

Shutesbury Select Board Meeting Minutes
April 24, 2017 Shutesbury Town Hall

Select Board members present: Mike Vinskey/Chair, Michael DeChiara, and Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil

Finance Committee members present: George Arvanitis and Eric Stocker/Co-chairs, Jim Walton, Jim Hemingway, Elaine Puleo, Bob Groves, and Weezie Houle

Staff present: Becky Torres/Town Administrator; Linda Avis Scott/Administrative Secretary

Guests: Jackie Mendonsa/SES Principal, Fred Vanderbeck/Pelham, Renee Richard/SES staff, Tori Parham, Emily Jones, and Martina Dooley-Carvalho/SES parents, Lauren Thomas-Paquin and Fred Steinberg/School Committee, Jeff Lacy, Lisa Saunders, Anna Aaron, Police Chief Tom Harding, Penny Kim/Town Moderator

Vinskey calls the Select Board meeting to order at 6:34pm.

Discussion Topics:

1. Shutesbury Elementary School:

FinCom considers feedback regarding the Shutesbury Elementary School budget. Mendosa speaks to the loss of the pre-kindergarten grant that currently pays for about ½ the cost of the preschool; the loss of the \$11,000 will have long-term effects; it would not be prudent to try and make up for the loss of these funds; currently, there are five students requiring special education services; the school is required to provide these services and, if unable to do so, the services will be provided out of district at a higher cost with transportation as an additional cost; the pre-school is an inclusion program with one teacher and several paraprofessionals; the school is required to provide a program for special needs children age three and older; the school is more interested in school choice for the younger grades; this is the first year SES has participated in school choice. Puleo: the FinCom increased the school budget by 2%. Arvanitis: the school budget was increased by \$38,000 over last year; we understand that loss of money is a problem; we felt the school would be able to find a way to be innovative in budget management; we will re-evaluate the situation next year. Mendosa: the main concern is funding for the pre-school program. DeChiara: investment in the pre-school is beneficial toward creating an inviting community. Puleo: the composition of next year's pre-school may be different. Groves: is it possible to increase the tuition? Mendosa: we could look at an increase in tuition; perhaps we could make up the difference this year, however, we would not be able to do so next year. Puleo: each year, the FinCom will review the composition of the school and the school's needs; there are funds for unanticipated expenses. Puleo: the FinCom is trying to craft a budget that comes in at less than 2.5%; we are cutting every line item and are down to a 1.1% increase; there is a request from the Select Board for a 0% change to the tax rate. DeChiara: as the dissenting Select Board member, there is a reason for free cash; departments ask for what they need – they do not ask for more than is needed. Arvanitis suggests finishing the conversation with the school then after a conversation with the Police Chief there will be a review of the budget with the Select Board. Vinskey: the issue at hand is much larger than the school and the police

department; within three years we will reach our levy limit and the budget will then be much tighter. Torres states her concern that a representative of the school remain to answer any further questions.

2. Police Chief Tom Harding: The FinCom considers feedback from Chief Harding: in the alternative budget, the department is level funded; the budget he submitted in the Fall of 2016 attempted to factor in all the payroll costs. Harding acknowledges that he is responsible for providing the most accurate budget possible; would like to re-calculate for FY18 to ensure that the payroll number is accurate. Groves: the FinCom decided we would be comfortable if the reduction in payroll resulted in less coverage. Harding: with vacations, etc., he has to decide whether to backfill the schedule; there is the possibility of having Officer Sawicki “on call” and paid for four hours at times when it is not necessary to have an officer “on duty”. Harding speaks to the need for changing the barrel on the shotgun in the sedan – the length of the current barrel is a safety hazard; if it is possible to do so, he is willing to change out the barrel. Harding is willing to rescind the \$1,000 increase to the department’s expense line; will review the payroll numbers.

3. Review Select Board Alternative Proposal to Finance Committee FY18 Budget: Vinskey reviews the 4.24.17 “Select Board Alternative Proposal to Finance Committee FY18 Budget”. Arvanitis: the FinCom is bringing forth a budget with a 1.1% levy increase to the town. Torres: there are two new single-family home building permit applications and homes that have been on the market are beginning to sell. Arvanitis: Torres is pointing out sources for new revenue. Vinskey: the levy can be increased by \$12,000 per new house. Arvanitis: concern is that the State is not helping municipalities; we are using conservative estimates; is confident that the FinCom budget will come in at less than 1%. Puleo points out the anticipated revenue from the solar project PILOT. Vinskey: we are within \$525,000 of the levy ceiling. DeChiara: that is only one scenario; we need multiple scenarios. Vinskey: we are as close to the levy ceiling, as we ought to get. Torres reviews the changes noted on the 4.24.17 Shutesbury Budget: “Rubbish & Recycling Hauling 3.5% increase – new contract, Sanitary Landfill-MRF: the new disposal contract is not final, and Health Insurance: 8.7% increase due to higher premiums.

Arvanitis asks the FinCom for lines to be discussed: Town Hall Administrative Support (line 10) – Torres: this line was initiated ~8 years ago to provide funding for an assistant to the Town Clerk and other administrative activities; when Bracebridge (former Town Clerk and Administrative Secretary) retired, her position was divided per the Personnel Board and Select Board; it was agreed that the new Administrative Secretary would keep track of her hours and do the required work; this line has been used to supplement line 5 (Select Board Secretary); line 10 was also used to cover the costs related to administrative support for the Planning Board and ConCom relative to the solar project; the necessary funds to cover the hours required for the Administrative Secretary will be determined later this year. Torres continues: the Planning Board Clerk position has been created; line 10 will be used for other administrative support, i.e. data input, possible Town Clerk support, etc.; it was used to input data subsequent to the cyber-attack. Torres cites the difference between work that can be done by volunteers and that requiring a skilled person; the need for line 10 has fluctuated. DeChiara: this line is for skilled

temporary administrative support assistance. Torres: we have set aside a minimum amount and are building data to make reasonable, informed decisions. Walton: people are responsible for their budgets and we need to either trust them or not. Puleo recommends keeping the FinCom Reserve line at \$72,000. Repair (line 62/68-SB) – Groves: the FinCom is recommending \$25,000 from Free Cash be used to fund line 176/Town Buildings Repair & Maintenance; the south side of the Town Hall may need to be re-sided; an industrial grade dehumidifier has been installed in a piecemeal attempt to improve the air quality; a handyman is needed to make the windows in the copy room and town clerk's office functional. Torres notes that there a number of systems and pieces of equipment in the town hall that require maintenance and cites the need to replace a commercial toilet and the door at the top of the stairs; argues against decreasing the "repair line" as we need to ensure projects can get done. Stocker, regarding lines 64/Heating & 70/Fuel (SB): prices are low now however may not stay that way. Vinskey: we are negotiating heating fuel and vehicle fuel prices; \$10,000 (line 64) and \$31,000 (line 70) are probably reasonable amounts and they may be even lower. Torres: it is not just the price of fuel; weather is a factor as well. Vinskey: in an unanticipated event, the FinCom reserve can be used. Houle: why should we be dependent upon FinCom reserve? Torres: the FinCom reserve is for emergencies. DeChiara: better line item budgeting is preferred over relying on the FinCom reserve. Groves: the FinCom reserve is a "rainy day" account; we need to make realistic budget line estimates. Fuel (line 63 FinCom) is reduced to \$34,131. Torres: commitments to fuel always come in after town meeting. Vinskey: the Select Board budget lines for fuel and heating are reasonable.

Return to Chief Harding: Harding: the payroll number of ~\$120,000 as compiled by Weiss/Accountant and Torres is the most knowledgeable number; he will be mind-full of the line as the department's year progresses.

Heating: FinCom is level funding this line. Groves: we made investments in the energy efficiency of certain buildings that are no longer a part of this line and we expect a detectable change in the energy costs for these buildings. Torres: the changes in energy costs need to be factored in. Stocker recommends reducing the heating line to \$14,000 (line 58 FinCom). Arvanitis: the Select Board is recommending a cut to their line 185/Gasoline Leak Fire Station. Torres: there was an \$80,000 allocation in 2009; the Select Board is working on "temporary solution status"; the annual payment to DEP and the cost of monitoring, annual testing and reports totals \$8,000 -10,000/year, testing of the monitoring wells and neighboring wells needs to be done; funds in this line carryover; \$36,182 was spent last year. Torres is hopeful that what is needed to close out the project during the next fiscal year will be determined. Vinskey: another series of injections was done in 2016; the rest of the money is for monitoring and reports; we are not anticipating additional expenses for this project. Torres: once a temporary solution is reached, the fee to DEP, monitoring inspections and reports will continue. Arvanitis: we could bring this fund down to the annual amount needed and use free cash to "beef up" the Hazardous Waste Clean Up fund which could be done during a special town meeting in the fall. Puleo: will we have resolution before the fall special town meeting? Torres recommends not making any changes until there is more information about the temporary solution; states her willingness to reduce the number from \$15,000 to \$10,000. Arvanitis: at this point, \$19,415 in cuts has been made. Puleo: Library Building Fund (FinCom line 175 and SB line 188): any change to this line needs to be voted from town meeting floor.

Vinskey: half the town voted against the library. Puleo: half the town voted against an override. Puleo: town meeting always votes for the Library New Building Fund. DeChiara: putting money away each year is the responsible way to build a fund for a new library building. Walton: the Select Board has a responsibility to enhance the value of the town not just to cut funds and make it a less attractive place to be. Arvanitis: the fact of the matter is that town meeting has voted in favor of this line year after year; recommends it remain as is; once it is taken out, the voters cannot put it back. Stocker and Torres: there is a requirement to balance the budget; the warrant article dollar amounts cannot be changed.

Return to Shutesbury Elementary School: There is a \$10,730 difference between the school's request and the FinCom budget. DeChiara: a \$5,000 increase to the school line would split the difference. A request is made to return \$11,000 to the school and \$5,000 to police. Steinberg: the Union 28 Finance Director recommends that school choice funds not be relied upon for budgeting. Houle moves \$10,730 be returned to the school budget and the motion is seconded; Puleo suggests ½ this amount. Steinberg: the cut would effect the education of students. Arvanitis suggests increasing the school by \$8,000, which would decrease the levy to \$42,300. FinCom votes to approve this increase. Police wages: \$120,533. Groves: the FinCom is the watchdog; recommends no increase to the police wage line. Vinskey: this is an equity issue between the officers' and chief's contracts. Puleo: the FinCom does not want a Select Board budget because it will divide the town; recommends no increase to the police wage line; that will leave a .6% increase and the Select Board will be asked to withdraw their alternative budget. \$42,293: Heating (line 58) \$14,000; Fuel \$34,431; School Transportation \$65,088 Retirement \$181,433; Gas leak \$10,000 School: \$1,946,323 Total: \$6,242,051. DeChiara agrees with Puleo about her recommended position; he would not want to do further budgetary negotiations. Current number reflects no change to Police Wages. Repair: no change. Current increase: \$42,293. The FinCom recommends a .87% increase in the tax levy. It is noted that the meeting started with \$53,708 and that the FinCom is now asking for \$11,000 less from taxpayers.

Puleo notes the FinCom's effort to reduce taxpayer burden and asks Vinskey and Makepeace-O'Neil if they will let go of the Select Board alternative budget that has the potential to create division. Vinskey states that there is no concrete plan for how to approach reaching the levy limit and notes the difference in priority on how the police and school are handled versus the library new building fund. Makepeace-O'Neil notes Vinskey's rationale and that there are lines that have been underspent for years; notes the number of children on free lunch indicating the hardship caused by a tax increase. DeChiara supports the FinCom in presenting a budget they are comfortable with. Vinskey restates his concern about approaching the levy ceiling. Walton: there is a difference in philosophical approach. Arvanitis: the FinCom talked about a level service budget and to let the voters decide. Vinskey states that he talked with the Chief about coverage – Shutesbury would be a prime candidate for a shared police chief; it is up to the voters to decide what coverage should be. Walton: the Chief told us what is needed to maintain coverage. Houle's motion is to fund the Police Wages line at \$120,533 passes. The levy increase is .97%; a \$47,293 increase.

The FinCom votes to not recommend the Select Board budget. Kim refers to the FinCom bylaw and asks if the Select Board alternative budget has standing, as it has not gone

through the process. Arvanitis: because we are dependent upon the State, it is difficult to do long range strategic plans; all the small communities in Western Mass are in the same situation. Torres: we are working with Joe Markarian/FRCOG on long range planning. Vinskey asks for discussion from the Select Board on whether to go forward. Vinskey: we are approaching the levy ceiling and there does not seem to be concern about this; recognizes that this may be concerning for voters; appreciates all the FinCom has done and hopes it is an indication of a commitment to long term planning. Vinskey moves to withdraw the Select Board alternative budget. Makepeace-O'Neil appreciates the FinCom's budget work; is willing to make amendments from the floor for those lines she continues to be concerned about and the impact of property tax increases on low-income families. Vinskey: these are long ranging and critical topics that the residents need to be aware of; keeping the Select Board budget is a way to do so. DeChiara: there is a place for reports during Annual Town Meeting, if the alternative budget is pulled, the Select Board could speak to their concerns. DeChiara states that he does not support the alternative budget however acknowledges the impact of Vinskey's and Makepeace-O'Neil's work; is considering not signing the Warrant if it includes an alternative budget. Torres will appreciate further study on the issues. Vinskey is concerned about the levy ceiling and recommends that the financial team and state resource people be involved in the conversation. Walton: we need to make sure we find ways to work with departments to determine appropriate spending and to keep them engaged and supported. Vinskey moves the Select Board withdraw the "Select Board Alternative to Finance Committee Proposed 2018 Budget"; motion is seconded by Makepeace-O'Neil. Makepeace-O'Neil recommends that amendments to the FinCom budget be made from the town meeting floor. Motion passes unanimously.

4. Annual Town Meeting Warrant: DeChiara moves the Select Board approve the 2017 Annual Town Meeting Warrant as amended; Makepeace-O'Neil seconds the motion that passed unanimously.

At 10:10pm Makepeace-O'Neil moves to adjourn the meeting; motion is seconded by DeChiara and passes unanimously.

Documents and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

1. 4.24.17 letter from Jen Malcolm-Brown regarding cuts to the Preschool Learning Environment Grants and asks for support of the School Committee's funding proposal
2. 4.24.17 Shutesbury Town Budget
3. 4.18.17 Select Board Alternative to Finance Committee Proposed FY18 Budget (not unanimous)
4. 4.24.17 memo from Vinskey: Select Board Alternative Proposal to Finance Committee FY18 Budget

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Avis Scott
Administrative Secretary

