

**ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC HEARING**

**April 7, 2015
7:00 p.m.**

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

Guests:

BOS: Mike Zambo (First Selectman), Bill Falletti, Ralph Fletcher, Christine Abikoff (Administrative Assistant)

Town Treasurer: Cheryl Baker

Clean Energy Task Force: Cindy Moeckel

AVFD: Wayne Fletcher (Chief), Dave Thibault

BOE: Kim Rourke (Vice-Chair), Lisa McAdam Donegan, Jim Lippert, Kay Warren

Ashford School: Dr. Jim Longo (Superintendent), Seth Lyman

EDC: John Calarese

P&ZC: Jeffrey Silver-Smith (Chair), Luther Brauch, Bob Zaicek

Other Guests: Theresa Fletcher, Tony Paticchio, Paul Varga

Ashford Board of Finance Chair, Cathryn Silver-Smith called the Public Hearing to order at 7:02 p.m.

Ms. Silver-Smith gave an overview of the budget process, noting that the BOF elicits questions and comments from everyone who participates from other Boards or Commissions, as well as other interested townspeople. She also stated that the BOF appreciates every individual's participation. She explained how a mill rate is calculated and the effect of an increase or decrease on a homeowner's taxes. Finally, Ms. Silver-Smith thanked the BOE for giving the BOF a well-organized document and answering all questions, stating that "they are to be commended for the herculean effort in turning it around." She also thanked the BOS for their cooperation, noting that the BOS made many cuts to the proposed Town Government budget before it was presented it to the BOF, and still had to cut again.

Public Comment:

Mr. Zaicek commended the BOF and the BOS for a job well done. He asked if Dr. Longo wanted to say anything about the budget process.

Dr. Longo stated that he had tremendous support and an excellent staff to help him. He had a good base with which to work and that, even with the cuts the school should function well without ruining services. He thanked the BOF and the BOS and said that the 3-Board (BOF, BOS, BOE) meeting held prior to the start of the budget process was helpful and that he would like a 3-Board "retreat" to start off each budget year. He stated that he is available for any questions anyone has for him on the school budget, and that the full budget is on the Ashford School's website.

Ms. Silver-Smith agreed that the 3-Board meeting was helpful because everyone was candid and it ensured that everyone was on the same page. She read an email from BOE Chair, Jim Rupert, who could not attend the Hearing, saying that he appreciated the BOF's collaboration with the BOE this year, feels that the BOE has presented a great budget and understands that there is still a need and a desire by the BOE to improve the budget and thanks everyone involved for the better communication among Boards. Ms. Silver-Smith expressed her appreciation for Mr. Rupert's comments. She stated that the BOF's role in budget-making is not a popular one, and that BOF members do listen to everyone and are mindful of the impact of their decisions, including the impact on Ashford children and seniors. Ms. Silver-Smith then personally thanked Ms. Bowen for her invaluable help in putting together the budget and Ms. Abikoff's for getting BOF notices published at the correct times and for helping her with the budget calendar every year.

Ms. Zaicek said that the BOE's budget package this year was well presented, clear and well done. She enjoyed the opportunity that the 3-Board meeting gave for all to discuss and work on a cooperative level, and that everyone stepped up and did their part to make it all work.

Ms. Silver-Smith appreciated the taxpayers coming forward to challenge the BOF because it always makes them think again about what they need to consider when preparing the budget.

Selectman Zambo stated that the Region 19 budget meeting is also being held tonight and wondered at the likelihood of their making the hoped for reduction to Ashford's share of their budget. Ms. Silver-Smith stated that the sizeable cut that the Region 19 BOE Finance Committee is recommending is likely to be approved. The cut would reduce Ashford's portion by \$28K, which would reduce Ashford's mil rate increase from .899 mils to .801.

Selectman Zambo once again thanked the BOF and the BOE on behalf of the BOS for all of their work. Ms. Silver-Smith added that at least half of the people in the room this evening are unpaid volunteers who are working on various boards for the good of the Town.

5. Adjournment: Ms. Silver-Smith adjourned the Public Hearing at 7:37 p.m.

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