

## **BOARD of SELECTMEN BUDGET MEETING – FEBRUARY 11, 2009**

TOWN HALL/LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM – 7:30 P.M.

### REVISED/APPROVED MINUTES

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

In attendance: R. Marconi, A. Bodner, B. Manners, D. Masters, J. Plock

### **Agenda**

#### 1. 2009-2010 **Overall** Budget Discussion

R. Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. On Monday, February 9, the Budget Meeting focused on Proposed Capital Expenditures for 2009-10. Tuesday's meeting, February 10, was an Operating Budget Discussion, and tonight, the focus is an Overall Budget Discussion. Kevin Redmond, Director of Finance, came forward to participate in the evening's discussion.

**Police Department** – Chief Roche will arrive shortly following the Police Commission Meeting which began at 7:00 p.m.

**Police Patrol** – The Police force is down one person due to the death of Chief Ligi. There were promotions down the line when John Roche was promoted to Chief of Police, with a new Captain, a new Lieutenant and a new Sergeant, resulting in one open Patrolman space. There is less vacation pay with one officer down. Overtime in December 2008 was 58.3%. Last year this number was 22%. This number is significantly driven by highway works programs. These are private duty jobs and not Town of Ridgefield work. Thru December 2008, this total was \$135,000 in expenses and \$138,000 in revenue. Prisoner food is budgeted at \$400 each year. The dollars requested for uniforms should go down with one officer less.

**Support Costs** – Telephone charges have gone up – need to look at this. Everything else is flat except for a small increase in electronics maintenance. Will ask Chief Roche for more specific information regarding “aging equipment”. Check with Laurie Scholl regarding dispatcher line – up to \$92,070 versus \$72,000 in the past.

**Headquarters** – Fuel costs are down slightly and hope to see more of a benefit there. J. Plock inquired as to why there is such an increase in building maintenance? The budget amount for 2007-08 was \$7,000. This number was increased to \$11,700 for 2008-09 and is continuing at this higher level. The resource officer for the high school is budgeted 25%/75%, with the 25% falling into the Patrolman sector.

Police Chief Roche arrived and came forward to answer questions. What about the cruiser replacement schedule? This schedule was implemented in '94 and is the best program for the Town. The vehicles are used 24/7. We used to get \$3,000 to \$4,000 in a trade-in. If we keep the cars longer than the optimum length of time, maintenance charges go up by about 20%/vehicle and more expensive parts will need to be replaced such as transmissions, etc., and the trade-in value will decrease. R. Marconi asked what would the Police Department do if the cruiser replacement question is a separate item on the ballot and if it is voted down? A back-up program should be available if this scenario should occur. The vehicles need to

idle in order to keep the lights, computers, sirens, etc. functioning. It is too hard on the battery to turn off the vehicle and continually restart.

Andy Bodner asked who would we be offering these used vehicles to for only \$2,000? We should be able to get more than \$2,000 per trade-in. If a vehicle is purchased for \$22,000 and sold for \$2,000, it is costing us \$6,000-\$7,000/year per vehicle.

Diesel vehicles are not available. The cruisers need to be heavy cars because they carry so much equipment. The weight they carry causes them to be lower to the ground by 4-6 inches.

D. Masters indicated that last year the Board of Finance cut the police vehicle's expenditure. This year we are trying to find even more cuts. We should request the police vehicle budget item, but we need to realize that this request may well be cut. Chief Roche responded that each year we review the proposed 4-3-4-3 rotation and come to the conclusion that this is the best approach. The requested cruisers and radios need to remain in the proposed budget. We can defer the electronic center with light bars, the siren replacement program, and the interior improvements, but the radios are the lifeblood of the officer when they are out of the car.

Canine Shelter – The two shelters are across from one another. The Town shelter doesn't have electricity for automatic switch-over to heat or air conditioning in the case of a power shortage. The cost to rewire the building is more expensive than the cost of a generator. Currently, we transfer the animals to a vet if the power goes out. We do receive an invoice from the vet when this situation is necessary. ROAR is a private facility not regulated by the State, and is a welfare and rescue organization. The function of each shelter is different. If the two shelters are combined, the shelter would have to be run according to Connecticut state regulations. Isolation and quarantine are functions of the Town shelter. Could we regionalize with Redding? The shelter has impounded 7 dogs already in 2009. We do not want to mix a volunteer shelter with one where animals are impounded awaiting the owner's summons. J. Plock indicated that it would be helpful if there is press coverage explaining the differences between the two shelters. The request for a shelter freezer is deferred – the shelter will go to a vet if a freezer is needed for a rabid animal.

Andy Bodner inquired as to the overall canine cost. Chief Roche responded that the van and officer totaled about \$112,000 this year. The entire cost for animal control, building maintenance, etc. is about \$145,000/year. If regionalize, will we really save enough? We get \$1/year per dog from the license fee. This amounts to only about \$10,000 to \$11,000/year.

Police Uniforms – Why \$38,000 if down one officer? This budget item covers equipment replacement, laundry, gun belts, bike patrol clothing, dress uniforms, summer and winter uniforms. Detectives get an allowance for their suits. The canine officer is a separate function. Chief Roche will review again this budget request.

Maintenance of Vehicles – 3.5% increase is for tire costs.

Andy Bodner inquired about coverage when down one patrolman. Do they end up bringing someone else in with a result of overtime? Chief Roche responded that a detective never covers for a patrolman – they are two entirely separate functions.

Telephone – Increase from \$44,000 to \$50,000. K. Redmond will look at this.

Another question was raised – 10% of the revenue from speeding tickets issued in Ridgefield by the Ridgefield Police Department are to be returned to Ridgefield from the State of Connecticut. Is there a line item for this? Do we need to apply for this refund? K. Redmond was not aware of this possible income source and will research it.

Dispatcher - \$72,000 increased to \$91,000 – why?

Building Maintenance – Was \$7,197 in 2007-08 and then \$11,700 for 2008-09. Listed again for \$11,700. Why this continued increase? Chief Roche replied that there increased costs in maintaining this old building – plumbing, oil burner, etc. The building is “just old”!

**Fire Department** – Chief Burford came forward to participate in the discussion. The Fire Department is fully staffed at 44; there are no changes there. There is a decrease in some of the utilities. Looking at fuel and electricity charges for all departments and hope to lock in rates as did for oil prices.

Fire Inspector – We currently have part-time trained personnel for this position. The cost of \$27,000-\$28,000/year recouped in revenue charges.

Assistant Fire Chief – salary line is \$86,000 for '08.

Fire Marshall – salary line is \$77,958, in union so is contractual number.

Overtime went down by \$40,000; expecting substantial savings here; holiday pay went up by \$20,000 with two new people.

EMS – Ambulance billing fees are above what has been budgeted.

**Parking Authority** – Need to implement parking fees at Branchville Train Station. There will be opposition to this. Would like to charge only non-residents, but the State won't permit this.

**Public Works** – A doubling of rental income is included in this budget. The rent abatement at Chef's Warehouse ends. We will be getting \$27,000/month in rental income starting in July 2009. The expiration dates for all the Town leases put together in one report would be helpful. Children's Corner thru Parks & Recreation brings in about \$170,000/year.

**Highway Department** – The Office Clerk position went down to \$33,000 from \$42,000 – was \$39,800 previously. The position is now filled by two part-time rather than one full-time employee. Laurie Scholl, Director of Human Resources, will be here tomorrow night to discuss employee costs. The Highway Dept. is looking at diesel fuel to see if they can lock in at current State rates. R. Marconi indicated that electrical rates have also been put out to bid, but a lock-in would require a Public Hearing, and a vote at a Town Meeting. The road sweeping has been eliminated. They hardly used any sand this year by using Magic Melt instead. This is an expensive product but they used it prudently and it lasts longer. Do not have to cover most roads two times as in the past, which saves on the vehicles and overtime. This new product will not result in a build-up of sand in the ponds, catch basins, etc. The Highway Dept. will not have to sweep as much sand as in the past, nor hire outside contractors as additional sweepers. Each year additional dollars are budgeted for snow removal and we are still always above budget on this cost.

**Solid Waste** – This includes brush removal. We are still waiting for bids for the scrap metal contract. Recycling is down in a bad economy.

**Town Engineer** – This budget is flat for next year. Building maintenance is the Town Engineer's responsibility. He had asked for \$51,500 but will defer and accept the previous amount of \$34,000. Was his request for \$51,500 to cover urgent items or cosmetic repairs? The 2007-08 budget did not include the

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generator for Yanity Gym – heat exchange repair. The budget numbers are really \$66,000 as the lower number did not include the encumbrance. We will seek further clarification of this request and report back.

**Community Grants** – R. Marconi reviewed the proposed list for Community Grants.

**HART Bus** – Cut one full bus resulting in two full-time buses for five days/week. More efficient group trips and a combination of pick-ups and drop-offs will be instituted. The doctor's bus will be on Tuesday and there will probably be a bus on Saturday – not yet scheduled. 200 Town residents use the Hart bus. This bus system provides transportation for the disabled with a cost of \$17,000/year. Residents that call for the Saturday bus are not going to have individual service as in the past. A. Bodner suggested that Ridgefield purchase a bus and hire two drivers. They use two vans that are equipped with lifts for handicapped access. R. Marconi agreed to look into the costs involved.

**Meals-on-Wheels** - \$500 – do not cut!

**Women's Center** – 1400 residents from Ridgefield have used the Women's Center, although many of these could be repeat visits. R. Marconi is suggesting a reduction to \$5,000. The Center provides an important service, which is not provided for elsewhere in the Town. B. Manners expressed strong opposition to a reduction in support for the Women's Center.

**Lake Mamasasco** – D. Masters expressed support for continued assistance of \$2,000 to this Town asset. Support of Lake Mamasasco benefits Ridgefield and helps to keep the tax value up.

**Founder's Hall** – Suggest keeping the grant at \$60,000 instead of the \$80,000 previously. There is a program fee for those from out-of-town but not a membership fee. It was agreed to seek additional information before cutting further.

**RVNA** – The RVNA was given \$40,000 last year in rent reduction. This year, they are asking for \$50,000. The question is how do we reduce even the \$40,000? – Will leave the contribution at \$40,000 for now.

**Debt Service** – The proposed refunding transaction should result in a decrease in debt service costs, although there may be a slight increase initially. The Town has gone out to bid for Underwriter's with a closing date of March 16. The offering statement will be put together next week. K. Redmond will investigate a carry-over debt of \$360,000. He needs to unravel this transaction during the Friedman era to see what actually happened and why this debt is on the books. We will then need to go to the Board of Finance to request a transfer from the general fund to cover this debt. This was not an audit item but needs to be solved.

**Library** – Chris Nolan and Peter Authier came forward to discuss the proposed Library budget. They are budgeting 0% operating increase – flat from the Town. There will be a six-month salary increase freeze, benefits have been reviewed, and the pension plan is under study. They have joined the Board of Education consortium for electricity and have lowered their postage costs by using email instead. They are looking at additional ways to raise dollars from programs. They have increased the daily fine from 10 cents to 25 cents and are looking at a slight staff reduction. They are not curtailing hours nor days of operation. Their current usage numbers are 400,000 walk-in's/year and about 1200/day. 30,000 items are being checked out – books, movies, tapes, CD's, etc. A. Bodner inquired about the possibility of charging for movie rentals? We cannot charge as this is against State law. Some libraries provide one free copy and charge for additional copies. The Library no longer gets rental income from Webster Bank. The charge for the children's program, Camp Snooze, brings in approximately \$5,000.

R. Marconi inquired about electronic books. Ms. Nolan responded that the library is the “bridge” to the new technology. A. Bodner indicated that there is a cost to deliver their product to the people. What about a modest fee to help cover costs? Ms. Nolan responded that there should be recognition that the Library is able to provide all these services with a 0% increase. A program out of our core mission, it is OK to charge. The BOS expressed a thank you to the Library for their many programs and services to the Town of Ridgefield.

Kevin Redmond indicated that he will try to have responses to the questions raised in the three nights of discussion ready for tomorrow night’s budget meeting. He will have the totals for the Town budget ready also, but Executive Session will be necessary for personnel issues.

**J. Plock moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Budget Meeting at 10:30 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson