

Ashford, Connecticut
ASHFORD BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Thursday March 9, 2023

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

1. Call to Order was at 7:04 p.m. by Chairman Judith Austin. Members present were: Garth Bean, Jesse Burnham, Angie DeSanto, John Kopec, Paul Varga. (DeSanto and Bean via Zoom)
Guests: Selectmen, Mr. William Falletti and Ms. Cathryn Silver-Smith, Treasurer, Sherri Soucy; Jane Urban, Cynthia Ford, Rick Koualty and three others via Zoom. A total of 8 on Zoom at 7:00.

2. Roll Call and Seating of Alternates: The roll call was taken, no alternates present.

3. Communications:

Budget correction from BOE for substitute costs
Tech, facilitator, cost for 2023-24 is the same as last year.

4. Public Comments (3 minute time limit per speaker):

Mr. Koualty spoke of the "harmony" between the BOF, BOE and the town regarding the last meeting, procedure and "impressive" presentation. He noted savings in fuel costs and efforts to do the right thing with a less than 4% increase in the BOE's budget request. He hopes the budget will be approved.

5. Approve Minutes of the Meeting Thursday, March 3, 2023

MS DESANTO MOVED AND MR. BURNHAM SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR BOF MEETING ON MARCH 3, 2023 AS CORRECTED. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Correction: p.1 under BOF members present: Jesse Burnham, not Jessie

6. New Business:

- a. Selectman's Update:** no update due to lengthy agenda items for this meeting
- b. General Government Budget presented to the BOF by BOS**

Documents supplied to attendees by the Treasurer:

"DRAFT - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION, Town of Ashford, Proposed Budget info 2023/24, Board of Finance." Contains: Expenditures, 2021/22 - 2022/23, actual expenditures to date as of 3/2/23, and proposed for 2023/24. Arrangement of data is by department with budget adopted in 2022-23 and proposed for 2023-24; supporting explanatory documents are included as seen helpful.

"Annual Parks Maintenance Plan 22/23."

"Ashford Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. Proposed Budget, Fiscal Year 2023-2024."

"Babcock Library FY 2023-2024 Budget Proposal."

Four supplementary pages provided separately.

Mr. Falletti, First Selectman's Presentation

Mr. Falletti stated that at the BOS' last meeting the proposed budget of \$3,845,804.00 was unanimously approved, a .11% increase over that of 2022-23.

He went on to highlight areas with notable savings. Contracted fuel costs and cybersecurity costs will be down. The total charge for cybersecurity this year of \$41,000+ covers both town and school. The town's next year's portion is to be less by \$7,060, a 37% savings. Next year the total cost will be \$18,000, a \$6,660 cost for the town's portion. The BOS is out to bid for the sport fields mowing. Depending on circumstances they might have the work done by the Public Works Dept. Currently it costs about \$13,000/year.

Additions to the budget were noted. The full-time Youth Services and Social Services Director position is proposed for a \$14,000 increase to bring that salary up to an appropriate level. There will be some offset from the state. An increase in the Ashford Citizen Editor's salary is recommended especially considering effective

communication with citizens is so necessary and the fact the Editor currently does much of the work at home. A \$20,000 increase in the Public Works Dept./Transfer Station covering a position up to but not over 30 hours per week. It is thought this position, if multiskilled, could also cover utility driving during storms and help as handy man for the town generally and town hall specifically.

There are minimal increases in other areas, some are contractual.

The Capital Nonrecurring Fund (CNR) Committee of Mr. Varga, Ms. Austin, Mr. Funk, Mr. Kalonovk and Mr. Rupert, Chair of the School Building Committee will be finalizing their recommendations by the next BOF meeting. The fund began with \$364,000 and with \$340,000 spent there is currently \$300,000 left in that fund. The recommendation is to keep the Undesignated Fund balance between 10 and 15% of the entire budget; Ashford's at present is at 14.3% of our total budget. By reducing this percentage funds could be secured to put into the Capital Nonrecurring Fund. As Ms. Silver-Smith stated later in the discussion, funds are protected while in the CNR and can be moved out if needed.

Questions were asked by the members. **Mr. Burnham** asked about the number of employees at the Transfer Station, There are 5 plus the Foreman. Members were told that Ashford is the only transfer station (in our area) with no use fee, and costs are rising considerably. Mr. Terry Wakeman, Chair of the Transfer Station Comm. is leading how to proceed; the new job proposed will be not more than 30 hrs./week, with no benefits. **Mr. Varga** asked that they (Committee and BOS) also look into the news that an Ashford condo group will no longer pay for removing owners' trash/waste materials, so those residents will be new users of the Transfer Station.

Ms. Austin asked about the After School Program; She was told it is not a Rec. Dept. program but will be a separate department and will be self sufficient as it will be funded by clients' payments and seed money from ARPA funds. It will be a utilization program. Although unusual for a child day care type program to be sponsored by a town, earlier area programs have ended; The need in town has been expressed, and both the BOS and the Parks & Rec. Dept. have set forth possible plans. Service would be provided for an estimated 15 children from 3-6 p.m., Monday - Friday. Three part-time staff (no benefits) would be hired. Ashford School cafeteria and gym would be used as they have agreed.

Ms. Austin also asked about the Fire Dept. and what the \$69,000 included? The pay scale is proposed to be upgraded by \$1/hr. to compete with neighboring towns, per **Mr. Varga, Chief**. There is a continued need for volunteers, not unique to Ashford. The full-time employees would be raised from \$19 to \$20/hr. Services are offered 18 hours/day by 2 people. The EMS ambulance pays for itself. Other needed costs have been and are purchasing second pieces of selected equipment so that if one piece fails, a second is there. Also, contamination of some materials, like mattresses, can happen requiring fresh substitutions. With needed equipment and supplies on hand, the service is maintained despite issues.

Mr. Burnham asked if the end of the Cadlerock land issuers was in sight? Mr. Falletti noted that despite not receiving an earlier grant, they will be applying again soon.

Ms. Austin asked about the tax collection efforts for Ashford. \$269,703 has been collected over the high percentage stated as the original achievable goal. This money goes into the General Fund.

Mr. Kopec was told the town does have the mowing equipment. He also stated that single-stream recycling is not working for the town; it is not actually recycling. An opinion was stated by someone else that citizens would not go back to separating items for actual recycling. Mr. Kopec was told that there is a bill in the Connecticut legislature concerned with this issue. [see Press release, 1/24/2023, "Governor Lamont Announces 2023 Legislative Proposal: Addressing the Future of Materials and Waste Management." online] Mr. Kopec also expressed concerns regarding the costs of the debt and the roof construction project bonding costs over time. It was mentioned that after the roof work new windows and asbestos removal would be need - so further borrowing and costs.

Mr. Falletti noted that the grand list has an increase of \$94,473.00, an .80 % increase.

The upfront costs for the roof project can be managed in three ways: temporary bonding, private financing, or use of the town's Undesignated Fund Balance. as expressed by Mr. Falletti at the last meeting. This upfront expense has not been included in the presented budget proposal. The costs are expected to be covered by \$50,000. Regarding the complexities of the roof project, a project manager is recommended.

7. New Business:

Capital Improvement Plan presented to BOF by BOS

No decisions have been made yet as to what projects will be funded. Possibilities are the school roof project, Cadlerock property and road project(s). \$361,000 is needed for the CNR from the UDF balance. A fire

alarm system at the School and a future School windows project are being considered for the future (windows perhaps in 2025-6). A report on decisions will be ready for the next BOF meeting.

A question to the Treasurer by Mr. Varga about what mil rate to expect was not able to be answered at this time as revenues have not been documented yet from the state.

8. Old Business:

a. FY 2023-2024 Budget Discussion

Ms. Austin agrees with Mr. Kopec and his concerns about increasing debt not only this next fiscal year but in the following years. We have little control over the R19 costs, dependent upon the numbers of our students attending EO Smith H.S. The sheet dated 3/8/2023 provided by the Treasurer conveniently shows each budget Town General, BOE, R19 and total. Mr. Kopec specifically referred to this data, and most in-person members expressed their serious concerns for the future. As it stands now percentages increases over last FY 2022-2023 are 11% Town General / 3.61% BOE / 6.24% R19, with total percentage increase for the three at 9.95%.

9. Agenda Items for Next Meeting - Thursday March 16, 2023

Members were asked if other departments should be asked to present their budgets to the Board. It was decided that Ms. Austin will ask for a R19 presentation by Ms. Sharon Cournoyer, Superintendent, for next week's meeting, and the BOE second presentation is to be requested for the week after that. Let the Chairman know if any other departments should come in.

On the next agenda will be: Budget 2023-2024 discussion, Capital Improvement Budget and presentation covering the R19 proposal if Ms. Cournoyer is able to attend.

10. Remarks for the Good of the Board

Ms. Austin suggests that all members read over the budget packets and especially look at requested increases. The material has been presented effectively with accompanying documents and explanatory information. The Chair expressed interest in thinking about these formal budgets and how they will look in the future.

11. Adjournment:

MS. DESANTO MOVED AND MR. KOPEC SECONDED A MOTION TO ADJOURN. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AT 8:50 P.M.

*Respectfully submitted by,
Valerie B. Oliver, Recording Secretary
3/10/2023*