Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

Charlotte Madar, Chairman of Board of Apportionment and Taxation, called the Budget Hearing meeting to order at approximately 6:00 p.m. All those present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

Board of Apportionment and Taxation
Charlotte Madar, Chairman- Present
Joe Palmucci- Present
John Belden- Present
Louis Dagostine, Present
Joe Knapik- Present
John Zikaras- Present

Board of Alderman
John Anglace, President- Present
Jack Finn- Present
Anthony Simonetti- Present
Eric McPherson-Present
John Papa- Present
Noreen McGorty-Present

Board of Education
Department Requested $69,120,000.00; Mayor recommends $67,600,000.00

Freeman Burr introduced himself and stated, this is my fifth year as the Superintendent of Schools. I have Al Cameron our Finance Director here with me tonight as well as Mark Holden our Board of Education Chairman.

Mark Holden stated, it is a pleasure to be here at the budget interview this evening. Surprise, Surprise we are going to be asking for more money this evening. The reality is that the Shelton Board of Education is delivering bang for the buck for the Shelton
taxpayers. We are currently, ranked as spending less money than 150 towns in the State. Only 14 towns spend less than us per pupil and we are outperforming 105 other Districts in this State. Our full budget request, this year, was a $3.5 million increase. To put that into perspective, if we add that $3.5 million onto what we had for this year's budget and we compare it to the last listing we can get which is actually budgets from other towns from two years ago, we would move up to 129th instead of 151st. This would still rank us in the bottom of 25% of towns in terms of how much we spend. What I'm asking you to consider, that your Board of Education is doing what they can to deliver the most bang for the buck. Things that are included in our request that we can't currently fund include things like; Media Specialists. These are people who are in the Library's and teach the kids how to use the computers and they have to be there for the kids to get access to the books. Currently, in our schools there is limited access to the Library's because we are sharing Media Specialists between schools. With the new Teacher Evaluation's that are coming online there is increased classroom supervision that is required for teachers. We need to have enough administrators in each building to provide the supervision that the State mandates that we do. These are things that we simply cannot do. On the other hand, we understand that Shelton is a community that values its low taxes and so we are going to try and meet you part-way.

Freeman Burr stated, Good evening, we thank you for this opportunity, and we do appreciate the fact that you only scheduled us for this evening. We acknowledge that everyone's time is valuable, since we have some warmer weather; I am going to try and move through this presentation as quickly as possible. I am taking a different approach this year because I am going to start with our goals this year;

- Secure funding to support full implementation for Full Day Kindergarten throughout the school district. This is our number one goal here this evening.
- Secure funds to support Special Education and Support Service personnel for identified students. We have additional positions requested in the budget and you are going to see we have done some amazing things over the last four years with Special Ed out-of-district tuition. What comes with that is an increased number of Special Ed students and a need to provide for their legal programing. What we do not pay for in staff to support our Special Education students we pay from them in; Attorney fees, Mediation and Do-process. I know the Mayor hates Special Education law. President Anglace and I have spoken about it and it is a terrible law, but the reality is when we have no place to go for our Special Education budget we take from our Regular Ed kids in order to cover because we can't say no.
- Demonstrate Shelton School's Academic Achievement Performance and student/staff accomplishments. We are going to show briefly the Shelton's School's Academic Achievement Performance which we are extremely impressed with plus student staff accomplishments.
- Present justification and funding scenarios for full funding of the Shelton Board of Education $3.5 million request.
- Present the opportunity for a cooperative agreement with the Shelton Board of Education and City Officials. This will put beyond all the nonsense on how
ineffectively we spend our money and to reach out to you and say together we are going to work to make Full Day Kindergarten happen, give our parents, kids and community the best education possible. We will propose to take some things away and also propose implementation of Full Day Kindergarten and the money necessary to support Special Education students so we are not increasing our cost.

Freeman Burr stated, we have communicated with our parents that we are going to do everything in our power to implement full day. We now need 8.5 teachers to implement Full Day Kindergarten based on the response we are getting. We will need furniture, fixtures, and equipment that we estimate at $200,000. We need texts and consumables at an estimate of $120,000 and curriculum and training for our staff at $20,000. The total implementation cost is $986,000 this number is up about $48,000 from last month’s presentation. Please note that this does not include the existing ½ day Kindergarten which is included in the budget request. The total cost for implementation is $986,000 due to decreasing enrollment in our elementary schools we have 5 elementary positions; we would either lay off or use them to offset the people that retire or leave. What we are proposing to do is reallocate those teachers to take 5 of the 8.5 positions needed for the Full Day Kindergarten. We are also going to propose that the City assume $200,000 for the furniture, fixtures and equipment and move that to capital outlay. We have the space but not the furnishings. The primary advantage of Full Day Kindergarten is to meet student’s academic needs. Kindergarten also works on addressing physical needs plus social and emotional needs. Currently, half day Kindergarten is full of 175 minutes of instruction and a total for the year is 31,675. For Full Day Kindergarten students would receive 350 minutes of instruction per day with 63,000 minutes of instruction for the year. I believe that implementation of Full Day Kindergarten is an investment in Shelton’s educational future.

Freeman Burr explained, Special Education, when I arrived here is 2009/2010, Al Cameron came to me with the news that we had a budget deficit that was around $1 million dollars, about $500,000 of that was attributed Special Education. We need to develop appropriate programing for our identified students with disabilities. The budget allocations over the last few years are not helping us to keep pace with our Special Education needs. What we have done in four years is we have kept the cap on it. Our out of district costs have not increased it is because we have used our personnel from the teaching level through a reorganization of our central office personnel to develop appropriate programming for as many students as possible within our school communities. We will never eliminate the need for out of district programs. The total count of students in the Special Education program is growing from 616 students in 2012-2013 to 630 students in 2013-2014. If we do not get enough funding to keep pace with this than we need to dip into the funds for the regular education budget. We need an additional 1.5 special education teachers, 1 speech and language pathologist and 5 tutors with benefits we project this cost to be $325,000.

Freeman Burr discussed the student, school and district accomplishments.
Freeman Burr explained, we are competing with Masuk, Oxford and Trumbull and we actually surpassed Oxford in math but we still are not catching them in reading and writing. These are all the surrounding towns and comparing ourselves to the region. All of Shelton’s schools are either excelling or progressing on report cards. Only two schools are in transition. Our surrounding towns spend more than Shelton does per student. How things compare with our competition; the average dollars per pupil between Oxford, Trumbull and Monroe is $13,500 for Shelton it is $12,400 the difference is $1,300. We have 5,000 students, if we were asking for the difference, which we are not; we would be talking about $6.5 million. We are only asking for an additional $1.5 million which equals $300 per student/181 days of school =$1.66 per day more per student.

Freeman Burr added, in Oxford 64% of the budget is allotted to the Board of Education. In Shelton 57% of the budget is allotted for education. The next slide shows the last 5 years of our requests and allocation vs. City Fund Balance. First, I would like to say thank you because last year we received 61% of our request and it is the first year we received a significant amount of money. Currently, we are $500,000 over budget and we are hoping to close that. We are over budget in propane and fuel oil. The only way to counteract those dollars is taking from our students. So for example, if we get staff that leaves half way through the year we are putting substitutes in for the remainder of the year. In the previous four years our total request was $7.4 million in total and we received $731,989. We received less than 1% of our requests as costs were escalating including one year that we were given Workers Compensation costs without notice before we made our budget it was after the year began. We not only have dealt with the Workers Compensation costs but we will also have a reduced allocation in that next year. This year Shelton is getting $5.3 million from the State, that money does not come to Shelton Public Schools that money goes to directly to the City and is in the budget as revenue. Our recommended budget with increases is;

- Administration $200,000- $134,000 of this request is to add an administrator at Perry Hill so that they will have three principals as does Shelton Intermediate.
- Certified Staff $1,100,000
- Other Certified $320,000
- Non-Certified $550,000
- Benefits Increases $875,000
- Trans Increase $300,000
- Instructional $200,000

Total increase $3,500,000.00

Freeman Burr added, our budget request is $69,120,000 where we are at now is $67,600,000. The current gap is $1.5 million we have shown opportunities were Shelton really is if they had the will to fund the full amount. We are not asking for a lot. What we wish to propose is that the City takes on the propane costs; City owns the buses, the yards, and the filling stations. Take on propane, this year the cost will be about $400,000. If the City takes on that $500,000 a year from now 2015 the City will reap about a $100,000 rebate. We are also asking that the Board of Alderman take the
furniture, fixtures, technology and equipment request of $200,000 as capitol. We are here for the additional $1.5 million but if we have to get to a better place than what we are asking you is to find another $500,000 to increase our allocation from $2 million to $2.5 million. From discussions with the Mayor, he indicated to me that there is money in youth programs. Over the next 3 years he does not expect to spend $245,000 we are asking you to allocate that money to our side of the budget. That would bring the remaining gap to $775,000. We really do need the $1.5 to operate the schools but this is an alternative proposal. Consider the opportunities to close that $1.5 gap and if not let’s get together, stop pointing fingers and let’s get this done for our kids and families. If our kindergarten kids can reach an agreement we can too.

Joe Knapik asked, short of the City allocated surplus money what contingencies exist to cover the current Board of Education shortfall? You have been able to deal with the same situation in the past.

Freeman Burr replied, we continue to go to the same place. There are no contingencies, look at the regular Education side we leave positions unfilled. Right now we have our instructional budget frozen with no new hires. When we get our third quarter financials then we will have a better assessment to where we are.

Louis Dagostine added, thank you for appearing and presenting your budget. This is now the third meeting that I have been to about Full Day Kindergarten. The data that supports it is overwhelming. I believe that I am correct when I state this, that I am the only one at this table currently with a child in half day Kindergarten. I experience firsthand on how rushed my son is during school. You have $1,950,000 in roll over costs if you are not given the full $750,000 do you have a rank order of priorities if your given half the amount?

Freeman Burr replied, that money will go first go to cover Special Education.

Aldermen Finn asked, Joe Knapik mentioned the surplus money and Louis touched on the rollover. Everybody knows we have a $7 million surplus this year what the public doesn’t know; June 30th we had almost a $12 million undesignated surplus on top of the $7 million. You need $1.5 million as a rollover and would that rollover also include the cost of Kindergarten?

Freeman Burr replied, what we are asking for is the difference between what the City has committed and additional $1.5 million to put all our requests in.

Aldermen Finn asked, what would the residents be looking at if you were not funded in full?

Freeman Burr answered, Perry Hill would go without an Assistant Principal, all projected classroom positions that we wanted to add would go away. We budgeted for propane on what we were fairly sure it would cost by working with propane dealers on what the cost would be. Along with what the gas mileage would be.
Al Cameron added, we budgeted the propane cost on $1.66 per gallon we were led to believe that it could be as low as a $1.30 per gallon. We are experiencing the propane being $2.08 per gallon. We budgeted for a total of 135,000 gallons for the year and we have used 142 already. So when you roll it all out we are looking at a $275,000 shortfall.

Mark Holden stated, part of it is the propane buses are not as efficient when it is really cold. Also the fuel economies that we were told to expect were based on roads that are not as hilly as Shelton’s are.

Alderman Papa asked, just clarify for me in your salaries and benefits you have 8 teachers at $608,000.

Freeman Burr stated, our elementary enrollment is going down so we believe that we can pull five teachers out without impacting class size as it exist now. Then we would use the five teachers as full time Kindergarten teachers which will reduce the number of Kindergarten teachers we need.

Alderman Papa asked, so you will still need to hire 3.5 teachers

Freeman Burr replied, yes.

Alderman Papa said, my last question, I just want to make sure that it is clear; you are short $1.5 million? If we could pay for the propane and for the furniture that’s $700,000 so the basic number is $2,745,000.

Freeman Burr answered, correct, if the number gets to $2,745,000 we can implement full day Kindergarten, take away pay to participate and the savings from propane will offset the Special Education and Support Service costs. We will still be in a tight place.

Alderman Anglace replied, all you are saying is that you will be back next year with the same situation only different numbers in different places. For 22 years I have sat here and I have seen this before. Why did the Board of Education agree to do all day Kindergarten when you have these problems existing before you get to that point?

Mark Holden replied, it is the educationally sound thing to do and we will control our costs in the future.

Alderman Anglace replied, that’s not proven there are studies on both sides of that and it is just not proven. You say that time and time again and I don’t buy into that.

Mark Holden replied, your studies are older than mine.

Freeman Burr added, you are right there are studies that talk about both sides. I think it is the quality of delivery. When you look at the delivery quality we are getting now, not only in our half day program but throughout our district, we are moving with limited funds and there isn’t a reserve to continue doing that.
Alderman Anglace added, what we should be talking about here is the problems…

Joe Knapik interrupted saying we should be asking questions not offering commentary at this time.

Alderman McPherson replied, I disagree, this issue with the budget, we are asking questions and it’s important to exchange the comments. There are people who have differences of opinion and those need to be discussed. I hear let’s work together but you know what I have to tell you when Freeman mentioned the finger pointing well the finger pointing comes from some members of the Board of Education who accuse the Mayor and Board of Alderman of not supporting your requests. There have been many requests that the Board of Education had that we supported unanimously.

Freeman Burr replied, you have not heard it from me.

Alderman McPherson replied, I saw it in an email that a Board of Ed member sent out.

Alderman Papa stated, the important thing here is we are communicating with the Board of Education. The Alderman need to propose a budget and we have to ask questions so we can propose a budget to you that you can live with.

Alderman Finn added, I did request a few months ago a meeting between the Board of Alderman and the members of the Board of Education just to discuss this one line item. That was turned down.

Alderman McPherson asked, how many children do we have right now in Kindergarten.

Freeman Burr answered, 283 children are in kindergarten.

Charlotte Madar asked, we have the Kindergarten problem now what about Common Core that is next.

Freeman Burr answered, we have been transitioning our curriculum for five years now.

Alderman Simonetti asked, the cost for transportation for a Special Education student is $20,000 a year for one student?

Freeman Burr answered, yes that is correct.

Alderman Kudej asked, pay to participate, what happens if you have an athlete that is outstanding but can’t afford to pay?

Freeman Burr replied, anyone that qualifies for free and reduced lunch pay a reduced fee. Additionally, we work with Mr. Niski and Booster Clubs to provide scholarships for kids if needed. Also we help parents out with specialized payment plans in order for kids to participate. I would love to see it go. We have about 23% of our kids that qualify for the free and reduced lunch. We also have a cap for families that have multiple kids playing multiple sports. You don’t pay more than a certain amount.
Alderman Anglace stated, what your failing to say is that the amount of support that I have given you and in many of your capital items. We picked up the buses $1.2 million we are paying each year for the buses. Now I agree with you and I’m sympathetic to what you say about the propane. Nobody anticipated that coming and we are sympathetic towards that. We have made great strides together and you’re talking here tonight and I’m listening and you’re saying we need to get our house in order because there are so many loose ends. Then on the other hand the Board of Education makes a commitment to Full Day Kindergarten. Then you come in here and say you raised the budget 5.7% when the cost of living went up 1%. I just don’t think that is realistic and from my point of view I have reservations. It isn’t that I’m against what you want to do as an educator but we have to work towards a better way of getting it done. My concern is the academic program that these kids will be exposed to and how we measure what we do because there are too many studies out there that say it can hurt kids.

Freeman Burr replied, we did have a few parents raise that concern and what we indicated was that any parent who wasn’t sure their child can handle full day we would work with them one on one to transition their child accordingly.

Alderman Anglace asked, will full day Kindergarten be mandatory for all?

Freeman Burr answered, we would try to get everyone to the full day program. Our numbers are showing our parents are interested. We do believe Shelton can cover that $1.5 million gap and we believe it is a matter of will and that the resources are there.

Meeting discussion is also held on tape.

Adjournment

John Belden moved to adjourn the April 2, 2014 Budget Hearing meeting; seconded by Louis Dagostine. A voice vote was taken; motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned approximately 7:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Anglace
Clerk, Board of Apportionment and Taxation