

Commissioners of Ridgely

Minutes February 11, 2008

The February Town Meeting was held in the Ridgely House on the above date at 7:00 pm. Nancy Gearhart, President; Chuck Hunter, Commissioner; Linda Epperly-Glover, Commissioner; Joe Mangini, Town Manager; Merl Evans, Chief of Police; Chuck Creason, Police Lt.; Chad Mothersell, Police Officer; Robin Eaton, Director of Public Works; and Carol Balderson, Town Clerk; were present.

A list of other attendees is attached.

Call to Order – President Gearhart called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence for our service men and women.

President Gearhart apologized for residents not being aware of the change in meeting dates for February. It had been decided at the January meeting. It was in the minutes (posted) and on the website. In the future it will also be posted on the front door.

Approval of the Minutes – 1/7/08 – Commissioner Epperly-Glover made a motion to approve the minutes as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Hunter. Unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report – Clerk reported January totals as follows: General Fund - \$152,522.16, Sewer Funds - \$152,420.58, and Water Fund - \$22,110.22.

Bills have been presented to the Commissioners for payment approval.

Police Report – Chief Evans reported there were two burglaries at Connolly's Store, so far there have been five arrests.

In January they had reports of 10 UCR related incidents which resulted in 9 closures (90% closure rate). The rate for major or UCR reported crimes in 2007 was 94%. This is well above the state average. RPD closures were usually within 30 days.

Three drug arrests were the result of search warrants, one a sizable amount of drugs seized and cash, but the cash was in Day Spring.

The copy machine at the Post Office was vandalized and a suspect identified - a homeless individual whom they have warrants for in regard to Connolly's incidents. He has also been sleeping in some vacant houses.

The Chief asked that folks let the department know when they have an incident. It will help them to identify a suspect and will allow the police to charge the individual at one time instead of having to go back and apply for more charges when they find out about it later.

They had one ICE incident; two illegals were arrested for theft and DUI. The incident began at 11:30 pm and ended at 1 pm the next day.

The Chief reviewed the monthly report.

Commissioner Epperly-Glover asked if we now have 24-hour coverage.

The Chief replied when there was no one sick or in training, etc.

Chief Evans presented Officer Chad Mothersell with the Officer of the Year Award.

(The Police left at this time.)

Public Works Report – Robin reported on his department activities, training, and meetings for the month.

He attended a Tech Park meeting. Most of their activities are stopped until spring. The water has been tested and is okay. Need to test all valves and hydrants before bringing online.

Robin reported that the light on Seward Road is finally working.

Robin reported they have replaced the basketball nets in M. S. Park and painted lines on the courts. The soccer goals are in the process of being stripped, primed, and painted.

Alleys are being filled and graded, and pot holes have been filled with cold patch.

The crew has been cleaning up around the yard; looking good.

Water/Sewer Report – Robin reported they started stream discharge January 18 and have 41 days holding time in the lagoon.

Robin reported on an issue with a sewer line at Park and Fourth. There were apparently some houses back in the late 90s when they redid the Fourth St. sewer line that got missed when they ran new connections. This particular property had a problem about a year or year and a half ago. The plumber/contractor on site was convinced it went back to the alley at that time. There was another problem last week and when they started digging, about halfway down the yard it turned and went out to Fourth St. It has been fixed.

The yearly testing for water has been completed and is okay.

All the reports for MDE for 2007 have been filled out, sent in, and filed away.

Other Board/Commission/Committee Reports – EDC – Joe reported they met on Jan. 9. The State is waiting for them to finish the loan program itself for the Revolving Loan Program. The Strategic Economic Dev. Plan – need to talk to the Commissioners about that because that is a matching grant.

Joe reported they are still trying to work on the Day Care Center at the Brodie building. Last week he was informed that the Marketing Director for the County is trying to get her to go out to the Tech Park.

They broke ground today for Mr. Brodie's shopping center. He spoke with the owner of Coliseum and he is anxious to get in there (probably in the fall).

The owner of the restaurant up town is planning to open a family restaurant (breakfast, lunch, and dinner). There is also the possibility of two stores.

There is a public hearing scheduled on Feb. 19 for Hanover Foods with the County's Board of Appeals.

Ethics Commission Training – Jan. 30 – President Gearhart reported she thought it was confusing. Commissioner Hunter said the instructor touched on a lot of things in the short time he was here.

Parks/Recreation Committee – Joe reported they met on Jan. 15 (third Tues. of the month at 7:00 pm). The next meeting will be Feb. 19. The main focus of the meeting was a couple of things they wanted Public Works to do and he gave a list to Robin.

Joe said he talked to them about focusing on more town activities, rather than just sports.

Planning/Zoning Commission – Met on Jan. 23 – Martin Sokolich reported they approved two building permits and one demolition permit. They also approved a design for a new sign at the Medifast building.

They talked with Shane Johnston about some of the planning issues coming up with the sewer plan, municipal growth elements, and updating our Comprehensive Plan. They are planning a work session on Feb. 20 to go over what he has come up with so far. There is some urgency in getting some of these things done.

John Hurley asked about the house that burned at 207 Park (next door to him), status. Joe said a letter went to the owner as to what she wants to do with it. She has 30 days to respond.

Mr. Hurley said the rumor was that she came here to ask about demolition and putting in a single story home and was told that wasn't possible in that part of town. There are two single story homes across the street. He doesn't care what kind of home goes in there, but is tired of looking at a burned out house next door.

Martin said someone came in and asked some questions. They did not know if it was a total loss, or a convenience. They have not heard back.

Joe said the owner did request demolition and to put another house there. Demolition has to be approved by the Planning Commission and that did not happen. The type of house she wanted to put there was not going to be approved. She's back to square one. They still need to know what she is doing with the building. The property needs to be secured, or something has to happen. She is in a district that requires major permits to be approved by the Planning Commission, not by the Zoning Administrator. There were issues the Planning Commission had with that that were not resolved to her satisfaction.

Rails to Trails Advisory Committee – Met Jan. 22 – Joe thanked Martin for his help (he serves on the Advisory Committee and the ESHI Board). Pace Design is on board as the consultant. Design to be presented at the next meeting on Feb. 26 (invited folks to attend).

There has been some discussion about what to do about the caboose.

The committee will look at it and make recommendations. Once there is a final schematic design it will come before the Commissioners. Then it will go out to the public.

Ridgely Historical Society – Met on Feb. 7 – President Gearhart reported that Brenda Walls came to the meeting and was talking about having an old fashioned ice cream social in Railroad Memorial Park. The tentative date is May 3.

Tree Commission – Did not have a meeting. The next meeting will be the fourth Thursday in Feb.

Town Manager's Report – Joe reported WWTP Sewer Capacity Management Plan – 37,933 ga. left as of Feb. 1.

He has been in contact regularly with the Deputy Secretary of MDE. The Town should be receiving a letter very soon. He thanked President Gearhart for helping get a meeting set up with the legislators and going over with them. He also thanked Robin and David, especially Robin for putting together a very good presentation.

There were two questions posed: 1) what projects had Ridgely approved and needed help from the State with, and 2) upgrade of the spray irrigation system; need a timetable (this was sent this evening).

Joe explained the spray irrigation system upgrade that is planned. The upgrade of the plant from 200,000 ga. to 300,000 ga. will come after this. It's two separate operations.

There was a short discussion on the possibility of grant funds being available for the spray upgrade. The upgrade to 300,000 ga. is to be paid for by Ridgely Park.

Joe said if grant funds are not available for the spray upgrade we will need to do a loan.

Ted Wold asked what would happen if we don't upgrade the system.

Joe said we would probably get a consent order from the State ordering us to do it.

Mr. Wold expressed concerns about whether we can afford it now with the economy like it is.

Robin said our Superintendent is licensed to operate our system, and his license is on the line. Commissioner Hunter said whether or not development comes, things wear out and need to be replaced/upgraded.

Development Projects – Joe reported that if MDE will allow the Weese Town House Project, Ridgeway Estates Subdivision, and 128 Walnut Street, they would probably start pretty quick. Thinks there may be a sale involved with Walnut Farms Subdivision and they would want to get started pretty quick too. The only project that is out there, not ready to start, is Ridgely Park.

Municipal Capital Projects – Joe reported that he thinks the Little League is planning on having electric put in at the Cow Barn Athletic Field Facility.

Hoping to hear from Robin's soccer field application in March. There is also a County grant coming for the athletic field facility.

The 36-unit Cow Barn Project is gone at this time.

Joe reported they met with the Fire Dept. last week regarding the Municipal Public Safety Facility. They are looking at going out and getting a consultant to come in and do a feasibility study to construct a building on the Fire Dept.'s property to be shared by the town.

Municipal Grant Proposal/Projects Update – Joe reported the M. S. Park Renovations Project should be done before the Strawberry Festival.

Still working on a 140th Anniversary Celebration Project. Needs to get with Commissioner Hunter on that.

Joe announced that there is a public hearing before the County Planning Commission Feb. 25th and 26th on the North County Water and Sewer.

New Business – 1) President Gearhart made a motion to re-appoint Mickey Newport to a five-year term as a member of the Ridgely P/Z Commission, seconded by Commissioner Epperly-Glover. Passed unanimously.

2) President Gearhart made a motion to re-appoint Lisa Takala to a five-year term as a member of the Ridgely Tree Commission, seconded by Commissioner Epperly-Glover. Passed unanimously.

3) Ordinance #307 – Introduction – An ordinance of the Commissioners of Ridgely to amend Chapter 136 Property Maintenance of the Municipal Code of the Town of Ridgely.

Joe said our Codes Administrator wants to use a more recent copy of the code.

President Gearhart read Ordinance #307.

Commissioner Gearhart said anyone may request copies of these ordinances.

4) Ordinance #308 – Introduction – An ordinance of the Commissioners of Ridgely to amend Chapter 75 Building Construction of the Municipal Code of the Town of Ridgely.

Joe said this ordinance was proposed by the Fire Department.

Joe read the ordinance which requires sprinkler system installation in new homes.

John Hurley said this is a safety issue. They do not build homes like they used to. Sprinklers are in townhomes now.

Joe said the town has information provided by the Fire Dept. if anyone is interested in looking at it.

Martin Sokolich asked for a clarification on the 50% renovation.

Joe said it is 50% of the assessed value at the time of the permit application.

Martin said there is some confusion regarding whether retrofitting an older home is necessary, or just the renovated portion.

Joe suggested that if there are any amendments to the ordinance they be passed along to the Fire Dept.

5) Ordinance #309 – Introduction - An ordinance of the Commissioners of Ridgely to amend the Town of Ridgely's FY 08 General Fund, Sewer Fund and Water Fund Operating and Capital Improvement Projects Budget.

President Gearhart read the ordinance which suggests revisions to some revenue and expense items due to unforeseen circumstances.

Joe read the memo accompanying the ordinance. Recommended amendments to the General Fund Revenue are as follows: 1) Real Property Taxes-Increase of \$12,800, 2) Personal Property Taxes-Increase of \$10,000, 3) Building Permits-Decrease of \$15,000, 4) Homeland Security Funds-Increase of \$10,500, 5) MD Public Safety Grants-Decrease of \$18,700, 6) Caroline Co. Traffic Safety had two line accts., now one - \$84,000, 7) MD Highway Safety Grant had two line accts., now one - \$20,000, 8) Public Safety Impact Fees-Decrease of \$46,000, 9) MD Highway User Fees-Increase of \$5,500, and 10) Park Impact Fees-Decrease of \$46,000.

The major reason for the building permit fees, public safety fees, and park impact fees reduction is tied to the MDE issue.

The major change on the expense side is that the Street Loan payments are not \$150,000 this fiscal year, but because the Town used a loan for this work, the actual annual payment is \$50,000.

Recommended amendments to the Water/Sewer Revenue are as follows: 1) Developer Impact Fees-Decrease of \$225,000 (Sewer), 2) WWTP Income-Increase of \$1,393,000 since a loan, or financing, will need to be obtained to upgrade the WWTP spray irrigation system to include engineering costs and construction (Sewer), 3) Other Charges-Decrease of \$45,000 (Sewer), 4) Developer Impact Fees-Decrease of \$135,000 (Water), 5) Other Charges-Decrease of \$45,000 (Water), and 6) Investment Earnings-Decrease of \$4,000.

All of these amendments are a direct impact that the withholding of our subdivisions approval has had on the Town because of the MDE issue.

On the Water/Sewer Expense side, the major and most dramatic change would be the WWTP spray irrigation upgrade, an increase of \$1,226,155.

Joe recommended that, if the Commissioners so desire, we hold a public meeting before adoption or discuss further the reasons for the recommended amendments.

Joe said he would be glad to meet with anyone in the community to go over this as well.

President Gearhart questioned the changes in Police Dept. grants.

Joe said the Chief would be the best one to explain those.

Clerk explained that their fiscal year runs different from ours and when we put the budget together he wasn't sure what the exact amount would be. The \$84,000 is the actual grant for overtime money for all the police departments in the county; if they don't request it, it won't be used.

Ted Wold said there were several changes in the General Fund and Water/Sewer Revenues, but only one changing the expenses. We aren't going to be adjusting more expenses?

Joe said our capital projects are being pushed back, and we feel we are staying pretty well within the budget on the General Fund side.

Mr. Wold questioned \$60,500 earmarked for miscellaneous expenses throughout the budget. At this time, we have only spent \$23,034. He would like a breakdown.

6) Resolution No. R-1-08 – Adoption - A resolution of the Commissioners of Ridgely to renew the Town of Ridgely’s Urban Renewal Line of Credit.

Joe read the resolution which continues the line of credit to allow for loans for rehab of deteriorating homes.

Commissioner Epperly-Glover made a motion to adopt this resolution, seconded by Commissioner Hunter. Passed unanimously.

7) Consideration of applying for ESHI Grant to renovate the “Telephone Building”. President Gearhart said JOK Walsh acquired some grant money through the County Historical Society and is going to contribute \$20,000 to moving the building up closer to Central Ave., putting in a foundation, repairing the building, putting in handicap access, steps in the front, and painting the outside.

It will be up to the Town to do the inside. President Gearhart said it has been discussed by the Historic Commission and by the Rails to Trails Committee. She wants to put a phone museum and information center to go along with the Rails to Trails. There are grants available for this type of thing and she would like to apply for a 50/50 grant from ESHI. 25% of the 50% can be in-kind volunteer hours. Can also turn in town employee time on the project.

President Gearhart said there is a college professor who teaches a class on historic preservation who will come and do an inspection of the building and can make recommendations. If the Commissioners approve the application for this grant she will contact him.

President Gearhart said small grants are \$2500 or less (competition is from four counties).

Larger grants are statewide (above \$2500).

Commissioner Epperly-Glover agreed to a small grant - \$2500.

8) Consideration of placing an ad in the Ridgely Lions Club’s new telephone directory -

President Gearhart said she was in favor of placing an ad. The Lions Club does a lot in Ridgely.

President Gearhart made a motion to buy a one-page ad at the cost of \$150, seconded by Commissioner Epperly-Glover. Passed unanimously.

President Gearhart made a motion to pay the January bills as submitted, seconded by

Commissioner Epperly-Glover. Passed unanimously.

President Gearhart made a motion to adjourn at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol A. Balderson
Clerk

