

**ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, March 2, 2023
Hybrid Meeting / In-Person and Zoom
Ashford, CT 06278**

1. **Call to Order** was at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Judith Austin. Members present were Jessie Burnham, Christina Davis, Angie DeSanto, John Kopec, Paul Varga
Guests: William Falletti, 1st Selectman, Ex-Officio Member, Jane Urban, BOE Chairman, Cynthia Ford. Superintendent Ashford School, Daena Chrzan, School Business Manager, others representing the School and the BOE as well as members of the public.

Documents available at the meeting were;

Edwin O. Smith High School, Regional 19 District (Ashford, Mansfield, Willington), Superintendent's Proposed Budget, 2023-2024 Budget Year, Abbreviated Version. Rev. 2/13/2023. 24pp.
Ashford Public School, 2023-2024 Board of Education Proposed Budget Snapshot. 15pp.
Classroom Size Projected and Teachers; Intervention and Specials Teachers; Special Education Support; Historical Staffing Numbers: Teachers and Paraprofessionals. 4 pp.

2. **Roll Call and Seating of Alternates:** roll call was taken; Ms. Davis was seated for Mr. Bean.
3. **Communications:** none
4. **Public Comments:** One attendee encouraged listening to the BOE's budget proposal with an open mind, understanding the quality of education provided in Ashford.

5. Approve Minutes of Meeting Thursday February 16, 2023

MS. DESANTO MOVED AND MS. DAVIS SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOF THURSDAY FEBRUARY 16, 2023. MOTION PASSED WITH ONE ABSTENTION FROM MR. BURNHAM.

6. New Business:

a. Selectman's Update

Mr. Falletti asked if the BOS budget could be presented next week due to staff shortage? The tank delivery will be the third week of June. The school roof may require some temporary funding; this can be accomplished by securing temporary bonding, private financing via a bank or use of the town's Undesignated Fund Balance, the least expensive option. The funds will be needed to pay for architect's drawings, etc. Savings to the town have been secured by locking in fuel costs; was 368/gal. now 303/gal. fuel / was 356/gal. now 292/gal. heating oil / and now also 280/gal. for gasoline. In answer to a question, the BOS is authorized to make decisions regarding the school roof cost payments, etc., but Mr. Falletti indicated the BOS will confer with the BOF.

7. New Business:

b. Ashford School Budget presented to BOF and BOS by BOE

Ms. Urban and Ms. Ford both presented comments beginning with a brief overview of the school mission, noting that their budget process is a collaborative effort that began back in November. It was stated children today are very different than those even five years ago especially in their experiences with materials and personal relationships. Three key savings elements noted were: the Superintendent is also serving as the Director of Pupil Services, the Business Manager has locked in fuel costs saving \$32,000, and the hiring of a Reading Interventionist full time for the Middle School and a part time School Psychologist - both will also save funds.

Questions from the BOF members followed. It was generally agreed that having questions answered in writing prior to the meeting was helpful. The BOF appreciated the responses.

Ms. Davis questioned iPad purchases and was told that security, teacher survey and costs were involved in making the decision to purchase. Desk tops are used in the media center computer lab, while iPads will be used in the elementary grades instead of the desk tops. **Mr. Varga** asked about replacements; technical expenses are expected each year due to aging equipment and changing technology. Savage offers valuable advice on devices and on knowing how to properly age out equipment. Apple also offers special financial packages that will guarantee dollars for old equipment to help offset

replacement costs. The two Savage contracts (town and school) are written separately. The BOE's contract cost \$79,500.00, a savings of \$40,00 over hiring of an individual.

Mr. Varga asked if the budget provided funds for the school mandated but unfunded lunches. The answer was no but that they would be funded by surplus funds from last year. If Ashford were not a party to the National School Lunch Program, they would not get federal fundings toward this effort. Ashford will not know if the state will fund their share until the Governor's budget is approved. Regarding medical, dental and retirement benefits being higher, he was told that one reason was that insurance claims are high. Higher claims cause higher premiums; currently there are about 15 claims per month. Math Specialist and Reading Interventionist positions were considered vital. Also, the fact that a world language specialist, now focusing on teaching German, was hired was praised as well. The other language taught is Arabic.

Mr. Burnham asked about the generator; its replacement cost will be covered by insurance.

Ms. Austin asked about curriculum improvements for reading. Several programs are being piloted, and ESSER funds will allow Ashford to purchase a reading program next year. The programs focus on the science of reading for K-grade 3. Last year Ashford purchased a math program that helps the school map a plan to get to curriculum goals.

The cost of staffing is offset somewhat by grants per the Superintendent, and entitlement grants are renewed each year as long as the school is in compliance. Teacher salaries are funded by the budget not grants. **Ms. Austin** noted that perhaps it would be a good idea to have the BOF, BOS and the BOE get together thirty days prior to the board of education negotiation's per the Guide to General Statutes & Principles of Financial Administration, pg.21 for an understanding on their departmental effects of spending as a whole for the town. Ms. Austin noted although the Statute does not state for what reason, it is implied that the two boards would discuss the financial situation in the town and the effects of various levels of contract settlement. Although the BOE does inform the BOF when their contract deliberations are to begin, this conversation has never occurred in the past. The General government and schools determine their budgets separate from each other. The school determinations are made with the advice of counsel with happenings/trends regarding teachers statewide included for consideration. A smooth contract process is cost effective as going into mediation is expensive. There was agreement that a conversation to discuss and understand the process is important. Legal fees usually increase during contract years. The only contract this year is with the noncertified staff. The Business Manager noted most contract negotiations cost about \$20,000 if no arbitration is required. It was felt that our unions were very cognizant of Ashford's financial situation.

The hiring of a part-time School Psychologist is for a position focusing on testing, attending related meetings and writing reports as the two social workers can handle the personal services.

Mr. Kopec would like to know the costs of the unfunded mandates. Currently the state provides about 91% of the costs that exceed the normal per pupil cost, thus paying for most of the costs for special needs students. The questioning ended at 8:30 p.m.

All participants were thanked. The ability to answer questions put by the BOF prior to the presentation was appreciated by both the BOF members and the BOE and Superintendent, but a presentation outlining basic information about the budget would be appreciated too for next year. All agreed.

8. Old Business:

a. FY 2023-2024 Budget Discussion

Most felt that the discussion was complete for tonight. Ms. Davis noted that Parks & Recreation, Youth and Social Services and Animal Control departments had not reported expenses. Mr. Falletti will look in to the situation. The Treasurer will be asked to be at the BOF meeting next week.

8. Old Business:

b. Election of Board of Finance Clerk

MR. VARGA MOVED AND MR. BURNHAM SECONDED A MOTION TO ELECT MR. JOHN KOPEC BOF CLERK. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

9. Agenda Items for Next Meeting

BOS presents their General Government Budget

10. Remarks for the Good of the Board

Ms. Austin expressed her appreciation for Board members and stated that the BOE and School personnel did an awesome job. All were respectful.

11. Adjournment

MS. DESANTO MOVED AND MR. VARGA SECONDED A MOTION TO ADJOURN. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AT 9:00 P.M.

*Respectfully submitted by,
Valerie B. Oliver, Recording Secretary. 3/3/2023*