CALL TO ORDER

Alderman Anglace called the public hearing to order at 7:00 p.m. All present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

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 Anglace stated that the proposed budget from the Board of Apportionment and Taxation is what we will be taking comment on tonight. It was published in the Connecticut Post, April 18, 2012, and if anyone needs a copy of it, is on the table. Other than what you have to say, if time permits, the board will stick around and work a little more on the budget. The primary purpose of tonight is to hear your comments in respect to the budget, so if you would like to be heard, please raise your hand when you are recognized and come to the podium and state your name and your address for the record, and let us hear what you have to say. We will start off by not imposing a time limit, because we can tell that some people have more to say than others, but if it gets too long I hope you don’t mind if I ask you to summarize.

Freeman Burr, Superintendent of the Shelton Public Schools

Good Evening President Anglace and the Board of Aldermen. Thank you for the opportunity to address you here. I will keep my comments very brief. I would also like to acknowledge, with great appreciation on behalf of the Shelton Public Schools, and our staff for your support last year of our budget after a very difficult year, two years ago when we had many layoffs. Your allocation to our district last year allowed us to maintain stability, and stability is extremely critical during these difficult economic
times. With that, I will make some brief remarks about our request this year of $636,000. It is a 1% increase over a year ago; it is actually about .99%. As we enter the budget development, we were very cognizant of this would be a reevaluation year and to that end, we wanted to make sure that we could offset costs in the budget before we looked at any additional increases. With respect to that, we accumulated a sick leave, which are payouts for our staff when they retire; up to $665,000 that would come off our books in fiscal year 2012-2013, next year’s budget.

Also, we projected 8 teacher retirements generally as I presented to you about a month or so ago. When we get retirements, usually that are senior teachers departing and being replaced by teachers at a much lower scale; at about $30,000. So, we were projecting retirements at a cost savings of $250,000. Our teacher and administrator salaries will be approximately $525,000. $505,000 of that is our obligation to the teacher contract and as you may remember, that was negotiated through arbitration. If you are aware of the state’s collective bargaining process, that means we enter negotiations. If we have unresolved items, we go to mediation if we are unable to still resolve our items we go to binding arbitration, and generally I am sure of those of you that been through that process, understand when we are looking at salary increments; essentially it is a give and take. Usually we will win about 50% of the items that are being arbitrated and whatever bargaining unit we are negotiating with, we will win about 50%. I am sure that many of you who are involved in a collective bargaining process are aware of that. Noncertified personnel, such as custodians, secretaries, paraprofessionals, etcetera, are due increases of about $240,000. Health insurance, we have noted that over the last several years, as staff has left and younger staff has come on board, we have more single teachers taking advantage of plans, which is a reduction for us so we have lowered our 8% renewal which was suggested to us by the city’s health insurance consultant, Smith Brothers. While they suggested 8%, we lowered that to 6%, of which means that our role of insurance would be about a half a million.

Finally, our student transportation contracts we will go into the last year of a five-year contract for transportation for our students, which is about $112,000. Those costs continue to escalate, and we are very weary and concerned of what they will be like next year when we go out to bid. To that end we are only looking to be adding, and by the way, the total rollover which I will give you a handout on this, is about $1,000,360, with the savings on the accumulated sick leave as well as the savings from retirements; we are taking $922,000 off of that, for a net of $436,000. In the addition of the $436,000, we are proposing to add $200,000 in what we refer to as program improvement. One of those will be a technical support position that is for our technology office. That responsibility is to install, maintain, upgrade, repair the technology in the school district. We have to do that, we have to make sure that our students are exposed and given the opportunity to a 21st century education.

We anticipate $55,000, for curriculum development, and I will speak to that. You have probably heard of the adoption of the common core state standards. While we do try to do curriculum work during the school year, keep in mind frequently that we have to release our very teacher leaders the elementary and high school, etcetera. When we release them that means we have to cover them with substitutes. Additionally, we do try to get people to work with us during the summer on curriculum. We usually spend about four weeks a year; again many of the people that work with us
during the year, during this time, and work over the summer get that work done; but to get that work done, and to get that work ready for the transition to the common core in 2015, we have to pay. We anticipate costs at a little bit over $50,000 next year, which is also included in the $200,000 program improvement is our request of $75,000. We believe that that $75,000 will reduce our Pay-to-Participate from where we originally started two years ago, to 48% cost that exists. So our proposal to the Board of Aldermen is $636,129, as I have said we have rounded it off to 1%, it is actually .99%. I thank you very much for the opportunity to present our budget to you this evening. Thank you.

Aldermen Anglace: Mr. Burr, did you say you have a handout?
Freeman Burr: I do. Mr. Cameron totaled the BOE members.
Alderman Anglace: That would be very helpful, thank you.

Ron Pavluvcik, 287 Eagles Landing, Aspetuck Village

First of all, thank you for your volunteered time to the City of Shelton; I know that you put a lot of hours in and also to the Board of Apportionment and Taxation to get to this point tonight. I see we have the same people in attendance behind me tonight, as we do every year, same interest groups so maybe it is time that we just took back a little bit on a year ago and ask ourselves how are we doing. I think overall that the City of Shelton is doing well on an image point of view. We’ve had some new activities take off in the last year. The dog park, I am one of the frequent people using that, and that was a great idea!

Then, I thank you in your help for getting off the ground after the massive road paving project, and expenditure. I don’t think there are very many roads left in towns that are in really poor shape, so that argument that we have heard in the past doesn’t hold water anymore. From what I read about the reevaluation in the own assessment on my condo at your probable decision, and in a few weeks on the mill rate, most people will experience a $300 to $800 reduction on their property taxes on their residence, due to the re-eval in combination to the slightly rising mill rate. I guess we will pay a little price on that on the cars. That will be a higher expense but, still overall, I think we are doing pretty good. That might give a false sense of security, though, that we are doing great and we aren’t. I am surprised when I drive around through the corporate parks, how many empty office buildings there are with the vacancy signs in front. Even the HealthNet building, which is occupied, I think that it’s temporarily owned by Sikorsky, while they do some renovation at the Sikorsky engineering facility. So, that I believe will become an empty building again fairly soon. I think the vacancy rate is about 17% or 18% cost in Shelton and that is very high. While the town still gets revenue from the building, of course we lose revenue on the office equipment inside, and we lose revenue from the lack of employees driving back and forth everyday. So we are having a slight recession in that regard.

The other thing that is going on, while there are a few new buildings that will be going up, certainly the Radcliffe Apartment buildings will be great to see rising out of the
ashes there. Literally on Canal Street with the concrete gutter in the ground, and a new assisted living facility coming that I understand, behind the Outback Steakhouse. I understand that Mr. Saffron, I think it is, has an office building that will be going up on River Road, by the Sports Center, which he owns. The five story medical office building has been approved. So even though these things are going on, you probably would agree that we don’t have a lot of projects on the pipeline that will continue to bring in tax revenue that we had for the past twenty years in Mayor Lauretti’s leadership. The three main developers that have built up Shelton to where it is today. One of the three, Mr. Scinto, I think is still in house confinement. He has kept a low profile. I have not heard of any new projects that he has got proposed, and the pipeline. Mr. Botti is in jail, and sadly, Mr. Monty Blakeman is dead. So I don’t what else is new to come along in the next few years to keep the ball rolling, to bring in more tax revenue. So I think this is necessarily a good time to continue to be frugal.

Certainly you are aware with the high unemployment that continues. We have state residents that are going to be losing their benefits because the 52 or 99 weeks has expired. In the news this week, it said that housing values have yet to bomb out, so you have more and more people that have their main residence underwater beneath them now. So I think it is a bleak forecast in our revenue, and therefore, need to really put together approval of the budget this year.

Now as usual the 800-pound gorilla in the room is the education budget. I think the numbers have your considering tonight for the reduction is appropriate. I think we poured a lot of money into the school system in the last 15 years, with all the enhancements to the existing buildings: the high school, all the other elementary schools, the new Perry Hill School, the Intermediate School. Certainly the infrastructure is in place. We spend a fortune on computers, we spend a fortune on those magnetic or electronic chalkboards, and yet we still see mediocre test scores year after year. Here is one handout from Mr. Burr’s education budget plan that he posted on their website, showing that the college enrollment percentage is still very low in Shelton. 72% get into college from Shelton go to college, only 54% graduate and I only see that the SAT scores that he posted are still below the state level: 505 in math for Shelton versus 508 for the state average, with all the cities blended into that number. And therefore, the scores in reading, we are below the state average of 503, where 499 is from his handout. So, throwing money at the school system has not been the solution in prior years, and even beyond that, there is miscellaneous information that gets sent out. The Board of Education sent out their flyer on the survey they have in their list of colleges that Shelton kids have gone to after graduation last year, and they just list each college one time. What they don’t list is how many kids go to those colleges. They may have Harvard listed because there was one smart kid in Shelton that somehow got into Harvard. Right below that, you have Housatonic Community College as if they are equals, and in asking around the town I am very disturbed to find out that the large number of Shelton High School graduates go to Housatonic Community College. I will say that this college is better than nothing for some kids. Not every kid goes to college. I respect those who go into the military and ones that go into vocational schools, but lets be honest, Housatonic Community College is a glorified high school. It was created 30 years ago, originally in the Bunnell High School buildings in Stratford to house the kids.
Alderman Anglase interrupted the speaker. Alderman Anglase told the speaker to focus more on the budget.

The speaker continues:

I am distressed that our kids are not doing that well, in general, there is a lot of smart kids in Shelton and they got very diligent parents that motivate them to do their homework but there are too many kids that are falling through the cracks and going to these mediocre colleges and dropping out of those colleges. One example is the fellow that was in the Huntington Herald last week that comes up with this invention, he calls it a bracelet that says, “I Love Booty”. He is a 2010 graduate of Shelton High School and he is very proud of his business here selling these things, “I Love Booty”. He says quote in the article: “That college was not a path for him that he wanted to take when he finished high school. He tried taking classes at a local community college, but he walked out after 10 days”. He is a regular salesman in the job he’s got. He is also an active skateboarder. Those are his accomplishments. I understand that the benefit of these “Booty Bracelets” is to benefit the cause of colorectal cancer, and I am not insensitive to that. I happen to have advanced prostate cancer, which I am struggling to suppress and get under control. So, I am aware of the need of funding and research. What I am trying to say up here is that there are too many mediocre students coming out of Shelton High School that are not doing as well as they should, despite all of the money that we have thrown at the school system, and all the reforms that have been discussed in curriculum and computers over the years. In today’s paper we see once again that teachers unions are fighting Governor Malloy’s effort to reform the tenure system. This brings back memories from years ago when the state teachers sued the State of Connecticut, to try to not implement new standards for teachers. In conclusion, I will cut it short, that this is not the time to fund fully the Board of Education’s wish list, or makeup list or improvement list of funding for their system, and we have been down that road. The economic times that lie ahead of us are pretty discouraging, and I think you need to hold the line and to adopt the Mayor’s budget that you have in front of you.

Finally, I will make one recommendation; I wont just stand here and criticize without at least making one recommendation. To Mr. Burr and the Board of Education, and the Headmaster Smith at the high school, I think that is what her name is: I have seen too many kids out of that high school and talked to too many kids that are not getting homework, they are carrying books. They may have one study period during the day. They can’t be possibly be doing five subjects worth of homework in a forty minute study period, when it takes them ten to fifteen minutes to settle down and to get their materials out. Here is my recommendation: I would like to see every high school teacher be required to post their homework assignment several days in advance, on the school website, for each of their five or six classes. This way, parents can see in advance what their child is supposed to be doing. If someone is out sick, they can find out what their assignment is going to be. I think it would be an incentive for teachers that are apparently not their students enough. This is what the kids tell me, that they are not being challenged. If you look at the Gael Winds newspaper, which came out a couple of weeks ago, here is the article.
Alderman Anglace interrupted again and was not sure if the speaker was summarizing his points. Alderman Anglace mentioned to the speaker that the context of his comments would be better made at the Board of Education meeting versus the public hearing on the budget. His recommendation was appreciated.

The speaker continues:

I will take that into consideration, and I will just say that quite a few high school students in their own paper; their names are right here and their classes: seniors, juniors and sophomores, agreed with Malloy’s recommendation for teacher evaluations including the tenure overhaul, which has been a big “bug-a-boo” in mind for years and that will go through and straighten out the mess we have now in our public schools.

In conclusion, please adopt the budget that’s in front of you, and we will be prepared for tough times ahead. Thank you.

**Arlene Liscinsky, 54 Country Ridge**

I said what I had to say. I am also Finance Chairman for the Board of Ed. We had a 7-0 at the time when we adopted our budget. We had a lot of buy in for bids for board members when we adopt the budget, because we certainly do recognize what the situation is. I happen to be an owner of two past successful businesses; I recently sold my business.

I guess you can say that I am somewhat retired and approaching the senior citizen level, but what I have to say is that my value of education is no less than it was 22 years ago, when my first daughter started kindergarten here at Shelton. I am one of those parents that I was extremely active, as you may have well known and see. The value of education in our home and unfortunately, public education today. I just came back from a conference on education and it is somewhat under assault, not only on a state level, local level, and national level. On the other hand, teachers and administrators and schools and children need tools and resources to move forward. Its been said that the jobs today that our kids in kindergarten are not even created. You heard that before I am sure! Five of you sitting up there had ties to education. You have family members, or you are an educator yourself or a former educator, so I would like to know the benefit of the doubt and hope that you agree with me on the value of education in this workplace today, more than ever!

To the gentleman before me, his comments – I tend to be a person that is more optimistic. I do not agree with his many times, negative requirements of our students here in Shelton, or anywhere of that matter. I am a product of a community college. I went to Norwalk Community College, and I think I did okay and I moved forward, and I have continuously have continued to educate myself obviously by trying to reenter successful businesses. To his remarks, it just so happens that I have some information here that I had about the graduation rates. We have certainly at the board level and with the superintendent held and his staff, have looked at lot of numbers and have crunched numbers. We have looked at the data and it is just recently that the data driven decision-making that you hear about, that has come onto the scene of education.
In my business it is something I do all the time, because I always evaluate my business, how I did this year versus last year, how I did last year and what the weather was, and so on and so forth...because it has an impact. Given the fact that our resources, and I’m not going to cite all the numbers, because no one wants to hear the fact that we probably just have a fall out or just a shade above the minimum with what the state pays for education on average. Our percentage for enrollment for college is 72% - these numbers are right off of the State of Connecticut Department of Education, and just to give you some reference points, the percentage of college enrollments, Trumbull in which they have a $30 million more of a budget, and about a 1,000 more students—but their graduation rate in a percentage was 73%. Orange/Amity, a wealthier district: 71%, Derby: 60%, Milford: 65-67% because they have two schools, Stratford: 48%; Bunnell: 63%. So it may all be based on an average of $200,000 more, per student, than we do. The state average is about $13,900,000, and we spend it on $11,800,000. To quote you, Mr. Anglace, all the time about “getting the bank for our buck”, certainly we have done very well and consistently in the last three years have done more with less.

I am going to speak as a taxpayer; I don’t necessarily see that in the general area because I think that our students have shared a burden, the burden what has happened certainly in education, is in the economy. He spoke about the roads, and I had conversations with my alderwoman and my alderman, Mr. Papa. I moved here 1990 of March, my road was paved then but has not been paved since. I have all of the e-mail trails of all the potholes on my road. It has not been paved in 22 years! I did the assessment on my taxes right before I left my new assessment and my assessment gone down 14%. My taxes will be $58.00, so my challenge to everybody is if we could get 10,000 households to donate that $58.00 to the Board of Education, we’ve got our budget request! I think there is a certain sense of fiscal responsibility, and certainly you are all the fiscal authority. We all have different roles- the Board of Aldermen, the Board of Education – I have heard comments that that they were saying how they didn’t like how we were spending our money, then my suggestion would be to run for the Board of Education, not the Board of Aldermen or the Mayor or whatever the case may be. We have different roles, we have spent the last several years trying to be extremely cost conscious, we have negotiated excellent contracts and I don’t think anyone can dispute that. We have, as far as technology is concerned, you know John, I have said this publicly before, we thank you but it is time again to renew and refresh our technology. The new quote on quote “new SIS” that had technology that is 8 years old now, and just as a point of reference, I tried to go to on the website for the city and it says that your bandwidth is full. I could not get on to the website so I am not sure if that is an internal problem, but I would certainly suggest that you look at that. Given that I would certainly say that our request has been very moderate, modest- extremely modest and on behalf of our future, I believe that education is an investment. It is not throwing dollars at it; it is an investment in the future, an investment in our children, an investment for our grandchildren and certainly a big investment in our home values. I thank you for the opportunity for letting us speak tonight, and I certainly hope that you will support our budget request. Thank you.
Alderman Anglace said Thank you Arlene! I appreciate your thinking highly of me to quote me, but I can assure you, as much as I am honored, but I must admit that I was not the first one that said that”.

Guy Beardsley, 276 Leavenworth Road

I think most of the board people know me. You know that the student accomplishments as they come out of the Shelton school system need to be evaluated as an individual. There is some really outstanding people that come out of the Shelton school system exactly the way it has been run. I know a particular one, an ’07 graduate, who is now fluent in Japanese and teaching English in Japan, and with a great future. Just as one example, she went to high school and the high school sent her to Yale to pick up on the initial Japanese courses. So, you know, evaluations of student accomplishments should be taken as an individual, not as a group. I would like to bring to the board’s attention though, a couple of small items. As a member of the Citizen’s Advisory Board, and as a Farmer’s Market, Market master for 20 years, I would like to emphasize the degree of graffiti and probable illegal activity that goes on down there. It is very likely we would require some funding to look at that issue. I speak as an individual, not as a board member representing what the board is doing, but I know that is a particular problem that we have discussed and I think most people are aware of it but it does require activity. I will answer any questions more specifically if you all have anything to say. Thank you sir.

Alderman Anglace said, I don’t think I have any questions for you, but I just wanted you to know that thanks to our colleague, Alderman Finn, it was the first issue downtown that it was brought to our attention. Things have been progressing pretty fast. A lot of things progress when you deal with illegal activity, a lot of things progress when they are behind the scenes with the police department and their type of activities to uncover the culprits, etcetera. Also, the Parks and Rec department has been down there and uncovered a new type of paint that you put it over the graffiti, then you put another coat of stuff over that, and then nothing is going to stick to it. So, apparently what they are betting on is that they will never be able to put more graffiti on where they put it the previous time. That was completed today, so we are well aware of it, we are all on top of it and we are incensed because of the type of activity, and believe me, nobody would like to catch them more than us! As we found out by discussing this with the police department, there have been people that we have caught and when they get to court, they’re excused. So politely excused, if you know what I mean, and nothing happens so that the punishment phase just doesn’t seem to be there to curtail any future activity. It is a subject that is near and dear to our hearts, all of us and I appreciate you bringing it up. Thank you. We will spend whatever we have to spend. We are looking into this carefully.

ADJOURNMENT
There being no other speakers, Alderman Anglace closed the public hearing at 8:25 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Brittany Gannon, Acting Clerk

DATE APPROVED: _______________ BY: ________________________________

Mark A. Lauretti
Mayor, City of Shelton