

## **March 27, 2025 Board of Assessors Meeting Minutes**

**Board Members Present:** Chairman Howard Shpetner and Members: J. April Stein (Remote participant) and George Arvanitis.

**Also present:** Administrative Assessor David Burgess, Interim Town Administrator Gabriel (Gabe) Voelker, and Assessors' Clerk Leslie Bracebridge. **Guests:** None

**1.Chairman Howard Shpetner opened the meeting at 2:10 PM.** Howard reviewed the single-purpose of the meeting – to develop a strategy and action plan to staff the Assessing Department following receipt of written notice from David Burgess that he will be ending his position as Administrative Assessor in the Town of Shutesbury on June 30, 2025.

All present recognized with gratitude, that David's generous provision of his expert skills and knowledge, voluntarily in FY 23 and for well below regional assessing staffing costs in FY 24 and 25, has been a gift (a "blessing" in Gabe's words) to Shutesbury.

Due to the scarcity of trained and experienced Assessors across the state of Massachusetts, it will be costly and very difficult to find someone to assume David's role.

Chairman Shpetner asked Interim Town Administrator Gabriel Voelker for a thumbnail sketch of the hiring process and Gabe offered the following:

1. The Personnel Board will review and up-date the job description by considering fair and reasonable pay, and current tasks.
2. Then the new Town Administrator, Hayley Bolton, who starts her position on Monday April 7, will advertise: Through online services such as Indeed, state, regional, and local organizations websites and publications, as available.
3. Applications/resumes will be passed to the Board of Assessors for review.
4. Assessors will make a recommendation to the Select Board for endorsement and hiring.

Due to the statewide scarcity of trained and experienced Assessors, other strategies for filling the position will be simultaneously researched, including:

1. David's inquiry to the known provider, Regional Resource Group, Inc. (Often referred to as: "RRG" or "Harald Scheid" or "David Manzello") followed up with an inquiry to:
2. Bishop & Associates (Often referred to as: "Roy Bishop")
3. In addition to publishing the advertisement as listed above, telephone calls, and/or mailed inquiries will be sent to any known Assessors in the area who might want a second, retirement, or just a different Administrative Assessor position.
4. Any input regarding changes to such things as hours, and pay will be thoughtfully considered by the appropriate Shutesbury officials.

Assessors' Clerk, Leslie Bracebridge stated that though she and all Assessors have taken and passed Assessors' course 101 and therefore understand (or at least in theory can turn to the coursebook to understand) the complex statutes and theories of assessing, applying that course knowledge to the actual complexities and legalities involved in individual tasks, and questions

that arise in the assessing office requires experience, and often extra research time and skills beyond what she is able to provide, even with the town's flexibility with her original 12 to 15 Clerk-hours per week that she was hired for can provide.

Leslie further stated her personal desire for what is best for Shutesbury over any changes for herself. If changing her current tasks in any downward way relative to hours and responsibilities, even to eliminating her position, is the best option for Shutesbury to meet the needs of the Assessing department, she will be fine. During the transition, she offered to continue to work to the best of her knowledge and available time, to continue to get the day-to-day office tasks and activities accomplished, and will gladly orient any in-coming Administrative Assessor or other administrative operations option, as she knows the tasks to currently be. Leslie stated her strong belief in the need for at least a 20-hour/week, Administrative Assessor or an outside provider, such as RRG, to monitor the Assessors' Department "big picture" of Shutesbury's statutory requirements that the Department of Revenue (DOR) Division of Local Services (DLS) tracks in cities and towns, as those things will be reviewed in the up-coming (FY 28) 5-year revaluation.

For example, statute requires 10-year cyclical inspections of every real property. Those inspections were curbed during the COVID years and have not recovered in the years following, during which, the Assessors' office has had an Administrative Assessor for from zero hours to at most 5 hours per week. David confirmed Leslie's assertion, adding that many properties need inspections and many field cards need updates, including photos.

A comparison of the pros and cons of a provider, versus an individual employee, included such things as the hidden employment costs of a local municipal employee above the advertised salary, provider provision of specialized employees for many of the highly technical tasks of advanced data management in Vision, valuing large utilities, the regular and standardized tasks of valuing properties, the legal tasks of possible Appellate court cases, possible records storage costs in keeping with public records mandates, might "even out" assumptions of what an Administrative Assessor on salary would cost versus provider costs.

Assessors reviewed and made some edits to the 2019 advertisement wording used in the last Administrative Assessor search. George offered to calculate a proposed salary range for the advertisement, based on regional figures that he has access to in his role on the Finance Committee. He noted that the town budget needs to be settled in 3 weeks. As a member of the Personnel Board, April offered to bring the job description to the next Personnel Board meeting for review and updates. Gabe offered to update the next Town Administrator, Hayley Bolton, who will begin work on Monday, April 7 regarding the Town Administrator's role in seeing that the hiring happens in a timely manner, and ask Haley to make calls to potential individuals, who might be interested in the position. David offered to "put in a good word for Shutesbury" to "RRG" and provide them with the Town Administrator's contact information.

The next Assessors' meeting is already scheduled for Wednesday, April 16, 2024 at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted, as approved on April 16, 2025,

Leslie Bracebridge, Assessors' Clerk

**Documents used in the meeting:** 1. The March 27, 2025 Assessors' meeting agenda. 2. Assessors' staff job descriptions. 3. The 2019 Administrative Assessor advertisement wording.