



Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectmen Budget Meeting Minutes
UNAPPROVED
February 28, 2023 at 7.00pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Rudy Marconi, Maureen Kozlark, Bob Hebert, Sean Connelly, Barbara Manns (via zoom)

Kevin Redmond, Director of Finance, provided an overview of the budget. The treasurer increased the interest income from \$750,000 to \$104 million resulting in a reduction in the mill rate from 2.48% to 2.04%.

1. Fire Departments Budget

The major increases in budget items for the Fire Department are from building & vehicle maintenance and equipment. The revised 5-year plan now includes new radio equipment. Chief Jerry Myers talked about the need to update to tri-band radios due to frequency changes. Updating the radios will be necessary in order to have the correct bandwidth allowing them to communicate with surrounding towns. The Fire Department is asking for a new radio for each individual firefighter. The Board had many concerns and questions about this request since the Town just spent \$3.5 million on a new radio system. There will be a Fire Commission meeting and more discussions on this topic.

2. Economic & Community Development Budget

The ECDC budget request is for \$105,000. Glori Norwitt, Chair of the ECDC, gave an overview of the projects that the ECDC is working on which included:

- A toolkit for new businesses
- Incentives or grants for new or expanding businesses
- A town wide jobs board
- Marketing campaigns for business promotion
- A map of downtown in the kiosk in front of Deborah Ann's.
- Awarding more money for the Shark Tank winner in order to attract more people and help the business that wins

There was a discussion about which ideas would have the largest economic impact and the needed improvements to the ECDC website so it becomes a

better resource for new businesses.

3. **Bord of Education Budget**

Susie Da Silva, Superintendent of Ridgefield Public Schools, gave an overview of the operating budget items which included:

- Switching the security model which involves hiring a Director of Security and 9 new School Security Officers (SSOs). They will keep 5 SSOs through Securitas, the current contracted security company.
- Special Education costs
- Facilities and fixed costs
- Moving from daily subs to more consistent subs at the schools to help with staffing shortages.
- Hiring an additional Visual Performing Arts Teacher, and network technician
- Adding a RISE program to Branchville Elementary School
- Repurposing the Veterans Park Elementary School Elementary Supervisor to full time as an EL Tutor and combining the Nursing Coordinator with the Family Care Specialist position.
- Updated the contribution plan
- Phonics & Math programs

There was a discussion about the push from parents for a full time Art Teacher in each elementary school. There have been meetings with the principles of each school to discuss this. An Art Teacher at each school would result in overstaffing. There are a specific number of minutes allotted to art and there is not enough time in the curriculum to increase art without reducing or eliminating something else. Currently the part time art teachers are enough to cover the art classes at each school.

There was a discussion about the surplus that the Board of Education sees each year and why. The BOE will be receiving about a \$1 million refund, which will go back to the Board of Finance.

Joe Moritz, Director of Facilities for Ridgefield Public Schools, gave an overview of the capital budget which included:

- Asbestos abatement
- Adding an entrance guard booth, security vestibule, surveillance & access control package and new cafeteria gate at the High School.
- Transforming a room in the G-Wing into a bathroom and converting the dark room into something else (still to be determined) at the High School.
- Alternative High School addition gaining 600 sq ft.

- LED upgrades to Farmingville Elementary School
- Emergency power generator at Ridgebury Elementary School
- Bollards at Branchville Elementary School
- Engineering study to development the framework for the district master plan – this will help with grants

Wes DeSantis, Director of Education Technology, talked about the technology budget items which included:

- A new internet pathway for the schools that is separate from the town.
- Continued cyber security challenges and the collaboration efforts with the town.
- New equipment, the delays in receiving it and the reasons for those delays

There was a discussion about the need for more space at the schools, the growth in preschool and class sizes.

No votes were taken

Bob Hebert moved to adjourn the February 28, 2023 Board of Selectmen Budget Meeting at 10:17pm. Maureen Kozlark second the motion. Motion carries 5-0.