

Shutesbury Finance Committee  
Tuesday, November 1, 2022 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu, Melody Chartier, Bob Groves, Jim Hemingway, Susie Mosher, Jim Walton and Town Administrator, Becky Torres

Members Absent: George Arvanitis

Meeting called to order at 6:34 pm

**1. Minutes from 10/04/22 approved as amended.**

- a. While some members would like attributions in the minutes, the current minute taker is not including them, except in the case of a non-committee member speaking. Minutes reflect the committee's discussion. As always, amendments to the minutes can be offered if part of the discussion was missed.

**2. Update on budget requests**

- a. A Google Drive file has been set up for budgets to be collected and accessed there.
- b. On November 15 we will meet with the Highway and Police departments.
- c. Tim Hunting sent a message to the Fin Com, alerting us to some machinery repairs this summer and he expects more maintenance budget expenditures from plowing and sanding. We'll discuss the impact of this on the FY 23 highway maintenance budget on November 15.
- d. The Administrative Assessor position is vacant at the moment. For the F 24 budget proposal Becky and Leslie are reviewing the contracts associated to the assessors' office. Roy Bishop is the consultant covering some of the reval work. Becky, Leslie and Jeff Quackenbush are working to get tasks done. There are many assessor vacancies throughout the state.

**3. Final Update from final regional school guardrail sub-committee meeting**

- a. Like Shutesbury, the other towns were not were not supportive of guardrails, but the regional school business office included the concept in its presentation. At the meeting.
- b. They projected numbers for the budget in the coming 9 years, with and without guardrails, as a worst-case scenario and based on enrollment projections.
- c. There was skepticism about the reliability or practical use of these projections.
- d. Our committee understood the guardrail concept as a one-time step to facilitate the agreement to go to full statutory, five-year rolling average assessment, smoothing out the first year. What would be the need/effect of long-term guardrails? Ongoing transferring of assessments, based on a 4% guardrail limit, could create new inequities.
- e. This may not be a political stand to die for and in fact the guardrails could be passed then not needed to be invoked. We will listen to how this is being presented and received at the four-town meeting. Then the Fin Com, School Committee and Select Board will discuss how to react.
- f. Susie Mosher volunteered to get the enrollment numbers used in the presentation.

**4. Update on the high school track project**

- a. Ajay researched relevant information from regional school minutes and presentations and created a Google drive folder for us to read. He will send the information to the Select Board.
- b. All four towns are financially committed to the \$1.5m in the Capital Debt Assessment in the regional agreement, (\$106k for Shutesbury's portion)

- c. The Regional School Committee (RSC) is committed to option #3 – artificial turf on a repositioned track, in light of fundraising goals, lower maintenance, increased use and revenue potential.
  - d. The region offered suggestions for the towns to use CPA funds, returned E&D money from the FY22 budget, and other possible grants to fund option #3 (\$4.6 m) This would incur an additional \$85K for Shutesbury if we used the E&D money too.
  - e. The lower maintenance costs of artificial turf would decrease the annual operating budget but increases the initial capital expense. Any future replacement and disposal of artificial turf would be a capital expense.
  - f. Controversy over the safety, replacement and disposal costs, and environmental impact of artificial turf has risen since the March RSC decision.
  - g. Concerns over a need for updated estimates, the process to choose an option, and costs of other projects in town during this inflationary period, are relevant.
  - h. Members need to read the researched material and Susie will contact Doug Slaughter for clarification on where this process is going, how one option will be chosen, (i.e. input from the towns) and the need for updated cost estimates.
- 5. Expense Report Review**
- a. The VADAR accounting system monthly report is not presented in an easy-to-read format. Other towns across the state also use VADAR – how are other towns managing this problem?
  - b. We focused on discerning which lines would give us information; maybe we can learn to plow through. The report is 33 pages long, too lengthy to print out.
  - c. Becky will contact some people to search for a more readable format.
- 6. Committee and Project Updates**
- a. Gale Associates is looking over a contract to do an evaluation of the school roof for the purpose of making a full design proposal for the engineering bid.
- 7. Next meeting**
- a. Scheduled for Tuesday, November 15 @ 6:30
  - b. Review budgets with the Highway and Police departments
  - c. Bob will discuss his conversation with Dan Hayes, SES Committee Chair, re: school choice

Meeting adjourned at 8:37 pm.