Board of Ed move. No further discussion.

Vote: Vote by show of hands and the motion was approved.

The Moderator read Resolution #5

RESOLUTION APPROPRIATING \$570,000 FOR PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF GOVERNOR STREET PARKING LOT AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$570,000 BONDS OF THE TOWN TO MEET SAID APPROPRIATION AND PENDING THE ISSUANCE THEREOF THE MAKING OF TEMPORARY BORROWINGS FOR SUCH PURPOSE.

Gus Ryer made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: Ed Tyrrell felt it was a bad idea for the parking lot, because there are no written plans as how it is to be used. He suggested the Main St. retailers and landlords, who benefit from such a parking lot, pay half the cost. Jan Rifkinson agreed with Mr. Tyrrell that there should be a plan in place as to where employees should park. No further discussion. The Moderator called for a vote.

Vote: Vote by show of hands in favor, and the motion was approved.

The Moderator read Resolution #6

RESOLUTION APPROPRIATING \$120,000 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER BUILDING AND PRESCHOOL ROOF REPLACEMENTS, \$125,000 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF SKYDOME BUILDING ROOF REPLACEMENT, \$113,000 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACQUISITION OF VILLAGE STORM DRAINAGE STUDY, AND \$150,000 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF SIDEWALK IMPROVEMENTS AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$508,000 BONDS OF THE TOWN TO MEET SAID APPROPRIATIONS AND PENDING THE ISSUANCE THEREOF THE MAKING OF TEMPORARY BORROWINGS FOR SUCH PURPOSE (PROVIDED THAT THE BONDS SHALL BE REDUCED BY THE AMOUNT OF ANY STATE GRANTS RECEIVED FOR SUCH PURPOSE).

Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approved, seconded by Barbara Manners.

No discussion

Vote: Vote by show of hands in favor, and the motion was approved.

The Moderator read Resolution #7.

RESOLUTION APPROPRIATING \$690,000 FOR THE DESIGN AND ACQUISITION OF A FIRE PUMPER TANKER AND \$196,301 FOR THE DESIGN AND ACQUISITION OF A HIGHWAY MACK DUMP TRUCK AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$886,301 BONDS OF THE TOWN TO MEET SAID APPROPRIATIONS AND PENDING THE ISSUANCE THEREOF THE MAKING OF TEMPORARY BORROWING FOR SUCH PURPOSE.

Dick Moscia, made a motion to approve, seconded by Barbara Manners.

Discussion: Jan Rifkinson wondered why needed these this year, and it would raise our long-term debt. The Moderator called for a vote.

Vote: Vote by show of hands and ballot in favor, and the motion was approved.

The Moderator read Resolution #8.

RESOLUTION APPROPRIATING \$100,750 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF SCOTLAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OIL TANK REMOVAL, \$121,900 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF SCOTLAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ASBESTOS ABATEMENT, \$97,538 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND INSTALLATION OF SCOTT'S RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL BUILDING AUTOMATION SYSTEM, \$475,700 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND INSTALLATION OF DISTRICT WIDE TECHNOLOGY AND FACILITIES SAFETY UPGRADES, AND \$153,500 FOR THE PLANNING, DESIGN, ACQUISITION AND INSTALLATION OF RIDGEFIELD HIGH SCHOOL COOLING TOWER AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$949,388 BONDS OF THE TOWN TO MEET SAID APPROPRIATIONS AND PENDING THE ISSUANCE THEREOF THE MAKING OF TEMPORARY BORROWINGS FOR SUCH PURPOSE.

Ann Marie Sufaro made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.
No discussion. The Moderator called for a vote.

Vote: Vote by show of hands, and the motion was approved.

The Moderator then announced Item #9, “ To consider and vote upon a resolution entitled “Resolution Making Appropriations Aggregating \$947,476 For The Planning, Design, Acquisition, Installation And Construction Of Various Public Improvements And Equipment And Authorizing The Issuance Of \$947,476 Bonds Of The Town To Meet Said Appropriations And Pending The Issuance Thereof The Making Of Temporary Borrowings For Such Purpose.” He explained that the vote would be by each individual department.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

Lowboy Dump Truck	\$58,349
Pickup Truck	\$20,058
Guardrail Replacement	\$40,000
Twenty Ton Trailer	\$22,694
Snow Plows	\$20,000

Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, seconded by member of the audience.

Discussion: Jan Rifkinson discussed eliminating \$58,349 for the Lowboy Dump Truck.
He objected to buying a new truck every year.

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

GOLF

ProCore Greens Aerator	\$21,371
Tow Behind Debris Blower	\$7,230
Turf Truckster	\$9,347

Dick Moccia made a motion to approve. Ed Tyrrell seconded.

Discussion: None

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

¾ Ton Truck With Plow & Sander	\$25,843
1 ½ Ton Truck With Plow & Sander	\$55,113
ADA Compliance	\$20,000
Aqua Area – Pool Surface	\$98,278

Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: None

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

TOWN ENGINEER

Window Replacement-Town Hall Annex	\$41,000
Underground Tank Removal-Venus Bldg	\$13,000
Skydome AC Replacement	\$23,000
Skydome PreFab Storage Units	\$28,000
Building Exterior Painting	\$32,000
ERMS Roof Repair	\$39,000

Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion:

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

TREE WARDEN

Tree Replacement	\$55,000
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Jan Rifkinson made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: Mr. Marconi commented that trees are replaced every year but has no detail information on it

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

License Plate Reader	\$20,000
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Andrew Neblett made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: None

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Car 1	\$17,500
Firefighter Protective Gear	\$88,470
SCBA Tanks	\$11,200

Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: None

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Server Replacements	\$30,000
ViewPermit Cloud	\$22,700
Treasurer-MUNIS Tyler Forms	\$20,850
Engineering HP Plotter	\$ 7,723

Alex Harris made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: Jan Rifkinson asked what percentage of the computer information is in the cloud. Andrew Neblett replied there was none.

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

PLANNING & ZONING

Plan of Conservation and Development	\$46,250
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Motion made by Ed Tyrrell to approve, seconded by John Devine.

Discussion: None

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Tractor-35 HP (Used)	\$11,500
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Ed Tyrrell made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: None

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

LIBRARY

Security System	\$22,000
Patron & Staff Computer Replacements	\$20,000

Andrew Neblett made a motion to approve, seconded by a member of the audience.

Discussion: None

Vote by show of hands. Items approved.

After discussion on the Town Budget and the proposed bond resolutions, the Moderator asked for a motion to adjourn the Annual Town Meeting to a Referendum on May 15, 2018 at Yanity Gym between the hours of 6:00 AM and 8:00 PM and reconvene after that Referendum in the Town Hall Large Conference Room to consider and set the tax levy for the next year. Additionally, absentee ballots will be available in the Office of the Town Clerk beginning tomorrow, May 7, 2018. Ed Tyrrell made the motion, seconded by a member of the audience. Motion approved.

Maureen Kozlark made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Bob Hebert.

Vote: "Aye" votes unanimous. Motion approved and meeting adjourned at 10:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Serfilippi, Town Clerk

