

**ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
January 14, 2016**

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

**Guests:**

**Board of Selectmen:** Mike Zambo (first Selectman), Bill Falletti, Ralph Fletcher

**Board of Education:** Kim Rourke (Vice-Chair), John Lippert, Dr. Marian Matthews, Lisa McAdam Donegan

**Ashford School Administration:** Dr. James Longo (Superintendent), Don Neel (Business Manager)

1. **Call to Order:** Chairperson Cathryn Silver-Smith called the Special Meeting of the Ashford Board of Finance to order at 7:07 p.m.
2. **Seating of Alternates:** None.
3. **Hear from Public:** None.
4. **FY 2016-2017 Pre-Budget Discussion (BOF, BOS and BOE):**
  - Budget Schedule and Communications:  
Ms. Silver-Smith distributed the Ashford Town Budget Calendar for FY 2016-2017, which has been posted on the Town website and published in the *Ashford Citizen*. She and Mr. Zambo will discuss an additional article for the *Citizen*. BOE members will share the budget schedule during their next meeting. Ms. Silver-Smith invited the BOE to send her any key school budget meeting dates that they would like added to the calendar.

Key Budget-Related Meetings/Events

Meeting Date	Board	Agenda Items	Board Action to Be Taken During Meeting
Feb. 18	BOF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Government Budget presented by BOS</li> <li>• Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) presented by Capital Improvement Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review only</li> <li>• Review only</li> </ul>
Mar. 3	BOF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ashford School Budget presented by BOE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review only</li> </ul>
Mar. 17	BOF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town Budget (includes General Government and Ashford School budgets)</li> <li>• CIP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust/approve Town Budget and CIP for Public Hearing</li> <li>• Set date for Public Hearing</li> </ul>
Apr. 5	BOF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public Hearing:</b> Town Budget and CIP presented by BOF to public</li> <li>• Special BOF Meeting: to finalize budget for Annual Town Meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust/finalize Town Budget and CIP</li> <li>• Send Town Budget and CIP to BOS for Annual Town Meeting. <i>Note, the budget and CIP cannot be increased after this point</i></li> </ul>
Apr. 19	BOS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Annual Town Meeting:</b> Town Budget and CIP presented to public</li> <li>• Adjourn to referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send finalized Town Budget and CIP to referendum</li> </ul>
May 3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referendum: Town Budget, CIP</li> <li>• Referendum: Region 19 Budget</li> </ul>	

Ms. Silver-Smith noted that Region 19 BOE adjustments to their superintendent's proposed budget will not be complete when the BOF publishes the proposed Ashford Town budget and CIP for the April 3 Public Hearing.

- State Aid

Mr. Zambo stated that all state aid will be reduced, except possibly Town Aid Road and we should be prepared for it.

- Town Department Budgets

Mr. Zambo stated that he already has budgets for most departments included in the General Government budget. Ms. Silver-Smith stated that she did not receive a request for the BOF's budget. Mr. Zambo stated that for six smaller departments the Finance Department is using the same numbers they used last year, but that he will request that she receive her budget package from the Finance Department.

Mr. Calarese (BOE) arrived at 7:17 p.m.

- Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) Committee

Mr. Zambo also stated that the Capital Improvements Committee met on January 11 to discuss projects for the DPW, AVFD and Ashford School. He said that they made some good headway and would like to have more steadfast figures for project costs by their next meeting. He said, "It's a good group and they are invested in doing their best." The next meeting of the Committee will be held January 25.

Supporting material (RFP, vendor estimate, detailed scope and plan, proposed funding source) should be included with each capital improvement request. The submitter is expected to explore funding sources (ie. grants) to offset cost to the town. The group agreed that we are looking for efficiencies, particularly where energy is concerned wherever possible, so it may be best to combine some projects for economies of scale. The town has already taken advantage of the Green Bank and was awarded approximately \$13,500 and other money may be forthcoming up to roughly \$23,000 to be used for energy efficient lighting for the Senior Housing and Town Hall. It was suggested by Ms. Matthews that the library be considered under Capital Improvement projects as well.

Replacement of the School and Town financial accounting systems with one common system should be on the CIP list. FY 2015 Annual Audit pointed to deficiencies in the school's system that must be addressed. Also, the current school and town systems are not linked, which leads to difficulties translating reports/information. Conversion to a common system will be a major undertaking but all agreed that it is necessary to do so as soon as feasible and that the effort must be well-planned and managed to minimize disruption. Mr. Neel has been involved in conversions to new systems in a few other towns and Ms. Silver-Smith has requested he expertise in this area to benefit the process.

Ms. Silver-Smith requested that the BOS create a financial system committee at their next meeting (Tuesday, January 19, 2016). The committee should be comprised of at least one member of the BOE, BOS, BOF, and the Finance Departments from both the town and the school. A consultant may be engaged to assist. Site visits/interviews should be conducted with other towns of our size to gain insights from those who have converted to a new system. The Committee will need to come to a consensus regarding what is needed from the system based on the shared goals, objectives, and reporting needs for both the Town and the School. Mr. Neel offered to provide a list of potential towns to speak with and send the information to Mr. Zambo, Mr. Rupert, Ms. Silver-Smith and members of the committee. It is estimated that the cost to implement the system in both departments could be between \$80K and \$125K plus upgrades and maintenance, and that the implementation cannot be completed in time for FY 2016 audit. The solution should take into account state requirements for a uniform chart of accounts (UCOA), even if it may not be required for reporting until a future date. The town is currently sends our financial information to an outside firm which "crosswalks" (converts) the information to the state's UCOA structure. Mr. Neel indicated that he has developed a chart of accounts that is more appropriate to district needs and is in the process of developing a crosswalk between the school COA and what the State requires.

- Ashford School Budget

Ms. Rourke stated that the school is working with a zero-based budget, which is a new process as of this year.

- Grand List  
There grand list is expected to decrease when the revaluation is performed, which will impact town revenue. Mr. Zambo stated that revaluation will start this month. This will affect the mill rate for 2017-2018 as well.
- FY 2016-2017 Budget Format  
Dr. Longo will send the BOE's proposed format for their budget (including report columns) to the BOF for feedback. As before, a narrative with increases and decreases by object will be provided with explanations of variances. Ms. Silver-Smith noted that the columns presented in both Ashford School and General Government budgets should be consistent.
- Ashford Financial Policies and Procedures Manual  
Mr. Zambo stated that he met with Ms. Barber on Wednesday (01/13) who indicated that she plans to meet with department heads to review the testing results and report back her findings to Mr. Zambo on Monday, January 25, prior to bringing the information to the BOF. Mr. Silver-Smith stated that she expects Ms. Barber to work directly with the BOF to keep them apprised of progress/plan, as the project is being managed by the BOF, not the BOS.

Ms. Eastwood arrived and was seated at 7:50 p.m.

- State Mill Rate for Motor Vehicles  
Mr. Fletcher noted that the State will set the mill rate for motor vehicles for next year. It is expected to decrease from 32 mills to 29 mills, and to be reimbursed by the State, but this cannot be counted on at this time.
- Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF)  
Background:
  - CCJEF seeks to achieve an adequately and equitably funded PreK-12 public education system that is based on the learning needs of students and the real costs of delivering high-quality education in every community.
  - In 2005, CCJEF and several named school children and their parents filed suit against the State of Connecticut (CCJEF v. Rell) for its failure to meet its constitutional obligation to adequately and equitably fund the public schools. In a 2010 pretrial ruling, the Connecticut Supreme Court affirmed the State's constitutional obligation and remanded the case back to the trial court for full trial on the merits of Plaintiffs' adequacy and equity claims.
  - CCJEF v. Rell education equity and adequacy trial started in January 12 in Hartford.

Dr. Longo will forward information he has received about the case to the BOF.

- Annual Audit  
The 3-year contract with the Town's current auditing firm will end June 30, 2016. Regionalization for the purpose of the annual audit was discussed. Mr. Zambo stated that talks with NECCOG continue but he does not expect anything to be coordinated in time for the FY 2016 audit. Towns being discussed are Union, Chaplin, Eastford, Pomfret and Scotland. In the meantime, as both Town and school are satisfied with our current audit firm's performance, we may want to request an extension of the current contract for one more year.

Mr. Zambo, speaking on behalf of the BOS, thanked all of the Boards and volunteers present, stating that "a small town like Ashford would not survive without you."

Mssrs. Falletti and Zambo left at 8:10 p.m. and the meeting took a break until 8:25 p.m.

- Ashford School  
Ms. Donegan stated that she appreciates the set-up of the room this year as it was more conducive to a round table discussion. Ms. Rourke encouraged everyone present to come by the school and see what is going on there. She said there are new, exciting after school clubs, a robotics club that is doing great things, and that there is very high level of student enthusiasm. Ms. Donegan stated that they could possibly set up an open house arrangement for an evening or individuals may want to come to a BOE meeting when students are

making presentations. There are also many new academic and behavioral programs. The school is much more attractive and we can be proud of it.

- January 19 Town Meeting – Proposed Property Sale

Mr. Pfalzgraf stated that he hopes that townspeople will attend this meeting to decide on the proposed sale of the property located at the southeast corner of Routes 44 and 74 to Atlantic Retail Properties to be used to build a new Dollar General store.

- April 19 Annual Town Budget Meeting

Ms. Rourke voiced a concern regarding the April 19 Town Budget Meeting date, as a lot of families may be out of town due to school spring vacation. Ms. Silver-Smith clarified that the figures for the budget presented will have already been set and the only change that can be made at that time would be a decrease. Individuals who want to provide input into the budget should attend the BOE and BOF meetings prior to April 19, in particular the BOF's March 17 meeting and/or the April 5 Public Hearing when the budget will be adjusted/finalized for the Annual Town Budget Meeting.

- Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Facilities

Ms. Matthews spoke about the Clean Energy Task Force's work to make the town more energy-efficient. She would like to remind the Boards, including the Capital Improvement Committee, that when planning is done, both the School and the Babcock Library should always be taken in to consideration as well when grant money is coming available.

Upkeep of the school was discussed, since it is the biggest asset the town owns; that renovations that are needed must be done before they get out of hand. Mr. Fletcher said that the last energy audit was done in 2008 or 2009 and there is still a lot of work to be done, i.e., window replacements which could involve removal of lead paint, energy-efficient outside lighting, air handling system, etc. It was noted that Ms. Eastwood, Mr. Zambo and Mr. Rupert have been in conversations with the Green Bank regarding funding for some of these projects and are hoping to have a new energy audit done in conjunction with these discussions. Mr. Fletcher stated that a cohesive plan is necessary since there are requirements based on the proper sequencing of projects and the timing of the proposals. It was also noted that the CABA (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) should have this information available for the Committee. Mr. Fletcher offered to speak with the rest of the BOS regarding the formation of a Committee for buildings, grounds and facilities. He stated that he will report back to the BOF with his findings, including new opportunities for funding.

Ms. Zaicek left at 8:55 p.m.

- Final Remarks

BOE representatives stated that they were satisfied with the meeting and Ms. Silver-Smith stated that she felt this evening's discussion was very good. Ms. Eastwood suggested that the three boards meet on a more frequent basis.

**5. Adjournment:** The Ashford Board of Finance Special Meeting adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathryn Silver-Smith (for BOF Clerk)