



BOARD OF ALDERMEN
CITY OF SHELTON
SPECIAL PUBLIC HEARING MEETING ON
THE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024
MINUTES

MAY 9, 2023, 7 P.M.

SHELTON CITY HALL AUDITORIUM, 54 HILL STREET, SHELTON CT

Live-Streamed at www.cityofshelton.org

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Alderman McPherson called the Special Board of Aldermen Public Hearing Meeting on the Proposed Affordable Housing Plan to order at 7 p.m. in the auditorium at Shelton City Hall. All those present stood and pledged allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Roll Call

Alderman John F. Anglace, Jr., President – Present via phone
Alderman Eric McPherson, Vice President – Present
Alderman Lorenzo Durante – Present
Alderman Porter McKinnon – Present
Alderman Anthony Simonetti – Present via phone
Alderman Bernie Simons – Present
Alderman Cris Balamaci – Present
Alderman Kevin Kosty – Present

1. BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

Alderman McPherson: Anybody who has not done so and wishes to speak tonight, please sign in with the clerk. Everyone speaking will have five minutes to speak on the budget. Please keep comments confined to the budget since this is the public hearing for that. Anybody that may have written comments and may not want to come to the podium, they can certainly submit them with the clerk and they will be entered into the record as well. I ask and the Board asks to refrain from any applause so we can get to the next speaker as I am sure there are a lot of people who want to speak tonight and we certainly want to allow you the opportunity to do so. Having said that, we will go through a quick attendance. Board President Anglace and Alderman Simonetti are on the phone. Present are Alderman Balamaci, Alderman Durante, myself, McPherson, Alderman Simons, Alderman McKinnon and Alderman Kosty. When you come to the podium, please speak clearly into the microphone. Will the clerk please read the first speaker to come to the podium. Alderman Simons will be the timekeeper, 5 minutes per speaker. Thank you very much for your cooperation. If you agree with the previous speaker, please say so or if you have something new to add you are welcome to do so as well.

**BOA SPECIAL PUBLIC HEARING MEETING
BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024**

MAY 9, 2023

ANTICIPATED REVENUES			
Government Grants	7,846,619		
Local Taxes	107,355,661		
Other Local Revenue	9,825,992		
General Fund Surplus	6,100,000		
TOTAL ANTICIPATED REVENUES	131,128,272		
PROPOSED EXPENDITURES		PROPOSED EXPENDITURES	
Administrative Office	753,376	Public Health	321,055
Employees Resources	7,709,356	Building Department	405,019
Legislative	172,937	Highways & Bridges	3,889,403
Board of Ethics	600	Road Repairs	25,000
Elections	172,322	Public Works Director	78,702
Inland/Wetlands	109,464	Engineering	441,450
Economic Development Commission	69,801	Tree Warden	135,175
Economic Development - SEDC	128,000	Recycling Program	47,302
Planning & Zoning	585,139	Sanitation	3,093,548
Recreation	1,796,596	Bus Transportation	3,395,000
Probate Court	14,700	Library	1,260,767
Elected/Appointed Officials	18,450	Debt Service	5,906,542
Conservation Commission	79,983	Utilities	2,889,220
City/Town Clerk	467,730	Building Maintenance	1,737,596
Public Employees Appeals Board	200	Management Information Services	500,870
Senior Center	449,585	Assessor	646,380
Zoning Appeals Board	24,540	Tax Collector	356,725
Corporation Counsel	242,270	Purchasing	396,817
Public Safety	129,909	Public Risk Management	2,308,871
EMS Commission	111,231	Accounting	680,926
Fire Marshal	334,196	Community Development	92,350
Animal Control	350,300	Miscellaneous	1,131,300
Fire Department	1,196,425	Outside Agency Contributions	380,210
Police Department	8,418,535	Contingency	175,000
Youth Service	237,861	TOTAL EXPENDITURES - CITY DEPARTMENTS	
		TOTAL EXPENDITURES - BOARD OF EDUCATION	77,259,538
		TOTAL PROPOSED EXPENDITURES	131,128,272

PUBLIC SPEAKERS

Mollie Moe, 23 Shagbark Road

I am speaking again in front of this Board to implore you to fully fund the Board of Education budget and not the proposed version by the current Mayor. I have been in education for the past 15 years, first as a teacher and now as a school counselor. I have worked in inner-city, suburban and rural districts. The needs are the same throughout. Good quality faculty and staff, low class sizes in order to accommodate the ever growing needs of the individual child and familial involvement in order to collectively support the child in a positive and collaboration between school and family. I currently have two children in the Shelton School System and both attend Elizabeth Shelton Elementary. It is not only your obligation to listen to my plea, but truly act in the best interests of our children. The best interest is to vote to fully fund this budget. The consequences would be dire if the Mayor's proposed budget is approved and not the original BOE request. Our school principal, Ms. Weber, has requested one additional classroom teacher to accommodate the ever-growing enrollment at Elizabeth Shelton. We are currently the most enrolled elementary school in town and if that request is not fully funded, the class sizes will be maxed out. My daughter, who will be in the 4th grade next year, will be in a class size filled with 31 students. My son, who will be a first grader next year, will be in a class of 29. That is absolutely ludicrous to have that many 6, 7, 8, 9+ year old children in a classroom for six plus hours. This year I am a room parent for my son's kindergarten class. I volunteered throughout the year and I am almost scared to say what an amazing job his teacher has done give the class that she currently has of kindergarteners to manage and educate. I can't imagine that that class, adding five more next year, what that would look like. For reference, second grade will increase to 29, third grade will increase to 30 and not to mention fourth will increase to max out 31. How much valuable learning will occur with those maxed out sizes. Several studies have shown that a lower class size greatly benefits overall student achievement. Lower class sizes offer the opportunity for the teacher to be able to differentiate the various learning styles of students, there are less negative behaviors to manage because the teacher to student ratios will remain lower. Students have more one on one interactions with the teacher with a positive result with more individualized attention. Students truly feel like an individual learner and not just a number in the classroom. Isn't it our responsibility as parents, educators, community members and elected Board officials to invest in our children within our community, because aren't they the future? When a simple budget request can't be filled to serve the basis needs, supports and resources of our education system, what message does that send to our children and the school staff? This budget is not requesting anything above and beyond. It is simply requesting the bare necessities of what they need to function and remain competitive as there are competitive school districts that families would want to consider when moving into a town. Please answer that call and fully fund this budget. Thank you.

Kate Kutash (BOE), 275 Beardsley Road

As most of you know I am a member of the Board of Education. On April 5th Mr. Saranich presented the scenario that with our current enrollment, allotment as recommended by the Mayor, there could be between 60 to 65 positions lost. I want to provide you with a concrete example of what our school system could see happen if we, the Board of Ed, are not fully funded. Not saying this is the way it will play out, but it could. 60 positions. Let's just say for the sake of you actually picturing what it could look like if 20 of them are elementary teachers, four from each of five schools. That eliminates a classroom of 25 kids at four different grade levels. Split between them, possibly two other classrooms left at that grade level. They are already at 25 if not one of those higher numbers stated at Elizabeth Shelton. Doing the math, 25 plus an additional 12 means 37 children in a class at each of four different grade levels. Picture that. 37 kids in classrooms that are already crowded with 25. No room left for holding group meetings, meeting, learning stations and the like that have become part of the teaching/learning model. Think again, 37 bodies in one classroom. Do we want that? Our students, teachers and staff deserve better. Thank you.

Ludwig Spinelli, 14 Willard Road

You have a very difficult job before you. Having sat on the Board of Aldermen, this is one of the most important things you do, set the budget. It is not a democratic budget, it is not a republican budget, it is a budget that kids need. You see the signs all over town. I don't think I need to remind you how important it is, but even from an economic perspective, ask any realtor, what do people look at when they want to move into a town. If we are going to be at the bottom of the pupil expenditure, it is going to hurt the real estate values and devalue everybody's home, those who have invested in it. Just look at the same house in Monroe, the same house in Trumbull. Why are they worth more than Shelton? Shelton is going to get a reputation that it does not deserve because we are so focused on trying to keep taxes low that we are actually hurting the integrity of the school system. I ask you to find the funds to fully fund the Board request. I don't think it is excessive. Do the right thing. I know it is not easy and we cannot depend on the State of Connecticut to send money down as you may have heard and I would not bank on that. Again, I don't want to take the full five minutes as there are many other people, but please, this is the best thing you could do, the most important thing is to do it for the children. Thank you.

Ellen Thomas (Parent) – Speaker Stafford Thomas, 303 Nichols Avenue

Hello. My name is Stafford Thomas. I am 7 years old. I am in first grade at Booth Hill School. I really like it when there are only 20 kids in my class, not 30. I learn so much more that way. Thank you good night. Mrs. Marks is the best!

Caitlin Jurkowski, 58A Wheeler Street

How do I follow that? Good evening. I am here tonight as a very concerned mother of two little girls just starting their educational journey in Shelton. My first daughter is in kindergarten and my second will be entering kindergarten in the fall. I also happen to be a kindergarten teacher myself in a neighboring district. I was born and raised in Shelton, attended Mohegan, SIS, SHS and have always been proud to call Shelton my home until recently. When Covid started there was a public outcry of value and supporting and defending teachers. Teachers were being given awards, being recognized and it was as if suddenly we were seen. Now what? The implications of this budget not being passed is truly a slap in the face to the teachers who work tirelessly with who is the future of this City. What will the future of the City look like if we don't support our schools? Proposing cuts and expanding class sizes sets the tone that in this City we don't value teachers. Do you not care that teaching 31 kids in an elementary setting is outrageous and impossible for one human being because we don't just teach. We nurture, we raise, we care and as a kindergarten teacher I can tell you firsthand that a class of 25 is detrimental to a student's growth and achievement. That is a foundational year, setting kids up for future success. These 4- and 5-year-olds go from daycare and preschool with five plus caregivers in a small educational setting to a class of 25 with zero extra para-educator support. These superhero teachers are required to make them read, write and do math, all while making sure they are happy, fed and most importantly safe. That is unrealistic. I urge you to spend just a day in a 4th grade classroom of 31 kids and tell me afterwards that all the educational, social/emotional and basic needs were met. We are falling behind neighboring districts rapidly and there is no secret the reason. Our students deserve better, our teachers deserve better and I hope more than anything that one day I can say I am again the proud parent of a kid in the Shelton School System. Put the politics aside and think of your own children, what would you want for them? Thank you.

Marissa Memoli, 311 Meadowridge Road

The proposed budget cuts to the existing budget, I am speaking specifically from the perspective of a fellow education and an ESS parent. I currently have a first grade student attending there and a rising kindergartener in the near future. I have been in the field of education for over 15 years in various roles. I believe beginning the school year with unmanageable class sizes can only result in a lack of learning for our most vulnerable learners. It will also damage the relationship of veteran teachers who are set up for failure from the beginning. A question I ask you to consider – what happens when class sizes reach max capacity in the middle or beginning of the year. Redistricting our youngest impressionable learners with reasons they will never understand. It will only disrupt the academic and social/emotional well-being of our innocent children. With the increasing amount of apartments we are seeing in the downtown area, which is primarily districted for ESS, we are starting the year with above average class sizes, only creating unrealistic expectations. From an administrator standpoint, these budget cuts will force principals and other supervisors to make decisions that are not best for our children and

potentially damaging for the overall morale of their buildings. Food for thought – at ESS the class sizes for 3rd and 4th grade are highest going into next year. These are students that learned how to read through a screen during Covid. I am not sure how many of you frequent the buildings. I am fortunate enough to be in a position where I am in various classrooms ranging from Pre-K to 12th grade on a daily basis. I see average class sizes of 17 to 22 children and even that is too much. Now take that a step further and add at least 5-10 more kids, pure insanity. There is no possible way that all of our kids will be met daily. I urge you to picture those young and impressionable minds when making your final decision. Please, please fully fund the district's budget. Thank you.

Monica Peterson, 10 Brook Pine Drive

I am a retired teacher from a Connecticut school district and I am also the vice-chairperson of the Shelton Democratic Town Committee. As such, I urge you to pass the budget for the school district as proposed by the Board of Education. The children of Shelton deserve no less. Thank you.

Dr. Michelle Eckler, 17 Grove Street

Good Evening. I come to you this evening in support of the Board of Education budget and I call upon you as our elected officials to do the same. I have two very important jobs in my life. I am the mother of two wonderful special needs children here in the City of Shelton. I am also a public educator of 22 years with both classroom and administrative experience. I have four degrees including a Doctorate in Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Leadership. I do believe that my experience as a public school educator at a variety of levels gives me a very unique perspective on what it means to be part of running a school district. Never in the history of my administrative career, 13 years of the 22, have I ever sat in a meeting like this and heard anyone say they are not going to give the schools money that they have. I have only ever been told that the well had run dry. Never have I been made to feel like students and children of the town that I worked in were so unimportant that we couldn't find the money to better fund their education. I worked in a school district for 10 years that was an extremely low income school district with a very high mill rate. What I am really here to talk to you tonight though is to tell you a story of a mom who wanted nothing more than to get the best education for her children. I am also a Shelton High School graduate, class of 97. I remember my years in school as some of my best memories. My husband and I lived in a different town when our first son, Richie, was born in 2014 and we made the decision to relocate our family to Shelton for its reputation as an excellent school district and, specifically, for its Pre-K program at the time. Richie had a speech delay and shortly before he began Pre-K he was also diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum. We were so excited that the Shelton Pre-K Program would provide him with access to his typical

peers while also being able to meet his very distinct and special needs. Every single Pre-K teacher that worked with Richie in 2017 and 2018 poured their heart and soul into making his experience nothing short of amazing. When we learned of his placement in the Alternative Learning Center which was then housed at Sunnyside we were a little nervous but excited. Richie had three amazing years at Sunnyside with two different teachers who honestly deserve sainthood as well as some pretty phenomenal paraprofessionals. Now at Elizabeth Shelton Richie is thriving in the ALC. Richie's little brother Luke will follow him next year into the ALC as he has developmental delays as well. Luke also had some pretty amazing teachers and paraprofessionals in the Pre-K Program and his language has blossomed this school year. Though most of the time we still can't understand what he is saying, when his words do come out he will definitely be quite the chatterbox. Why do I share these stories of my children with you? Because failing to fully fund the Board of Education budget will directly impact both of my children in ways that I hope none of you can even begin to comprehend. While either of my boys are fully mainstreamed, any kind of cut will mean sending my autistic 9-year-old into a 4th grade classroom of 31 students at Elizabeth Shelton School, when he needs to be in the mainstream room. Richie's ability to function in a large group setting like that will be low at best and he will miss out on critical time with his non-disabled peers that are required by his IEP because more than likely he will meltdown and have to leave the room. If you have never experienced an autistic meltdown, you should consider yourself lucky. Not being able to help your child in a situation like that is terrifying and any cut to the school system has potential to make those meltdowns for my son more common. Cuts will also directly affect my son, Luke. Kindergarten class sizes of 25 will be the size if the cuts happen at Elizabeth Shelton and they are not ideal in any situation, let alone sending a child with limited language into one of those classrooms. The goal for Luke is to get him to turn into that little chatterbox we were hoping for, not to stifle his voice with too many little voices in one room. I know I am not alone in saying that it isn't an option anymore to not fully fund the Board of Education budget. There are just too many stories like those of my children where kids will be hurt by cuts. As our elected Board of Aldermen, you have a chance to make it right this year. So I implore you to fully fund the Board of Education budget for the 2023-24 school year and give our children a fighting chance at a high-quality education. Thank you.

Jessica Myers, 27 Country Ridge Drive

I don't really have anything prepared. I just wanted to ask for your support to fully fund the Board of Ed budget. Thanks

Meghan Hall, 12 Captains Watch

I also don't have anything prepared. I just urge you all to support and fully fund the Board of Education and support smaller class sizes.

Mark Holden, 275 Soundview Avenue

Good Evening. It is important that you provide adequate funding for education to maintain or improve our student achievement. People are talking about class sizes and that is certainly a big part of it. If you have too many kids crammed in a class, the teacher will not be able to give adequate attention to each of the students. Here is some historical data based on the State standardized tests for student achievement in Shelton. In 2014-2015 we were ranked 76th in the State for student achievement. The following year, 2015-16 we improved to 57th in the State. In 2016-2017 we improved to 51st in the State. In 2017-18 we improved to 36th in the State which was within 0.2% of the Board's goal of making the top quartile for student achievement. Budget constraints cost us ten staff members in 2018-19 and it was a tipping point and we dropped to 66th. In 2019-2020 the BOE had a budget that cost them 18 teachers. There was no testing that year so we don't know exactly how it affected it. The 2021 budget results in the loss of 23½ people and our student achievement dropped from 66th two years prior to 83rd. 2021-22 we have a lot of federal grant money available and allowed us to maintain staff and even hire some much needed counselors. We moved up 12 positions to 71st and just like in the early years when we had a good jump in student achievement, we again had some schools recognized as schools of distinction. Shelton has a tradition of hiring great teachers and administrators who genuinely care, but teachers who are no longer in the classroom because of budget constraints could no longer help. Because of the Covid funding cliff the BOE needs a larger than normal increase to maintain what they have. You can blame the Federal Government if you want, but if you don't pick up the slack, we stand to lose dozens of teachers and that is going to hurt student achievement tremendously. High taxes hurt property values. The quality of the school system also has a dramatic impact on the value of our homes. Your job is to find a way to make Shelton the best place it can be and that means giving the schools the resources that they need in order to allow our students to thrive. Thank you.

Tom Hanas, 11 Hidden Pond Lane

We are once again here this evening to ask the Board of Aldermen and Mayor Lauretti do something that hasn't been done in quite some time in the City and that is to fully fund the proposed Board of Education budget. At the last meeting there seemed to be some confusion about what fully funding the budget means. I will explain. The BOE developed and presented the cost for a status quo budget next year and taxpayers were asking the City not to cut it, not make changes to it, just simply fund it. That is what it means to fully fund. You would think the importance of education is a simple decision. I had discussed this individually with some of you. I continually hear accusations how the BOE improperly spends their money and other political nonsense. Here is the reality. Our classroom sizes have skyrocketed. The student to teacher ratios are 29 to 1. We have old technology and not enough mental health support staff in our schools at critical times in this country. It is not like the BOE is taking advantage of the situation

considering over the past five years the City has undercut their previous status quo budgets year after year by \$9.2 million in aggregate. This resulted in the elimination of 52 educators from our schools and essentially placed in the situation we are faced with here today. As a taxpayer I no longer want excuses. Previous years no parents showed up at all to support education, this past year we have seen rooms packed with people here representing education. Can I see a raise of hands who does not want to support education in this room? (Mr. Hanas was asked to address the Board). You guys won't raise your hands. (Alderman McPherson: We can't, we are supposed to listen to you). Okay, but I know where you stand. Either way, I want you to do your job. I understand yours are volunteer positions and again thank you for your service, but you are not running a lemonade stand here. You are all elected officials who make critical decisions for our City and a level of accountability comes along with that responsibility. I am not going to sit here and regurgitate all the reasons why we need proper funding. The parents have done an excellent job explaining that over the past year. You are well informed and it is now up to you as to whether or not you truly care about education. With the election looming, it is imperative for many of you to get this right as myself and a lot of my fellow republicans facing this issue are closely watching the outcome. There is no question and we can figure out how to beat the status quo budget. Financially it is possible and can be done. The way we use grants, general surplus funds or other methods to get there, we can make it happen. You somehow managed to keep taxes flat during historic inflation levels, you could easily figure out a way to get this done as well. Thank you.

Jen Martinez, 15 Treeland Road

I have three children at Mohegan and I actually recently resigned from Shelton Public Schools this past March. One of the major reasons why I resigned was because of the lack of resources Shelton Public Schools had. Our schools are understaffed and filled with outdated technology. Students have desktop computers that don't even run the programs they need because they are so outdated. I challenge the Board to visit all the schools in Shelton, talk to the staff and hear their concerns. Shelton has lost many teachers this past year and will continue to lose teachers if they do not provide the teachers and staff the resources they need. If Shelton wants to be a great city, it needs to invest in the future. The future of the City of Shelton is to give to the classrooms of Mohegan, Booth Hill, Long Hill, Sunnyside, Elizabeth Shelton, Perry Hill, Shelton Intermediate and Shelton High School. Please fund our budget. Thank you.

Matt McGee, 312 Huntington Street

I didn't prepare anything because I think you guys know where I stand. I got involved about 4-5 years ago now fighting for our schools as a student. I am still here because I care. I just wanted to read three things, some research I did before I came here. The first piece of information is actually what the Mayor had in his hand when he gave his budget address and it talks about the

enrollment history of Shelton Public Schools. As you guys probably know, enrollment has dropped, to his and your credit, by about 500 students since the 2014-15 school year. My next piece of information though is something that that piece of paper did not have and that is the total Special Education enrollment. For those of you who don't know, Special Education students typically cost anywhere from 2, 3, 4 or 5 times the amount of educating a regular education student and that has increased in Shelton over the last nine years by 168. I typically hear from certain friends that, oh the enrollment has dropped so why do they need more money. That precisely there is your reason why. The last thing I do want to read off as a statement of fact, a couple of the class sizes as they currently are, and again I am sure you have seen this but you may not have talked about it publicly, but I will. In Booth Hill the kindergarten class, we have class one 24 students, class two 24 students, class three 24 students. Grade 1 Booth Hill two classes, 27 students, class two 27 students. Grade 4, class one 24, class two 28, class three 29. Elizabeth Shelton School Grade 4, 27, 26, 25. Long Hill Grade 4, 24, 25, 25. Grade 3 in Mohegan School, 26, 26, 24. This is all currently by the way. Sunnyside School kindergarten class one 26, class two 28. I cannot remember – I'm 21, I was in school a few years ago, not that long ago, I do not remember an elementary school ever having a class over 25 students. Maybe I am wrong, maybe I am mis-remembering, but this seems like a new phenomenon for us as a community. If you guys want to take a vote and you want to cut 2.5 million from the schools, by all means. If you can go to sleep at night and then wake up the next morning and look yourselves in the mirror and be fine, then by all means vote the way you want to vote, but if I were you, I would not be very okay with that. Thank you.

Martha Parkins, 15 Serene Drive

Thank you to those Board of Aldermen members who took the time to respond to my emails. I attended the recent Board of Aldermen Budget Workshop. During the meeting it was mentioned that many emails and phone calls have been received encouraging you to increase the funding allocated to education in order to fully fund the education budget. Please take a moment to look around the room at the strong presence here tonight in support of fully funding the budget. The people here are a reflection of the importance of education to the citizens of Shelton. As was mentioned during the Board of Aldermen Budget Workshop, you are voting on behalf of your constituents. Your constituents have spoken. They want the education allocation to be increased. I look forward to your vote on May 25th on behalf of your constituents.

Melissa Addario, 7 Hazel Court

I have a daughter going into 2nd grade and a son going into kindergarten this fall at Booth Hill. I stand before you today with the same concerns I had a few months ago when I spoke. I want to say that I do not agree with Mayor Lauretti's budget proposal. It blows my mind why the school systems get undercut each passing year and the Mayor does not seem to think it is a problem. The need is even greater this year than the years before due to the fact that the grant

money has ended. We need to keep the teachers we have plus the additional teachers, paraprofessionals and counselors. We are asking for you to keep our schools functioning at standard levels. The superintendent, Ken Saranich, gave a great presentation to the Board explaining why the Shelton Public Schools need this money. It is not a want, but a need. There is nowhere else to pull from and as a result, if we are underfunded we will lose the teachers we need. It couldn't have been laid out any clearer. For those of you who are still on the fence about class size, let me tell you, class size matters. To have 29 or 30 kids in a classroom is not okay. To bring it down to having 27 or 28 kids in a classroom is not okay either. I have had the opportunity to spend some time inside my daughter's classroom. There was minimal disruption from kids leaving the classroom in and out for extra help. That was something that an alderman had said he had heard was a reason why he didn't think class size was the problem but maybe disruption in the classroom. I did not find that to be the case. There is disruption when the kids, on a daily basis, cannot easily move around their own classroom and cannot even sit on a carpet all together as a class, missing out on the extra attention from their teacher, which is very important. I sat in on my daughter's classroom in the beginning of the school year this fall for Back to School Night. You could not easily move around the classroom with the sea of desks in your way. The teachers said not all the kids could get on the carpet together, so some had to stay back at their desks. This is where my daughter spent her day trying to stay focused with all the noise and chaos that is sure to have happened around her with 30 kids in it. I don't know about you, but I work more efficiently in an open, organized space than a closed in crowded space. How are our children supposed to get the education they need in an overcrowded and underfunded system. Repeating what I said at the last meeting, even under the best of circumstances, kids can fall behind, but under these circumstances, we are challenging fate. Kids will fall through the cracks and not get the attention they need and deserve. This is wrong. Mayor Lauretti when he spoke of his budget proposal, he spoke about 30 years ago when he was first elected about how great kids had done back then and what they were able to accomplish in their adult lives now. But this is not 30 years ago, this is today. We have to live in the present, not 15 years ago, not 5 years ago, today. The needs of the children is different now, especially going through the pandemic. To think what was acceptable 30 years ago would still be acceptable today is absurd. Nothing is the same. We need to adjust to the times and to the needs of our children in today's world, not what may have worked 30 years ago. Somebody said, I don't understand the signs, but we fund the Board of Ed budget. Well it means, we need this money that has been proposed to you so our schools can run efficiently and our children can get the best education they deserve. Once again, the school and staff deserve better. The families that live here deserve better. Most importantly the children deserve way more.

Diana Meyer, 56 Maple Lane

I am sure most of you know that I am a proud member of the Board of Ed along with my colleagues here tonight. What I wanted to talk to you about first was our last finance meeting

which I thanked Mr. Kosty and Mr. Anglace on the phone for attending. At that meeting we were discussing the overage of our budget this year. My new colleague, Jim Feehan, who is new to our Board of Ed was flabbergasted that we were running such a high overage and he questioned our superintendent and even afterwards continued to ask questions because he couldn't understand being a member of the Stratford Board of Ed for so many years, how we were running our budget that way and we had to explain to him that last year that was the way the Board of Aldermen set the budget, that they would cover our overages. I started to think about – I'm not sure what you have planned for this year – but what would happen if you do that this year. If you give us some money and then say don't worry we will cover the overages. Well, this is an election year and those of you sitting here tonight may not be here next year when we run that overage. We may have a different Mayor as a matter of fact. My concern is that if you do that again, that you will all be gone and there will be a new set of people in here and that may not fly with the new people. I want you to really think carefully about how you are going to structure the budget this year. The other thing I want to talk about is something Mr. Hanas had brought up. At the Budget Workshop last week, I wasn't able to come, but I did hear there was discussion about a lack of transparency with the Board of Ed as well as mismanagement of funds. Unfortunately the minutes aren't out yet, so I could not read that, but in further discussion with other people, I hear it seems to be a recurring theme when Board of Ed members don't attend your meetings that there is lack of transparency, there is mismanagement of funds. I have to say it was hurtful, it was disappointing as Board of Ed members. I think we are the most transparent department of the City. Mr. Saranich is here. His right-hand man, our finance director is here, who has frequent conversations with City Hall. Mr. Saranich and Mr. Anglace I know get together frequently. Mr. Saranich talks to the Mayor. We presented a three-ring binder to you in a three and a half meeting about our budget. Our meetings in finance are open to all of you to attend. I don't know how much more we could be transparent and if you think that is an issue, Mr. Saranich and Mr. Heffelfinger are here today and I am sure they would be glad to discuss it with you. As far as mismanagement of money, I have to say the same thing. We are an open book to you. You had questions, Mr. Saranich answered them this week. If anything, if you come away with anything tonight, please you have to change the narrative. Maybe as far as the mismanagement or lack of transparency, but I think now that is not true and I really hope in the future that you come out of this, that we will have this collaboration and that this mismanagement and transparency talk stops here. Thank you.

Debbie Oppel, 11 Corn Hill Road

I am a product of the Shelton Public Schools, Class of '79. My children and my husband are also graduates where we all received an excellent education. I have been an educator with the Shelton Public Schools for 23 years. I started at Sunnyside School, I was at Lafayette School and when that closed I came to Elizabeth Shelton School where I am a Special Education teacher. I work pulling students into my classroom to educate them in small groups with that

definition being challenged. I also work collaboratively in general ed classrooms, two of them a second grade and a fourth grade. We have eight or nine students in those classrooms and those classrooms all have upwards of 20 students in them this year. I come here to ask you to fully fund the proposed budget which I fully support and I hope you make the right decision on that. Thank you.

Eric Coleman, 48 Congress Avenue

Good evening. I don't have anything prepared. I am just here to request full funding of the Board of Ed.

Kathy Yolish, 1 Waverly Road

I have been a teacher in Shelton for 35 years and I have been on the Board of Education for 14 years, serving the last four years as Board Chairperson. A few weeks ago something, I think to be very important, stood out in an article published in both the *Connecticut Post* and *The Herald*. The article told of the Board of Aldermen's generous donation of \$20,000 to the Robotix Team to help defray the cost of their participation in the World's Competition to be held in Houston. City officials have been so supportive of many school endeavors, the Science Fairs, Pay to Participate, Robotix, Perry Hill and Shelton Intermediate School outdoor gardens, to name a few. We are so appreciative of the support, honestly. But, its success is rewarded as stated in the media and I quote the comment made at that Board of Ed Board of Aldermen meeting. This is one of those things where we reward success. Then should not our school budget be rewarded for its success, especially over the last two and a half years or two plus years. This year, four out of our five elementary schools were recognized by the State Department of Education as Schools of Distinction. Additionally, this year Shelton High School has been fully accredited for the first time in more than ten years. We now have highly successful learning programs at our K through 8 schools with the purchasing of Wit and Wisdom and the Eureka Math programs. Our Shelton High School graduation rate demonstrates further success with a graduation rate of 88%. Just last week, actually a few weeks ago now, one of our Shelton High School sophomore students was one of four winners of the Ernie DiMattia Emerging Artist Award at the Palace Theater in Stamford for his one act play. More than 70 students from Connecticut entered the contest and I should mention that it was his Language Arts teacher that encouraged him to write and submit his piece. The above-mentioned successes of our school system are only a sampling of many more than I could list. However, it is imperative to note that part of this success was due to the ARP and ESSER dollars, Covid relief monies, we received from 2020 to 2023. This approximately was \$7 million. This money will be totally expended by this June. How will we continue to succeed if we are not given the money we asked for and obviously need. I am appreciative of the amount the Mayor has indicated in his budget, but I hope that our elected City officials will reward our success with a fully funded budget to ensure this pack of success we have demonstrated. If success is measured for the achievement of desired results, and is

the positive consequence of one of achievement, then I wholeheartedly believe that our educational system should be rewarded for all the positives that have been accomplished thus far. I believe our elected city officials are intelligent and I also believe that they want the best education for our kids. I am hopeful that you will act accordingly. Thank you for all you do for our City and hopefully what you continue to do for our school system. Thank you.

Ava Johnson, 44 Fox Hunt Road

Good evening everyone. I am 9 years old, a dedicated 3rd grader at Elizabeth Shelton School and a proud Shelton resident. Please raise your hand if you are a teacher or an educator who currently works with students or are a retired educator. Thank you for your service and Happy Teacher Appreciation Week to all the awesome and caring teachers out there. If you did not raise your hand you probably can't fully comprehend the work and what it takes to educate today's kids. Let me tell you. While we are brilliant, talented and compatible of doing incredible things, we also have lots of needs. In order for our teachers and administrators to do our jobs efficiently, they must have the resources that they need to be successful along with a reasonable classroom size. Can you imagine teaching 30 fourth graders all day. It is not fair to our teachers and to the kids. Research says that larger classes are proven to make it more difficult for the teachers to set and enforce behavioral expectations, monitor students and pay individual attention to each student. Large class sizes leads to more disorder in the classroom which ultimately affects student learning. Is that what our politicians here want? I believe that is the Shelton way or our mission. I see many new businesses and stores in town. I also see new construction and development growing. I am positive that this will bring lots of money to our town and we should invest this tax money in the future of the kids of Shelton who will soon be business owners, firefighters, doctors and teachers and much, much, much more. I, Ava Johnson, promise to make the most of my educational journey. This is an important decision for Shelton. Do you believe me? Please support me. My teachers and the Shelton Public Schools thank you for listening.

Sara Wilbur, 37 Canfield Drive

Good evening. I previously sent in comments to be read tonight as I was traveling for work and didn't think I would make it back here in time, but I am extremely grateful for my very speedy Uber driver that got me directly here, so I was able to make it here in time. I attended all the Board of Education Budget Workshops, and spoke at various Board of Ed and Board of Aldermen meetings showing my support for funding the Board of Education budget. I have also spoken with many of you individually. I, along with other parents, put up yard signs reading, "Fully Fund the Board of Education." It appears some are questioning the term. "Fully Fund the Board of Education" means - do not take away from the Board of Ed request. All items requested

are essential. I can appreciate there is still a need for negotiation, that some item costs are variable, and that the State may fund additional items. I recognize the final line item may not be \$80,371,637 as requested by the Board of Ed, but just ask that the requested items are funded. It will be detrimental if they are not, and the Board of Ed is forced to reduce staff. I can also appreciate you have to put forth a balanced budget, and the Mayor's recommended budget is \$131,128,272. The Board of Ed budget request falls \$3,112,099 short of the Mayor's recommended budget. I implore you to review every line item. Compare prior years' budget to actuals. Can particular line items be reduced? If the City cannot put forth additional funds to fund the budget request, the Board of Ed should not be one of the only line items affected. As elected officials of the City, I expect you will do what is right for all your constituents and not simply agree with the Mayor's recommendation. I expect you to perform your own due diligence and base your recommendation on facts. Regardless of the outcome of the budget, I demand that you provide thoughtful justification for your decisions and recommendations. You have many taxpayers' eyes on you, especially during an election year. I encourage you to do the right thing and appropriately fund the Board of Ed budget request. Thank you.

Shannon Lynn, 179 Meadow Street

I was not planning on speaking tonight. Actually I crossed my name off the list earlier, but I feel like there is one more piece that I wanted to say before we leave tonight. As an educator I am fully listening to all the concerns of funding the Board's budget for educational purposes and I agree with them all. As a mother of two, I want to speak on the behalf of the safety concerns of my children if you do not fully fund this. My daughter is in 1st grade at Elizabeth Shelton and my son will be in kindergarten soon. When I send them off to school I trust the teachers and the staff to support them, care for them and keep them safe. However, my fear from events going on in this crazy world is that sometimes it is hard to put them on the bus and let them go in the morning. I ask you to think about how these teachers with 25+ children that are very young, have no idea what they are doing, what they are going to do in a lockdown, what they are going to do in a fire drill, shelter in place or if it is not a drill. What do you do with 30 7 year olds? How do you keep them safe? What do you do? Not only does this budget allow – if you don't pass this budget it does not allow for the best education but it allows our children not to be safe and for those innocent lives as well. I urge you to please do what is best for everyone, everyone that is impacted by your choice and totally fund the budget.

Ellie Maynard, 9 Woods Grove Road

I am in 3rd grade at Booth Hill School. I think the Board of Aldermen should fully fund the education budget so we don't lose our teachers. I don't think we kids should be here tonight, up past our bedtime asking you to care about our education. Thank you, have a good night.

Amy Harrington, 15 Cisco Drive

I wasn't planning on speaking tonight either. I have sent a couple of letters and apologies that I haven't been able to be here in person to support until now. I think you would have a lot more parents here if they could. We all know kids are super involved. One thing that has struck me since Covid is how much we expect our children to endure that we as adults won't. We tell our kids that they should never get upset that they have to always behave and yet I know myself and I'm sure many other people can think of times when they, themselves, have not behaved and no one holds them accountable. I think this is another one of those situations where we are expecting children to sit in classrooms of 30+ people, but would you sit in an office crammed in with 30 people every day for 180 days that they are in school. Also, the elementary schools have no air conditioning so let's add that on top of it with all those people and paper to write on. Could you do your jobs without paper or pencils? What about your support staff? I know even at my job now staffs are cut and adults are drawing the line. They are saying we are not going to do more. These children and these teachers, they don't have that option. They have to go in and no matter what their class size is, that is their job. I think looking at it from the classroom perspective is great. It can be difficult when it may not directly affect us, when we are not in the classroom every day to live it or feel it. I really urge you, if you can't go to the classroom, to put yourself in those shoes and your life and think of how you would do without those items. I also want to say that I know myself and other parents, we fund through the PTO a lot of the deficits that are not able to be funded with the Board of Education budget every year and it increases year after year how much we contribute to the expense of cultural enrichment so that what are these kids even able to write about and these teachers do a fantastic job. I'd rather see the PTO raising money for guest speakers than pencils and paper, Chromebook and everything else. It shouldn't be that way. The one thing that parents cannot contribute extra out of own pocket is the salary for the teachers. Thank you.

Priscilla Moronta, 221 Meadow Street

I wasn't planning to speak, but I felt compelled to first of all because this is Teacher Appreciation Week and there are so many educators here off hours to show you how important this is. Beyond that, what I am here for is as a professional who works in a multi-billion dollar company, who manages their budgets and manages operations and has to make those tough decisions, I say to you, education is not it. When you look at the budget each year you have to make difficult choices, line by line and I appreciate that. Unfortunately what you are going to see is year by year an erosion and those trends will show you, those dips, 66, 87, 54, 26, we are going to go down. I want to say to you as the Ghost of Christmas Future, I come from New York City. We moved here because we were told how wonderful Shelton was and we found that to be true and I want to say it has been absolutely wonderful. We know what big class sizes are. We put our kids in private school because of it and even there it was large. I want to tell you, matriculation

rate of 88%, it is going to go down to 40%. You start hitting 31 in a classroom and those numbers, what happens is the children cannot make the connection needed to the teacher because what really matters is the trust the child has with the teacher and that is given through time. Time is given by less children in a room. When they have that time to be safe and say they are not able to understand that is when growth truly happens. What you will see is that these children have dreams to go on and move and do these wonderful things. The highest compliment you can have, and I see it here in Shelton, all these children that came up and became teachers because Shelton has done education well. We should continue to keep doing education well. I ask you, I implore you, do not let this town change to the point where it is just like New York City where it is okay where a teacher may not be able to talk to a child every day, knows their name, knows their grades, but those are the kids that are most at risk when they are not the ones to raise their hand and say I am alone, I need help. We are going to slowly erode that connection between the teachers and the students and we need not to. I am on SIS PTO Board. We have done so much fundraising and I thank all the parents for being so helpful for that. I just want to say, people are hungry for educational situations. We have donated over \$5000 this year for educational pursuits for in regard to fieldtrips. We have done a book fair where we had the opportunity to donate back \$3000 because we worked so hard. I want you to understand that I see the struggle to keep this budget balanced. I see it, I appreciate it and I thank you for your hard work, but when you are looking at where to make those cuts, I besiege you to please fully fund the budget, if not even take into consideration inflation. Thank you very much.

Scott Smith, 104 Ridge Lane

This room is pretty full, but it is just a fraction of the people. I nearly had to do something unthinkable just to get here tonight because my two kids need me as a parent right now. This is one in ten or maybe one in 20 of the people that feel like the education budget needs to be fully funded. This pendulum has swung all the way over here. You guys, you represent us. You are the legislative body in this town, in this city. Your constituents are saying our kids need more than you are providing. They are saying it very loudly. I don't know how much you are on social media, it is an absolute firestorm out there. We have the yard signs, the whole thing. This thing is swinging this way. Now the other argument is usually we have a large senior population on fixed incomes. The way the tax code is set up and Eric, you and I have had this conversation before, if you are an elderly person who maybe has a fixed income and is below that salt tax line, the federal government takes your money and goes down to Washington. You guys need to vote to keep that money that would normally go down to Washington, here in Shelton. It would make a world of difference. It is not time to horse around with this anymore. I have a kindergartener and a freshman. The kindergartener, the jury is very much out. The freshman needs supports. They are not being provided. Also, this district compared to other districts fund raises you to death. I get so many emails saying hey we need money for this, from the school.

I know what it looks like from other districts. The pendulum has swung too far and you guys need to bring it back. Do you guys really want to be the anti-education aldermen? Is that really what you are contemplating? You are our voice in this experimental democracy. Please vote with your heart. Profiles in Courage, I'm sure we all read it in high school. This is one of those moments. You guys have to stand up for the kids that don't have votes. For every nuclear family of four there are two votes, but there are four bodies it needs to take care of. Thank you for your time.

Victor Catano, 114 Park Avenue

Good evening. I am coming to bring a different perspective to you, a perspective of school administrator. I am a private school CFO and we moved here to Shelton because I grew up in New York City and my only alternative to not die or be killed or run with the gangs was to go to a private school and thankfully I was able to secure funding to do that. Because of the educational opportunities that I have been afforded, I have learned that education is the great equalizer in this country and it is really the only hope that our kids have. We always talk about how if this generation only did this, if this generation only did that, but we are responsible for making sure that our up and coming generation has all of the resources that they need. As someone who has to balance budgets for a living, I don't envy your task. I fully understand that challenge, but without being presumptuous I have not been to a finance meeting. I only came because my wife, who is a teacher, told me that I needed to be here and voice my opinions and I'd be a dead man if I didn't come. I also love the teachers. I have a daughter who graduated from Shelton High last year, I have another son who is going to graduate soon. I have a kindergartener and a soon to be kindergartener. I just stay up a little bit at night thinking about what that is going to look like as my younger children progress. From that perspective, one of the rules of thumb that I always try to follow when I balance my own budgets is no matter what it is that the deficit is looking like, my priority is always to not impact the program. I think as people balancing the budget, you know exactly what that means. We try to preserve the program and we cut bone before we cut the meat of the program. Again, I haven't been to one of your meetings, so I don't know what that looks like for you. I just wanted to make sure that you heard me share that opinion. I thank you for your work. I don't know how I can personally help, but if you ever need a different perspective from a private institution eye, because you have seen everything in the public eye, I would be happy to be invited anywhere to maybe offer a fresh set of eyes. Thank you. Have a good night.

Maria Quesada, 690 Howe Avenue

I work in kindergarten. It is so hard working with 16 or 17 children. We can put them on the carpet and circle time is not easy for the teacher. I help the teacher, but we can't control 16

children, I can't believe one teacher can control 30 children. Kindergarten is coming from pre-school. Kindergarten needs time with the teacher when they learn. We have to do the best for the student. I hope you pass the budget please.

Emailed in responses:

Heather Prentice Email:

Hello Board of Aldermen, Education and Shelton residents,

It's been a pleasure to be a resident of Shelton for the last eight years. This year marks the first that my daughter has going through the Shelton school system. The support and growth she has shown since the beginning of the year has been incredible.

The BOE needs to be fully funded to continue to support the youth of our city. The teachers and staff deserve the manageable class sizes to create the environment our children need.

You have my families fully support to pass next years budget.

Thank you,
Heather Prentice
Alex Limauro

Kimberly Saginario Email

The mayor is in a unique position right now to make everyone happy: the conservative residents, and the working families with kids in the educational system. We have the ability to fully fund the Board of Ed without raising taxes. A surplus has already been exposed. Approaching an election year, it is in every elected official's best interest to fully fund the Board of Ed. Republicans are supposed to care about jobs. Why then, should the private sector continue to unnecessarily lose jobs under this heavy Republican watch?

We need to support our educational system as opposed to continuing to starve it. Other towns in our D.R.G. have managed to pass their budgets without incident, even when asking for increases.

I find our schools to be staffed with some of the best, most experienced and passionate educators I have ever encountered (and yes, I am a teacher from a district with a voting population similar to Shelton's). I cannot bear the thought of my four-year-old not getting the same educational experience that my 12 year old was privileged to have. All the things Shelton

Public Schools can brag about will have to slowly degrade because of chronic underfunding. I gave a teacher an Amazon gift card for Teacher's Appreciation week today. She wrote me a thank you note saying she will buy tissues for her classroom with it. The fact that she was so grateful and excited to use a personal gift to supply her classroom was very disappointing. Yet this has become the norm: teacher's using their personal money or parent-funded PTO money used to keep schools afloat.

One of the richest men in the town I teach in owns a diamond business. While, Republican, he ALWAYS advocates for the school budget because he knows that school ranking is one of the top things people look for when they buy homes. If we continue to cut jobs because of lack of funding, we can look forward to 30 kids in a class, sharing textbooks and materials, and teacher's having to lower themselves to ask parents for basics like soap, Band-Aids, and staples.

Here is the chance for all elected officials to please all citizens without affecting taxes. Here is the chance for all elected officials to back up their promise to "give back to their community" as many are quoted to have said.

Thank you,
Kimberly Saginario

Melissa Marini Email

To Whom this May Concern,

As a former Shelton Public schools student and now a proud teacher in the district, I am asking that you please support and approve the proposed budget for the upcoming 22-23 school year. Our children need the funds for technology and supplies, and we desperately need our jobs.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Melissa Marini
Booth Hill School
Grade 2 Teacher

Alexis Weinstein Email

Dear Mr. McPherson, I will be in attendance at tonight's meeting. I hope it will be full of parents as concerned as I am. In case I am unable to speak at the meeting, I wanted to send you an email letting you know my concerns about the potential of not fully funding the Board of Education budget. As you prepare to decide how you will vote on the board of education budget,

MAY 9, 2023

I write to call to your attention a variety of problems and concerns if the education spending package is not fully funded. The top of my list is classroom sizes. In ESS alone, if they are unable to hire an additional teacher, there will be only 3 sections instead of 4 for kindergarten or grade 2 next year, with 29 students in each class, plus any of the move-ins that come in throughout the school year. Have you ever tried to teach almost 30 elementary schoolers, some with special needs? It is beyond inadvisable. My daughter recently received a 504, making her eligible for additional assistance, and should be recommended for summer learning so she doesn't fall behind, but that isn't available due to potential budget restrictions. As locally elected officials responsible for balancing budgets, I appreciate the difficult choices you have to make. Nevertheless, it is disappointing to me and many other parents that despite every resident I have spoken with voicing their support of making our children a priority in this town that you are considering a funding model that is neither sufficient nor sustainable and that funding for public school students is slowly eroding, reducing opportunities for students who we are counting on to be the foundation of our state and towns economic future. We want local policymakers who are working to ensure our students succeed both in school and beyond high school so that we can build our economy with an educated and skilled workforce. If you are unable to do that, I know myself and many other parents and residents will remember that when it comes to who we will be voting for.

Best regards,
Alexis Weinstein

Alderman McPherson: We have come to the end of the speakers. Is there anybody else wishing to speak? On behalf of the Board we thank you very much for taking the time to come out on this. It is absolutely an important issue and we certainly appreciate your input and the time for you to come out and speak.

ADJOURNMENT:

Alderman Simons MOVED to adjourn; Alderman Balamaci seconded. A voice vote was taken and motion passed unanimously (8-0). The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted
Donna Fonda

Donna Fonda
Acting Clerk, Board of Aldermen

DATE APPROVED _____

BY: _____
Mayor Mark A. Lauretti