Call to Order

Alderman Anglance called the public hearing to order at 7:05 p.m. All those present rose and pledged allegiance to the Flag. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board of Education Chairman Tim Walsh and the Shelton High School Lacrosse Team and their coach, Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Walsh noted that Mr. Kennedy’s son is currently at West Point.

Roll Call

Alderman John F. Anglace, Jr., President – present
Alderman Lynne Farrell - present
Alderman John “Jack” Finn – present
Alderman Stanley Kudej – present
Alderman Noreen McGorty - present
Alderman John P. Papa – present
Alderman Eric McPherson - present
Alderman Anthony Simonetti - present

Public Hearing

Alderman Anglance explained that the purpose of tonight’s hearing is to hear the views of the public on the budget. He stated the Board will remain until all people who wish to be heard have their opportunity to speak. He asked that each speaker only come forward once. He asked if any member of the public wished to address the Board.

Frank Monaco, 96 Long Meadow Road

The number one thing I wanted to let you know is that the kids really deserve to do a lot of things that should not be taken away from them. I’ve been a resident of Shelton since 1961. I was also involved in the PTA years ago when my children were growing up. This is the worst I’ve ever seen. The budget is not a major thing, because we, the people of Shelton, if the budget is raised, fine. We will pay more than we have to. The number one priority is the people of Shelton, and what they think should be done with their children. The children should have everything possible. That is what’s important.
Bill Maloney, 10 Jodie Lane

First of all, I’d like to thank the Board of Aldermen for allowing me to address you tonight and for your hard work and dedication to the City of Shelton. I come tonight wearing many hats. I’m a teacher of 27 years at Shelton Intermediate School, a coach at Shelton High School, a parent of two high school students, a citizen and taxpayer in Shelton for the past 20 years. First as a teacher, I’d like to address the current Board of Education’s budgets request. The initial budget request was for a $7.89 million increase, which would have essentially rolled over last year’s budget with no cuts. I realize in these tough economic times that that budget was never going to pass nor should it have passed. The Board of Ed creatively reduced the budget to $3.5 million, reducing teachers, paraprofessionals and programs. This budget, though not what was needed by the Board of Ed, was a livable budget. The superintendent has recently, and it’s up on the school website, decreased the budget request to $2.5 million by eliminating and reorganizing central staff, consolidating, and in some cases eliminating administrative positions. One of the items that cannot be controlled though is the salary and health care benefits for employees. The Shelton teachers are currently in the third year of a four-year contract. I’d like to remind the Board of Aldermen what transpired four years ago during contract negotiations. The Aldermen and Mayor Lauretti asked the Board of Ed and the teachers for a favor, asking for a salary structure that would limit salary increases in the first two years of the contract to negligible months. You asked for this favor to make yourselves look good because the first year of the new contract was the town’s revaluation and the second year of the contract was an election year. In both years one and two the teachers effectively received a zero salary increase through an increased premium share on the health care benefits. You, the Board of Aldermen and Mayor, requested that the salaries be back loaded for years three and four. It’s apparent to me that Mark Lauretti is trying to wreak havoc on the Shelton school system. The last two years the board has received a 2.5 and a zero percent increase. This has led to the school system doing more with less. Class size has remained steady though we still have a higher class average than the state average and the cities we are compared to. A zero budget increase this year will decrease teachers and paraprofessionals and increase class size, eliminate programs at all levels including AP courses, electives at both the high school and intermediate school, a possible closing of addition elementary school beyond that of Lafayette, and eliminate programs in the arts and sports. Shelton currently spends $10,913 per pupil - $1,605 below the state average, ranking us 136 out of 169 towns in Connecticut. Though, Shelton’s wealth ranking for the Connecticut State Department of Education is 41st out of 169. This is far greater than the ranking of our spending on education. It’s your responsibility as elective leaders to represent the taxpayers, citizens and children of Shelton. As you can see, public demand has never been stronger for education. Parents and taxpayers want to ensure the class size does not increase and that students have the highest quality teachers and programs. It
has not been the Board of Education’s mismanagement of funds that have landed us in this situation, rather it is the Board of Aldermen that has not properly planned for the settlement at you requested four years ago from the teachers. I’m asking you to please not be a pawn in the Mayor’s game, leave partisan politics behind, provide the funding for salary and benefits that you structured. Please do not sacrifice our school system and our children because of inadequate funding and a lack of political courage. Let us make children and public education our top priority and provide the resources needed to make a difference for every child in Shelton, truly leave no child behind. Thank you.

Cheryl O’Brien, 153 Village Drive

In your opening remarks at the first budget workshop meeting, you expressed your dismay at the cost to the City of the State’s unfunded mandatory Special Education programs. You spoke at length and with sympathy about the Board of Education’s dilemma in finding funding for these enormously expensive programs. You admitted to being previously ill-informed as to the enormity and complexity of the issue, adding that you can engage the services...

[Alderman Anglace asked Mrs. O’Brien to speak at the alternate microphone.]

of fellow Board member Lynne Farrell to remedy that situation. I trust that you are now fully apprised of it’s critical impact on the Board of Education’s budget request and you will, in turn, educate the other board members to that effect. I further expect that you will then leave no stone unturned in your collective efforts to fully fund the Board of Education’s request. Our city’s economic future is inextricably tied to the school system, and anyone who tells you differently is sadly mistaken. Failure to fund our school system so that it is in compliance with State law and accreditation requirements will precipitate a citywide economic decline. Families will not move into a city with substandard schools and existing families will move out. The businesses which provide our city a solid tax base will follow suit. Alderman Kudej alluded to this issue at the first meeting when he mentioned the closures of Connecticut manufacturers Pratt & Whitney, Marlin and Winchester to illustrate the State’s economic downswing. The loss of such businesses will force taxes up and property values down. It is the responsibility of this board to the taxpayers of this town to resolve this issue and protect our future.

You also expressed your disappointment, Mr. Chairman, in the insinuations that the City has been less than transparent in its dealings with budget issues. It has been reported that our Mayor feels that the Board of Education has been exercising a practice of fiscal mismanagement, despite the fact that annual audits by City-appointed auditors have revealed no evidence to support this claim. If the Mayor or any of you on the board has concrete proof of these allegations, now is the time to bring it to light. If not, we will be forced to conclude that the charges are baseless and insist that you move on to confronting and addressing facts. One such fact is that you must provide the Board of Education with funding for State mandated programs. It’s a law. Another is that you must fulfill your financial obligations to the Perry Hill School. Finally, you must honor your contractual obligations to our City’s teachers. Pay close attention to the aforementioned
Last week the Board of Education cut an additional $300,000 from its request by agreeing to early retirement for 24 teachers. Sadly, this reduction will directly impact our students in the worst possible way. The loss of classroom teachers, many of whom take with them invaluable experience and expertise is a sacrifice [inaudible] to be avoided. It is representative of the decisions the Board of Education has been forced to make due to the Mayor’s refusal to acknowledge the City’s responsibilities to our schools. The Board of Education has also announced that it has sent out for re-bid its insurance contract and has received several excellent options which it conservatively estimates will save an additional $700,000. These two extra cuts combine for another $1 million, bringing the Board of Education’s total reduction to $5 million from its original $7.8 million requested increase. This would effectively [inaudible].

As for the City side, I just admit that attending the Board of Aldermen’s first two budget workshops has been nothing if not enlightening. I was amazed at the number of City agencies which returned huge sums of their funding at the end of the fiscal year, some in the hundreds of thousands, only to have the Mayor recommend budget increases for 2011, some in excess of the departmental requests. For example, the Police Department returned $529,000 last year, but the Mayor’s budget recommends an increase of $146,000. The Sanitation Department returned over $424,000. This department requested a budget reduction of $127,000 but the Mayor recommends an increase of over $21,000 above the request. These are only two examples of many which were noted at the workshops but time prohibits listing them all here. On page 27 of the Mayor’s proposed City budget workshop, there’s a category entitled “Miscellaneous.” It’s total funding is over $1.1 million, divvied up among seven line items. Three of these line items account for $1,095,000. These three items are, Police Private Duty, $676,000, an increase of $52,000. LOCIP Projects, $300,000, status quo. And my personal favorite, Youth Programs. This category received $10,000 in funding for the current year. Thus far it has spent nothing. It’s requested budget for 2011 is again $10,000. The Mayor’s recommendation is $120,000. This is an increase of $110,000 over the current budget, and $110,000 more than the department requested. As for Mark Holden at the April 22 budget workshop meeting, when the Board of Apportionment and Taxation requested clarification of this figure from the Mayor’s office, it was told only that it was accurate, and no further explanation was forthcoming. I know that $120,000 sounds like just a drop in the bucket when we’re talking about a total City budget of over $110 million, but how long does it take the average working person to earn $120,000? [Inaudible] the Board of Education and save a couple of teachers and by the way, that $120,000 figure is $15,000 more than the Mayor’s total recommended increase to the entire Education budget.

[Inaudible] these givebacks are all built in by design to maintain the five percent General Fund balance to ensure the best possible lending rates for bonding purposes, and the $4 million surplus on the revenue side is a rainy day fund. Given the amount of excess funding floating around, to suggest that the Board of Education should make do with a miserly $95,000 increase, knowing full well that the majority of it’s $3 million deficit is
the result of State-mandated programs for which State funding has been and continues to be withheld is both ludicrous and insulting. The rainy day is here.

[Inaudible] that the arts, sports and clubs are not important. Take a moment to peruse a current college application. In the good old days, grades were enough to get you in, but not any more. You’ve heard students and parents alike plead to keep these activities alive because college scholarships depend upon them. Well, it’s not just scholarships, it’s admissions too. I have here copies of the UCONN application, and the common application, which is used by many colleges and universities. Both applications dedicate an entire page to the listing of academic, honors, extracurricular activities and work experience. The same amount of space the average high school transcript occupies, which [inaudible] the student’s entire four-year academic career. Academic honors include such things as membership in various honor societies and sports or academic teams, national scholarship awards, local scholar-athlete awards, etc. Extracurricular activities, the category for which the largest amount of space is allotted, includes extracurricular, community, volunteer and family activities and hobbies, such as athletics, clubs and the arts. Colleges look for continued dedication over a prolonged period to these activities. An applicant is required to list, and I quote, “specific events and/or major accomplishments achieved in these activities, including leadership positions or offices held, varsity letters earned, and the years of participation.” This section is to be completed so as to allow the college to, “focus on the highlights of the applicants extracurricular achievements.” A resume may be attached to illustrate the complete list. Work experience is the last and smallest category to complete. These documents should make it obvious to everyone that extracurricular activities are not extra any more. They are expected. Sending our children to college is a big part of the American dream. If you cripple our school system with short-sighted nickel and dime tactics, you will steal that dream from many. Colleges will not lower their standards because middle schools lower theirs. They will simply accept fewer applicants and raise the tuition to compensate.

My parents worked hard to sacrifice to send me to college as I’m sure many of your parents did for you. Don’t be myopic. Remember the values your parents lived by to try to teach you. Tighten your belt, but not at the expense of education. Our generation has produced some of the most brilliant minds in history, furthering science, technology, medicine and the arts to levels our parents could only have imagined. By failing to fully fund the Board of Education budget, forcing it to cut classroom teachers and suspend extracurricular activities, you not only let our children down, but you let our parents down as well. You eight individuals hold the fate of our City’s economic future in your hands. Do not take it lightly. You have the knowledge and the authority; therefore you have the power. The question is, do you have the courage? Can you eight elected individuals rise above the politics as one body to do the right thing according to your moral responsibility to the citizens of this city? Can you find courage to do what is right, not just what it is your right to do?
Stephen Kennedy - 186 Thoreau Drive

As I speak today, I speak of my sons for today. I speak for people in the past who have graduated from this school who have gone to college because of an education and an athletic background. I speak of three of my sons who all did sports, they all played, they all went to college - one of them, yes, my son Brandon at West Point. I have another son that went to Johnson and Wales. I have another son who became a nurse. I have a daughter who is now a junior, a cheerleader. I speak for the Cheerleaders, I speak for the girls’ Lacrosse team. I also speak for people who are over in Afghanistan besides my son because of the Tommy Paschos, because of Sean McCafferty who went to West Point. They contributed in the sports area. I will also talk about people that they didn’t have sports in general like Dan Orlovsky would not be in the NFL today. I will speak of Eddie Morocco, God rest his soul, he’d be turning in his grave right now if he saw something like this. Stan, you know, you’re a baseball player, you know that. I also speak to people of not Republicans and Democrats, but do Republicans have a different child, or Democrats have a different child? You people all have children and for Mayor Lauretti to say it is not about the children, is totally incorrect. Look at it this way - I know people right now that are working three jobs to put someone through college. It is about the children, it is about anything that any parent has a child you would die for that child. And for you people on the board to sit there and say, “Well, my kid’s not in school anymore - I don’t have to worry about that,” your grandchildren [inaudible] the same way. It has to end. The politics is killing this town. Being involved in Shelton sports in high school goes back to ’96 - you look at the tradition and the honor. You look at the championship that Joe Benanto won. You look what he did in basketball. Without sports Shelton has always been an athletic community. They have always been that way. To sit there and say “Hey, guess what guys? We don’t have the money.” I know a woman over here - she made a comment - $110,000 for something we have and they only use less than $10,000 the year before? Be responsible adults, make the right decisions, forget about party lines, forget about Republicans and Democrats. You are voting for my friends, my children, the dancing school, the dance club, the band, the girls, the boys baseball teams, the girls’ basketball team - every single sport. How do you decide to deny, eight people decide the effect of thousands of children, not just today but down the road? With that we have to study. God bless you; have a good night.

Paul McCabe, 21 Wellington Court

I thought it was important that I attend this meeting this evening to voice my opinion regarding the Shelton Education budget. I became increasingly interested in the debate over the budget and I read a few editorials in the local papers in addition to viewing a good number of the signs on people’s lawns urging taxpayers to fully fund the Board of Education budget request of approximately $66.5 million. The fear mongering was palpable and reaching a fever pitch which piqued my interest. I know that most of the
Parents of Shelton students here tonight who advocate fully funding the Board of Education’s budget are well-intentioned, however they are basically asking Shelton residents like myself, who have no children in schools and never did, to fully subsidize the cost of educational spending by essentially providing the Board of Education with whatever funds they request, while trusting them to do the right thing. Again, this is not about not funding the schools. I am all for funding the schools. I’m also for responsible spending. I want parents to be reminded of the fact that the portion of their property taxes that go to the school spending is often far below the level needed to pay for even one student’s education. That cost is borne by other taxpayers without children in the schools. I’m not opposed to making a reasonably substantial contribution to education spending in Shelton for payment of my property taxes, but I do not approve of rubber stamping budget proposals of the Board of Education, especially when proponents claim that the children will suffer if their request for additional funds is not satisfied. Knowing that, ask yourself, who is playing politics? Given that information it seems apparent to me that your plight and pleas for funding the schools should not be directed at the Mayor and Board of Aldermen but rather the Board of Education.

Sports teams and extracurricular activities do not cost that much. It should be noted that the Board of Education has noted that 82 percent of the budget is comprised of salaries and benefits. Proponents of increased spending to threatening the sports programs I find to be despicable. I believe it is obvious to many taxpayers that money is not the answer to improving education. Just ask Michelle [inaudible] of Washington, D.C. or Joel [inaudible] of New York City School systems, where they spend more than $20,000 per student only to yield consistently abysmal test scores and drop-out rates that often exceed 50 percent year after year. The amazing thing is that those same education bureaucracies continue to say that more money is needed to improve the schools. Who are they kidding? You would think that people would learn from the lessons of history. I only refer to these cities because they are classic examples of failed strategies of the crowds who incessantly preach that more money is the answer to all that ails us. I presume that the key barometer for measuring the success of any school is its standardized test scores. I never understood why parents somehow believe that additional taxpayer money is going to be the primary driver of improving test scores. Based on my own experience, and it is in Catholic school, that thinking boggles my mind. I would hope that most people realize that education starts at home. The involvement of parents encouraging their child’s education by helping to foster a thirst for learning and instilling a work ethic that’s critical to their success in school. My simple and probably very unpopular suggestion for improving our schools test scores is for parents to tell their children to get off the X-Box, stop calling or texting their friends hundreds if not thousands of times a month, and to open a book and study.

In this Internet age, there is no excuse for one not learning. Students of today have been provided with unrivaled educational tools that we never could have dreamed of just 25 years ago. Sadly, I find that although most of today’s students possess the greatest tools for learning, they fall far short of the level of fundamental education and knowledge gained by those who came generations before them. I, like many, mourn the passing of the Greatest Generation, many of whom never went to college but who nevertheless were instrumental in saving this country and countless others who are making this
nation the greatest in the world. I trust that increased educational spending was not a key determinant that made that possible.

I believe the Board of Education and some parents fail to grasp the gravity of our current economic situation. Whether you feel it or not, we are currently living through the worst economic environment since the early 70s and certainly more difficult times lie ahead. We are the beginning of a prolonged period of slower economic growth and in some sectors relative stagnation. Unemployment is currently hovering near 10 percent and our debt service costs will rise at an increasing rate as a consequence of Washington’s [inaudible] spending. Interest rates and inflation are poised to rise dramatically over the coming years, and future budgets will be strained by slower growth and tax receipts, so we must plan accordingly.

The proponents of the Board of Education suggestions that my property value will decline and crime will increase if I do not support the Board of Education request for additional funds is absolutely ludicrous. It’s another failed attempt to infuse propaganda into the budget process. One Shelton resident referring to Redding Connecticut recently wrote an editorial where they stated, “I’ve seen first hand what repeatedly passing budgets with a nine percent increase can do for a school system, and I believe maybe you should ask the taxpayers who oppose those hikes what they think.” It just might be possible that this individual, as well as many who advocate fully funding the Board of Education’s proposal do not understand that the number one priority of a bureaucracy is to perpetuate itself. If you have any doubts, just look at our nation’s Capitol and that of our State.

I will close by stating that I fully endorse Mayor Lauretti’s proposal for funding the schools, and I believe it is the prudent course for Shelton to take at this time. I ask that the Board of Aldermen accept the Mayor’s proposal for Board of Education funding in it’s present form. I also want to say that I came from a school that had tremendous sports programs. I went to St. Anthony’s High School on Long Island. I attended Catholic school my whole life. My father had 12 children. He put us all through Catholic school on an electrician’s salary because he believed in a good education. I believe in sports. I believe in funding the sports programs and I believe it’s very important as part of one’s experience in high school, and also in elementary school. This is not against the children, this is all for the children. I just believe that prudent spending and efficient management of the funds that the Board of Education is given is critical to our success. I don’t think we should rubber stamp their proposal. Government, obviously, can easily spend too much, and if you give them the taxpayer’s money they will surely find a way to spend it, and many times inefficiently. So I’m just asking that the Board of Education find ways, save the money, put it where it belongs, and if they truly [inaudible], that’s where the money should go. Thank you very much.

Jason Simpis, 18 Surrey Drive

I’ve been a student in the Shelton education program for a long time, but until high school, I never quite realized what my passion was. I mean, I’ve always liked athletics, I might not look like it but I’d like to think I’m a strong person. When I
got to high school I realized running is my passion. I love all sports - soccer, frisbee, lacrosse - I've played all of them. But if I didn't get into high school, if I didn't get into this athletic program here, I wouldn't have found out what something I wanted to carry on for my entire life. On a high school level it just blew my mind. Everyone from all over the state is coming in and competing and its not just in track and cross country - on football, in baseball, in soccer, all over the state when Shelton plays someone else, rivalries are forged, friendships are forged. People of Connecticut are now interwoven with each other, so good for the athletics here. It's what I live for; I just came from a meet. I'm exhausted; I just want to curl up and go to sleep right now.

Just doing sports in general has taught me so much about my life. I'm dedicated now - my Mom wouldn't agree, but I hope some of my coaches would. I'm dedicated, I know what to do, I know how to get it done, and I ration my time wisely. I don't know if any of you guys has run a 5K. I know Mayor Lauretti has, he practically challenges us at our cross country banquet. Once you get through that, once you slog through all that pain, you know you can pretty much do whatever you want when you put your mind to it. What lesson are we going to teach everyone if we cut the athletics? How are the students going to learn that? How are the children going to learn that - the people who are in the lower sports groups who have nothing to look forward to if we cut the athletics here at Shelton High? You respect whoever you race, you respect whoever you play in everything and that goes back to what I said, you forge friendships with everyone. Just today against Lyman Hall one of my friends actually came, I met him two years ago running in indoor track and I still talk to him, even today. I asked him about his girlfriend, which I don't really ask a lot of people about. What matters is, there's a generation of athletics across this state - people in the high school level who know each other on a personal level. We know how to get things done. If you're a teacher or a student at Shelton High can you please stand up? People, when you look at these faces these are the people who are going to be directly affected by these cuts. These are people who are going to lose friends, who are going to lose teammates, who are going to lose practically their entire life. I know without sports I'm losing my entire life out there. How could you look at these people in the eye and say, "Well we're not going to do everything we possible can to try to keep you guys around." I really don't know much about politics. I'm in a political club, but the most I know really is Robert's Rules of Order. There has to be some way. You guys were elected into these offices for a reason. You have to be probably the brightest minds in Shelton right now. We have to be able to find the solution and make everyone happy. Keep the sports; keep the taxes lower, maybe not as low as they are but lower than everyone else's. I know that's a possibility; I heard it at the other board meetings. Everyone here who stood up is going to be affected; I'm going to be affected. I don't want to lose my life. I know there are some football players here. Maybe I don't get why they play football; I mean its kind of a rough sport for me. Maybe they don't get why I run, I mean, I'm kind of puny, it's not
their thing. But we all know athletics is needed in this town. Athletics is what keeps us together. Please you cannot take that away from us.

Michael Kaminsky

First I’d like to thank you members. That’s Paul, as I’m sure you know he comes to all the meetings with me. And how much progress he’s made that as a child with autism that he can come and sit with me, and as a parent that knew nothing about autism, I really have to thank the Special Education teachers that helped me so much on how to deal with that. That brings me to my first point, I’ll be honest like some other people I came in here just breathing fire and just wanting to say “fund the budget, fund the budget, fund the budget,” and then that led me to a path where I met with everybody. I know I’ve said this to you, but there are so many people here who haven’t heard that and I want them to hear this too. And that led me to a path were I met everyone from the Mayor to Freeman Burr and his Finance Director, my two Aldermen, members of the A and T Board. I’ve looked through these budgets, the City budget, the Board of Education budget with a fine-toothed comb. I must say Mrs. O’Brien stole a little of my thunder.

The first point I wanted to make, you cut me short a little bit on, was about Ripton School. That was closed when Paul was going into kindergarten. We were told point blank at that time that it was closed because the P.J. versus the State case. For those of you who do not know about that, it was a case by a handicapped child’s parents that was in court for eight years. By the time that was settled, that child was no longer even in school. It was supposedly mandated that Special Education children spend 80 percent of the time with “inclusion,” which means in typical class. So they closed Ripton under those guidelines we were told it must be closed. So my son was then sent in, and of course as a parent of a child with special needs wonder what’s going to happen with change. Instead, Paul thrived in that situation; he was about 77-78 percent every year.

So this year we go in for our annual meeting, which Mr. President the term is “IEP.” I know we had a problem with that a few weeks ago. This year because of the cuts he’s being pulled out of the classroom and we’re told he is 53 percent. So I go to the powers at be at the end of the meeting and say, “what happened to the P.J. against the State case that said it has to be 80 percent? I’m told, “oh, that was never mandatory that was just guidelines.” The first thing that hits me is that they’re talking out of both sides of their mouths for whatever happens to please them, and that’s the Board of Education. As I talk to more people, I begin to understand that whoever I’m talking to has their own political agenda and our city is absolutely the same as Washington and Hartford and there’s nothing but bipartisan politics going on here. That everybody just does whatever the Republicans tell them to do, or whatever the Democrats tell them to do, and quite frankly I don’t know about everybody here but I’m fed up with that. And the day
elections come in 2011 and I don’t care if everybody here goes away, I’m not going away and somebody is going to pay with their job, because I’ll take it from you.

Now, I went through this budget and the first thing that struck me; this was dated on February 23rd of this year. I had this budget in my hand for 36 hours, I met somebody from the Board of A & T and I said to this person, “how come they gave $5,000 to the Derby Historical Society?” You know what her reply was? “We did?” Now, what’s wrong with that picture? I had the budget for a day and a half – 36 hours - I knew more about it than she did.

So I went through this budget today line item by line item. Like I said, Mrs. O’Brien stole some of my thunder. I just went through everything that has been budgeted for over $1,000 and hadn’t spent a penny. I added up, and I also added up a few items that were just so grossly over funded and spent just a little bit of money. And I came up with $640,677 minus $31,000; gives us a total of $609,000. That’s just on things that haven’t been spent. I sat there last week, and Mr. President you made a big deal over $4,000 for Christian Counseling, and they spent every penny of that money. Yet, when it got to TEAM, you said what a wonderful program that is, they were budgeted for $18,000 and you wanted to approve them for $20,000, they hadn’t spent a penny and you didn’t say a word about that. I also notice there’s something called Storm Watch. I don’t know about you guys but I saw it in three different places, they spent $18,000 on Storm Watch, or budgeted. Out of that they spent an incredibly low amount. They also added $3,400 for testing.

Now, there’s three different departments that have Storm Watch; I don’t know but your Storm Watch is doing a great job, they cancel school and then it doesn’t snow. How come you have to three different departments getting money - $15,000 for the Fire Department to have Storm Watch? What is the Fire Department doing with $15,000 for Storm Watch? How about this one? Police Department Investigative Overtime budget $39,482, spent zero. Temporary Employees $7,000, spent zero, Firing Range Maintenance $9,500, spent zero, Crime Prevention $8,500, some how they made $66 on that. The Tree Warden, he’s doing a great job because a tree branch fell on my car and missed my windshield about one tenth of a second, you should see the dent in my car. Chemicals $5,000, spent nothing, Trees and shrubs, $6,000, spent $31. Printing and Advertising $1,000, spent zero. Equipment $3,000, spent $301, yet these are constantly refunded. Town Clerk, Records Preservation $10,000, spent nothing. Thank God the Mayor cut that to $6,000 for next year. Here’s a lovely one - Sidewalk Repair, $30,000, spent zero. Many departments over and over. Minor Tools $12,200, spent $946. The Assessor, Professional Services $10,000, spent $45. Now there’s a great one, Volunteer Appreciation Day $5,000, there’s a business picnic that we talked about last week $2,000. Shelton Day, we’re supposed to be in crisis, we need to spend $90,500 on Shelton Day? Fireworks $12,000, Barnum Festival parade, I can’t imagine why we’re giving Bridgeport $2,500 for the Barnum Festival Parade except our Mayor was the Grand Marshal a couple years ago. That adds up to $41,000, you add that
to the $609,000 I came up with $650,000 and that wasn’t even counting all the things that were under $1,000. Now I hear all the time Social Security, all of the seniors are in bad shape, one of the Aldermen came up to me and started talking to me privately about Social Security. I’m on disability, we haven’t had a raise in two years. You know what I said to him? You’re talking to the wrong person, I’m on disability we had 4.8% raise last year and he had nothing to say about that. We didn’t get a raise this year but we got a double raise last year. Okay, so I know; I don’t like it when I’m deceived. I like the truth that’s what I’m searching for. I’m not on either side; I’m fully for the truth here.

We’ve had some people say the economy is getting better. It’s not getting better and the teachers need to know that. I wonder about that point too. My best friend hasn’t worked since New Year’s Eve in 2008; his brother hasn’t worked since a month after that. I have another friend who hasn’t worked in over a year. And I wonder if the teachers - and I know this isn’t going to be very popular - my wife works at Yale they got a $1 billion - $2 billion endowment and they won’t give anybody that’s making over $75,000 a raise. People all over are having to give back. I know you have a contract, but are you willing to give back something to save some of your own people’s jobs? How about that? I don’t know anybody whose getting 5.6. I know you say you got nothing, but you should be happy you’ve got a job. Why don’t you talk about that with the Mayor and make a little compromise there. You know, there’s two sides to every story here and there’s 90-something people getting laid off. Maybe if you gave back some of your raise you can save some of those jobs. You’re making good wages most of you people. That’s about all I have to say. You know, it took me a lot of research to come up with this stuff instead of just emotionally say, like Mr. Kennedy there, to just emotionally say “Oh we need the money for our kids, everything for the kids.” No, there’s an answer here but to just say, “I’m not going to give because I’m the Mayor’s boy and the Mayor told me ‘no’ and I’m going to follow the party line,” that is not the answer, and we’re sick of that kind of [inaudible]. Thank you.

Joseph Knapik, 23 Stonewall Lane

President and Members of the Board Aldermen, here again are assembled large groups of citizens mainly concerned with the funding of education in Shelton. This has been the case in the greater part of the past 20 years. The truth of the matter is that as in an divorce proceeding, there’s his side and her side and the truth lies somewhere in the middle. There needs to be a compromise between the Lauretti administration and its political arm, the Shelton Republican party, and education advocates. Both sides have made their points, its true that an annual Board of Education requests of between five and six percent, when the inflation rate is between one and one and one and one-half percent, is unsustainable. Unfunded state mandates and open-ended Special Education costs are contributory to this problem. It seems to me though, that the Board of Education has tried to narrow
the budget gap by involving an early retirement system for its staff and seeking
insurance costs savings. It is likely though, that a reduction and supportive and
advisory administrative staff would contribute to the solution of the funding
problem. I believe the Superintendent of Schools has alluded to this potential
reduction. It would be ill advised to cut front line staff, teachers and primary
administrators. Trying to teach 30 first graders to read is not the way to go.
Asking one to manage 30-35 seventh graders is a reach. Shelton has
approximately $4 million in reserve, money derived from contrived surpluses. Part
of this could be applied to assist the Board of Education in closing the funding gap.
Shelton costs for future borrowing might go up. Shelton has borrowed too much
money already. The use of this reserve is up to the Board of Aldermen. That’s
their part of compromise. Taxes need not rise. Seniors who are temporarily
financially dislocated need not suffer. A decent education system can be
maintained. The functioning of Shelton schools, while not perfect, is a value
compared to other city departments. Such as Public Works, who damage and don’t
repair and minimally maintain neighborhood roads. And the Police Department,
which has difficulty responding to quality of life complaints. The Aldermen have the
power and money to solve these budgetary issues. It will take political will, there
might be a price to pay, just ask all of the deposed Republican members of the
Board of Education. But you have to do right. Visualize the second grader who
lives down the road from you. Mittens, coat, and boots getting on the school bus
to go to school. It’s sad that someone would damage this kid. Thank you.

Steve Arena, 121 Village Drive

About 20 years ago, my wife and I moved here to Shelton for the simple reason – nice
quiet suburban city that was having prospective growth, has a wonderful school system.
Just like a lot of people do if they’re going to have a family, they look at what kind of
school system am I going to have in that city that I want to move in. That is part of the
real estate process. People look at that. A lot of people research it. That’s what we did.
We saw the school system had a lot of value to it; it was a good school system. There
were a lot of good ratings on it. That was one of the major reasons we moved to Shelton
20 years ago. We have three kids, one daughter at Ithaca College, one in High School
and one in elementary school. I’m going to be here for a long time. I usually don’t come
to your meetings, and I apologize for that. When I do come, there’s a reason for it. The
reason is simple. We need to start funding the budgets and start moving ahead. We
cannot continue having more budgets stagnant. There’s cost of living, there’s
inflationary costs associated with various functions and services to the various
departments. We are not accommodating to those increases. I understand the Mayor’s
intentions – they are good. They were good 20 years ago. They’re not good today. I
hear people say, “Why do we want our taxes raised, I don’t have any kids here in the
system.” Listen, we’re a community. It’s not just about the kid, it’s about the
community. The kids are part of the community. You are part of the community. We all
have to work together to make the City successful. It’s not just about Republicans or
Democrats [inaudible], it’s about the community. That’s what we have to look at when
deciding what these budgets are going to be. When it comes to funding, we need to look
carefully at the lines. We’ve heard Ms. O’Brien, we heard this gentleman here, who have scrutinized the budget lines. It’s become very apparent that there are a lot of people on your Board and on the Apportionment and Taxation and on the Board of Education that did not do their homework. It’s time to start doing your homework. We elect you, that’s your responsibility to us. If you cannot perform that responsibility, then in 2011 we will ask for change.

Here we are 2010. I’ve been speaking at these things for 20 years. It always seems to be that when we come to this kind of situation where it becomes [inaudible]. You have 7-1 right now on this board. There are a lot of people in this audience and in this City right now that say, “You know what, why bother talking at a Board of Aldermen meeting, it’s a done deal. Why bother speaking?” I say maybe just maybe I can get into the conscience of maybe a few of the people in the majority party and say “Think with your conscience, think as an individual. Don’t think as a political party.” Don’t think because the Mayor, who I have to put on record I’m very disappointed did not show up tonight, maybe he’s with his gubernatorial evaluation team. That’s one I can’t wait to watch. In that regard, another concern of mine is, is he using our City for his political ambitions by having taxes stay like this? I hope he is not using the Republicans on this Board for that purpose. It would be a shame.

When it comes to the core budget, I heard the gentleman talk about the roads. I live on Village Drive. Go down Village Drive. If you make it down Village Drive, I live a mile in off East Village Road. If you don’t have alignment damage on your car, you’re lucky. I have a road, I get damage on the alignment on my car, that’s $200 to realign. Maybe we should pave the road. [Inaudible] Look at those roads, they’re horrible. Talking to Mr. Maloney here – he’s on Jodie Lane off Long Hill. Look at those roads. They’re horrible. Yet they have line items that they say no, we’re not spending, not spending, not spending. If we don’t start taking care of our city now, we will have to spend the money later on. It’s going to cost us more to take care of things. Let’s start doing the right thing now [inaudible]. Let’s hold the line, let’s pocket the money, end of the year we look wonderful that we give money back. Hey, look at Shelton, we have a surplus, all that great stuff. Meanwhile, my car is falling into a ditch. That doesn’t do me any good, it doesn’t do the taxpayers any good when you have road conditions like that.

The last thing I want to speak to is the Education budget. I know there’s a lot of people here tonight very concerned about the Education budget, as I am. I have two children still to go through the system. They are very dedicated in the extracurricular activities. My son he’s on the varsity soccer team, JV basketball, JV baseball. My daughter is in fifth grade – she most likely will be playing sports as well in Shelton, if we have sports. They’re also very active in the extracurricular and clubs associated to their schools. It makes them as the whole person. Granted, academics is number one in our family. We draw that, that’s where our kids, knock on wood, one of them is in college, hopefully the other one’s going to college. My son right now is in the top five in Shelton High School in the sophomore class, and he’s going to continue that way. I don’t want him to lose the opportunities that other kids have had in the past, and I don’t want my daughter losing that in her future. I’m asking you to work with the Board of Education and find a way to fund extracurricular activities for the school system. If we don’t have these programs in
place these kids are not going to be able to compete against the other children in the
cities and towns in Connecticut and around the U.S. when it comes to going to college. I
just experienced that with my daughter going to Ithaca. Just like Ms. O’Brien said, the
applications are extensive and they’re looking at the whole person, not just academics.
We’re going to drive our children to become the best they can be, to get to college, to
meet the American dream. We have to give them what they need to do that, including
extracurricular, give them the ability to be good students in student council, be in various
clubs, be athletes. As [inaudible] said very nervously, that to make him a better person.
Athletics makes them better people. Athletics makes them smarter people as well.
There are a number of studies that show athletes have a tendency of having better test
scores than non-athletes. There are studies out there to prove that. I’m asking you to
work with the Board of Education and look for ways to fund the extracurricular activities
of the school system.

Lastly, to the Board of Education members, as I spoke to you at your meeting, you need
to wake up and start looking at the line items in your budget, you need to start figuring
ways out to properly spend money – just like I’m asking the Board of Aldermen. We now
have a [inaudible] a lot of people with these bright orange YES signs. YES has made a
commitment saying they’re going to watch the Board of Education. I’m hoping that’s the
case. I’m going to talk to those people after this meeting. Bottom line is, if you’re not
doing your job, you’re going out the door just like these people will. Thank you.

Freeman Burr, Superintendent of Schools
17 Livingstone Road, Bloomfield CT

Good evening, President Anglace and ladies and gentlemen of the Board of Aldermen.
Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this evening regarding our Shelton Board
of Education budget proposal for 2010-2011. First and foremost, I would like to
acknowledge that these are indeed challenging economic times for the City of Shelton,
the State of Connecticut and the nation. To that end, the budget we proposed is not
representative of a rollover by existing Board of Education services. Our proposed
budget represents $4 million in staff reductions and cost savings which cut across every
level of our current organization. Furthermore, this budget represents over $900,000 in
reductions of Central Office staff and services which reflects 20 percent of the cuts in
our proposed budget. However, it should be noted that Central Office only comprises
about eight percent of our staff.

Our proposed budget begins to establish an [inaudible] shift for the Board of Education
whereby we will do more with fewer resources. It also represents our first effort to create
a culture where we need to live and operate with the need to have, not with the nice to
have. To do this, we’ll align our district resources to create a more efficient instructional
delivery model for all of our students. That will also include redesign of our current
services for Special Education students without compromising their Individual Education
Plans. I think it is important to dispel some misconceptions and false beliefs regarding
our Shelton Public Schools, specifically as relates to student achievement. Our four-year
Connecticut Mastery Test data shows that all 20 test indicators in reading, writing, math
and science that Shelton Public Schools exceeds the State average in the number of
students meeting goal. Nearly all of our schools have [inaudible] yearly progress, benchmarks for a whole school in accordance with the No Child Left Behind benchmarks. One exception - Lafayette School – did not meet adequate yearly progress, although significant growth has been reported there during the last few years. This is also on the Connecticut CAM website where there are elementary school report cards which demonstrate that Lafayette was ranked in the top 25 percent of elementary schools with academic performance gains in the State of Connecticut. It should also be noted that Sunnyside is in the top 16 percent. Long Hill is in the top 28 percent. Mohegan is in the top 40 percent – all exceeding the State average in academic performance gains. Although Shelton Intermediate School met the adequate yearly progress overall benchmark, some groups had been identified for improvement for our students with disabilities as well as our English language learners. Under the leadership of Headmaster Ken Saranich we are confident that this trend will begin to reverse itself during this year and the next. Shelton High School overall met adequate yearly progress benchmarks once again. [Inaudible] students at Shelton High School met or exceeded the State average in the number of students at or above proficiency in all four areas – reading, writing, math and science, under the leadership of our Headmaster Dr. Beth Smith, and we believe that this will continue in the future. Overall we have [inaudible] in Shelton, and our [inaudible] become great [inaudible] in the future with the right ingredients. To that end, our district and school leadership will align our district and school resources to improve our school targets based on the proposed budget we’ve given you. We will work with schools and staff to do more with less and improve teaching and learning for all students. However, we will need to be funded adequately to become great. Further, since our proposed budget was submitted, we worked with the Shelton Education Association to offer retirement incentive package which 24 teachers have taken advantage of to date. The potential cost savings for this will be approximately $325,000 in the year 2010-2011. Our Finance Director Alan Cameron initiated a bid process for our health insurance carrier through the City of Shelton that will likely amount to a potential cost savings of $700,000. This will lower our proposed budget to $2.5 million. Thus far the proposed budget will leave a $2.4 million gap. The City has offered just a $90,000 increase. We have worked diligently to lower our request by $1 million. Just as we demonstrated good faith in trying to lower our 2010 –2011 obligations, we need the City and the Board of Aldermen to demonstrate the same good faith in funding our schools adequately.

I think it is critical that the members of the Board of Aldermen understand the runaway costs of Special Education services, not just in Shelton, but in school districts all over the State of Connecticut. Our cost overages this year will amount to $3 million plus. Our excess cost reimbursement grant will cover approximately $750,000 at best. These overages have gone up 300 percent in the last five years and will continue to rise. For example, just last week we found out through the mediation process that a student with disabilities that we will now be paying this budget year up to $30,000 for an out of district placement. There was no consultation with the Shelton Public Schools about this placement. That’s the kind of environment we are working with in terms of dealing with the legalities of Special Education. There will be no action on the part of our legislators to give relief to school districts this year or next. In fact, they had passed the In-School Suspension mandate to go into effect July 1, 2010. They have more unfunded
mandates planned for 2011-12 if the legislation passes. Our grant revenues will continue to be reduced this year and next year with the worst impact to come in the year 2011-2012. However, the Economic Cost Sharing grant to the City of Shelton will remain the same for this coming year. Again, the impact will be on the Board of Education, not on the City. I do wholeheartedly agree with Mayor Lauretti and many others about the irresponsible unfunded mandates passed by federal and state legislators. There will be no immediate relief now or in the near future and therein lies our problem.

Our students with disabilities live here in our City and we are obligated to provide a free and appropriate education to each of them under the law. During the last five years, we have been making reductions in the regular education program to offset our escalating Special Ed costs in order to service our students with disabilities effectively. There is no discretionary money left in our budget to fund these mandates. The funds we are requesting are needed to cover escalating and unpredictable costs that cannot be quantified. We need your assistance now in this coming school year or we will risk adversely impacting the education of all of our students in Shelton, now and in the future. Ultimately we will risk the quality of life in Shelton as well for our students, families, and community at large.

On behalf of the Board of Education and my Central Office leadership team as well as my Building Leaders, we offer our hand and a commitment and willingness to work together with you to address the inadequacies in public school funding in the future. We are happy to unite with you to join the Connecticut Coalition for Equity in School Funding. We are prepared to join with you to shape the earth under the feet of our State and Federal legislators. Let’s unite and do what we need to do to create new funding models for public education. Let us not balance the education future of our students because of our disdain for irresponsible legislators and legislation.

These students are our future, and the future of Shelton is in your hands now. In closing there have been times this year that the district challenges have been overwhelming for all of us, yet as a new Superintendent what has sustained me is walking into classrooms and seeing teachers and students working together in spite of the adversity, trying to improve the education for all of our students. I think my strength has continued to be reinforced by observing that first hand.

I ask you to consider the moral and ethical question that faces us. There are no scapegoats here. There is no need to demonize the people that we value. At the end of the day, this is about our students. I would ask that we think about ethically and morally is right to educate them in the best possible way. I also ask just to think about challenging the powers that be at the State and Federal level to find a way to adequately fund our school system, but not at the expense of balancing the budget on the current students who attend our district’s schools. Thank you very much.

Joan Capro, 174 River Road

First I would like to say that I felt really ignorant sitting here listening to Mrs. O’Brien and the other gentleman going through the line items, realizing that there’s $640,000
apparently kind of lying around. So Board of Education, I would ask that you please go get that. The other thing I would like to say is the same old thing being done in a lot of towns that are going through the same thing, trying to avoid taxes being raised. It costs a lot of money to run buildings and run school systems. I’d just like to say that I belong to a church in Milford that, due to its size and growth, was able to rent, once a week, every Sunday, a high school auditorium in Milford at the tune of $8,000 a month. We sit on some pretty great real estate here with these properties. We have great hotels and restaurants. We have trails that not only will churches and youth events, drug reps like Pfizer, they look for places to rent. They use our hotels and use these facilities and they would pay a big buck to do it. I know a drug rep organization that last weekend went to Providence, Rhode Island for the weekend. I’ve been to Providence, Rhode Island. Shelton is a heck of a lot better than Providence Rhode Island. It’s beautiful, it’s clean, and they come with money to spend. They could rent our facilities, pay big bucks to do it, and [inaudible]. Churches are growing at a great rate. They’re looking for properties and they rent space that holds the size of the church that’s growing. They also have money and they spend big bucks to do it. I’m just giving you some ideas and I’m certain there are some very intelligent people with marketing skills who could market this facility and the High School and rent it on Saturdays and Sundays when the auditoriums aren’t being used for anything else.

The other think I would like to say is that I’m very concerned about the way the education system seems to be going if you start doing the cuts. I’m all for not wasting money. Absolutely. If we give you the money, we expect you to spend it wisely. The money doesn’t have to be spent. We have kids here, more kids are coming and it costs a lot of money to run these buildings. My biggest concern is that if the school system doesn’t spend the money on the students, it will stop people from coming to this town, and will cause people to leave to give their children what they came to Shelton for. If you don’t give them what they want they’re going to leave. What I’m afraid of is there’s going to be a great exodus in Shelton. And what we’re going to be left with is like the original – great water views and nobody around to appreciate it. Thank you.

Bill Crisanti, Beardsley Road

I don’t know if I can give such an eloquent speech like the previous speakers, but here goes, I’m going to give it to you in layman’s terms. Money is not the answer. When is enough going to be enough? These people are here, they’re crying for their kids, I can respect that. Let them pay for their kids. Not me. The bottom line is, I’m not paying any more. That’s it. Enough is enough. I’ve got a brother, and a nephew and a niece that are teachers. They tell me what goes on behind the scenes. You know, it’s nothing but a country club for teachers. And I’m not paying for it any more. That’s all there is to it. Money is not the answer. We spend the most money out of any country in the world, and our kids still [inaudible].

Alderman Anglace interjected at this point, stating, I’d like to ask the audience, this educated audience, wearing the nice buttons, who are profoundly interested in education, to extend the courtesy that you expect to the speakers who share a different point of view. And I won’t say that again. If you insist on being discourteous to the
speakers who have different views than you, we will curtail this public hearing immediately. Thank you. Proceed, sir.

Mr. Crisanti continued, anyway, this country, this great nation that we have spends the most money on education out of any country in the world, and yet our kids still can’t fill the shoes of any children in them other countries. So money is not the answer. I don’t want to hear that. Enough is enough. I don’t even have a job; I got laid off a year and a half ago. I’m still going to make ends meet. I don’t need my taxes to be raised. Because I know what’s going on. You here, these people up here, these teachers, they are money oriented, that’s what they are. Because I know - I’ve got three in the family. I’m not going to fall for that and you people shouldn’t fall for that. I want to keep my home. I’ve had it for 30 years. I don’t want to lose it because I can’t pay my taxes. If it comes to that, I’ll cancel the insurance and burn it to the ground. Trust me, I will. And then you won’t get my $6,000 a year. When I first bought my house in Shelton I was paying $1,100 in taxes. Now I’m up to $6,000. How much more can I take? I’m up here representing the silent majority – the people out there that are too tired to come to these meetings and work too hard. The Board of Education – they have too much time and too much money on their hands. They shouldn’t even be there. Like Arlene Liscinsky gave $800 to what’s his face there that wanted to run for State Senate, Dick Belden’s job. I can’t come up with $800 like that. If I had $800 I’d be smiling right now. I’m telling you, you people have to do the right thing and say no. If these people want to subsidize their kids, I don’t want to subsidize their kids. Let them pay the money.

I sent my three kids through school. My wife and I weren’t down here complaining and crying. We just accepted what the Board of Education had to say. Now I have to listen to these people cry and dictate how I spend my money, or lose my house. That’s not going to happen, I’ll tell you right now. You people have to do that right thing. No more money to education, because all it does is raise taxes. You could spend $1 million on me for singing lessons but I’ll never sing like Elvis Presley. I may be able to belt out a good tune of Happy Birthday, but money’s not the answer. I’ll never sing like him.

So you people have to understand and listen to the people out there losing their homes, to the senior citizens. I’m a senior citizen. I’m 62 years old. I don’t have a job. I can’t afford to pay any more taxes. If these people want to educate their kids, let them pay 63 percent more in taxes. That could mean an average of $3,000 to $6,000 for each household. So let them pay. I don’t want to pay. I don’t use the service. I shouldn’t pay for it. There should be different tax structures in this town. People that use it and people that don’t use it. What do I get for my tax dollars? Garbage pickup, that’s it. I don’t need anything else. I need the firemen, I need the cops. Everything else I don’t need. The roads, I’ll take care of myself. They don’t fix the roads so what am I getting for my tax dollars? I have to pay for these kids to go to college? You know, look what they did - college kids and teachers, the biggest union in the country. They even say on TV that the teachers and teachers unions are very dangerous people. They are. Look what they did. We ended up with that thing in the White House. You know? A radical Muslim in the White House, primarily for the teachers. [INAUDIBLE] Listen, I’m not up here to offend anybody. I am just up here fighting for my own backside, you know? This country, believe me, you people have got to wake up. This country is going down the
tubes. You know, lifeboat - capacity 10, the 11th has to drown. That’s me – I’m the 11th. I don’t want to drown. You’re like just taking the lifeboat, but you forget about me. Capacity 10. The 11th’s going to drown. That’s me. And some day it may be you. I don’t know. But you have to do the right thing. Don’t raise taxes. Because every time you do, it hurts the economy. I stop spending, I cut all my services and what not. You know, that’s what it does. You raise taxes, people stop spending. I don’t even go to the Donut Inn any more because I can’t afford it. So don’t hurt businesses, don’t hurt the taxpayers, don’t hurt me. If these people want, let them pay. That’s all there is to it. Thank you.

Josh Wells, 5 Boysenberry Lane

Good evening everyone, I’m here speaking on behalf of my father, Skye Wells here. My family has deep roots in the City and my great-grandfather was educated in a one-room school house on Bridgeport Avenue. My grandfather went to Shelton Public Schools, and so did my father. My brother was a 2007 Shelton High School graduate and I’m going to graduate next year, hopefully. I’ve always taken an interest in learning and served on the Board of Education, my father has, that is, dealing with issues like athletic facilities, parking and security issues at Shelton High, and the early stages of planning for the Perry Hill Road 5-6 project. He’s worked with previous superintendents and served on the Booth Hill School Building Committee. Like many cities and towns we find ourselves facing difficult financial choices. My father’s a local businessman and my mom is as well. We understand the situation. There’s a [inaudible] value of education and how much and what we should invest. There are many opinions over what needs to be done. I am frustrated at the lack of communication and commitment to solving this problem. My father and my mother, too, on this. As a third generation homebuilder I can tell you that any house without a solid foundation will collapse. Education is the foundation for our City’s future and with a school system that stands out over the neighboring cities and towns Shelton finds itself in the same situation as many other communities – declining property values and future generations of children who are academically unprepared for the future. So what should we do? Maintain the status quo and cut salaries and positions, losing qualified educators? If we stay on this course we may be forced to cut as many as 90 positions, even as our own city grows and our schools become more crowded. Everyone agrees we need to bridge the $7 million budget gap. But the solutions we’ve all heard are so far unsettling. Should we keep our taxes at the current mill rate and make up for the differences through layoffs or cut the sports and extracurricular activities? No. I don’t think this is the way to go. My father doesn’t either. I don’t believe these are the only choices we have.

On behalf of both of us, we’d like to propose an alternative. Shelton residents are proud of our low tax rate and we should be. Having a community that offers free services and facilities without breaking the bank is something every city should strive for, and we’re lucky to have that here in Shelton. While it may be politically unpopular, I suggest that a small increase of our mill rate would solve many more problems than it causes. A mill rate increase of a half mill point would cost the average taxpayer $110 a year per household, which is just 30 cents a day, instead of placing the $3,000 to $6,000 as the previous speaker said, on the rest of everyone. The revenue from households alone
would be approximately $1.54 million. This does not include the commercial properties which would add significantly more revenue, such as the gold mine that has become Bridgeport Avenue. This City’s mill rate could still be the envy of the surrounding towns. This increase would alleviate the budget gap and would provide sufficient funding for our Public Works and the City infrastructures like the sidewalks and roads that were mentioned. This is just the City side.

Our Teacher’s Union needs to take a close look at the number of administrative positions currently being held and offer their own concessions to the town. Some valuable teachers and coaches stand to lose their jobs. Many of them have families to support and cannot afford to lose their income. For example, one of the teachers and my coach is [inaudible] special [inaudible] teacher and country and track coach in Shelton High. He’s the father of two young daughters with a baby on the way. His knowledge and guidance has been instrumental in helping his student athletes attain cross country and track scholarships at some of the best universities throughout the east. Each teacher that faces a layoff has their own story and offers a valuable contribution to his or her students.

In closing, it is crucial that the Board of Aldermen and taxpayers actually show their support for our educational system by demanding a small tax increase to save our schools. In going back to what my friend Jason over there said, that friendships are forged throughout the sports. I can say that too because if not for sports freshman year when I did indoor track, the most miserable of the track seasons, I would not have become friends with that kid right there, who is like a brother to me, among other kids on the team. My coach, I don’t know if he’s still here, but he is more than a coach. He is the one person when I was running a race, I would hear him yelling the loudest out of anyone. I would hear that voice. It is just something that stays with you. I remember every piece of advice he’s given me. That is something that I don’t want to lose. By proposing that we cut all sorts – that’s not the answer because apparently, according to The Huntington Herald, and Board of Aldermen, Board of Education, it’s no bluff.

Stefano Sanza, 27 Greenacre Drive

You may remember me from the previous public forum. For those of you who missed my speech or forgot about it, I spoke mainly about clubs, sports and electives, which I still believe is enough reason to make no cuts. Today however I’m here to talk about even more important topics. Shelton High School has not been the same lately. There seems to be an ominous feeling in the atmosphere. It’s not nothing, though. It’s because many of the teachers can’t take their mind off the fact that they all have lost the one thing that everybody needs, wishes to have, and strives for in a falling economy – job security. Some have already started looking for jobs. How can you focus on performing to the best of your ability when all you do is leading up to heartless downsizing. Their source of income, their reason for going to college down the line. That’s a peculiar example that is being set for us high school students, isn’t it? Do well and graduate High School and get into a good college and get a degree, then watch it go to absolutely nothing. It seems as though the American dream is being viewed through scratched up and foggy spectacles.
It’s amazing how in times of financial downfall the most important thing seems to be forgotten about under [inaudible] and frantic chaos of trying to find a solution. I’m speaking, of course, of Shelton High School’s beloved guidance counselors. And yes, “beloved” is the correct word for all of us love our guidance counselors. All of which want nothing more than the best for the students at our school. I could not imagine losing any of them. Throughout four years that we spend here, a relationship is built between a student and guidance counselor that should never be broken. They are amazing at what they do. They give you the proper guidance as soon as you need it. They seem to always have time for an individual meeting, even though there are literally hundreds of students that need them. If I ever find myself wondering about the path I want my life to take occupationally, or any other way for that matter, I talk to my counselor who always helps me greatly. That goes for all students and guidance counselors relationships in the school.

Whether or not you were wondering, I am 16 years old. In another month, I’ll be 17. The year after that I’ll be 18. Of course, as outspoken as I am, I’m planning on registering to vote immediately. So are many of my friends and some of my friends have already registered to vote. Voting is a powerful thing in America. It gives us the ability to decide the fate of government - federal, state and most importantly, local. Whether or not people in power stay in power depends on how I view the decisions they made during their terms. Earlier I spoke about job security for teachers and guidance counselors alike. The people who really should be insecure about their jobs are the ones sitting in front of me this evening. The citizens of Shelton are a single entity. An entity that thinks and speaks, but most importantly, remembers. Sure, you may think that cutting out our sports, electives, clubs, and downsizing our most important staff members basically turning us into a spiritless town with no pride may be the right thing to do. But believe it or not, none other than the Board members will fact the most astronomic consequence. The decisions you make will live on forever and come back to you in the near future, particularly voting season. You have the power to secure the jobs of teachers and guidance counselors and coaches alike, but most importantly your own. You represent us. Make a more mutual decision where in the end more people are content. It seems as though the educational systems everywhere are deciding to cut, cut, cut. Well I say we start a new trend. Not join all these schools that heartlessly make such drastic decisions so willingly. Let’s make our other town-wide frivolous expenditures obsolete and give a little to the educational budget. With our learning environment the way we feel comfortable, our minds will be enriched and probably in condition to learn. So let’s show the world what importance education should have in our community. This town will always be remembered as the one who said yes to Education. Other than taking the easy way out and hopping on the anti-education, anti-extracurricular bandwagon that other schools nationwide have chosen.

Which brings me to my closing statement. And you can quote me. “I would rather be the catalyst to a new fire than fuel for another.”

Thank you.
Jennifer Recker, 46 Rolling Brook Lane

I am one of the founding members of YES, which stands for YES to Education in Shelton. Our short term goal is to let the Aldermen and Mayor know how important the funding of education in Shelton is to many of our citizens. Longer term, we hope to be the voice of education for the citizens of Shelton. We have over 1,000 people right now who are members of YES and are requesting regular updates from YES. This number has continued to increase daily since our inception only four weeks ago. I have three children in elementary school and two babies at home. As I have told you before, I couldn’t be happier right now with the Shelton school system. In my experience, the curriculum in Shelton is both challenging and fun. The Board of Education needs more than $7 million additional dollars for next year to maintain all of the programs that we have this year, plus the new programs mandated by the State. The Board of Education is not asking for the $7-plus-million. They have done their due diligence and are requesting less than half of that – now $2.5 million additional. If you are unable to fund that $2.5 million, we will see some drastic changes to our schools as we see them today. Class sizes will swell to above 30. Without the tutors and the aides to help those with special needs, classroom teachers are going to be overwhelmed. The quality of the education for all students in Shelton will be significantly decreased. If you look at the numbers, Shelton spends the least per student, approximately $11,000, compared to other schools in our DRG, or District Reference Group. A DRG is a grouping of schools in the State of Connecticut that are similar to our school system in size, economics, etc. Again, let me repeat - we spend less per student than any other school districts in our DRG. Shelton also spends much less per student than schools in our surrounding towns. To then further cut this expenditure per student really is unfair to everyone. What will this do to the quality of our students’ education? What could this do to the value of our homes? I can tell you what will happen. Both the quality of our education and the value of our homes will be significantly decreased. Ask any Realtor and they will tell you how closely education and home values are tied. This will affect every taxpaying citizen of Shelton. So please, be creative and continue to work with the Board of Education to figure out a solution. Help protect our two most valuable assets – our first most valuable asset being our children and their education, and second most valuable asset being our homes and their value. Thank you.

[inaudible] Stroud, 132 New Street

I am a member of the Marching Band; I am the manager of the JV Baseball Team. I’ve seen this school and what I’m seeing – okay – I’ve lived here for three and a half years. I came here from Oklahoma. You have these kids, okay? Everybody is coming up here asking to save our athletics and save our clubs. At our age it is really hard to see past Friday night and see past what we’re going to lose. Now, while I’m a senior and these decisions won’t affect me directly, they will affect my little brother; they will affect my friends who are younger than me. You talk about the college application. I filled it out. They are very hard to fill in with enough extracurriculars as it is. If these kids don’t get into college and you start taking things away and you hinder them, that would be so wrong. They are going to raise their families here in Shelton. Shelton has an overwhelming number of people who are born here, raised here, stay here, raise their
families here. So you’re just going to hurt yourselves. You’re going to have an entirely uneducated town and your crime rates are going to go up. Everything is going to [inaudible]. I think that you should find a better compromise and figure out where to find this money. Shelton desperately needs it.

Tim Walsh, Chairman, Board of Education 42 L’Hermitage

I am been an educator in Shelton; I’m very proud of it, I’m very proud of the school system. I’m proud of our Board of Education, which does not act politically, it is a very bipartisan board. On most issues we are unanimous, although we have some spirited discussions at times. For people who accuse us of being partisan, they really haven’t attended any of our meetings or any of our workshops. They’re all open. Our Finance Committee meets monthly. It’s an open group. Mrs. Liscinsky leads it; she’s a tiger – she commands that our people ‘fess up to everything. I think our money is spent very, very judiciously. Our new Superintendent, and I think most of you have met him already and realize that he is a taskmaster as well. He demands a lot from his people. He’s come up with some new revisions of our Central Office staff. As he already told you, he’s reducing it by about 13 people - putting some of those people back in the schools. We are certainly proud of that and proud of him and his efforts.

I’m not going to take a lot of time quoting figures that you’re already aware of. Everyone knows that for the past three years our Board of Education budget has received a zero increase. You already know that in order to survive this cut we have to take drastic measures to operate our schools. Everyone knows that this law, our High School is up for accreditation by the New England Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges. In fact, Alderman Simonetti sitting there is completing a project that somewhat evolved from the last accreditation meetings where our lavatories were found to be inadequate and the City and the Board of Aldermen did step up and we passed a bond issue and it’s just about complete. We’re getting close.

There has been a relationship. I don’t want anyone to misunderstand that we do talk to the Board of Aldermen and we continue to talk to them. We continue to plead with them. But if we don’t get the educational programs at our High School, and if we have to cut back, there’s a good chance we could lose our accreditation. So the young people talking, Mrs. O’Brien and the rest of the people, about filling out an application, if the school is not accredited that will be right up there number one. It’s going to be impossible for some of our bright young people to attend schools that they should.

Athletics – I think you’ve heard enough of it but as a former Headmaster at the High School I can tell you, the information that some people have given you is absolutely right on. Kids who play sports come to school because if they don’t come to school they can’t play. They get the grades because if they don’t get adequate grades they can’t play. They mess around in school, they get in trouble in school, they can’t play. So sports and other activities are extremely important to the operation of the school and to the fulfillment of student needs.
You just heard that Shelton has the lowest expenditure per pupil in our State rating. In fact, and this is something that might surprise you, we’re the lowest in the Valley including Derby and Seymour. That must surprise you because we’re a much wealthier community than either one of those towns. I don’t mean to put them down, but we do have so many more assets and so much more capability. They both struggle. And struggle brings up another term because everyone in the State is struggling, there’s no question. But I bet you we’re the only town in the State of Connecticut that the Board of Education has gotten a zero increase for three years running. I don’t believe there’s another. [inaudible]. I have a great deal of sympathy for some people who are struggling. I live on a fixed income – I’m retired and live on a retirement income, my wife and I. And although I have two grandsons in the high school, two outstanding young men, and I don’t mind paying a few more dollars for their education. They deserve it.

Id’ like to read a couple of things to you. The first is a statement taken from a handout from the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding. Our Mayor was just the President of this group, he’s the immediate past-president but he was president when this was distributed. It’s a two-sided piece that the Superintendent was kind enough to secure for me. I’ll read briefly, and we’ve heard this before, “Think our public schools are too expensive? Just consider the alternative.” And the young lady got up just a minute ago and included some of these in what she said. “Less competitive work force, rising unemployment, failing businesses, lower incomes and tax revenues, a declined standard of living for most Connecticut residents.” And put Shelton in there in caps, “increased crime accompanied by overcrowding and costly prisons, rising welfare needs coupled with fewer government resources leading to unrest. Fewer scientists, doctors, and even teachers, artists, entrepreneurs and other leaders of tomorrow. Incalculably vast lost opportunity rising from the City’s failure to provide the resources needed to develop the talent and skills of our children.” Just the little picture at the bottom says, “Today’s youths, tomorrow’s workforce. Invest in education, education grow the future.”

I have two other brief things to read as well. The first is from an older gentleman who’s left us - Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln said “A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting when you are gone. Attend to those things which you think are important. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. He will assume control of your cities, states, and nations. He’s going to move in and take over your churches, school, universities, corporations. The fate of humanity is in his hands.” I think we all really realize that our youths will follow us and do that. One more paragraph, “I commend the Shelton residents,” and this is from the Shelton Early Childhood Plan which our people worked very hard to adopt. “I commend Shelton residents, interested parents, business leaders, clergy members, educational professionals, health care providers and City officials who generously volunteered their time to develop this comprehensive Early Childhood Plan. Our community was honored to be selected for this prestigious plan funded by the State of Connecticut and a private foundation. In Shelton we are all working toward a common goal - we all want what is best for our children to succeed in school and life. Mark Lauretti, Mayor, City of Shelton.” I hope that we listen to the substance of what the Mayor had to say, not his actions. Thank you very much.
Arlene Liscinsky, 54 Country Ridge Drive

I’m here, obviously, I’m Finance Chairman for the Finance Committee of the Board of Education. I’m a Board of Education member. I’m certainly here to support the budget that we voted on. I think it’s my responsibility and due diligence. I’m also a business owner. I’m also closing in on being a senior citizen, fightingly so. Also, I’m a parent of two children who have passed through the school system, from Kindergarten through Shelton High. I’ve very proud of the education they have both received and I’ll talk a little bit about that in my comments. I’m certainly here to support the budget proposal of $66,535,340.

I recognize the people in this community have fallen on hard times and I certainly understand the Mayor has his own rationale to keeping a zero percent budget. I don’t agree with it, but it has been mentioned numerous times that we have to do more with less, both by our Superintendent of Schools and the Mayor. The Mayor also mentioned there would be no City layoffs and I’m going to quote him in his budget back in February that says, “This budget proposal will not cause layoffs or reduce programs or ask for any furloughs.” However, I do believe he fails to realize that teachers are also City employees.

The Board of Education budget has been held to a zero percent for two years now. We have been at the state level for funding for the last three, yet we’ve had the same increases in contractual wage increases, energy increases, health insurance increases that the City has had. The difference is the Mayor has [inaudible] the budget, which has grown approximately three percent in the last two years, yet not allowed the Board of Education to address it within their own same budget. The Board also has been the driving force in getting the City to keep health insurance and energy costs to a minimum, and we have worked quite well, cooperatively with the City and we thank you for that. We have looked at our five-year history of expenses and we have reallocated funds to accurately reflect those expenses. This was all done during our budget workshops. Again, as Finance Chairman I welcome any and all to come to our meetings. They’re once a month and they’re posted on the website.

We have changed our hours of operation, we have reduced staff both certified and non-certified, we have bid energy generation services, we have negotiated excellent staff contracts with increased co-sharing of health costs each time. We’ve reduced programs; we’ve asked staff to be more creative in managing the cost centers. We’ve applied technology to be more efficient in matching costs. Every time I’m up here I do thank you John, we’ve sat together on the Technology Committee for the last six years or thereabouts. Through your efforts and the Committee’s efforts we’ve infused $2.5 million worth of technology in this school district. I know when I was PTA Council President, that’s when it all started, with the Wide Area Network and looking forward.
We’ve also applied technology to be more efficient in managing our costs, including our bus routes, thereby saving dollars in our transportation costs. We have collaborated with City building committees for more efficient planning and these are just very few of the many initiatives we have done to be more cost effective and to save the tax dollars, the alternate dollars. To add to all of this, we have dealt with unfunded mandates, spiraling special education funding and reduced reimbursements from the State and Federal governments. As a result, we have never managed to let the reduction of dollars impact our students. Over the years I’ve stood before you not only as a Board of Education member, a PTA leader but most importantly a parent of two children who have received an excellent education. I’ve seen wonderful strides in curriculum as addition offerings at the High School. Technology in our classrooms, maintenance of our facilities, and again I thank the City because we have collaborated on boilers and roofs and all kinds of other projects and the City has been very helpful in us accomplishing those goals. We’ve have added tutors, guidance counselors, reading assistants - direct support to our children’s needs, and I’ve been here at this podium for the last 20 years at every budget hearing and John could attest to that because most of you have been here at the same time looking me right in the eye. I’ve lobbied John Papa, I’ve lobbied Ken Olin, and most recently Noreen McGorty.

The Board has done everything in there power to keep class sizes low. We have hired the best and the brightest and the Shelton school system has a dedicated staff, many of which I can say my daughters can remember with fondness and had a great impact on their choice of careers. My oldest daughter gradated from Boston University with a degree in Journalism, who now works for a fortune five hundred company in Boston and she can thank Mrs. Stellavato at the High School for planting that interest, she was member of the Gael Winds. My youngest, Erin, has a Math degree from Quinnipiac and will be graduating in two weeks with a Masters in Elementary Education. Unfortunately, her job prospects will be somewhat difficult. She [inaudible] many of the high school teachers that taught her math. I can think of Mrs. Halko, for instance, who is now retired, who is a phenomenal math teacher. In this fragile economy now more then ever, we cannot turn our backs on our students. Right now they’re only ones being asked to sacrifice.

As adults in this community we must remember, this is public education - an opportunity for all we are talking about. It is our obligation as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles to provide for the next generation. Education yes, is an investment in the future generation. Lets not take the self-serving attitude of the gentleman before us, of “how does it impact me?” We’re all in the community and I think Mr. Arena mentioned it also. We all live in the same community; we all share the same services. Let's help the next generation move forward. I would also like to ask that we all educate ourselves in the process and just don’t believe
all the political rhetoric. Pointing fingers and innuendo never accomplished anything. I want everyone to understand the Superintendent’s recommended budget already has $4 million in staff cuts, which the Board supported each one. Should we not get the money we need to continue the great strides we’ve made in our school system then everyone in the community, along with the Board of Aldermen, must take responsibility for not only the loss of roughly 148 jobs but dismantling of everything that we have done that has been great in the school system over the years.

The Board of Aldermen will take responsibility for not responding additional dollars and the community will take responsibility for voting the same individuals in who vote no every year in lieu of low taxes. Think of the impact that these cuts will have on the City of Shelton. How will our High School accreditation next November be affected? How will the value of our houses be affected? How will it impact businesses who want to move here and will their employees want to move here if you don’t fund education properly? Will we be able to attract the best and the brightest teachers in the future? Who wants to work for an employer who’s in constant turmoil? To those bargaining units in town, your members have to start having a voice at the table and continue to be a part of the solution - not just at negotiations. We’ve touched on that with the mitigation of the last budget. We met for many hours one Friday evening and I have to say it was a great exchange of thoughts and ideas and suggestions. Just as the general public e-mailed a slew of suggestions, some were doable some were not, many of them which we’re doing already. The bargaining units should also ask, what parity do they have with other city bargaining units? The nine members of the Board of Education and the Superintendent cannot do this alone. We need your support; the children of this community need your support. I appeal to all of the general public as adults, speak up for the children of this community as they can’t speak for themselves and please let’s all take part in their future. Thank you.

Paula Gill Lopez, 3 North Street

Since I’ve learned of the discrepancy between what the Mayor wants to give the Board of Education and what the Board of Education has requested, I’ve been educating myself about the numerous issues and opinions that have been passionately expressed in this budget year. I’ve spoken to Aldermen, Board of Education members, the Superintendent and various other elected officials. I’ve heard all kinds of things. But for the most part, regardless of the objection, it has become clear to me that every City official I’ve spoken to individually wants to do right by our children. They’re committed to providing Shelton students a good education. They differ, however, regarding how that should be done. I’ve heard again and again frustration with un-funded mandates, which legally must be funded and I’m sympathetic but as a professor in the Department of Graduate Psychology
in Special Education at Fairfield University, I know that these special education mandates have been around for 35 years.

They were first developed in 1975 by the federal government as Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act and now they’re IDEA. The problem is that the federal government is no longer providing adequate funding to the state for students with special needs. As a result, the state in turn is passing the bill to the city. I’ve heard people say that it’s not fair to the regular education students to spend such a large portion of the education budget on the special education students. If there is one thing I’ve learned in working in education, is that “fair” is not that every child gets the same thing. “Fair” is that every child gets what he or she needs to succeed appropriately in school. For some, fair is having a reading tutor and for others, fair is being able to participate in sports or drama or take AP courses. There’s a new federal mandate for the general education. In Connecticut it is called Scientific Research Based Interventions or SRBI. The SRBI initiative is going to radically change the way regular and special education is being conducted. SRBI is going to require a reallocation of services for all students. I believe there will eventually be a cost savings associated with this new mandate. But we have to implement it before any savings can be realized.

We are all in this together; there are numerous [inaudible] statistics on the YES to Education Shelton website that describe the negative outcome correlated with the decrease in educational services. Many who spoke tonight have described those outcomes that affect the entire community. Our new Superintendent has already saved over $1 million by renegotiating contracts with health insurance providers, legal counsel, and providing retirement incentives. It’s time for a good faith effort, just like Superintendent Burr said, “We really need to show good faith.” The Mayor’s fiscal conservatism has created a situation in Shelton unlike many other cities, where we have the money to augment the savings the Superintendent has realized in some of his recent negotiations. If we work together as a community to send a message to our state and federal elected officials to let them know that they need to compensate our city for the education mandates they impose, we can do that as a city. But in the meantime whether it’s through a mill increase or through the City’s surplus or through a combination of both or some other creative solution, I urge you to work together to find the funds to avoid devastating cuts that will impact our children’s and our community’s future. With that said God bless our children and God bless Shelton. Thank you.

Ray McCarthy, 50 Daybreak Lane

I’m a fifth grader at Long Hill School. I hate what’s going on now; it’s disappointing. I really don’t like that if the budget doesn’t get passed that after school activities might be stopped. It will be hard for a lot of kids to get into college. Also, if this
budget passes, many of the teachers will be laid off. I don't like that. I should be worrying more about this year than the next year and the next year. Thank you.

**Brittany Lampert, 42 Mustang Drive**

I’m an athlete on the volleyball, basketball, and softball team all year round. I can say that sports have changed me. Before I played sports I was timid, I really didn’t have something that I really love and I wanted to go after. I didn’t really have courage to do anything. I can say that if sports were taken away from me right now I don’t who I’d become. I don’t think I’d have passion to do anything and I don’t think I’d have courage.

When I go out onto a softball field, I know that maybe I will make mistakes - that’s fine, that’s life. But I know because of sports that when I make mistakes, I can do something that’s going to be better than that. I know that what I messed up on, the next thing that comes at me could be ten times better, and I learned that because of sports. My teammates wanted to say that they have pride and I have pride too. I love saying I’m a Gaelette. I love saying that I’m on a team despite the fact we might have 5-15 record sometimes. I mean, have you seen the Red Sox? Stan, he was there when I grew up in Shelton Little League, I don’t know if he remembers me but I remember him. I was there to support him when he got his plaque and everyone clapped and I hope he’s there to support me right now, because if I don’t have sports next year I’m not going to be the same kid who’s up at this podium right now. I wouldn’t have the courage to be up here right now if I didn’t play sports. I would be at home sleeping because it’s a little bit late and I’m tired and we have a game tomorrow but I’m here - because if you take sports away you’re taking away kids’ courage. You’re not taking away just fun and friendship and a good time you’re taking away what they can become. You’re taking away potential and you’re taking away what makes a person a great person.

Math, reading, history that’s great, that makes you a great smart person but when you’re trying to raise the family and you’re getting through life and you’re making first impressions with people, their not going to be like “well what did you get in high school, what were your grades?” They’re going to notice that you can talk to them, that you can make eye contact and you’re not intimidated by anybody. That’s what sports has taught me. I’m asking you, please don’t take away sports. No one on the sports teams are really here so I’ll say it. Just imagine all the sports teams, there were a lot of kids here and I’m just asking you to look at when you were a child, and see who you are if you didn’t have extra-curricular activities or sports, or music, or any of that because you might not be sitting up there. You might be at home with the people sleeping. You might not even be sitting with the people in here. I’m proud to say that I did have the courage to come here and I am up on this podium and I’m proud to say maybe one day although it might not be probable, maybe I’ll be sitting up there because I have the courage to do it and
that's from sports, not a textbook not a math test, nothing. It's because of sports and it's more then just a game because once you've entered that game it's your life. That's all I have to say.

[Alderman Anglace called for a recess at this point - 9:30 p.m.]

Joshua Kopec, 12 Deer Run Lane

I'd like to start by thanking everyone for spending just about all their night here. I know it's not easy. I thought an easy solution to the crisis here is that I'm going to take my shoe off and we are going to pass it around until it's full. All progress has resulted from people who took unpopular positions. Please keep this in mind as I speak. What does Shelton have? What do we show for education? Is it test scores? Is it successful people? In 1944 there was something passed called Education Acts which after World War II was designed to basically select which jobs would be popular in the future which were 80 percent manual at the time and 20 percent clerical. Only 50 years later it became 60 percent clerical and 40 percent manual. Now I know these budget cuts aren't easy in anyone's shoes. This isn't a problem that we want to face. There was a time before now where there wasn't public education. I know Abraham Lincoln was mentioned earlier. He was self educated. He did not have the opportunities we have. Now there's also the sports scene introduced to us. Sports is not a right, it's a privilege. Our main concern here is education. My mother is a paraprofessional for the Town of Fairfield. My sister is a teacher down in Tampa, Florida. Just to give you a brief background. Connecticut will be facing a $2 billion dollar deficit as of next year. I realize there are a lot of unfunded mandates by the state. It's not easy in anyone's shoes. Since 1960 the amount per pupil has tripled in spending. But has our education become three times better? Those who run the schools don't have a personal risk involved in them and don't have an incentive to cut costs. Why put in extra effort? We see with not only (inaudible) but with everything else that has gone on that this hasn't helped the citizens. I know there are many not in attendance tonight. Senior citizens for example downtown, Route 108 and also the Long Hill School area who can't come here to voice their concerns. Social security has deadlocked, it stayed the same and it will be staying the same as well. There is an interesting statistic here. We have spent $120 million dollars in Shelton over the past 12 years on new buildings. And that cost is not counted into the spending per pupil. Derby however, over the past 20 years, is just building a brand new school now. Now I ask you. Has our education gotten any better with these new schools? There are a few very popular people who dropped out of education. Education is very popular but it doesn't work for everyone. For example, Steve Jobs, who just had a 14 billion dollar quarter with Apple; Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook who is worth hundreds of millions
of dollars and also Ulysses S. Grant who actually failed out of Westpoint and was one of the most prestigious generals in United States history. Knowledge is everywhere and is in no way, shape or formed defined in the classroom. I just ask you, and I want to tell you, school has done quite good for me but you can’t base your life off of education. Most of your real world knowledge doesn’t come from a school.

Laura Marcinauskas, 172 Nells Rock Road

April 18, 2005 my house burned down while I was in the hospital with my youngest daughter Rebecca. We lost everything in the fire and it was our third hospital stay of (inaudible). She has a rare genetic disorder that in September 2007 she was the only documented case reported in the world. She is now five years old and currently in the preschool Special Education program at Sunnyside School. She will be going into kindergarten next year in a school that is yet to be determined as we are on the dividing line for the school redistricting possibility. My concern is not the current education for there are laws protecting her. My concern that there are no laws protecting my two other children’s education. What I am hearing from the mouth of the Superintendent when he is presenting the education budget to you that the reality of the mayor’s present budget proposal not only will close Lafayette but now a larger school. That’s wrong. This will directly affect classroom size with closer to 30 children in each classroom. What concerns me more is the fact that the Superintendent also stated we are moving all paraprofessionals from the classroom. So not only are you going to have significantly larger classroom size but these special needs children will be in the same classroom without the necessary people in place to direct them. The direct negative impact of that scenario if you choose not to change anything of the current budget proposal has me afraid of the quality of instruction of my children’s education. We rebuilt our home on Nells Rock and thus we paid significantly more amount of money to the City of Shelton as a result of this new construction. I am willing to pay more if I knew that the budget change would go directly to my children’s education. Thank you.

Laura Treonze, 25 Dartmouth Drive

One of the things I find most intriguing about these meetings is that the energy in this room is so high. And I think what is disheartening about it is that this energy is created out of fear instead of out of inspiration. So all of these citizens come here to these meetings instead of the many other meetings that happen through the year because they are fearful of the loss. And that fear of loss is based on misinformation. Because it’s not as easy to get information as you might think. As a relatively new citizen in Shelton. I have only been here seven years. I’ve attempted to participate on a number of
different levels at various times and it’s not that easy. So I say to you as the board, and to you as the citizens, it’s really time to participate and that participation comes through inspiration. Right now we are faced with budget issues that will impact our educational system. The gentlemen who said that he doesn’t want to pay for children to go to school because he doesn’t have children. Well, this is a community issue. It’s an issue about trust, an issue about communication and an issue about funding and that is a direct result of a lack of participation and a lack of knowledge. I think as a community we need to decide that we are tired of doing things because it’s mandated. We want to do things because we can be great. We can be part of a list of communities that are affordable to live in, or we could be part of a list of communities that are great to live in. When we talk about the impact of education it impacts our property values more than you may know. I mention this every time I speak because I think there is a lack of education about this. I am a realtor. I service everywhere from New Haven to Stamford. The first question I am asked and with the buyer frenzy going on right now with the tax credit every single buyer I meet says, ‘what is the educational system like?’ They don’t ask me how much the mill rate is. They don’t ask me what the assessment value is or the percentage because they don’t understand it. They ask me what me what their education system is like. When we compare Shelton to Monroe and Trumbull which are the three most popular towns for people to look in, Shelton is chosen last because of the perception of our educational system. We will make that perception a reality if we do not fund education. This year I think the answer has to be funding. Long term you can throw money at this. It is a major issue of trust and that trust can only be changed by inspiring community members to participate. Thank you.

**Brittany (inaudible)**

I stand here before you today as a student athlete at Shelton High School. As a little kid I had dreams about becoming a soccer superstar and to get a scholarship at a college of my choice. When I learned that my school might possibly be unaccredited it was devastating. Not only would our sports programs be cut but our teachers and counselors who we rely deeply on every day. My counselor is my life support at the high school and a person I can rely on to go to whether I have a problem or help to fill out my college applications. I know my next two years of high school will be planned and I know I can walk into Shelton High School as a confident student. When I also heard that teachers would be cut, many of them who got me where I am today it was heartbreaking. As a straight A student at Shelton High I wake up every morning knowing I could achieve my goals with teachers like this. Cutting things such as sports (inaudible). Counselors and teachers are the reasons why we can hold our heads high. Without all this how am I to go
around saying I am proud to be a Shelton High athlete. As my AP teacher would say, never shy from mediocrity but be the best you can be, but how am I to accomplish this is you make all these cuts to our school system? Tonight I am asking you to approve the Board of Education budget and say ‘YES’ to education. Thank you.

Maggie McDonald, 7 Tulip Lane

I am currently a sophomore at Shelton High School and the regional center of the arts. As a theater student, you have to have motivation. You have to build motivation for your character. You have to memorize your lines. You have to make an effect on people. Now what’s my motivation for getting up at 5 in the morning and getting the bus at 6. My motivation is to do well in school so I can continue to be a theater student. Without my guidance counselor, she has made such an impact on me. She helps me balance my schedule. She tells me what I can do to manage my time. I get home at 5 o clock every day Monday through Thursday. And I’m doing what I love. I don’t mind it. I take care of my school work and I take care of my theater work. I come home, I do my homework and I memorize my lines. And that’s all I want to do. I want to memorize lines and pursue my dream. Now I think that funding education in Shelton would be awesome. I think that’s the first priority right now. As a community we support each other and we’re supposed to support each other. Back in the 50s if you needed a cup of sugar you’d go to your number. Everybody helps each other, that’s what a community is for. We need money to help each other and fund each other’s dreams. I am not going to be able to become an actress and pursue what I want unless you fund this because they might cut our participation in RCA because they don’t have enough money. Cutting clubs like GSA, cutting electives and sports that also limits expressing ourselves. Now I sat in Ms. Polack’s office last week and we were discussing my schedule. What happened was that I’d been called in because one of my electives had been cut. We had been interrupted a couple of times because other electives had been cut and my choices were very limited. It actually broke my heart to see that all my theater classes had been eliminated. I had signed up for (inaudible) and now it’s gone. I was actually really looking forward to this class and I have no chance of taking it now. But I will fill that in with something else. Hopefully that won’t get cut. Classes are going to become even smaller and attention isn’t going to be given to people who need it. The teachers deserve their jobs. They work hard every day to make an impression on us and help us do our best. We need them. And, so what I’m trying to say. We definitely need to fund it. When you first meet someone, the best thing to do, the polite thing to do is to make eye contact and listen. Make an impression. Now, the best thing to do for Shelton is to fund education. Make that impression on everybody. Thank you.
Israel Feliciano, 10 Princess Wenonah Drive

Two brief things I wanted to mention. First thing is the most important factor I think affecting the performance and quality of education is the student-teacher ratio. That’s the single most important factor that we need to keep an eye on. If you tinker with that, one or the other, it’s going to have an impact on education on way or the other. To increase the student-teacher ratio has zero impact on the quality of education on the test scores of my children, etc., etc. To decrease it has a different effect. It increases the quality of education. Everything else is secondary. The single most important factor is student-teacher ratio. You close some of our schools, you fire some of the teachers, you cut down the paraprofessionals it’s going to have a direct impact on our quality of education. Our superintendent spoke here briefly about the trends in our educational scores. He said in the past few years our scores have increased. If you close our schools down the trend will reverse. That’s a negative outcome. You can bank on that. I can guarantee that. Now, the other factors are the psyche of our children (inaudible). Do we care? That’s the question we are asking you. I am trying to answer the question here as well. We, the family of children that go to Shelton Public Schools are invested in providing them the best quality of life that we possibly can. They are our most important asset. Their life is worth much more than mine. To see them in terms of numbers, like our Mayor has referred to them, is offensive. To read what I keep reading in the papers about the partisan bickering. It’s offensive. Shameful. You have been entrusted to carry out the needs of those who elected you to this position. What I’m seeing is a betrayal of that trust. I think you elected officials need to start approaching the role that you have been entrusted with a little more reverence, dignity, responsibility, and humility. I’m seeing too much arrogance. Too much partisanship. It’s embarrassing. I know it’s going to cost money. There’s no question about that but if you neglect to look at the most important issue here, the student-teacher ratio, shame on you.

Brandon Van-Akin, Village Drive

I go to Elizabeth Shelton School. I am also an athlete. I do baseball, lacrosse, football. I am part of Troop 27 and I’ve had like a really big humungous impact once I started sports. I’ve been more confident. I love sports so much that if I didn’t have sports I would be nothing. If I didn’t have sports I would go home and cry that’s how much I care about them. I also have a problem with reading. And I’ve had a reading teacher since I’ve been about in fourth grade and now I’m in fifth grade. They help me a lot and if they wouldn’t be there to help me I don’t know if I could get any better at reading and also one of my friends wanted to be here to also say that one
of his teachers has also helped him too. So, he wasn’t able to make it here tonight. He wanted to say that. Thank you.

Sean Zel, 15 Buttercup Lane

I am a senior at Shelton High School. I am also ranked first in my class. I’m here to speak to you about something I know a lot about which is the (inaudible) experience of school. I know a lot about the college application process and how competitive it is. Being first in my class you can imagine what my grades and test scores must be like but they are scoring grades that are matched or beaten by hundreds and thousands of other students across the nation let alone around the world. With my grades and scores and my list of extracurricular activities which include marching band, percussion, track and (inaudible). I was still rejected or wait-listed at eight of the ten colleges I applied to. I’m not trying to crush anyone’s dreams, I’m just speaking the truth. Colleges are getting more competitive and to get into college some students must have extracurriculars. On a more positive note I’d like to express my gratitude for the opportunities given to me by Shelton’s extracurriculars and hope that others after me may be offered the same opportunities. I’ve experienced the (inaudible), the satisfaction of cleaning the school grounds and the thrill of being a contestant of the Mr. Student Body talent show competition. It is through activities like these that I have forged my friendships and become the person I am today. Because of this my high school experience will always be one I remember fondly. To eliminate these activities is unfair to all Shelton students and in my opinion, not an option. Thank you.

Rebecca Graham, 20 Rugby Road

I am a member of the Shelton High School Softball team and just so you guys know we did defeat the number one team the other day. But my main objective up here is to tell you that softball for me wasn’t just a day out in the field. It started by me getting recommended by one of the coaches that I go out and play softball. And it has changed my perspective. I am no longer sitting at home. I have a 3.1 GPA and I am in numerous clubs, GSA, Renaissance Club, S Buddies. Another thing that is on the table for discussion are electives. I took an elective class last semester and I met Ms. Joan Shaw who is one of the special education teachers and with her help I have realized that I’d like to work with special education students and work in that field. If you take away electives, art and sports, then you take away a student’s (inaudible).
Benvinda Lucas, 24 Brookfield Drive

I am a parent of two children in the Shelton school system; I have one son at the Shelton High School and another at Mohegan School, and have always been proud to say that my children are in the Shelton school system. I was blessed with one healthy child and one special needs child, so I am here tonight representing both sides of the spectrum. Both my children are equally important to me; however society can be cruel and unfair. In society most schools and sports programs will always recruit the best scholars and best athletes to attend their schools. Teachers and coaches are always proudly speaking of their best students. I think it’s easy to teach the best and brightest; however it takes a special person to teach special needs children. I was taught by my parents that school begins at home, so when I became a parent I started teaching my children how to get ready for school, how to say no to danger and yes to education. It was easy to teach my healthy child and he has remained on that path; however when it came to teaching my special needs child I felt powerless, I couldn’t help my child. He was born with many symptoms of autism and diagnosed with Bardet-Biedl syndrome at the age of 2, at age 3 he started Shelton Ripton School. That year I became aware of what Shelton schools could do for my children and me, even though I already had my oldest son in school, it was not until my special needs son that I had not been able to educate at home on something as simple as right from wrong that I realized the power of the teachers, tutors and aids that work with the special needs children. When Ripton School closed and I was told that my son was going to be mainstreamed I was skeptical and afraid but once again Shelton schools proved that my son was safe and was going to get an education. Shelton schools have given me the most priceless gift a parent could ask for and that it “Piece of Mind” and “Trust”. My son was placed in the care of some of the most wonderful people I have ever met that would teach, guide and care for him. The gratification I feel towards the special education in Shelton is something that can’t be put into words. I urge you not to take that gift from these children and their parents don’t sacrifice the special education, these children need their teachers, tutors and aids, they need their summer school programs, for a special needs child school is not just a place where they go 5 days a week. It is a critical and essential necessary for them to function in our society that can still be so unfair for these children. I could have prepared a speech for my oldest son to deliver as many of his peers from the High School did, however I felt it was more important to speak for the special needs children who are not able to do that for themselves. In closing, I heard phenomenal speeches from the high school students at the board of Education meeting held March 24th 2010, I was proud to have my children be a part of same school system where so many students spoke so highly and proudly of their education, sports and school programs. The
students work so hard Shelton cannot afford to shake the foundation that builds their self esteem, confidence and pride that shapes them into young adults that will soon be in charge of our future. If we go forward with these cuts we are demonstrating to our children that when in trouble it is ok to sacrifice the education, when we should be teaching them that a good education is what they need to avoid making the same mistakes in the future that have put us in this situation. Please help preserve and improve the Shelton education to help our children become bright confident adults. The man who spoke earlier about not increasing taxes is a good example of what lack of education can do.

Al Cameron, 307 Meadowridge Road, Finance Director, Board of Education

Good evening President Anglance and members of the Board of Aldermen. Thank you for holding this meeting in an accessible place and thank you for your support in the past, support which has helped build the quality school system we have been talking about tonight. The system we have, the system we are all proud of, is the result of all of us working together, the BOE, the Boards of A&T and Aldermen and the Mayor. It is important to remember, without all of us working together we would not have what we have now. In these difficult economic times, in a few days, you will be faced with a difficult choice; accept the Mayor's recommended budget or fund the Board of Education's request. I am going to offer reasons to fund the Board of Education's request. Let me cut to the chase; in spite of the granite countertops and what we read in the newspapers, the Board of Education has been good stewards of the taxpayer’s funds. Here is the bottom line: our mission is to educate Shelton’s children and year after year we get the job done. Shelton students perform better than average on standardized tests with less than average funding. Consistently achieving these above average results with less than average input demonstrates that the BOE is doing something right and is deserving of your support. A little history: After salaries, the next largest expenditure at the BOE is for Health Insurance. To avoid duplication of effort, the Human Resources Department at City Hall administers the BOE Health Insurance program. But because the dollars involved are so large, I would like to remind you of some the actions the BOE has taken to minimize health insurance costs: 1. Negotiated employee cost sharing into all contracts. 2. To combat excessive renewal costs the BOE hired an independent insurance consultant to evaluate our renewals and broker of record. Based on the consultants recommendation, the City and Board of Education: a. Went out to bid for broker of record services and saved hundreds of thousands of dollars. b. Went out to bid for health insurance and saved millions of dollars. 3. This year, when the renewal came in at 17.6%, we asked the City to go out to bid again; it looks like the Board of Education will save approximately $720,000, the City $300,000. Over
$1,000,000 next year! 4. The employee cost sharing referred to earlier, will result in a cost savings of $1.2MM, almost 2% of the BOE budget next year. That is $1.2MM that, because the cost is being paid by the employees, we are not asking you or the taxpayers for tonight.

After Benefits, the next largest expenditure we can control is Student Transportation. Although we are located in high cost Fairfield County, have one of the largest communities in the state in terms of road miles and because of our lack of sidewalks we have very few walkers, we still spend $91 less per pupil for transportation than the state average.

1. Three years ago the Board of Education hired a well established transportation consultant to assess the efficiency of our transportation operation; he made two major recommendations:
   1. The City should own its own bus yard – he projected savings of $100,000 per year. Working with the City, we developed our own bus yard on Riverdale Ave., next to the Waste Water Treatment Plant, and we are saving $100,000 per year.
   2. He recommended that we hire a part time assistant to help us use our bus routing software more effectively; we did, and as a result our runs are more efficient and the number of complaints at the start of the school year fell dramatically. Finally, after Benefits and Transportation we come to Energy:

1. The BOE was a charter member of the Strategic Energy Consortium, putting the BOE and City in a very good position when electricity was deregulated. Working with the City, in a committee appointed by the BOA, on the Consortium’s second round of bids we were able to take advantage of dramatically lower generation costs, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars.
2. Taking advantage of grants from U.I., the BOE completed energy conservation and lighting projects at SHS that are saving $140,000 per year.
3. The BOE wrote the initial specification for the performance contractor that the Public Improvement Building Committee is evaluating; a project that may introduce many leading edge energy saving technologies into BOE and City buildings.
4. Finally, using a little commonsense, (no hardware or software!) we changed the hours of operation of our buildings and improved our energy management practices; as a result we used 14% less fuel oil last year and 19% less this year than the average for the previous three years.

While this list is not exhaustive, I selected these examples to expand on what Alderman Anglace said at the first budget workshop; the BOE and the City DO work together. I also wanted to emphasize that the Board of Education has, in many ways, been good stewards of the taxpayer’s funds, taking the leadership role and being a willing partner in
initiatives that have resulted in millions of dollars in savings for both the City and Board of Education. Since submitting our original budget request, the City and Board of Education went out to bid for Health Insurance. It appears that the new rates, with the new carrier, offer a potential savings of $720,000 for the Board of Education. With the early retirement agreement we have reached with our teachers, there is the possibility of a $300,000 savings, so to “fully fund” the BOE request may require $2.5MM, not the $3.5MM originally requested. We are told that the Shelton BOE is one of the largest employers in the Valley. I would like to be sure that everyone understands that even if the Board of Education’s request is fully funded, i.e. if $2.5MM is found, 112 people, employees of the City of Shelton, BOE will lose their jobs. If you choose to support Mayor’s recommended budget. Shelton taxpayers will continue to enjoy low taxes. In this scenario, instead of losing 15% of our workforce the effect will be much worse; we will send the system back to where it was twenty years ago, eliminating or substantially reducing many of the programs that you and the BOE have worked so diligently, for so long, to put in place. While we would be reducing staff to achieve the necessary savings, we would be adding unemployment expense at an accelerating rate. In total, unemployment expense would exceed $1.7MM! As citizens, we will pay for the no tax increase option, just in a more subtle way. The resale values of our homes, for most of us our primary asset, will fall by thousands if not tens of thousands of dollars. You may choose to fully fund the Board of Education request. If it becomes $2.5MM, that may mean a half mil tax increase, a modest increase that will cost a typical homeowner a little less than $20.00 per month. At 19.11 mils Shelton’s taxes would still be the lowest of all of the surrounding towns except Fairfield, whose rate is 18.9, two tenths of a mil lower. A survey of surrounding towns shows that Newtown’s tax rate is 23.43 mils, 20.5% higher than ours, Trumbull’s is 24.07 and Monroe’s is 29.5. Even in these economically challenging times, with a one half mil tax increase Shelton will still have very low taxes and it will continue to be a great value for Shelton residents. If you choose to fund the BOE budget, you will be choosing to support programs and initiatives that you have supported in the past; programs that have proven to be effective and have broad support within the community. You will be choosing to support a Board of Education that has been selected by the State Department of Education to participate in the Lighthouse Project, a two year long initiative, provided by the state at no cost to the Board, designed to improve student performance through more effective leadership. You will be choosing to support a new Superintendent who has undertaken a dramatic reorganization that promises to improve efficiency, control costs, and improve student achievement. In short, you will be choosing to invest in a good school system that wants to be a great system, that has a plan to get there and is working hard to make it happen. You will
be choosing to invest in our community and its future. I ask each of you to make that choice. Thank you.

Remy Caserik, 15 Partridge Lane

I am the proud mom of three boys attending grammar, middle and high school. Here’s a fact based on 2006-2007 data found online on the Connecticut State Department of Education. Shelton ranked 131 out of 166 in Connecticut municipalities in spending per pupil. I am sure that figure has gotten worse in the last three years since the figures were presented. That’s the bottom 20 percent. Eighty percent of municipalities spend more per child on education than we do here in Shelton. Perhaps that makes this year’s zero percent increase offered by the mayor particularly tough on our kids, on our future. But this year, and some members of the A&T board, including Chairman Holden, are shamelessly blaming their decision not to better fund education this year on the economy and the fact that there are Shelton families struggling to stay in their homes. This is a sad fact indeed but should not be exploited as the reasons for shorting on education for our kids. Especially since the zero percent increase is not something new here in Shelton. What were the excuses in the past? I would rather the potholes go unrepaired or city grounds go unmowed more than they do already than short our kids on education. We only get one chance to do this right for these particular kids. Just one chance. Yes there will always be new kids coming along and new generations but what about these kids. Using reasoning by the mayor and some members of the Board of A&T one could argue that those two facts are tied to one another, the ailing economy and not funding education properly, then education should be lower, education should be reduced until no one in Shelton struggles. It is sad that families are on the brink of losing their home but I would argue that it is no less sad that a high school kid that studied four hours a night, follows the rules, is a good citizen will potentially graduate from an unaccredited high school and find his higher education choices severely limited. Or that kid looking for a track scholarship as a means to better himself with a college education who may be coming from a struggling Shelton family himself. We’ll have no track program for which to launch his very admirable goal. Poorly funding education is a short-sighted approach to the economic conditions. Who will want to move to Shelton and raise a family if the schools are substandard? What will the lack of families or young professionals who have families moving to Shelton do to the property values? Board of Aldermen, I implore you to do the right thing. Use the power you have to right this sinking ship to support the schools. Amend the mayor’s budget to properly fund education and stand firm during his likely veto. Stand firm and override his veto. Not because it will be easy but because it is the right thing to do. Who knows? Maybe your honorable action will energize parents to help get you elected
to another aldermanic term next election? I think that moms and dads protecting their child’s future can be a formidable and hardworking force. The wounds inflicted by what will surely happen if a budget stands as it is will run deep and will not soon be forgotten. Thank you.

John Pawlowski, 21 Jonathan Lane

Thank you Board of Aldermen for allowing me to speak. I am third generation Shelton resident. My mother was born and raised here. She graduated from Shelton schools and taught at Elizabeth Shelton for over 30 years. I also attended Shelton Public Schools. My education at Shelton High School prepared me to attend University of Connecticut where I earned an engineering degree and an MBA. When I was in high school I was also a member of the basketball team. Playing sports in high school a lot of kids learn team skills, learn discipline, learn how to manage time effectively and develop many lasting friendships. If things like sports, band or drama are cut the students will miss the opportunity to develop critical life skills which will prepare them for college or the job after they graduate. In the current work environment, many of the projects are done in teams and having the ability to play on a team I learned the necessary team skills to use in the work environment. I am very concerned about the immediate and long term effects of the zero percent increase on the Board of Education budget proposed for this year. I currently have a son in eighth grade at Shelton Intermediate School who is planning on attending Shelton High School. My wife and I reviewed the curriculum at Shelton High School and were thrilled that they offered 13 UConn accredited courses and more than 15 AP courses at Shelton High School. When I attended Shelton High School there were only two AP courses. So we’ve come a long way with this education program. Some of the programs may be cut and some of the staff who teach these courses will be eliminated. From what I understand the high school may also lose its accreditation. That would jeopardize our students’ opportunity to be accepted at four year colleges and universities. It would also adversely affect the property values in Shelton if Shelton High School isn’t accredited because people aren’t going to want to move here. My daughter will also be attending the new 5/6 Grade Perry Hill School next year. If the current zero percent increase is passed they will not have adequate staff, 24 teachers and their class size will increase significantly. How can you open a new school and not staff it appropriately? From what I understand the class size will grow between 26 and 31 kids and there will also be minimal support for the special education students. That’s certainly a problem. If we keep increasing our class sizes we are going to reduce the quality of education and test scores will go down. I know that the State of Connecticut mandates special education spending and the costs for Special Education has increased significantly while the amount reimbursed
by the state has gone down significantly. Currently Shelton spends, from what I understand from Board of Education meetings, in the $5 million range for Special Education and the state of Connecticut certainly has mandated program in place for each special education child who needs to receive an education. However, the state used to fund a larger portion of these costs and from what I understand currently they are funding 1.2 million and they are going to cut that down to $750,000 this year. So again, we have mandated costs that we have to make up at the expense of the other students. The Board of Education has proposed several changes to reduce costs. From what I heard tonight they are going to reduce another million dollars in costs. However, the can only go so far. The current scenario is to lay off over 90 teachers which will have a huge impact on our school system and kids ability to learn. The kids will lose several valuable programs and the class sizes will increase significantly. This is counter productive. I did a little research online and I looked at the Town of Trumbull, which is comparable in terms of tax base. They just passed a 1.4 percent budget increase which included a $750,000 increase over last years Board of Education budget. And at last year’s budget they approved a 3.5 percent increase. However, this is at a time when Trumbull had a 3.5 million dollar deficit. Shelton expenditures per student are significantly lower than Trumbull’s. Yet Shelton has comparable tax base and industry base. The key point I want to get across is that if Shelton wants to be viewed in the same category as other towns such as Trumbull and other Fairfield County towns we need to adequately fund education. A good educational system is directly proportional to the real estate values in town. If a particular town has a quality educational system more people will desire to live here. People move to certain towns because of the quality of the education system versus paying for expensive schools. And I see this happening all the time at work. People always ask me what quality education we have in Shelton. I said, ‘it’s excellent but certainly zero percent increase isn’t going to help that.’ Since Shelton has one of the lowest mill rates in the area and one of the best tax bases we can afford to provide an increase in the educational budget. I am asking the Board of Aldermen tonight to fully fund the Board of Education request of 2.5 million dollars. Thank you very much.

Robert Mooney, 32 Vista Drive

About three hours ago I came here from Shelton’s Track Meet against Lyman Hall. We beat them 3-0 and you know what that tells them? That Shelton is here to compete. During my run I had this evening on my mind the whole time. My race was two miles. It was a very hard and long race. Just like the budget. It has been long and very challenging but I feel this town can beat the battle just as we beat Lyman Hall today. Today I did not win my race yet I am not discouraged. I know I am going to be working very
hard in the near future. And it is up to you to give me that second chance to do that race again in my next coming years. This sport has brought me friends, knowledge, strength and respect. I respect this town. I respect everyone in this room and that was here. Track might not seem like a team sport, but it is. This town is a team as well and we need to work together. This town has taught me a lot also. The Shelton Education is responsible for my knowledge. I'm not going to brag but I do know a lot. Not just from school but from teachers like Ms. Lauretti, who is my history teacher, and I'm pretty sure I'm getting a good grade, my friends, my counselor, my family and this all happens right here in Shelton. I plan on having a very successful future. But do you plan on me having a successful future? Do you plan on anyone that was here having a successful future if you go through with all those cuts with what is proposed? I don’t think it’s very fair to the students in Shelton now and that will be in Shelton in the near future to do this to our town and our community and to everyone that is involved. This is a great opportunity to show this town that even though we are hurt, we are not dead. We are not down for the count. We can rise again and fight until the end because I know that’s exactly what I’m going to do. I know that’s exactly what everyone here is going to do but what are you going to do? Thank you.

Mandy Blakeslee, 154 Village Drive

Can you guess why I am here tonight? I am here to support education in Shelton. I have four children, a kindergartener, a second grader and a fourth grader at Elizabeth Shelton and a two year old at home who will actually be in school. I grew in Shelton. I feel I had a great education in Shelton. My husband didn’t grow up in Shelton and when it came time to decide where we were going to live, as far as he was concerned Shelton is a nice town but just as good as any other town around, Orange, Beach Falls, Bethany, take your pick. Part of the reason why I want to live in Shelton is my experience growing up in Shelton and it wasn’t the quality of the roads that made me move here, it wasn’t the amount of open space, it certainly wasn’t a revitalized downtown because we still have old factories down there, it was mostly my experience in the school system. From a child’s perspective your experience growing up is what your experiencing in school. I can tell you that I had a lot of great teachers, dedicated teachers, teachers that probably weren’t making a decent salary then but they were always there and always teaching us things and encouraging us. People like to say a lot that throwing money at a problem isn’t going to solve it. You can’t make education better by throwing more money at it but I have to say in return that nothing gets better by taking money away from it. Nothing is going to get better if you cut the funding for it. If you pass the mayor’s budget as it was given to you, what you are going to do is force the schools to cut staff. If you look at the numbers you can see that it is going to be hard to do what
they need to do without cutting staff which is going to involve increased class size. From what I’ve particularly heard from my own school where my children go, I heard there are about 10 positions to be cut there, four classroom teachers, gym teachers, Special Education teachers, librarians and psychologists, guidance counselor. The results of that I don’t even want to think about what they are. Increase the class sizes and take away every person whose there that helps them if they aren’t doing well in class. Moving on as far as the town side of things. I’m a little tired of hearing about how great our low tax rate is in Shelton. I hear it from all sorts of directions, from the mayor to this person, that person, elected officials. The problem is, you can say you have a low tax rate and that’s all well and good but it’s a meaningless number. It’s a meaningless number if it’s not paying for, if it’s not bringing in revenue that’s paying for the needed city services. As far as I can see, if you keep the mill rate the way it is, it’s not going to pay for needed city services. The mill rate should reflect the cost of providing those city services and it doesn’t. So honestly, I’d really just like to ask you, “just please raise my taxes.” I don’t have a lot of money but I have to tell you, I’m probably middle of the road middle class, I’m not going on expensive vacations every year. We are getting by, we are pretty happy with the way we are but if you are going to raise my taxes by half of mil and it’s only going to be a couple hundreds dollars, I can find that money, I could cut out coffee, you don’t go out to movies, you don’t go out to dinner which we weren’t doing those things anyway but I can find a couple hundred dollars a year. I really could and I think there are a lot of people in town who can. And I absolutely would support any programs that support seniors who are on a fixed income who can’t because I also know seniors who can’t afford it too. Another thing I hear a lot about is unfounded state mandates. Ya know, I don’t think it’s fair either. It’s a shame that the state passes laws and you have to follow them but the problem is that it still doesn’t change the fact that it’s the town who is responsible for it. You can not like it all you want but the town is still responsible for paying for education. That’s just the way it is. And not liking it doesn’t help things and say you aren’t going to give the money for it because it doesn’t change anything. And basically if the state decides to give you more money for education, they are going to give that by raising my taxes, my state taxes, so either way I am paying for it because the taxes that you are distributing are my taxes from the town and if the state is going to give you more money then they are going to take more money from me for state taxes. So either way it’s my money that’s paying for it. Another thing I want to address is that people, a number of people have said, if we don’t have children in the school system then why should they pay for it. The way it’s works is that it is the responsibility of society to educate it’s children. Any two parents you can find, we don’t have the complete knowledge to educate our children in everything they need to know to grow up to be responsible citizens and that’s why we send our children to
school. There are a lot of things in town that I don’t actually use but I am paying for with my tax dollars. I hear we are going to have a dog park probably and community gardens and I think those are great ideas for people who need them but I am not going to need them. I have enough places to walk a dog if I decide to get a dog and I have enough area to put a garden in if I want to. I don’t begrudge these people for wanting them or having them but I also think there is a time and place to do things and if we are in such a severe budget shortage then maybe now is not the right time. I’ve also heard some talk from various people about the salaries that the teachers are getting. Apparently they are all getting these exorbitant salaries and I’d like to say I think they deserve every penny that they get. Personally I don’t want to live in a town where we can see how low we can keep teacher’s salaries. I think there’s a thing called professional standards and in any job you are looking for whatever your career is, if you are qualified for a job you aren’t going to go out and take a job that pays less than what is considered a professional standard or the going rate. So I hope we are paying teachers in this town what the going rate is at least, and if not more, because I’d like to know that we get the best teachers, not just the teachers that ‘okay’ just passing classes maybe. I want the best teachers for my kids. I think also as far as budgets are concerned you can’t just go by saying, “time for bad news - cut things all around.” I think you need to make priorities. People in their budgets at home make priorities. As I said, if times are tough you might not go out to eat, you might cut down entertainment. As far as the City goes, what I expect is to have good Police protection, I expect the Fire Department to have adequate supplies for themselves to protect our homes, and I expect that education is going to be right up there as one of the top priorities, and that the schools are adequately funded and we’re not going to cut down on our teachers and our class sizes. Thank you for your time.

Elizabeth Olson-Condo, 106 Chamberlain Drive

The education of the children in the town in which you live is the responsibility of the people who live in the town. The gentleman is welcome to move. As representatives of the people of your ward, decisions that you make should reflect the people, not any political party or any personal agenda, but the people. The people are here tonight saying that they would like you to fund the education of our children. I continue to be deeply concerned about Shelton’s future. As you’ve heard, families are looking for a town that will provide the best education for their children. If the funding for education does not go through, families will not move here. I work in Trumbull, [inaudible] in Trumbull. People choose Trumbull because their education is valued. Their education budget way surpasses that of Shelton. I am concerned about our current class sizes. People in Trumbull are concerned that their class sizes are going from 19 to 24. My daughter has been in the 24 class size since Kindergarten. It’s going to get worse. I can’t image where you’d put any more chairs, any more desks. There is no more room
for coats or backpacks let alone the children. The air quality in the room is already suffering because they have those little windows that can open.

I attended your meeting last week. It was an eye opener. I wasn’t aware of how many departments we have in Shelton and what we do. I thank you for that educational experience. I’m also surprised about how much money is assigned to various departments and groups that don’t use it. I don’t mean the Girl Scouts, but I mean the ones who have $20,000 or more and they don’t use the money but it’s funded again. So I’m going to look for some clarification on that. As well as, there was a group that didn’t use the money they were funded, but they were allotted an extra $100,000 – and you did ask for clarification on that. I would like to know if that was found out. One item in the budget was the increase in pay for some City employees. I was a little surprised that they were approved – I haven’t been able to give my staff a salary increase in two years because of the economic condition. I was told that it was contractual obligations, and I understand that. But we have contractual obligations to our Board of Education and our teachers. As was said earlier, they are actually City employees as well. I feel that they, too should be approved for their increase with the same conviction and loyalty that I witnessed last week amongst you all. Thank you Alderman Finn for your diligence in reviewing the budget. That was your job on the Board to do all of that. It appears to me that there is a lot of money in the budget that we can allocate to our Board of Education. And if we can’t, like was said before, then we need to increase the taxes. It has to be funded. Who ever heard of no increases? No business that can go by with no increase. If the town of Shelton can’t afford to pay what it needs to pay to get these going, it’s time to raise the taxes and make it go. I love our tax mill rate; it’s fantastic. But it’s not realistic if we can’t afford to pay what we need to pay for. I’m encouraged that I heard last week that you’re having a meeting with your board, the Superintendent of Shelton Schools and the Board of Education Finance people on the 6th. My expectation is all political, all personal agendas put aside and you get to meet like real people in the real world and keep Shelton a valuable option for current families as well as the people who are looking to move somewhere. There are families talking about putting their children into private schools – Hopkins or wherever they can to make sure that their futures are secure. So please, meet, don’t compromise the quality of education of the children in Shelton. Thank you for your time.

Adam Kocurek

Good almost morning. Anyway, I’m not going to lie. I’m a little irritated. It is late. I’ve done a lot of studying; hard day. All my friends that I wanted to share my speech with are gone. [inaudible] if I did not think that this was an urgent matter. I am a sophomore at Shelton High School. I know I speak for many people when I say the budget being proposed by the Mayor is short-sighted, erroneous, ill-advised and just frankly, selfish. How could a budget that would erase valuable clubs, sports, teachers, technology, accreditation and so much more possibly benefit Shelton? We are the next generation. The people who will be the heart, mind, body and spirit of the United States in a future that’s not far off. We, [inaudible] by the United States in all of its glory. The skeleton that our school would become if this budget is passed could not and would not prepare us for adult lift. It is truly frightening, the possibility of losing teachers that we’ve come to
love, our accreditation and our hopes for a bright and successful future. To those who feel that we should do more with less? No. I’ve had it. I have talked with teachers and guidance counselors and heard opinions from people of all different social standings. We’ve done that for far too long. It’s time to start doing more with more. It is loathsomely cheap and selfish to keep taxes low for political gain at the expense of Shelton’s hard working students, teachers and faculty members. Many Shelton residents would gladly pay a little more if it meant the salvation of our school system, despite the difficult economic times that still plague us. In addition, a healthy, well funded school would help Shelton in the long run. New families and businesses who would enrich our city over time, look to the school system as mentioned by previous speakers. Very few people want to settle in an area with poor schooling opportunities. A well funded school would be invaluable for Shelton’s economy. People move away from places with bad schools – not to them. You have to spend money to make money. I guess that’s what I’m saying. I’m but one of the many in my position. I work hard and my best. I’m an honors AP student, Vice President of a Shelton club, I’m joining many others, I volunteer, I take art classes and martial arts classes, and I plan on going to college in two, three short years, and that’s approaching very quickly. I implore everyone here, everyone that’s left, to see reason and save our schools. On a final note, it’s clear that the majority of the people here and that were here support a better budget for our schools, not the one proposed by the Mayor. Frankly, that’s how democracy works. From when I did all my AP History classes, the majority rules, the minority accepts. The majority of us here want a better budget and frankly if that’s not what is given to us, then that shows poorly on you. Thank you for my time. Good almost morning.

Alexandria Wong, 7 Walnut Tree Hill Road

My husband is first generation Chinese-American and my father is first generation Polish-American. For us, the education system has very deep emotional connections. You’ve heard a lot of people [inaudible] so I’m sure at some point it’s just going to be a lot of white noise for you. For us it’s a love story. We met 20 years ago in college. Eight years later we moved to Shelton. We chose it over Seymour which had failing schools. Shelton had a great mill rate so it was definitely the taxes that lured us over from Trumbull. We were looking at the tax rate and the school system, even before we had children. Right now I have a five year old and an eight year old; they’re in the school system. They both went through the pre-school program that’s set up through the town. They’re both really lucky and our family feels very blessed, we had a teacher Patricia Green, before she retired, she was in 30-plus years in the school system. I find it difficult to believe that she could have been any more dedicated in her first, second or fifth year than she was in her 30-plus year. One of the problems I had is that people have been saying “the dead wood in the education system,” the people are over paid, and trust me, the input that she had in our lives is priceless. My kids went on to have Linda Krilivsky, another 30-plus year veteran and again, I really find it difficult to believe that she could be any more dedicated or committed as she was in the first year that she started teaching. One of my daughters had Marian Kormansky, another 30-plus veteran. If I could design my kids’ education, I wouldn’t have chosen anything different. This year again, another teacher that one of my daughters has, 15-plus years experience, and I value that so much. Sure, as a parent, I think more than the people who have no kids in the system, of course I
would. It’s the same as if you’d ask a parent to say, “would you jump in front of a car for your child?” Well of course. No, I’m not going to go in front of a car every day just to prove it. As I said, it’s a love story. We love Shelton. We’d like to continue that love story with Shelton, but it’s also a love for our country. We actually prepared a statement but I had just a little bit more about that. As a democracy our nation faces tough economic and social environmental and educational challenges every day. Solutions to these challenges are more positive with the greater number of citizens that become involved. Like you saw tonight, 500-plus people prepared to express and listen to the views. As you, now in your mid-life, have been sitting here keeping yourselves propped up listening to us and for the most part, engaged in what we’re saying to you. I really do appreciate that and value your time.

Tonight we share the active participation of citizenship and it carries out your commitment to democracy by protecting an issue of commitment to our community. Our public schools take devastating hits around the state and the country as budget after budget is decimated by communities with no funds to give. But our case is different. You’ve already discussed how there are funds in the City budget, and we just need to decide to use them. There are a lot of people here who have said, “please give us that $3.5 million – but I want the initial $7 million. I don’t want to lose [inaudible]. I know it sounds like the parents just want to sort of pick-pocket the town, but its really not. There are many citizens of Shelton that urged you to reject Mayor Lauretti’s proposed budget, and of course that’s what I’m urging you to do as well. Mayor Lauretti took an already lean budget and stripped it enough [inaudible] which will swell classroom sizes. We’ve already discussed that it’s against the regulations of the United States Department of Education. I ask that you fully fund the education budget not just to protect those jobs but to retain and to champion the efforts of our schools. We currently have those class sizes that are within the federal recommendations. But that number will [inaudible] the education will go down and it puts our democratic way of life in danger. An educated population is the cornerstone of democracy. This nation’s well being depends on inception of educated, informed decisions, which is why you saw it in your position as Aldermen, you want to make a difference. Give the opportunity to the children as well. Education reduces costs to taxpayers as it costs less to educate a child now than to support a teenage parent or repeat offender in the future. Education monies help to secure the future of all of our citizens. Shelton Public Schools are the only spot that we must meet the needs of all students. We don’t turn away children or families. Public Schools will serve the physical, emotional and mental disabilities for those who are either extremely gifted, those who are learning challenged or those who are riding along that curve. We need to properly fund Shelton’s schools because they foster interactions and understanding when peoples of different ethic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Our children are our nation’s future. Their development affects us all. Education is not cheap, but ignorance costs far more. The children in our community learn by example. Show them an example of we care, and we want to take care of our own. We value public education. Mayor Lauretti presented his budget to you with declaration that it’s fiscally responsible in this tough economy. But I think that he was mistaken. Our town is doing well. Other communities are not doing so well. He commented on the fact by saying, “Shelton continues to lead the way in economic growth.” I want you to continue that leadership. Is it possible that you’re contributing
locally to our country’s sluggish growth by withholding sports from our smallest citizens? I believe that if Shelton withholds firm economic support from our schools we give a darker example than we intend to. We shout to the communities around us that economically stable communities such as Shelton won’t invest in their schools. We need good faith moves and positive signs of growth in the U.S. We are in the position to do that now and to keep our good base education model. Shelton Public Schools should not have poor funding and overcrowded classrooms. I believe it is an insult to the really struggling cities and towns in Connecticut who have no money at all to put into their budgets. I feel that we need to bridge the gap, we need to fully fund the education budget and then we can continue our love story. Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

Being no other speakers, Alderman Anglace closed the public hearing at 11:04 p.m.

Alderman McPherson MOVED to adjourn; SECONDED by Alderman Simonetti. A voice vote was taken and the MOTION PASSED 8-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia M. Bruder, Clerk Date Submitted: _____________________________
Theresa Adcox, Clerk
And Michelle Giaimo, Clerk

DATE APPROVED: _____________ BY: _________________________________
Mark A. Lauretti
Mayor, City of Shelton