The was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 29, 2007, by Vice Chairman Mark Holden of the Board of Apportionment and Taxation.

Those present from Board of A & T

Charlotte Madar
John Simonetti, absent
Mark Holden
Eric Levine
Joe Liscinsky
Judson Crawford

Those present from the Board of Aldermen
John Anglace
Chris Panek
Stanley Kudej
Ken Olin
John Papa

Absent
John “Jack” Finn - from Board of Aldermen
John Simonetti – from Board of A&T
Jason Perillo – from Board of Aldermen

All present stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Presentation of the 2007/2008 budget to the Board of Aldermen by the Board of Apportionment and Taxation.

On behalf of the entire board of Apportionment and Taxation I welcome you to tonight’s meeting.

Serving as acting chairman for the budget planning process has been an educational one for me.
My hope is a more structured approach with a closer eye on the time clock kept the interviews focused on the task at hand - developing a budget that delivers the best value for city residents. Much credit for the protocols belongs to Ken Nappi and Dan Debicella as what I used was based on what they developed and used when they served on this board.

I thank our Chairman John Simonetti for the confidence, encouragement and guidance he provided me throughout the process. His return to working as a pilot for Delta was an unexpected opportunity he could not refuse, and the timing was beyond his control.

I also thank the department heads who appeared before us and answered our questions. They made our job easier, and I respect them for their efforts to ensure Shelton residents get quality services at a reasonable tax rate.

As Aldermanic President John Anglace mentioned on the night we interviewed the Board of Education, this is a brutal year. Skyrocketing energy costs and the shift of the tax burden from commercial to residential taxpayers because of property revaluation means even level funding would make it impossible for us to reach our traditional goal of keeping taxes stable from year to year. Add some worthwhile safety related expenses and the problem just gets worse.

We've made numerous tweaks to the Mayor's recommendations. In some cases we had to increase proposed allocations to meet contractual requirements. In a few, we've increased line items because we felt department heads made a compelling case. And in some cases we've reduced line items to agree more with actual historical spending, and/or because we felt other avenues could be used to cover expenses.

The only change that was controversial was to the Board of Education budget. This one issue took roughly one third of our total workshop time.
Half our board felt it was necessary to spend more money. Half felt the additional funds would be desirable if we had unlimited funds, but in the real world would place an uncomfortable burden on the wallets of the taxpayers.

A majority of our board was determined to agree on a budget, and after considerable spirited discussion, we found reasonable changes could be made to revenue projections to make it work.

The result was a budget proposal that passed unanimously.

We have some general requests and suggestions.

1. We'd like our budget work sheets to include historical data for three recent years so we can easily see historical data when making our decisions. The revenue worksheets currently show the last completed year and this is a help.

2. If "Wash Accounts" were identified on the work sheets, it would save us time.

3. At various times over the years, there has been discussion about the potential benefits of hiring a facilities manager. We feel it is time to take a serious look at this option. A facilities manager should allow the city to ensure all our facilities including schools are properly maintained at a reduced cost to taxpayers.

For the sake of brevity, I will not read each and every line item, but these are included in my written statement. I will highlight some items.

On the revenue side:

We discovered the worksheets showed a lower grand list than the backup material. We adjusted our figures accordingly.
We have apparently averaged a 99.8% tax collection rate over the last three years. We feel the outstanding performance in tax collection makes projecting a 99.55% tax collection rate reasonable.

We also increased the City Clerk Miscellaneous receipts to reflect recent historical levels.

The conveyance tax is a major concern. While the elimination of taxes is a very rare event, it is set to expire. Our proposal is based on collection of $600,000 from this tax - or about half of what we expect for the current fiscal year.

If this tax is renewed, we can project another $600,000 of revenue, allowing for a reduction in the mill rate.

If it is not renewed, our budget will be under funded by more than a tenth of a mill.

On the expense side:

We haven't attempted to allocate LOCIP funds, but feel these could be used to pay for many things that aren't funded in the existing line items. Examples include: playground equipment, the boat ramp, benches, and tables and bleachers requested by the parks and recreation department. LOCIP might also be used to cover new carpeting for the Senior Center.

We recommend the Public Safety and Emergency Services apply for funds to buy a vehicle through LOCIP, or receive a vehicle retired from use by the police department. If this doesn't happen, line items for gasoline and Motor Vehicle Maintenance totaling $1600 for their department, and for tires and parts under Highways and Bridges totaling $1500 should be removed from the budget as they have no vehicles.

Cuts we've made based on recent historical expenses to the Senior Center could be easily covered if they increased member dues from $5 per year to $12 per year or $1 per month. If they do this, they'll have money left over to expand their programs beyond their request.
We increased the EMS line item for bundle billing by $35,000. This is a benefit to Senior Citizens who have medical emergencies.

We added funds to the Fire Department so they can buy the 36 sets of turnout gear they say they need to be buying on an annual basis.

The increase to the Board of Education budget was $398,000.

Balancing a wash account for the Police Department increased expenses by $93,600.

The budget process doesn't allow adequate time or resources for the Board of A & T to properly evaluate each and every request for capital expense.

Here are our recommendations and observations:

The Highways and Bridges department made a compelling case for continuing our tradition of replacing one large truck each year. The requests for a Mason Dump with plow and a 4wd pickup with a plow in the coming year also seem reasonable. There is considerable support among board of A&T members for some acceleration of the large truck replacement program in the short term to ensure the city has the resources they need to handle snow removal.

Police Chief Hurliman expressed a goal of leveling expenses over time by replacing three vehicles on an annual basis to ensure they always have enough vehicles to do their job. The board of A&T feels this is a reasonable goal and worthy of support. Given that these should be annual expenses, we question if they should be treated as ordinary expenses instead of as capital items.
The Fire Department has requested a replacement building for Echo Hose. We don't have a specific recommendation on this, but note if the building is to be replaced, funds allocated for maintenance and repairs of the existing facility should be reviewed to make sure we don't waste taxpayer dollars on a structure that's about to be phased out. This is not to say safety items, or things that must be done to allow them to function before a new structure is completed should be neglected.

The net result of our changes is expenses increased by $404,481 more than revenue. 23% of this is from balancing the Private Duty Police wash account.

Our proposal would require the mill rate to be approximately 17.67 or .08 mills higher than the Mayor's request.

The expenses add up to $103,696,852, and of that $61,213,287 is for the board of education.

If you have questions, the A&T members who are here tonight will be happy to answer them, and of course you're welcome to contact us for clarification as you move the budget process forward.

At this time Mr. Crawford has a moment to make a statement. Thank you Mark.

Democratic Comments

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen and Members of the Press. The second step in developing the Budget has come to a close. We the Democratic members of the BOARD OF APPORTIONMENT & Taxation accept the Mayor’s budget in principal. But we feel very strongly that the education, police, library and fire departments budget recommendations should be funded for more than they have been.

1. The education system in the City of Shelton has become both progressive and stimulating, thus we do not want to see the gains that have been made by the Board of ED for our children lost to the Budget Ax.
2. The Police Department is a vital service and the population ratio per officer is not the best. The department should have more flexibility and thus provide better service to the citizens of Shelton.

3. It has been shown that in today’s economy the Library is being used more extensively, and making the said cut would not be an advantageous move.

4. The Volunteer Fire Department in Shelton is another department that has been hit again with the Budge Ax. Every time the alarm sounds these men and women put their life on the line. This one department gives the most bangs for the buck.

I would like to extend a personal thank you to the assistant chairman who ran the meetings in the absence of the chairman and to all the members of the board Republican and Democratic for working in a truly bipartisan manner, so that this budget could be presented to the Board of Alderman.

And now to the member of the Board of Alderman as you start the third and final step in generation the Shelton Budget for 2007-2008 The board of A&T strongly urges that the budge present to you be ratified and that you not just rubber stamp the Mayor’s proposed budget.

Thank you
Judson W. Crawford

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise M. Domorod,
Clerk
Board of Apportionment and Taxation

One tape one side available at the City Clerks office.