

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, December 12, 2023 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu, George Arvanitis, Bob Groves, Jim Walton, Susie Mosher, Jim Hemingway, April Stein, and ex-officio member, Town Administrator Becky Torres
Members of the Public: Mike Vinskey, Chief Burgess, Library Director Mary Anne Antonellis, Board of Library Trustees Brad Foster, Elizabeth Murphy, and Michele Regan Ladd

Finance Committee meeting called to order at 6:34 pm

A. Police department FY25 proposed budget review with Chief Kristin Burgess

1. Level funded proposal with increases in salaries under contract
2. Will be presenting a capital request to Capital Planning for a new cruiser. The need for further maintenance on the 2016 cruiser has now exceeded its value and reliability
3. A capital request will be made for two more speed boards @ \$3,614 ea.
4. Fin Com requested a chart of current vehicles with purchase dates and life expectancy, estimated replacement cost similar to the list we received from the fire department. Chief Burgess said Officer Pelletier can do that and the chart will include mileage

B. Minutes from November 28, 2023

1. Were approved as written
2. We discussed the possibility of making the Veterans' Benefit line a budget item that rolls over if approved by the accountant, following statutory rules. We could decide a level to maintain and use Finance Committee Reserve funds if expense exceeds balance in any given budget

C. Preparation for Dec. 16 Regional School Four Town meeting

1. Ajay will contact Anna Heard, local school committee representative to the regional school committee, to get the agenda and supporting documents as soon as possible
2. The regional school committee is meeting tonight and may rescind the original track project authorization
3. The termination of ESSER funds and the new teacher contracts are two drivers we expect in the FY25 draft budget

D. Library FY25 proposed budget review with Library Director, Mary Anne Antonellis

1. Mostly level funding except adding 3 hours/week to the library assistant line
 - a. Due to additional COVID work for online registration, Zoom programming, increased public record requests, less volunteers allowed in limited space.
 - b. The request to extend library assistant hours goes to the Select Board for approval.

c. There was disagreement on the Finance Committee concerning additional library assistant hours. Is this a level services budget with additional costs or is this an increase in service? The Library Director said this is a sustainable operating budget.

2. The revenues from dog tags and state aid (FY 23 amounted to \$4,489) will be allocated for construction costs of the new library as allowed by Mass. Board of Library Commissioners. This funding has also been used for consulting in the past
3. The flat salary lines shown will change once this year's COLA is established
4. An update on fundraising shows that the Friends of the Library have raised over \$130K in 2023, bringing their contribution to the new library project to \$520 - 530K overall
5. The cost estimate from the design development stage will be available by the end of this month. Our special Small Library Pilot Project grant will pay 75% of all eligible costs

E. Discussion of preliminary SES budget documents

1. Three lines are new this year; tuition and transportation for an out of district (OOD) placement and the .5 adjustment counselor that was ESSER funded is now part of the operating budget. Overall, the main budget is projected to increase 7.79%. Without these three items (.5 Adjustment counselor and OOD costs) the budget increase would be 2.31%
2. We need to get information on the circuit breaker support funded by the state and other funding possibilities, (free cash etc.) for the tuition and transportation expenses
3. A question will be forwarded to Caitlin Sheridan, the U28 Financial Director about the paraprofessional position that was funded by ESSER in FY24.
4. The contract with SES teachers will be negotiated this winter and spring. And that will affect the FY25 budget
5. The budget explanatory notes were very helpful
6. We would like a chart of school choice enrollment history

F. Vote on January 16, 2024 Special Town Meeting warrant articles

1. First we addressed the funding sources. For Article 1 free cash was suggested as the best cash reserve to use. That changed the required town meeting vote to be a simple majority instead of 2/3.
2. The discussion concerning Article 1 included consideration of what the town's taxpayers and citizens are obligated to fund – education, town government, public safety, roads. We do not have a legal obligation to fund court cases, to become a test case or establish case law for a planning board bylaw. This is too open-ended and too expensive for our small town. This situation looks like a funding abyss

What are the consequences of not providing legal funding? What kind of response is required in a lawsuit? Can the case be "settled?" What kind of legal costs will that require? We have an obligation to pay our bills. We have a role as Fin Com to

recommend how to spend town money. We have limited information due to executive sessions. Our recommendation is to the town meeting; it is the voters at that meeting determine how to proceed on the lawsuit. We can speak to the Select Board and to town meeting about our opinions. Can we/should we change the funding amount in the article? This is a Select Board article; we cannot amend the amount. Future smaller legal costs, beyond the present allocation of \$55K could be drawn from Fin Com reserves if this article does not pass

Motion to recommend Article 1 to transfer \$50,000 to the legal expense line from free cash. Motion passes 4 yes; 3 no

3. Article 2 is to adopt MGL c.40 sec 22F. This also elected boards and committees to set their own fees and appointed boards to have fees confirmed by the Select Board.

Motion to recommend Article 2 passes unanimously, 7 – 0

4. Article 4 is to vote to transfer \$9,000 from free cash to fund mitigation and testing for gasoline at fire station in responses to DEP letter

Motion to recommend Article 4 passes unanimously, 7 – 0

5. Article 5 is to appropriate the FY2024 MLP certified retained earnings of \$136,943 as follows: 1. \$136,943.00 to the MLP FY2023 Emergency Reserve Fund

Motion to recommend Article 5 passes unanimously, 7 - 0

6. Article 6 is to transfer \$40,000 from Capital Stabilization to fund the cost overrun at the Locks Pond Culvert Project. (This requires a 2/3 majority vote at town meeting)

Motion to recommend Article 6 passes unanimously, 7 – 0

G. Committee updates/other business

1. Capital Planning met on Dec. 11. They are scheduling meetings with 5 departments that have submitted capital items. Fin Com would like to see the 10-year plan when it is updated by Capital Planning

2. Personnel –there are three open positions that the town is hiring –

a. Highway operator - candidate getting CDL

b. Assistant Town clerk, and

c. Land Use Clerk - Personnel Board is reviewing job description

d. The board is also updating the classification of jobs, working on the employee handbook, and comparing the FRCOG survey of hours and benefits for town government positions around the valley; they will include a review of the Shutesbury's COLA method to see if it is keeping up

Our next meeting was planned for January 2 until we found it is not in sync with the Select Board calendar. Instead, we will meet on January 9, 2024 to review:

*the Assessor FY25 budget at 6:45

*the Treasurer's FY25 budget at 7:15.

* and a request from the Energy and Climate Action Committee at 7:45.

A new calendar of meeting dates will be written up.

Meeting adjourned at 8:58 pm