



**Town of Ridgefield
Board of Selectpersons Budget Meeting
Minutes
UNAPPROVED**

March 02, 2026, at 7pm

Town Hall – Large Conference Room, 400 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

Present: Sean Connelly, Maureen Kozlark, Barbara Manners (virtual), Rudy Marconi, Geoffrey Morris

Absent: None

Rudy Marconi called the meeting to order at 7pm.

1. Board of Education (BOE) Budget Presentation by BOE Chair Tina Malhotra and Superintendent Dr. Susie Da Silva

- a. **Fiscal year 2027** - 4.62% total budget increase; 4.28% of the operating budget is contractual and/or necessary for new legal requirements. The BOE unanimously approved the capital budget in November 2025. The operating budget was approved last week by the majority vote. In operating 3.22% rollover is contractual obligations, legal costs, and other unavoidable costs; 1.47% is new investments in full time employees (FTEs), and continuation of existing investments such as Pay to Play.
- b. **Capital and Operating budgets discussion** – Dr. Da Silva presented a brief overview of the operating budget and discussed nuanced impacts to costs such as legal costs, new students arriving during the fiscal year after budget has been decided, and teacher rollover. These can't be budgeted but must be anticipated. Dr. Da Silva presented statistics showing Ridgefield's local ranking and statewide ranking for dollars spent per student and student performance. Ridgefield compares well and has improved dollar efficiency. Geoffrey Morris asked regarding the drivers of the \$2.7 million salary increase. Dr. Da Silva explained that the increases are contractual obligations for existing staff. Then he asked about the impact of reported declining enrollment. Dr. Da Silva responded that enrollment has two impacts on the budget; class size which is regulated by class size guidelines, and determines staffing needs, and; the per pupil funding for each school level, which covers materials per pupil. A member of the Board of Education added that FY26 budget included salaries for 101 elementary school teachers, but the anticipated decline in enrollment for FY27, caused a decreased need to 97 elementary school teachers, which the board considered for the FY27 budget. Ms. Malhotra added that the high school budget is nuanced because not only does total enrollment play a

factor, but also the specific classes for which the students enroll. Dr. Da Silva added that high school students have specific elective courses needed and graduation requirements to fulfill which drive staffing for those courses. Another board member added that although enrollment decreases, Special Education and interventions have increased over the last ten years. The BOE also addressed a report from M&P Planning, showing optimization of existing space. Maureen Kozlark added that enrollment is down roughly 1200 students over many years but the bricks and mortar costs are not decreasing despite the decrease equivalent of almost 3 elementary schools. Another member of the presenting group explained that since she was hired, the class size maximum has gone from 28 students to 24 students for elementary grades. Interventions are legally restricted to 5 students. Those groups meet in small spaces available, or in larger classrooms if needed. But they split the large classrooms to accommodate multiple intervention groups. Sean Connelly stated that the 4.6% is one of the largest BOE budget increases of past years and his concern is the impact to the mill rate, which last year was one of the highest for Ridgefield. This 4.6% BOE increase will have an impact on the mill rate that brings it to approximately 5% which the voters may not pass. Another board member asked what increase the BOS thinks the voters would tolerate. Maureen Kozlark explained that at the triboard meeting, the BOF demonstrated their due diligence and analytics to recommend a 3% mill rate. Sean Connelly asked about the number budgeted for Full Time Employees. Dr. Da Silva and the board members explained the rationale for the budget and confirmed that the 9.1 FTEs are program driven.

Next, Dr. Da Silva and the board presented an overview of the capital FY27 budget which was approved last November. They addressed projects, buildings, and information and communications technology. Total capital of \$2.937 million; \$706,902 was reduced by what is expected in the LOA incentive of \$321,505, leaving \$2,616,217 which was further cut to \$2,449,468. The BOS is asking the BOE to further cut \$166,749. Dr. Da Silva suggested the BOE consider reducing the classroom furniture. The BOE members present confirmed that BOS will make a recommendation to the BOF who will approve a reduced FY27 BOE budget that the BOE will not have approved. The BOE members present debated the line item to be cut as this was the only opportunity to deliberate that budget reduction because the BOF must have the line item budget by Thursday but the BOE meets next week.

2. BOS Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Vote

- a. **BOS Operating FY27** – Maureen Kozlark recommends denying the \$13,000 increase by ECDC and instead keeping the budget flat because there is no anecdotal evidence yet to support increasing the line item for staffing. The budget was increased last year for a staff person but no one has been hired yet. Sean Connelly suggested reallocating the \$13,000 for transfers such as the Holiday Trust and Welcome to Downtown Ridgefield.

Maureen Kozlark motioned to approve \$48,473,945 for the Board of Selectpersons 2026-27 fiscal year operating budget. Sean Connelly seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

- b. **Debt Service FY27** – This line item hasn't changed in any budget draft discussion.

Sean Connelly motioned to accept the fiscal year 2026-27 BOS budget debt service of \$8,869,395. Maureen Kozlark seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

- c. **BOS Capital FY27** – The capital budget currently proposed is \$10,972,950. The BOS is adding \$106,100 for FD showers and removing \$100,000 for cemetery. They are removing \$507,885 for Parks and Rec parking. They recognize this is the priority for Parks and Recreation, but with the purchase of the nearby property, there may be a parking solution that is not yet considered. Geoffrey Morris stated that this budget item has too many unknown variables that once determined, will impact the parking solutions for Parks and Recreation. Sean Connelly clarified that the budget cut is not about the cost but instead specifically about the parking solutions that will be viable once those variables are fixed. These cuts bring the proposed budget to \$10,471,165.

Sean Connelly motioned to approve a fiscal year 2027 capital budget of \$10,471,165. Geoffrey Morris seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

- d. **Non-binding recommendation to Board of Finance (BOF) on Operating FY27 BOE Budget** – Rudy Marconi reminded the BOS that the BOF had directed the Tribord to land around a 3% budget. The BOE has proposed a 4.62% increase. The BOS discussed applying \$1,000,000 Fund Balance. The BOS objective is to keep the mill rate under 4%. Therefore, the BOE budget needs to come in at 3.45%. The BOS discussed different scenarios where the BOF utilizes a larger amount of the Fund Balance and scenarios where the BOE budget is reduced to the BOF recommended 3.45%, to see where the needle landed on the mill rate. The BOS leaned toward recommending a BOE budget that adheres to the BOF recommendation, with the understanding that the BOF can approve a higher amount of the Fund Balance be used to bring the BOE budget up closer to their requested amount. Ultimately, the BOF will determine how much Fund Balance to use and how much of the BOE proposed budget to approve.

Sean Connelly motioned to approve a Board of Selectpersons non-binding recommendation to the BOF that the BOE budget be 3.45% increase, \$123,924,800, with a use of Fund Balance of \$1 million to keep the mill rate at 3.97%. Maureen Kozlark seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Dawn Marie Callahan, 56 Ridgewood Road, thanked the BOS for their dedication to the education budget and the designation as a cultural district. She stated that the arts have been cut in schools and not brought back.

Board of Education member Kathryn Graf asked for clarification on the math because 3.45% over last year's budget is \$123,928,962. BOF Director, Kevin Redmond, clarified that rounding causes the difference, but they will be looking at the percentages.

***Maureen Kozlark motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 pm. Sean Connelly seconded.
Motion carried 5-0.***