

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, March 19, 2024 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu- chair, George Arvanitis, Bob Groves, Susie Mosher, Jim Hemingway, April Stein, Jim Walton

Attending: Town Administrator Becky Torres, Amy Kalman, Yael Fuerst APEA, Karin Baker APEA, Elizabeth O'Brien Fernandez, Ashley Dunn, Sue and Elliott Kelly

Finance Committee meeting called to order at 6:33 pm

Minutes of 2.6.24 reviewed and approved as amended. March 6 minutes will be reviewed at our next meeting.

A. Highway request for Finance Committee Fund Transfer

1. The Highway Superintendent requests \$7, 139 for the road grader repair. There is a balance of \$9,000 in machinery maintenance line. After the repair, the balance of \$1,800 is not likely to get the town through FY24. The Finance Committee Reserve fund currently has a balance of \$59K. A motion was made to transfer \$4K from the Finance Committee reserve to the Machinery Maintenance line. Motion passes: 5 yes, 2 no.

2. Due to inflation, the maintenance budget line may need to be re-evaluated for the FY25 budget.

B. Regional School budget

1. On Feb. 17, 2024, there was a proposed \$1.7m cut to the \$36,496K level services draft budget at the four-town meeting, yielding a net budget of \$34,807K. The assessments were projected to total \$22,731K. This was based on an increase assessment limit of 4% from Amherst.

On March 14, 2024, the Regional School Committee passed a net \$35,749K budget that included cuts of \$748K from the level services number. This increased the assessments to the four towns to a new total of \$23, 673K. The assessment plan then imposed guardrails of 8.2% increase on all four towns.

2. This budget would mean an increase of \$88K for Shutesbury's regional budget. In our discussion we recognized that the assessment method had not been applied correctly and the warrant article sent to the towns for town meeting approval would be incorrect.

3. Anna Heard, Shutesbury's regional school committee representative explained that the most recent Regional School budget worked to reduce the proposed budget cuts that would directly impact student services such as programs, classes, teaching positions, support, etc. Questions about population decline, school choice funding, teacher-student ratios and special education needs were all discussed. Consideration of how much of an increase Shutesbury could manage and for what programs were discussed. The Finance Committee made a motion to report back to the regional school that:

a. This size increase (8.2%, \$88,627) is untenable for our FY25 budget

b. A four-town meeting is needed to hear how the other towns are responding because the regional budget is a joint effort

c. The assessment method is not applied appropriately in the 8.2% assessment column as we look at it.

The motion passes unanimously.

C. Fire Chief request

1. The training wages are nearly spent out with one-quarter of the year left. If the department can reach the beginning of May with the remaining \$1,500. For training, the Finance Committee can look to a line transfer from underspent call wages into the training wages budget line.

The committee decided to schedule a meeting for next Wednesday, March 27 at 6:30 pm to tackle the remaining agenda items. We will be working on the:

Capital Expense plan

reviewing the latest FY 25 draft budget and

consider any proposals to increase the Regional School Budget.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 pm