

Shutesbury Finance Committee  
Tuesday, November 28, 2023 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu, Bob Groves, Jim Walton, Susie Mosher, Jim Hemingway, April Stein, and ex-officio member, Town Administrator Becky Torres

Absent Member: George Arvanitis    Members of the Public: Mike Vinskey

Finance Committee meeting called to order at 6:32 pm

Minutes from November 1, 2023 were approved as written.

A. Expense reports review

FY 24 expense items discussed:

1. Certification expenses to attend classes for Accountant, Tax Collector and Assessor
2. Independent audit every 3 years; annual appropriation rolls forward
3. 20 hours per month @ \$25./hr for David Burgess, administrative assessor. Roy Bishop, consultant, handles some of the assessor tasks
4. Highway Superintendent expense includes vacation time paid out to T. Hunting
5. Culvert invoices still coming in
6. 52% of vehicle fuel budget spent reflects higher fuel costs
7. Regional School debt to be adjusted slightly lower
8. Insurance and Bonds line reflects policy premium payments and remaining balance will pay for drug testing, deductibles, and other small items
9. Legal costs for lawsuits, consultation on Conservation Commission bylaw, and some outstanding bills will require a Finance Committee transfer to cover bills into first half of January. Motion for a transfer of \$15K from the Finance Committee Reserve Fund to legal budget line approved unanimously; 6 yes

FY 23 review

10. Collector budget underspent by \$4,960. Becky will check in with Ellen McKay
11. Police wages underspent – difficulty of getting/retaining 3 full-time officers
12. New Fire Chief differential lowered wages by \$22,659
13. Tree Warden wages unspent
14. Veterans' benefits underspent. How many cases, rank and what benefits are due make this budget line hard to forecast.
15. Overall, 96.7% of FY 23 budget was spent. Some of the unspent money rolls forward, the rest goes to free cash reserves.

B. Fire Department FY25 budget request reviewed with Chief Lenny Czerwonka

1. Level funding requested in all budget lines with a note of concern about inflation. The Fin Com could consider an inflation factor for all FY25 budgets
2. Chief Czerwonka has applied for a grant for turn out gear

3. The pros and cons of regionalization of fire departments are beginning to be discussed with Leverett. Costs to train and maintain firefighters is expensive. Mutual aid agreements help

4. A grant for digital pagers has been filed. Most of the emergency network equipment and infrastructure is in place now, thanks to state funding.

5. Lenny included a description of current equipment, uses, and replacement projections. These are good faith numbers; the cost of fire trucks is rising rapidly. The list was reviewed and will go to capital planning to be discussed

6. The chief is proposing installation of a 30,000-gallon underground water tank at the elementary school as a prudent safety measure. It would be logical to get the tank in before parking lot is repaved. Estimated cost of tank is \$30K with the highway department helping on installation. This may lower the insurance premium on the school.

### C. Project updates

1. Shutesbury School Committee meeting was rescheduled to Nov.30; the Finance Committee will review their draft budget on 12/12/23.

2. Locks Pond Rd is open - the culvert is finished. Herculean effort.

3. Capital Planning is meeting on Monday, Dec. 11

4. Regional School Four-Town meeting is on Saturday, 12/16/23, 9 am; a first look at the FY25 budget

Our next meeting is scheduled for Dec.12, at 6:30. Our agenda includes:

\*meet with the Library Director to review FY25 budget request

\*meet with Chief Burgess to review FY25 police budget request

\*review and list any questions regarding FY25 elementary school draft budget,

\*vote on any Special Town Meeting warrant articles that have fiscal impact.

Meeting adjourned at 8:37 pm