The Public Hearing was called to order at 7:00 PM by President John F. Anglace. He led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Anglace:

Pursuant to section 7.6 of the Charter of the City of Shelton, notice is hereby given that the Board of Aldermen will hold a Public Meeting on the proposed budget for fiscal year 2015-2016 being held on Tuesday, May 12th at 7:00 PM. Copies of the proposed budget are on file. We have a few copies here.

The procedure is simply to raise your hand. When called upon, come to the podium and state your name for the record.

Janet & Ron Sabovik

200 East Village Road

Shelton, Ct. 06484

In abstentia:

(E-mail that was read into the minutes)

Tuesday May 12, 2015

Hello Mr. Finn,

Ron and I might not be able to attend the Board of Alderman meeting tonight regarding the city budget. We wanted to let you and the other aldermen know that we would like to see the Board of Education budget fully funded. The cuts being proposed will have a drastic effect on our school system.

We are asking that the Board of Aldermen fully fund the BOE budget.

Sincerely,

Janet & Ron Sabovik
The Board of A&T report to the Board of Aldermen deserves comment:

1. No one from either party advocated increased taxation to remedy the Board of Education situation. That statement is an assertion of fiction.
2. The partisan A&T report states that 6.2% spending increases year after year can’t be sustained. What years are we talking about here? The Finance Director stated that 6% of the budget, $6,000,000, is needed to satisfy bonding agencies.

The unassigned balance was $12,275,000 on 6/30/14, likely to be the same this year.

Subtract the $3,250,000 Board of Education request—that leaves $9,025,000 as surplus. That’s enough to satisfy bonding agencies, fund the Board of Education, and have $3,025,000 left. So, why the constant battle with the Board of Education?

The surpluses are not a sign of good management as is implied. They are part of overfunded departmental accounts. The police department returned $1,000,000 last year. The Street Department returned $500,000, et cetera. This is a budgetary farce.

The A&T report is accurate in that it states department heads, “Should be strongly urged to attend their interview to answer…and discuss”. Hopefully, the mayor will urge his department heads to do so.

Along those lines and as an example of poor budgetary planning:

1. The Street Department did not appear for at least two years at their budget hearing.
2. Without notice so as to preclude preparation time, a telephone conference was set up with the head of the Street Department to discuss budget.
3. Eleven people representing social service agencies remained in room 204.
4. Eleven people were held hostage during the failed telephone conference.
   These comments are an example of a poor way to run a government; hopefully, things will improve, but I won’t hold my breath.

Adnan Shilleh
62 Basking Brook Lane
Shelton, Ct. 06484

In the time that we live in today education is perhaps the most important thing that any child can have. It allows for the poor escape poverty, it helps to make dreams come true, and the economic benefit that education provides is invaluable. So it is crucial that our local government does whatever ensures that our children receive high quality education. I stand here tonight speaking to you because this isn’t the case in our town. The proposed budget for the fiscal year 2015-2016 is not in our children’s best interests, and harms our education system; viciously cutting spending for our schools further handicaps our ability to compete in the college application process and the job market. Balancing the budget is an important aspect of running a town but should not come at the cost of education. Instead of cutting spending our local government should look to increase revenues through taxation, revenues, or other means deemed appropriate for our town. 

I come here tonight not as a Democrat or Republican but as a concerned student. Like so many others I feel that these cuts will limit our ability to learn and flourish in our schools. Textbooks are outdated. Our technological abilities are mediocre and class availability continues to shrink with each passing year. Taking money away would make these existing issues worse. If anything we owe it to our students to increase money on education. We currently rank a disappointing 156 out of 168 Connecticut towns in spending for education. I’m fully aware that there isn’t a strong correlation between spending and a quality education but I do know that when education is underfunded the community suffers. This government needs to start prioritizing correctly and put our school system first. Failing to do so will only add to the money problems that we face in education.

When it comes to expanding our knowledge there is no better source than a teacher. Our educators work tirelessly to make sure that our students receive the education that they deserve. The amount that they do for our community deserves special recognition. However, this budget unjustly punished them by removing some teachers
from their jobs. Remember the backbone of our education does not improve our town but instead it disables quality of education. We don’t always agree with our teachers but tonight I’m taking a stand to defend them. It is my strong belief that we have to support our teachers, not fire them. Our current mayor has been re-elected on the platform of low taxes. However, it is sometimes necessary to raise taxes in order to fund the services that allow our town to remain desirable. Being closed minded on the idea of higher taxes not only hurts our educational capabilities but it is also irresponsible. In order to make money you have to spend money. An education is an investment worth taking. Turning our heads away from our schools would be like turning our heads away from the future. So the last thing I say to you tonight is please, don’t cut our education budget. Don’t cut the education budget. Thank you.

Judson Crawford
8 Jordan Avenue
Shelton, Ct. 06484

Good evening President Anglace and ladies and gentlemen of the Board of Aldermen. I would like to speak this evening in two issues pertaining to this budget.

1: Board of Education Budget started this process of going over five years of expenditures before putting together a budget. After the public meeting at the intermediate school that a new student with disabilities would be moving into our district. The Board of Education would have to pay $38,000 for an out-of-state placement.

2: The Shelton Senior Center Director was recently out on disability. As a member of the center I saw how hard our bookkeeper took over the administrative functions, daily program and activities. Over the period that the director was out there were times when only one person was there in charge. I ask the Board of Aldermen to fund the position of Bookkeeper as full time. I ask the Board of Aldermen to please fund the position of “Bookkeeper “as full-time. Yet secondly, and most important, I ask the Board of Aldermen to fully fund the Board of Education’s proposed request.

In closing, I went and asked a member of the Board of A&T and any member has served on the Board of A&T they would know what I’m referring to. If that person had the estimated tax collection sheet this would be one of the first items in the budget book when it is handed out to you the Board of Aldermen and to the Board of A & T. His answer was, “No”. Thank you very much.
Thomas Harbinson  
Conservation Commission Chairman  
15 Soundcrest Drive  
Shelton, Ct. 06484

Good evening. I want thank you for allowing us to speak here on the behalf of the Conservation Commission. I want to make sure that the funding that we put in for our conservation agent be followed through on. The conservation agent is currently part-time and the efforts of that office are leveraged to allow a lot of community involvement be it the Clean Sweep and Community Gardens, eagle scout projects and trail hikes. The activities done by a part-time agent are numerous and it does take away a little but of the pure open space activity in terms of evaluating parcels that are open for development, parcels that the City owns in terms of monitoring them to make sure that they’re not being dumped on and encroached on. There’s a lot of activity that our part-time agent is doing and I’m really asking that the full-time position be followed through.

Kristen Campbell  
26 Sunrise Circle  
Shelton, Ct. 06484

I am a mother of three small children. I just have one small comment to make in regards to the education of the children of Shelton. I’ve sat in more than one meeting in the short time that my daughter has been a student in the Shelton Public School System. How proud our City should be that our expenditure per pupil is among that of the very bottom of the State yet our students perform in the top third of the State. I credit that to our outstanding teachers but I do not find it impressive at all that our expenditure per pupil is so low. It leaves us to wonder how much higher our students could perform if our City would invest in them. I urge you to fully fund the budget.

Michelle Niolet  
10 Weybosset Street  
Shelton, Ct. 06484
I hear people’s comments and I know that people are very passionate. When I’ve heard and read and seen about the level of the Board of Education budget and I’ve asked a few times at least of the mayor to substantiate why he believes that the Board of Ed only needs 1.5 million dollars as opposed to the amount that they have asked for. Now I’ve read the Board of Education’s budget. It’s very detailed, very spelled out and I don’t see that level of attention put from the other side yet when I come to a hearing or come to a meeting I always hear we trust the mayor and we trust that he and Freeman will come to some kind of agreement together. Whereas I know that that’s what happens every year the board that you are ultimately the decision makers. I ask of you, I beg of you, to please individually ask these questions. I’m sure you do already but I’m reiterating that because I know that you each care about our children.

All of our children and we know that we are a healthy, wealthy city compared to many others in this State. We do a great job at making sure that we have money left over. If we have so much money left over and we have a healthy surplus, don’t you think it does us a disservice to spend so little per student when we have the ability? It’s not as if we’re poor and we just can’t afford more. We have the money. In spades. So why are we not investing like these people, this student, has begged of you as a Board to please care for our children the way that we can with or surplus? We don’t have to raise taxes. It’s already been stated by a member of the Board of A & T. We can do better for our kids. I have enough kids in the school system that I’m going to be going through this for a while.

I love Shelton. I love Sunnyside. I love Perry Hill. I love SIS. I haven’t been there as a parent for SHS but I know that we can do better for them and we have the allowance without raising taxes. So please, please, take the time and question the mayor’s level because I have not seen any facts to substantiate that level but I’ve seen many, many facts and much data to substantiate that changing these Board of Education they’ve changed exponentially. There’s much data to support change needs with rising costs of special education and cost of living increase. Inflation begs that they need more money. The Board of Education can’t take in more money. Thank you.

President Anglace:
Nobody else? Anyone else?

Mark Holden
Board of Education, Chairman
275 Soundview Avenue
Shelton, Ct. 06484

Hi, I’m Mark Holden. When we had our public information night a couple of weeks ago, one of our parents mentioned that it feels like an “us and them” mentality exists between the City and the Board of Education. It’s a common problem in Connecticut because of the process that Connecticut uses to fund education. It doesn’t have to be that way in Shelton. You have a Board of Education that strives to deliver excellent results at a rock bottom cost. The complaints that I hear from the mayor and the Board of Aldermen generally fall into two categories: complaints based on inaccurate information and complaints based on incomplete information. For example, asking for a 4-5% increase each year but it doesn’t get funded each year. That Board of Ed they ask for 4-5% increase every year. That’s more than inflation. We don’t get 4-5%. Some years we don’t get any increase. In spite of what the rate of inflation is our actual costs are based on new, unfunded mandates and new special education students. Over the last four years our special education population has grown by about 24%. Some of these students, if they need an out of district placement that can cost as much as $100,000 per student.

Since 2005 City Budget, on their side, has grown by 40%, 24% for the Board of Education. So your budget has grown much faster than ours. It’s time to stop complaining about the bonus for the superintendent. The first year I was on this Board we deemed that Freeman had been a reliable performer and removed the performance incentive from his contract. Nobody has gotten a bonus from the Board of Education in four years. Our monthly budget runs are posted on the City web site. Our check registers are available at our Central Office. Please look at them before you complain about how we waste taxpayer dollars. The reality is that we are very careful about taxpayer dollars. If we weren’t we wouldn’t be able to outperform most districts in the State. We are currently funded at $2,700 per student less than the average district in the State. If we wanted to be funded at the State average we would be asking for an increase of $13 million this year.

The budget process would be much less stressful for every one of us worked together, especially at the beginning of the process so everyone understood what everyone’s needs and goals are before money was discussed. The superintendent hadn’t met with the mayor since March. He will meet again on the 18th. It’s time for us to start respecting each other. You want to do what’s best for the taxpayers. We want to do what’s best for our students. Both are laudable goals. If we start trusting each other we can do a better job of reaching our goals. We need to work together. We want to avoid layoffs.
It would be easy to turn the any additional State monies over to us in order to lay off five less teachers. The City and the Board of Education have worked together on many projects over the years and every time we do the City and taxpayers and students wins. It’s important to learn from what happened in the past but more important to make tomorrow and the next day better. For everyone.

Ron Pavluvcik
287 Eagles Landing
Shelton, Ct. 06484

I love this town. I made a good decision when I moved here 15 years ago. Shelton has all kinds of amenities: hills, valleys, and ball fields. I love the low taxes. I have a confession to make; at least I’ve been a long-time proponent of Mayor Lauretti. I’m glad he didn’t end up running for governor. This City isn’t ready to do without him. There’s a lot going on in town: Chipotle, the latest of another little burger places, six hotels in town without any expenses to pay for munchkins in the school system. We’re down in student numbers. Don’t have to raise auto life insurance and employment and pensions. Top 1% in room: teachers and administrators. Don’t have middle and bottom people here. Prospects don’t look better for low income people even with spending more on the school budget/ 65 years r--- and still has two part-time jobs. Most students he talks to don’t think they’re getting a good education at the high school. Board of Education survey results showed more than half said that they weren’t well prepared. 15% stated that they weren’t well prepared. Our test scores aren’t that great but we are competing with Monroe and Trumbull. A lot of those kids in the middle go to Housatonic and have to take remedial courses. We aren’t cranking out too many really smart kids. We remodeled all the schools in the last 10 years. Everybody has an i-Pad. Has that improved test scores? It’s still a bad economy. Are you a senior citizen and you’ve got money in the bank? You’re only making 1% on a cd. I’ve lack confidence in this school system even though I’ve enjoyed living here. No child left behind, Common Core. Are we doing Common Core? Kids don’t take books home because they’ve done their homework in study hall. Too much touchy feely and accountability What could be done as it relates to the budget? Don’t pay teachers more when they get their Master’s degree. There’s no other job where tenure protects teachers from accountability. He asked Mr. Burr how many sick days teachers in Shelton have taken. He filed a freedom of information --- to find out that 8.8 sick days were taken. Do you know how much substitute teachers cost? $360,000 three years ago. Why can’t sick days go from nine to four? Not paying a lot in taxes but wanting
to see money used wisely. Want to see student achievement articles not about prom dresses.

President Anglace:
Did you wish to comment on the budget?

Ron Pavluvcik
I have complete confidence in the mayor’s numbers. I’m only up here once a year to keep it fair and balanced because these folks have a slight conflict of interest.

President Anglace:
Anyone else that wishes to be heard?

Lori McKeon
54 Philip Drive
Shelton, Ct. 06484

Last year I stood before you about full day Kindergarten and you made that happen. It is amazing. The last gentleman spoke about the 80% because the special education state mandate. When you don’t fund the budget those are the kids that will get hurt. Those “B” students that are in the middle. If just gets that little bit of extra help she will do just that little bit better.

I’ve substituted in the school system these last couple of weeks. You should be impressed with what your teachers do. I saw teachers feed children and give them a sweater.

Our enrollment is going down but not by a lot. Our number of special education students that need help is going up. Seventy of the students that are special ed and need to be supported and cost more money. Please fully support the Board of Education budget as you supported the kindergarten. Support the middle of the road kids and pass the Board of Education Budget.

Bryan Vasser
18 Balsani Circle
Shelton, Ct.
I’d like to thank everyone on the Board. I know everybody on the Board means well and wants to do their best. I don’t really take sides. I listen to things that I hear and then I decide. I do know that if you create a feeling of animosity on both sides with two teams that are supposed to be working together that’s not good. If you keep beating down the school system every year I wonder how long it will be before you lose them, mentally if not physically. I’m not saying write a blank check. I would urge you to sit down with the school system and come up with something that works for everyone. In the two years I’ve been here it seems like the Board of Education is just whipped. The money for full day kindergarten was found, at the expense of what I don’t know. Please work with the school board to work something out so that we don’t have to lessen the quality of education.

Debbie Callinan  
97 Wesley Drive  
Shelton, Ct. 06484

I have four kids. One at Shelton High School, one at Perry, one at Booth Hill, and one at Shelton Intermediate. My student that attends Shelton Intermediate School has a learning disability that was diagnosed at the elementary level. My child didn’t want to go to school or be in school. My child is currently in seventh grade and has received high honors. This is due to the teachers and administrators and other people that have helped him along the way. I have another student that received tiered instruction (SRBI). His SRI has gone up 300 points over the last year. I can’t thank the teachers enough. They are being evaluated and I can’t them enough. They have high expectations to live up to. I can’t thank them enough. I feel that we should fully support the Board of Education budget. I think we need to spend all of our money on education and on educating the future of not just our City and town but of our entire country. Thank you.

Thomas R. Minotti  
246 Aspetuck Trail  
Shelton, Ct. 06484

Good evening. I have two daughters employed by Shelton. They graduated and came back to Shelton. My son also graduated from Shelton and lives in Shelton. I have eight grandchildren in the school system and they are scholar athletes because of good school system. They do their homework in study hall because they are student
athletes. Also, I have two adopted grandchildren. My youngest granddaughter was accepted at private high schools but chose to go to Shelton High School. My children weren’t A students. I sit on the Finance Committee. If you think it’s easy to scrutinize line item by line item it isn’t. I want to see that these young people get the same education that my children and grandchildren have gotten.

Fred Turco  
198 Lenore Drive  
Shelton, Ct. 06484

I want to bring the discussion up maybe one notch to the social economic area. If Shelton doesn’t keep a high standard when compared to the other towns it can affect the tax base, home values, and crime rate. We want to maintain Shelton as a good place to live.

Erica Schwarz  
54 Montgomery Street  
Shelton, Ct. 06484

I don’t have kids. I do care that people coming up behind me are good, creative people. From what I’m reading the Board of Education budget is bare bones. It is hard for me to understand what the resistance is to it. It seems we have the money. Should we be doing more? I ask that you fully fund the Board of Education budget request.

Erika Sabaik  
200 East Village Road  
Shelton, Ct. 06484

I wasn’t planning on speaking but I spoke five years ago when I was in sixth grade. My brother has had to work so hard to overcome his disability. After nine years of hard work and the help of all the teachers and staff. There are people that are worse but that is my little brother.

I had a back injury and out of school for five months and teachers came to my house to work with me every day. They still helped me even when I came back. The social
workers have also helped me so much. They are such great people. They are amazing. They stay after school and give extra help. My sister has straight A’s. I’m an honor student. Please, please fund the budget for them.

Renee Giordano
49 Grove Street
Shelton, Ct. 06484
Kindergarten teacher

The point of half day versus full day kindergarten. Half day kindergarteners would be able to write one to two sentences while full day students can write full paragraphs. Half day students can add one to two facts while full day students are doing word problems. It’s amazing. It’s a disservice to not fund the budget because of the success of full day Kindergarten.

Dr. Freeman Burr
Superintendent of Schools
17 Livingstone Road
Bloomfield, Ct. 06007

A lot of gratitude and appreciation for what’s been accomplished between the Board of Education the mayor, and the Board of Aldermen. Our kindergarteners have met the benchmarks. Kindergarten teachers are meeting with first grade teachers to let them know how progressive the new first graders will be. The tech has been great. The people --- the building are the most important.

I haven’t met with the mayor since March. There’s a 1.5 million gap in the budget and it’s frustrating that we can’t work together before the proposed budget is submitted to the Board of Aldermen. In this day and age we shouldn’t be laying off teachers. Teacher salaries are competitive but reasonable. They have more challenges.

We would have 28 administers if we were at the State average. Enrollment is going down. We are not adverse to hard work. We never had an opportunity to do a follow-up survey because of the criticism of the first survey in 2011. I want to reiterate what I expressed in my casual conversations with Mayor Lauretti. I am happy to forgo new programming but have to get to a rollover budget to maintain services. We will have 40 additional special education students enrolled next year. The special education population is rising. A special education student cost us $26,000 while a regular
education student costs $12,900. Shelton special education cost is $20,200 below the state average. We’ve projected 15-30 more special education students. This money isn’t covered in the budget. It’s frustrating that we had five budget meetings before we came up with a budget.

Attendance issues with teachers are addressed. Teachers get eight sick days out of a 186 day contract. 96% of time attendance. Substitutes are under 2/1000% of the budget. Attendance rate is not Freedom of Information. It speaks to pregnancy leave, professional development, and family medical leave.

Get us to a budget where our staff members are going to be out in front of students teaching and not collecting unemployment.

Zak Shilleh

62 Basking Brook Lane

Shelton, Ct. 06484

I go to Shelton High School. My brother is different. He’s achieved a lot. I’ve got a learning disability and have trouble with school. I have been in a special education program since elementary school. I’ve always known that I could do better. Eventually I tested out of special ed. I tested out and did well. I would like to thank the special education teachers that helped me. I stayed after like four days a week. It was hard. I worked hard. The teacher helped me. I can’t tell you how many hours I’ve spent after school. I couldn’t sleep because of not getting the subject. Even into high school I would like to commemorate the teachers who helped me throughout my life. If these cuts go through how will other kids get help?

A motion was made by Alderman Papa at 8:43 PM to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Alderman McPherson. All were in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kim Anglace
Acting Clerk, Board of Alderman