



Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectpersons Special Meeting Minutes
APPROVED

February 24, 2025 at 7:00pm

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

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

Present via Zoom: Barbara Manners

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

Rudy Marconi invited Kevin Redmond, Finance Director, forward a general budget discussion:

- Mr. Redmond shared a breakdown of changes made between January's BOS Budget Meetings and today, including: Town Clerk's office staffing change, reverting to part-time Fire Inspectors from the proposed full-time Deputy Fire Marshall, adding \$25k for Ridgefield Commemorates America at 250, increasing IT budget by \$50k, reducing roads budget by \$50k, noting the Board of Education (BOE) budget reduction from 4.8% to 4.4%, noting a \$50k debt service decrease, and including 0.72% grand list growth – which, without use of fund balance, would result in a 5.92% mill rate increase, which Mr. Marconi and Sean Connelly both noted was unacceptable.
- Mr. Connelly noted it would be difficult to find additional savings within the Town budget without exploring headcount changes, and staffing-wise, the Town already runs lean.
- Chris Murray asked, what if they were wrong about the health insurance budget reduction and they go over budget. Mr. Redmond confirmed they could do a hiring freeze, and Mr. Marconi shared they could ask the Board of Finance (BOF) for an additional appropriation.
- Mr. Redmond shared a proposed scenario to reduce the mill rate below a 4% increase, which included a \$1M reduced BOE budget (from 4.4% to 3.57% increase) and \$1.5M fund balance use. Mr. Marconi noted a \$500k reduction from the roads operating budget.
- Mr. Redmond confirmed all Referendum items (Roofs, A-School/Transition Program Building, and Public Safety Building) are included: \$111k, \$72k, and \$360k, respectively, and the proposed budget would be updated accordingly following the Referendum.
- Barbara Manners expressed concern about the required increase in fund balance, from 8-10% to a 9-12%. Mr. Marconi shared Bond Rating Boards have advised a specific fund balance to maintain AAA status.
- Mr. Redmond shared, over the last 10 years, mill rate increases have averaged 1.17% and there have been years with 0% increases. Mr. Marconi noted have to take the grand list growth into consideration

1. Town Bus Budget – Laurie Fernandez, Director of Human Resources

Laurie Fernandez was unable to attend. *This discussion was shifted into the General Budget Discussion.*

2. Golf Budget – Frank Sergiovanni

Frank Sergiovanni, Ridgefield Golf Course General Manager, and Kevin Redmond, Finance Director, were in attendance. Topics discussed included:

- Mr. Sergiovanni shared their current golf cart lease payments are over \$100k/year, and they generated \$414k in revenue last fiscal year. Mr. Sergiovanni shared green fees will increase 10% this year, based on research of surrounding golf course fees, which will be reflected in part of the FY25 and FY26 budget.
- Mr. Sergiovanni shared in 2012, the current member/guest pricing model was introduced to replace the resident/non-resident model, and successfully created a new member fee revenue stream. Mr. Sergiovanni confirmed non-resident and guest fees have been the largest drivers of the Ridgefield Golf Course's sustained success, with 30% of rounds creating 51% of revenue.
- Mr. Sergiovanni confirmed their one capital request (\$186k) is to renovate tee boxes, sharing the number of rounds has increased from roughly 36k to over 40k per year since COVID. Maureen Kozlark asked whether their capital request would be sufficient for the intended renovations. Mr. Sergiovanni confirmed it would be sufficient for FY25, starting with the 7th Hole, then 11th and 15th as time and budget allows.
- Sean Connelly asked about revenue from the driving range. Mr. Sergiovanni confirmed they are limited by the revision to their special permit from the 1980s, and must use limited flight golf balls, and confirmed it's a limited scope practice and warmup area, not a driving range. Chris Murray asked whether that area was necessary. Mr. Sergiovanni confirmed it functions as intended for golfers to warm up before playing, and is necessary for lessons, but is not a destination driving range.
- With respect to operating budget, Mr. Sergiovanni indicated he requested the budget to hire an Assistant Superintendent, but raised the seasonal salary line to entice a more skilled person with a spray operator's license to assist with maintenance and aeration.
- Rudy Marconi asked about the impact of minimum wage increases. Mr. Sergiovanni shared the Golf Course has roughly 17,500 seasonal labor hours and the minimum wage increase has created a compression challenge.

3. Information Technology (IT) Budget – Andrew Neblett

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

- Mr. Redmond confirmed the IT budget has a 37.96% year-over-year increase. Sean Connelly asked about allocation of the additional \$50k. Mr. Redmond confirmed \$25k was added to each cybersecurity and professional services.
- Mr. Neblett shared some multi-factor authentication services are getting hacked, and discussed a service (Huntress) to provide an additional layer of security.
- Mr. Neblett discussed future projects, including replacing WiFi routers at Town Hall, and updating the security cameras to ones capable of capturing higher quality images.
- Mr. Redmond noted operating costs increased ~40%, and Mr. Neblett noted VMware, specifically, increased 304% year-over-year. Chris Murray asked what is driving the operating budget from \$988k last budget to \$1.363M this budget. Mr. Redmond confirmed \$988k was budgeted, but are projecting to finish the year closer to \$1.4M.

- Maureen Kozlark asked about help desk call volume. Mr. Neblett confirmed an average of 80 calls pr month, most can be managed remotely. Mr. Redmond indicated they have a meeting scheduled with EBM (help desk service) to discuss cost reductions.
- Mr. Neblett noted the Police Department requires individual (not generic) accounts, and as there is no current record retention guidance from the State, the Town has elected to keep email records forever.
- Mr. Neblett also noted the current Microsoft Office software will reach end-of-life in 2026, and it will be a cost jump to shift to online licensing then.
- Mr. Neblett shared in current fiscal year budget, received approval for \$70k for VMware servers, but prices have increased, and requesting an additional \$40k to hopefully replace the VMware servers and transition the old ones to the EOC as a backup.
- Mr. Murray asked about risk in reducing the IT budget. Mr. Neblett confirmed, and stated the importance of not going backwards with respect to cybersecurity investment.
- Rudy Marconi asked about a plan should the department go overbudget. Mr. Redmond shared he first tries to find budgetary savings within the cost center, but then would look to other areas if that did not present a solution.
- With respect to capital, Mr. Marconi confirmed \$225k total, including \$40k for VMware servers, \$32k for server software replacements, and \$126k for Police mobile computers.

4. General Budget Discussion

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

- Town Bus Budget
 - o Rudy Marconi shared they will apply for a \$160k grant through the DOT 5310 program to purchase a new bus. Chris Murray asked about service life. Mr. Marconi confirmed 10-15 years, and the current bus was purchased from ~nine years ago from SPHERE. Mr. Marconi confirmed the bus would not require a CDL driver – and that the Town would spend the amount awarded through the grant.
- BOE Budget
 - o Mr. Murray asked whether the BOE is aware of the BOS desire for a mill rate under 4%. Mr. Marconi shared they should, based on discussions from the Tri-Board Meeting, but he has not discussed with Dr. Susie Da Silva, Superintendent. Sean Connelly noted Dr. Da Silva has not experienced a budget reduction from the BOF in her tenure, which was previously common for the BOF to do. Mr. Murray expressed importance of being below 4%, which Mr. Marconi confirmed was iterated through the proposed budget model. Maureen Kozlark noted the proposed capital budget is ~\$3M.
 - o *Later in the meeting, it was confirmed the BOE voted to approve a 4.21% (\$4.8M) increase, down from the previously proposed 4.4%.*
- The BOS then discussed potential areas for cost savings in the Town budget, Ms. Kozlark noted there aren't many areas for savings to be found. Mr. Marconi noted they could delay the proposed Parks & Rec parking lot expansion, or do the work in-house, or could consider a different solution for the proposed tennis court improvements (\$1.1M). Mr. Connelly expressed caution about delaying projects given large capital items included in upcoming fiscal years.

5. Possible Capital/Operating Budget Vote

There were no votes.

***Maureen Kozlark motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:02pm. Sean Connelly seconded.
Motion carried 5-0.***