

**ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE
SPECIAL MEETING
April 2, 2015
7:00 p.m.**

Members Present: Cathryn Silver-Smith (Chairperson), Susan Eastwood (clerk), Chuck Funk, Merrill Simpson, Gail Zaicek, Judy Austin (alt.), Marion Matthews (alt.), Carl Pfalzgraf (alt.), Francine Hodovan (Recording Secretary)

Guests: Finance Department: Cheryl Baker (Town Treasurer)
AVFD: Wayne Fletcher (Chief).

Other Guest: Nichole Rice

1. **Call to Order:** Chairperson Cathryn Silver-Smith called the Special Meeting of the Ashford Board of Finance to order at 7:02 p.m.
2. **Seating of Alternates:** Ms. Matthews was seated for Mr. Horn.
3. **Approve Minutes of Meeting for March 26, 2015:**
MR. FUNK MOVED AND MS. EASTWOOD SECONDED A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 26, 2015 BOF MEETING WITH THE FOLLOWING CORRECTIONS. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY EXCEPT FOR MS. EASTWOOD AND MS. ZAICEK WHO ABSTAINED.

Corrections:

Under "Guests," name should be corrected to read "Tucker Rice."

Under Item 4, second to last sentence should read, "Mr. Hopkins clarified that a number of other steps were taken to improve writing scores, but none proved sufficient."

Paragraph 4, 4th line should read "They have professional development specialists from EastConn who come in and teach the teachers to teach. In order to change the school's whole writing program, it will take more than one or two years to implement changes."

The first motion on page 3, after the meeting resumes, should read:

"MR. PFALZGRAF MOVED AND MR. HORN SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015-2016 AND TO SET A DATE FOR THE PUBLIC HEARING ON APRIL 7, 2015 AT KNOWLTON HALL AT 7:00 P.M. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY."

4. Hear from Public:

Ms. Rice said that she would like to clarify and supplement what she stated at last week's meeting regarding bullying to say that she feels good about how the Superintendent and the Principal are handling this continuing problem. She also realizes that nothing and no one is immune to the chopping block. At last week's meeting Ms. Hodovan's and Mr. Morytko's letters were read and both people's ideas are important to keep in mind, as well as Mr. Simpson's comments regarding seniors. Ms. Rice stated that she is aware that the Town would like to keep expenses as low as possible while still maintaining responsibility to the children. She thanks to the BOE and the BOF for all of their work, but wants them to realize that the children need extra attention.

Chief Fletcher also thanked the BOF for doing such a tough job so well. He suggested that the BOF look at www.zillow.com to see that the ranking of Ashford School is only 5 of 10 and to read the comments people left there. He does not know how current the site is.

Ms. Baker was asked if replacements had been purchased for dangerous PE mats and other equipment at the school. She noted that the school decides where their annual appropriation is spent. They have not purchased replacements for that equipment, although \$4,800 was spent recently on computers for music and \$1,600 for new office furniture.

5. Communications:

Ms. Silver-Smith spoke regarding her communications with Jim Rupert, BOE Chair about:

- The 17% increase in BOE 2015-2016 “Outside Services” estimated expense reflected in the BOE’s March presentation to the BOF, as it conflicted with a known decrease of \$140K in Outside Services tuition for FY 2015-2016. Mr. Rupert followed up with the school’s finance department, who reported that the increase was due to tuition which no longer qualifies for excess cost reimbursement. In addition, the school will be paying more for services provided by the outplacing agency
- How the cut to the BOE portion of the 2015-2016 Capital Improvement Plan was made:
 - The BOE was not informed about the BOS recommendation to cut the school’s portion until after the cut was decided. The concern was not that the CIP plan was cut, as Mr. Rupert stated that the Town was extremely generous the previous two years. The concern was that the BOE was not asked if the cut would impact the school’s goals or priorities before it was made
 - Chief Fletcher stated that he also was not notified about the cut to the AVFD portion of the CIP until after it was made
 - Ms. Silver-Smith expressed concerns about the budget communication process, noting that the both Mr. Rupert and Chief Fletcher thought that the proposed cuts were decided before the BOF’s March 26 meeting to finalize the budget package for the Public Hearing, which was incorrect
 - Ms. Silver-Smith stated that the members of the CIP Committee work very hard to clarify and justify their requests and need to
 - Be informed when a cut is being considered by the BOS or BOF
 - Understand that the BOF makes the decision on the CIP at the same time as the rest of the budget, not before
 - Can advocate for their full request:
 - Any time prior to and during the meeting that the BOF holds to finalize the budget for the Public Hearing
 - During the Public Hearing
 - The dates all of BOF budget meetings and their purpose are outlined in the annual Town Budget Calendar and BOF Budget Policies posted every year on the Town web site
 - BOF members noted the concerns raised by Mr. Rupert and Chief Fletcher and agreed that the BOF, BOS and CIP will improve communication about this aspect of the budget decision-making process going forward.

Ms. Matthews reported that she was the only individual in the audience at the Region 19 BOE budget hearing. She asked the BOE why the insurance was increased by 34.11% and while she didn’t get the clear answer she was hoping for, Superintendent Silva gave her his phone number so he can clarify for her. Land and Road Use also increased by 775% (from \$2,000 to \$17,500). Ms. Matthews said that she requested that they reduce the Town of Ashford’s share of the Region 19 budget. Ms. Matthews stated to the BOF that she would like to know the job descriptions for all administrative personnel in Region 19, Ashford, Mansfield and Willington schools. Ms. Silver-Smith suggested that Ms. Matthews make her request for the Ashford School information via email and put Ms. Silver-Smith on copy.

6. New Business:

a. Auditor Services:

A discussion was held with regard to the regionalization of auditor services, which has the potential to reduce audit cost. Each town would sign their own contract within the bid, and with more towns aggregating, the auditor would have a bigger contract covering towns within in the same geographic area. Ms. Silver-Smith recommends discussing this with Selectman Zambo, who works with other municipalities on joint initiatives.

b. Reviews of:

FY 2015-2016 Ashford Town Budget Package:

Ms. Silver-Smith thanked Ms. Baker for her invaluable help during the budget cycle, and noted Ms. Abikoff’s help in getting the notice prepared for *the Chronicle*.

The Public Hearing will begin at 7:00 p.m. on April 7, not 7:30 p.m., as stated in *the Citizen*. Chief Fletcher said that he will change the sign in front the Fire House after the Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday and Ms. Silver-Smith will contact the Selectman’s office to request that they put a sign in front of Knowlton Hall with the correct time on it as well.

FY 2015-2016 Ashford BOE Package:

The revised BOE budget reflecting a cut of \$176,000 was reviewed. There were questions about the how the school inventory is being managed.

FY 2015-2016 Region 19 Budget Update:

Board members commented on the Region 19 budget, noted that the goals and the mission statement of the school are well-represented. The Region 19 budget package is created by the BOE's Finance Committee and can be viewed the E.O.Smith school website. It was also stated that Superintendent Bruce Silva works with the budget Region 19 provides him, and the number of tuitioned students that come to E.O. Smith helps to bring down costs for the three participating schools, Ashford, Willington and Mansfield.

c. FY 20104-2015 Annual Budget:

Ms. Silver-Smith stated that she has purchased software to format the document for production. Ms. Zaicek will send a write-up on the person it is being dedicated to and will request that Mr. and Mrs. Falletti give her a write-up on the 300th Anniversary. Ms. Silver-Smith has received many responses, but may contact some Departments to request something more.

7. Agenda Items for Next Meeting:

- Annual Report

8. Remarks for the Good of the Board:

Guest Nichole Rice thanked the BOF once again "for all of your care and concern." Ms. Silver-Smith thanked her for her involvement and noted that any concerns she has about the school can be raised at BOE meetings. Simpson stated that we need people like Ms. Rice to be part of the BOE.

Mr. Funk stated that the BOF as a whole really appreciates the work and time Ms. Silver-Smith spends putting the budget together and getting it completed on time, and presented her with a token of appreciation from board members. Ms. Silver-Smith thanked the Board and stated that it has been great to compare notes with everyone on the Board, and she appreciates how everyone brings something different to the table for consideration.

9. Adjournment:

MS. ZAICEK MOVED AND MS. MATTHEWS SECONDED A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE APRIL 2, 2015 SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY.

The meeting adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathryn Silver-Smith (for BOF Clerk)