

Ashford, Connecticut
ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Thursday May 9, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

Hybrid Meeting / In-Person - Ashford Town Hall and Zoom

Link to documents discussed during this meeting: <https://bit.ly/3yf3WXw>

The May 9, 2024 Regular BOF Meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by the Chairman, Ms. Christina Davis. Other members present were: Judith Austin, Keith Lipker, Tim Rhodes (Zoom), Pamela Summers, and Cathryn Silver-Smith 1st Selectman, Ex-Officio Member (Zoom).

Guest: Jennifer Miller, Executive Dir., Ashford Housing Authority

2. Roll call and Seating of Alternates: Roll call was taken, and Mr. Rhodes was seated for Ms. DeSanto.

3. Communications: At the May 7, 2024 budget referendum all three budgets were approved. The Gen. Govt. Budget received 152 yes and 41 no votes / Region 19 Budget received 156 yes and 38 no / Board of Education Budget received 151 yes and 43 no. In Willington the Region 19 Budget received a vote of 314 yes and 277 no; their other two budgets did not pass. Mansfield's Region 19 Budget passed with a vote of 133 yes and 8 no. Ashford is very fortunate that all three budgets passed. Ms. Davis thanked all those who had helped this process through to a positive conclusion, especially noted was the First Selectwoman, Town Hall Staff, the Ashford School team, Election Workers and the Town Clerk.

A meeting is to be scheduled with the new auditing firm, BOF Chairman, BOS, Treasurer and others to be involved.

The capital projects status document is to be finalized. A discussion with the Treasurer is to be held regarding proper method of funding our capital projects so operations are correct.

4. Approve Minutes: Regular Meeting Minutes, April 25, 2025

Ms. Austin moved and Ms. Summers seconded a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of April 25, 2024 as written. Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Silver-Smith asked if agenda 6. e. could be moved up in the agenda to save the guest time.

Ms. Davis moved and Mr. Lipker seconded a motion to move agenda 6. e. concerning the Ashford Housing Authority up before 6. a. Selectman's Update. Motion passed unanimously.

5. Public Comments: none

6. New Business: e. Discussion and possible action regarding the seed funding for a van for the Ashford Housing Authority (AHA)

The 1st Selectwoman introduced the topic indicating that a grant opportunity would allow reimbursement for the purchase price of the van, and further, the use of this van would help more of those housed by the AHA to get to needed services as the Senior Center bus requires a minimum of five passengers.

Ms. Miller then proceeded to explain that the van was to cost \$39,239; once purchased its cost would be reimbursed by the grant the AHA has received from the Senior Resources Center on Aging whose major goal is to help provide public transportation for seniors in mostly rural northeastern Connecticut, where there is no public transport. Those in senior housing here do need supports to get to grocery stores and medical appointments. Because of the restriction on use of the Senior Ctr. bus (must at least have 5 passengers) several trips have had to be cancelled.

Although the AHA does have a small reserve account it is not enough to provide the needed funds. The \$10,000 is a temporary bridge loan and will be refunded to the town once the grant funds are received. Ms. Miller also indicated that the refunded van cost would be received within 30 days after the van's purchase.

Ms. Silver-Smith added that for six months now a new Senior Consortium had been formed and was meeting monthly. It includes the BOS, Senior Ctr, Social Worker, Counsel on Aging and the Housing Authority.

In answer to Mr. Lipker's question, no, the Senior Center bus will not be replaced by this new van. Both will be needed. The AHA van will have a driver, already employed part time by the House Authority; the Senior Ctr. bus requires volunteers for drivers.

Ms. Austin asked about insurance costs. The insurance cost and other anticipated costs have already been built into the AHA budget. Ms. Davis asked about the numbers of seniors likely participating. Ms. Miller replied that the AHA houses 34 residents in 32 apartments. AHA is funded by rent from residents as well as state and federal support. The AHA is not part of the town budget and is not funded by local taxpayers.

The letter signifying receipt of the grant will be sent by Ms. Miller to both 1st Selectman and Ms. Davis. Ms. Miller was thanked by Ms. Austin on her presentation.

Ms. Davis moved and Mr. Lipker seconded a motion to authorize Treasurer S. Soucy to issue a check to the Ashford Housing Authority in the amount of \$10,000, for the purpose of purchasing a van, funds that will be reimbursed by a state grant. Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Miller will keep the 1st Selectwoman and the Chair informed about the project.

6. a. Selectman's Update

Ms. Silver-Smith noted the DPW grader is broken and needs repair or replacement. A heater in the school bus bay has exploded, the Senior Center has been found with 15 violations dealing with toilets, stove and bathrooms generally. A group has been put together to access the situation at the Senior Center and take affirmative actions. The Senior Center is expected to "run over" their current budget. With only \$2,000 in their budget for repairs more dollars are needed to bring the facility up to required standards. The town ideally wants its Senior Center to be presentable, have additional programs and be utilized by more residents, per Ms. Silver-Smith. She expressed gratitude for those working with her on the Senior Center issues.

The Parks & Rec. Dept. wants to paint/stain the pavilion and out building. The DPW is helping to fix violations noted by the Fire Marshal in Town Hall, Senior Center and Knowlton Hall.

6. b. Set the mill rate for Fiscal Year 24-25

Ms. Austin moved and Mr. Lipker seconded a motion to set the mill rate at 32.46 for motor vehicles for Fiscal Year 24-25. Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Summers moved and Mr. Rhodes seconded a motion to set the mill rate at 34.364 for personal property and real estate for Fiscal Year 24-25. Motion passed unanimously.

6. c. Discussion on the budget process and what can be improved for next year

Please let Ms. Davis know of your thoughts. She is concerned about the budget calendar perhaps causing the BOF to be rushed; she has seen the Willington calendar quite different from ours. Mr. Lipker noted the difficulty for some departments to get their budgets in on time. The 1st Selectwoman replied that notice is given to all departments on Dec. 3d that their budgets are due in January; they know what is expected.

Reports for both 1. the status of all capital nonrecurring fund projects (completed or in progress, etc.) and 2. for projects requested and how they are to be funded would be helpful. A smoother running audit is expected considering we now employ a full-time treasurer and have a new audit firm.

6. d. Discussion and possible action regarding the replacement of the roof for the Ashford Volunteer Fire Dept, building at 46 Westford Road

The roof replacement cost is quoted as \$99,999 by McClintock Roofing Co., LLC. The removal and reinstallation of solar panels on the new roof is quoted as costing \$16,000 by CTEC Solar of Bloomfield, CT. The roof is currently leaking and causing obvious damage. Questions regarding guarantees were expected but not specifically noted. The construction and the removal and reinstallation of the solar panels will be monitored per Ms. Silver-Smith. The funding for these projects will come from the unassigned fund balance so actions can be taken more quickly. Ms. Austin asked how many quotes were received? Although no exact number was known, Mr. Paul Varga, AVFD Fire Chief, was noted as reviewing carefully possible and eventual contracts for the jobs, per Ms. Silver-Smith. The Fire House in question is owned by the town and leased by the Volunteer Fire Dept. for \$1/year for 99 years.

Ms. Austin asked if we need to put the solar panels back on. Ms. Silver-Smith explained that per our original installation agreement, failure to reinstall the panels would cost the town a penalty of \$209,688. As a result, we don't have a choice in the matter.

Mr. Lipker moved and Ms. Summers seconded a motion to replace the roof for the Ashford Volunteer Fire Department at 46 Westford Road by McClintock Roofing LLC at a cost of \$99,999 and request that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting to authorize the expenditure. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Lipker moved and Mr. Rhodes seconded a motion to remove and install the solar array on the Ashford Volunteer Fire Department at 46 Westford Road by CTEC Solar at a cost of \$15,000 and request that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting to authorize the expenditure. Motion passed unanimously.

6. f. Update on the 22-23 Annual Report

Five departments have yet to provide reports.

7. Agenda items for the Next Meeting

Update on Capital Projects, CNR funding issue, update on timeline for audit

8. Remarks for the Good of the Board

All were thanked for their work on budgets and the referendum. A low number of voters is noted, but the fact that about 80% voted yes on each budget and that each budget received equal support was noted as unusual and a very positive sign.

9. Adjournment

Ms. Austin moved and Mr. Lipker seconded a motion to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously at 8:18 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by,
Valerie B. Oliver, Recording Secretary
5/10/2024*