

**ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING
Ashford Town Hall, Room 104
5 Town Hall Road, Ashford, CT 06278
March 22, 2018
7:00 p.m.**

Present: Charles Funk (Chairman), Judi Austin (Clerk), Garth Bean, Jesse Burnham, Gail Zaicek, Esther Jagodzinski (alt.), Carl Pfalzgraf (alt.), and Francine Hodovan (Recording Secretary).

Guests: Ashford Board of Selectmen: Mike Zambo, Bill Falletti, Cathryn Silver-Smith.
Ashford Board of Selectmen Administrative Assistant: Christine Abikoff.
Ashford Finance Department: Cheryl Baker.
Ashford Town Clerk's Office: Karen Zulick.
Ashford School: James Longo, Superintendent; Troy Hopkins, Principal; Cindy Ford, Student Personnel; Lisa Dyer, Business Office Manager.
Ashford Parks and Recreation Department: Sherry York.
Ashford Volunteer Fire Department: Wayne Fletcher, Fire Chief.
Ashford Residents: Edward Myers, Rebecca Haegar, Kim Kouatly, Jane Urban, Bob Zaicek, Ralph Fletcher, Paul Varga, Nichole Rice, Pat Wilson Pheanious, Kimberly Lappen, Keira Lappen, Christina Davis, Jennifer Leszczynski, Charlene Armitage, Amanda Cantrell, Jason Horn, Elissa Turcotte, Carolyn Trotta, Maureen Caye, Jennifer Brisson, Marc Brisson, Morgan Donaldson, Noah King.

1. Call to Order: Chairman Funk called the Regular Meeting of the Ashford Board of Finance to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. Seating of Alternates: Mr. Pfalzgraf was seated for Mr. Simpson.

3. Communications: None.

4. Approve Minutes of Regular Meeting of March 15, 2018:

MS. ZAICEK MOVED AND MR. BEAN SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 15, 2018 BOARD OF FINANCE MEETING WITH THE FOLLOWING CORRECTIONS. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY.

Correction: Add Jesse Burnham to list of BOF Members present. Under Item 6b, Further Discussion of 2018-2019 General Government Budget, rephrase second sentence to state "Regarding the AVFD, the FICA budget line includes all taxes from both Employer and Employee."

Under Item 6c, Further Discussion of 2018-2019 BOE Budget: Strike the comments made by Ms. De Santo. The minutes are also corrected to state that the Town of Ashford has 4 representatives on the Region 19 Board, not 3, as stated in the minutes.

5. Hear from Public: Chairman Funk read from two letters received from parents Brittany Izzo and Morgan Donaldson in favor of the BOE budget, and in favor of small class sizes.

Maureen Caye: thanked the BOS, BOF and BOE along with their staff and administration. She supports the 2.9% increase since the school has "gone without" for the past two years. She cannot and will not support a 0% increase. There are a lot of children who are lagging behind with social and emotional issues and there are gifted children with special needs for more challenging work. She also stated that for the vast number of children, art, music and physical education programs offered at the school are the only chance they have to be exposed to these subjects.

Carl Pfalzgraf: stated that the BOF has no control over the Region 19 budget which is grades 9 to 12 at E.O. Smith High School. He said, "It's all you folks going to their (BOE) meetings voicing their concerns. The BOF has no control over Region 19."

Parents **Kim Kouatly** and **Kristen Davis** both spoke up in favor of the 2.9% budget increase.

Nichole Wright stated that her 3rd grader's teacher asked for 18 packages of crayons and only received 6 packages, meaning that each student did not get his own package of crayons. Her 8th grader had to come up with his own paper for a three-fold poster he was working on. The school needs supplies.

Dr. Longo explained that the school had put a spending freeze on everything that was only lifted a few months ago with the passing of the budget for the current (2017-2018) fiscal year because of the indecisiveness of the State, not the Town or the School.

Selectman Silver-Smith reminded the group that everyone on the BOF supports the school and the elderly as well as others in this town that are in need of aid. To refresh everyone's memories, she reminded us that the town was unable to set a mill rate until October of last year due to the state of the State. The BOF requested that State Statute requires the BOS set the rate, as. The BOS stayed conservative in light of the indecisiveness in Hartford and raised the mill rate by 2%.

Chairman Funk reminded everyone that the BOE came to the BOF in 2016-2017 with a less than zero budget, but in the end, the BOF gave them more than what they requested to meet MBR requirements. So when the public is stating a case that the school hasn't had an increase in two years one of those years was from the BOE's own budget process.

Paul Varga stated that the Town has obligations to everyone and he well knows that Dr. Longo and the Principal have to make a lot of tough decisions, but he personally cannot support anything over a 0% increase to the BOE.

Dr. Longo said that the BOE budget was agreed to by a consensus in many areas – "no one got what they wanted." Salaries and benefits are negotiated by the State Union and there is nothing we can do about that, but the BOE is not giving raises to everyone. Class size, supplies and equipment are important to gain the love and respect for the school. For some of these children, education is their only chance of success.

Some discussion was had as to the property values in town being increased by having such a great schools as Ashford School and E.O. Smith, while others are looking at the crumbling foundations problems and other reasons that the town's property values have not gone up as much as we would all like.

6. New Business:

- a. **Recreation Department Budget Review:** Ms. York stated that the Parks and Recreation Department has a "rich tradition" in the Town of Ashford. They are responsible for all town-sponsored sports and cultural programs, i.e., 30 years of summer concerts, also skating, ice skating, and basketball. Parks and Recs works with Youth Services and the Ashford School to provide other programs, among them are Family Day and the gymnastics program at the Ashford School this past year, which was enjoyed by 30 children. There is also a summer camping program at Ashford Memorial Park and bus trips throughout the year. The Parks and Recs Department is also responsible for maintaining both Pompey Park surrounding the Senior Housing and Senior Center, and Ashford Memorial Park. The Recreation Committee has 5 volunteers who meet monthly to guide and direct, set policy and help by getting involved in hands-on activities. These are individuals who are active in our Community. Ms. York thanked Ashford School for the use of their gym for gymnastics and for partnering with them. She stated that her budget came in flat (0% increase) over the 2017-2018 budget. Mr. Pfalzgraf said that the Parks and Rec. Department brings a good quality of life for the citizens of Ashford. Ms. York said they do not have trouble collecting money for the various programs where fees are charged.

Selectman Zambo recounted that this year's basketball program ended just 2 weeks ago with a profit, and 97 children participating. He remembered that as a child, there was no basketball program and there were no parks to play in either. He applauded the work Ms. York has done for our town.

Selectman Silver-Smith asked about families in town who cannot afford to participate. Ms. York replied that The Lions' Club in Mansfield gives out "scholarships" for basketball and camperships to help those with this need. Ms. York also works with Ms. McDonough in Youth/Social Services as well to provide even more opportunities for our youth. Dr. Longo stated, "We love Parks and Recs." They are supplemented by the use of the school and their custodial services.

It was noted that in the future, Parks and Rec. should put their requests in writing, typed on the forms provided and to be very clear. Chairman Funk asked for a few line item clarifications, which the director will research and respond to in a timely manner. Ms. Jagodzinski asked if Parks and Rec. could apply to outside agencies/organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, ABA, etc., for some different forms of program funding, Ms. York replied that this approach has not been utilized as of yet.

- b. **Selectmen's Update:** Selectman Zambo handed out a chart of 2018-2019 Capital Projects and asked everyone to notice that the State has "postponed" one-half of Town Aid Road that we expected to receive, and budgeted for, during this current fiscal year, representing \$146,000 in lost revenue. If the state follows through with this reduction, the town will have to use money from the Capital Non-recurring Fund (CNR) to make up for this loss.
- c. **Proposed FY 18-19 Budget BOS Recommendations:** The BOS met on Monday, March 19, to discuss the budget and did the best they could under the circumstances. Since the 2016-17 fiscal year Ashford's share of State funding has dropped approximately \$1million, including ECS, Town Aid Road, LOCIP, Municipal revenues and Mashantucket/Pequot revenues. Selectman Silver-Smith stated that she was on the BOF for 18 years and in looking at the 2 mill increase last year and what is going on this year, she does not feel that this supports touching the CNR Fund. Looking at this from all sides, she also doesn't feel that our town can support any increase over 1 mill. She cautioned that using up all of the Undesignated Fund leaves the town with no cushion, it cannot be sustained and lowers the rating of the town for bond issues, etc. Mr. Falletti suggested that Ashford is in much better fiscal condition than many other towns, and explained that the BOS is trying to address contracts we have committed to, and areas where we cannot cut. He asks what it will take to get a budget passed and feels that a 2.9% increase will not get passed. The town presented an austere budget so what they recommend for the BOE budget is to the best of their knowledge and experience what they can permit with a clear conscience. So at their meeting the BOS, on March 19, 2018, made the following motion: **"FALLETTI MOVED RECOMMENDATION TO THE BOF OF AN INCREASE TO THE BOE BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$97,717 WITH THE INTENTION OF KEEPING THE CORRESPONDING FISCAL YEAR MILL RATE INCREASE AT LESS THAN ONE (1) MILL. FALLETTI FURTHER MOVED THAT THE BOF CONSIDER AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE FUND BALANCE IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO OBTAIN A <1 MILL INCREASE. SILVER-SMITH SECONDED THE MOTION WHICH PASSED UNANIMOUSLY."**
- d. **Hear from Public:** Parents **Kim Lappen, Kim Kouatly, Maureen Caye, Rebecca Haeger and Jane Urban** as well as **Superintendent Longo** all reiterated their support of the 2.9% budget increase for the BOE and the importance of Ashford School in their children's lives.

Francine Hodovan, tax payer, senior, disabled with no children in the Ashford School system, stated that she has worked as the recording secretary for the BOF for over 10 years and wanted to clarify a few things.

1. The BOF is only able to change the bottom line of the BOE budget. They cannot say as an example, that the school spends too much money on supplies that should have been spent on books. They listen to the BOE argue why they put these dollar amounts in but they are unable to direct the BOE to change those numbers. They are only able to change the bottom line.
2. The BOE has threatened to fire teachers every year. It is standard practice to put fear into the parents, but they have yet to do so.
3. Once a bottom line number is voted on and approved by the Ashford voters, the BOE can move money as they see fit, without any oversight from anyone from the outside. This might include as an example, moving money out of teachers' salaries and putting it somewhere else that parents may not be initially aware of. Therefore, it is incumbent upon parents to attend BOE meetings to inform themselves about the BOE's budget re-

appropriations that occur throughout the year including programs/projects/contingencies/etc. 4. Lastly, and very importantly, if a 2.9% increase for the BOE budget does not get voted in, the only place the budget can go from there is down. This is why it is important that the BOE present a clear, honest, concise budget that doesn't have a lot of movement between line items once it is approved.

Selectman Silver-Smith agreed and also stated that the BOE, as all departments in town do, come to the BOF who needs to be able to look at the history of a fund to see what was actually spent in the previous year's budget and where. Was money moved, how much and where to? Last year alone, \$88,400 of taxpayer money was spent on the Tech Ed Space. The Tech Ed Space project should have gone through the Capital Improvement Committee. Her advice to the BOE and the school is that rather than take money for what you say is education and then using it for capital improvements, it should go through Capital Improvements Committee.

e. **Board Action- Proposed FY 18-19 Budget (General Government, Ashford School, Region 19/Ashford, Capital Improvement):**

MR. PFALZGRAF MOVED AND MS. AUSTIN SECONDED A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSED BUDGET AMOUNT OF \$3,240,791 FOR THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT BUDGET FOR FY 2018-2019. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY.

MR. PFALZGRAF MOVED AND MS. ZAICEK SECONDED A MOTION TO INCREASE THE ASHFORD SCHOOL BOE 2017-2018 BUDGET BY \$100,000 TO \$705,140 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018-2019. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY EXCEPT FOR MR. BEAN WHO OPPOSED.

MS. ZAICEK MOVED AND MR. PFALZGRAF SECONDED A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSED BUDGET AMOUNT OF \$521,114 FOR THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS BUDGET FOR THE 2018-2019 FISCAL YEAR. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY.

MR. PFALZGRAF MOVED AND MS. AUSTIN SECONDED A MOTION TO REQUEST THAT THE SELECTMEN TAKE THE PROPOSED BUDGET TO PUBLIC HEARING. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY.

7. Annual Report Update: Ms. Zaicek stated that all departments have until next Thursday, March 29, to get their department summaries to her. Currently, she has received approximately 40% of them.

8. Agenda Items for Next Regular Meeting: None at this time.

9. Remarks for the Good of the Board: None.

10. Adjournment: MR. PFALZGRAF MOVED AND MS. ZAICEK SECONDED A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MARCH 22, 2018 REGULAR MEETING OF THE ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE. THE MOTION PASSED WITH EVERYONE VOTING AFFIRMATIVELY.

The Ashford Board of Finance Regular Meeting adjourned at 9:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Funk,
Chairman (for BOF Clerk)