



Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectpersons Meeting Minutes
APPROVED

January 28, 2025 at 7:00pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Sean Connelly, Maureen Kozlark, Barbara Manners, Rudy Marconi, Chris Murray

Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Maureen Kozlark motioned to add “Laurie Fernandez and the Discussion about Central Dispatch” to the beginning of the agenda. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

1. Laurie Fernandez and the Discussion about Central Dispatch

Laurie Fernandez, Human Resources Director, and Kevin Redmond, Finance Director, were in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- Rudy Marconi confirmed Central Dispatch, when fully staffed, will have 1 Communications Supervisor (a new position), 2 Leads, and 6 Dispatchers.
- Ms. Fernandez distributed documents to the BOS, outlining her original submission about the combined Central Dispatch from 2021, which was rolled out in April 2023.
- Ms. Fernandez shared the original proposal was to combine Fire and Police dispatches to ensure 24/7 coverage and streamline operations for 911 calls for Fire, Police, and EMS. Ms. Fernandez confirmed the estimate for a fully staffed Central Dispatch was \$635,389.
- Ms. Fernandez distributed a document to the BOS, outlining previous assumptions based on normal salary increases, which brought the estimated cost to \$687,803, less than last year’s budget, since the Central Dispatch is still not fully staffed. Mr. Marconi asked about turnover. Ms. Fernandez confirmed 50-80%, depending on location.
- Ms. Fernandez shared in October 2024, they looked at salaries in the area and found Ridgefield to be the lowest and adjusted the salaries to be in the middle of the range, increasing the salary budget by \$87,600 to \$474k (29% increase).
- Ms. Fernandez shared the RFD and RPD have stepped in to fill in gaps at Central Dispatch, and with the increased salaries, and new Communications Supervisor, believes the Central Dispatch will be successful. Maureen Kozlark asked about cross-training. Ms. Fernandez confirmed Dispatchers are certified in both fire and police calls, and the Communications Supervisor would oversee both. Sean Connelly asked about overtime. Ms. Fernandez confirmed the Communications Supervisor would help offset that need.
- Ms. Kozlark asked whether that staffing level would be sufficient in the future. Mr. Marconi indicated may need 2 more Dispatchers, which Ms. Fernandez confirmed may be needed to address walk-in traffic and phone calls to the general phone lines.

- Mr. Marconi invited Jerry Myers, Fire Chief, to discuss the proposed move from 8-person shifts (2 Firefighters per Engine 1, Engine 2, and two ambulances) to a 9-person shift, so the Shift Commander could drive a separate vehicle rather than being on Engine 1. Chief Myers shared this change would allow the Shift Commander to be available to the Central Dispatchers and make real-time decisions about events in Town.
- Mr. Redmond shared they examined the Health Insurance budget and actuals for the last 5-6 years, sharing that budget favorability has funded unfavourability in the IT budget, and they're working to right-size both of those budgets. Ms. Fernandez indicated the current health insurance budget is \$5.782M and agreed to reduce it by \$300k. Ms. Fernandez shared she typically budgets for all families but is now using a 2-person household assumption (a \$9k difference per employee). Mr. Connelly asked about a group coalition to ensure better rates. Ms. Fernandez confirmed Ridgefield is in a coalition created by a broker in Fairfield County.

2. Parks & Recreation Budget

Dennis DiPinto, Parks & Recreation Director, Phil Kearns, Parks & Recreation Commission Chair, Michael West, Assistant Director of Parks, Mary Knox, Assistant Director of Program Operations, Eileen Cipolla, and Kevin Redmond, Finance Director, were in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- Mr. Kearns distributed documents to the BOS and shared Parks & Rec is on track to exceed this year's revenue budget, but expenses are not anticipated to exceed their budget except for programming. Next year, Mr. Kearns forecasts a 3.5% increase in expenses and 6.5% in revenue, for a net positive of \$54k.
- Mr. Kearns shared their key revenue sources, programs and memberships, are up 11.5% and 8.4%, respectively. Mr. Kearns shared their highest pre-covid revenue was \$1M, currently over \$1.3M, with memberships increasing beyond the pre-covid high, and seeing a migration from the general wellness to the all-inclusive membership.
- Operating:
 - o Annual Salary Adjustments (\$62k, 32% increase): Mr. Kearns confirmed \$49k is attributable to the minimum wage increase.
 - o Mr. Kearns mentioned HVAC maintenance, pool pumps, filters, and motors, and general infrastructure are driving operating budget increases.
- Capital (\$1.987M)
 - o Sean Connelly asked about the pickleball courts, which were approved in the previous budget cycle. Mr. Kearns shared, per BOS request, they are exploring all possible locations on Parks & Rec's grounds and have proposed four locations to the Inland-Wetlands Board, which denied two of the potential locations. Maureen Kozlark expressed frustration with the timeline, as the project was already approved by voters. Rudy Marconi suggested Mr. DiPinto and Mr. Kearns explore a piece of property on Route 7 that was recently donated to the Town.
 - o Spin/Cycle Room Relocation (\$34k): Move from existing space to the current child sitting room to create an accessible spin studio with 30% more room (15 bikes, including 1-2 accessible bikes). Mr. DiPinto confirmed they would use some ADA funds for this project, and request \$13,978 from the Town. Mr. Kearns confirmed child sitting would be moved to a different space.
 - o Fencing: Mr. DiPinto shared the posts are in good shape but would like to replace fence fabric to address safety concerns.

- Irrigation System Replacement (\$80k): Mr. DiPinto shared the irrigation system at East Ridge Middle School (ERMS) is a 50-year-old system, and they have done maintenance and repairs for years, but now has multiple underground leaks.
- Rec Center Pool Surface: Mr. DiPinto shared Parks & Rec moved from a gunite pool to a fiberglass system 12-13 years ago, and the floor needs to be repainted every 10-20 years to protect the fiberglass system.
- Additional Parking (\$483k): Mr. DiPinto shared they conducted a study in 2019 to add additional parking at the Rec Center, and had the plans approved by Planning & Zoning, and would add an additional 30 parking spots.
- Turf Tractor: This would replace their oldest mid-1990s Kubota tractor with a more versatile machine that could also be used to mow wet fields.
- Truck Replacements: Two trucks, including one used for snow removal at RHS and ERMS, which would have a larger capacity for transporting sand and brush, and would be maneuverable enough to navigate the solar canopy.
- RHS Tennis Court Replacement: Mr. DiPinto confirmed this would be for all six courts, to replace the existing system as originally designed, including the drainage system underneath the courts. Mr. DiPinto confirmed the courts are expected to last for 30 years and have a 20-year warranty.

3. Information Technology (IT) Department Budget

Andrew Neblett, IT Director, and Kevin Redmond, Finance Director, were in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- Mr. Neblett distributed documents to the BOS, outlining their discussion.
- Mr. Redmond shared for the last 5 years, the Town has had to do year-end transfers from the health insurance line item to the IT line item and is attempting to build a realistic IT budget. Mr. Neblett shared Ridgefield has the lowest IT budget of comparable towns studied, and with the proposed \$1.3M Operating Budget (33% increase), Ridgefield would be in line with those other budgets for the current fiscal year, but behind for next. Mr. Neblett confirmed that will be closer to where the budget needs to be.
- Mr. Neblett indicated one of the big drivers is increasing subscription prices, including VMWare, which is the worldwide standard, and is used to run the Town's servers.
- Mr. Neblett shared he's working with other IT Directors across Connecticut to put together a presentation for the State about predatory software pricing and trying to work together to find cost savings where possible.
- Sean Connelly asked about cybersecurity. Mr. Neblett confirmed yes, a monthly expense.
- Mr. Connelly asked about advising the Town on leveraging AI for operational efficiency. Mr. Neblett confirmed, sharing he uses AI daily, and it will have a significant impact on a variety of roles.
- Capital (\$223k):
 - Police Mobile Computers (\$126k): Mr. Neblett confirmed this is to update the existing 18 units, which are on a 5-year cycle, with new toughbooks. Major Nick Fowler confirmed the RPD intentionally chose a model that would utilize the existing docking stations in each vehicle.
 - VM Ware (\$40k): Mr. Neblett shared this would add to the previous approved budget from last year, for \$110k total.
 - Software server (\$57k): This would replace servers from 2012.

4. General Budget Discussion

Kevin Redmond, Finance Director, were in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- Mr. Redmond distributed documents to the BOS, created by Alison Castoral, Senior Financial Accountant. Mr. Redmond shared they looked at the principal and effective interest rates to create a weighted average rate for each fiscal year: 2.87% for outstanding debt in FY26, 2.8% in FY25, and 2.75% in FY24. Mr. Redmond indicate the upward trend is expected as more recent issuances have been at a higher rate. Mr. Redmond shared they will track this each year and can also share with the BOF.
- Sean Connelly asked about the Presentation for the Public Hearing. Rudy Marconi confirmed they will be held at the Ridgefield Public Library on Saturday, February 8, 2025 and Saturday, February 15, 2025 at 10:00am and 1:00pm. Mr. Marconi indicated he also hopes to present to the Men's Club, Rotary, and PTAs.
- Mr. Marconi shared the Federal funding freeze occurred, which may affect two of the grants Ridgefield received: \$1.4M for Yanity Gym (congress-earmarked funds through Jim Himes' office) and the \$400k Safe Streets for All safety study. Mr. Marconi confirmed he and Mr. Redmond read the single audit report, which shows federal funds received, which indicated \$1.4-\$1.6M, with special education funding being a large component.

5. Possible Capital/Operating Budget Vote

There were no votes.

Sean Connelly motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:53pm. Chris Murray seconded. Motion carried 5-0.