

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, June 27, 2024 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, George Arvanitis, Bob Groves Susie Mosher, Jim Hemingway, and Jim Walton Absent: April Stein
Attending: Town Administrator Becky Torres

Meeting called to order at 6:32 p.m.

I. Minutes from 5/28/24 and 6/4/24 approved as written

II. Committee assignments tabled until next meeting

III. ARPS Track update

A. The Amherst Town Council (ATC) and Amherst Community Preservation Committee removed the restrictions previously placed on their track project funding. This frees up \$1.7m to be applied to the revised plan and updated estimate. The regional school committee approved a \$4.1m plan for the track with a N-S orientation, expanded number of lanes, with a natural grass infield. \$676K of costs will be placed on a list of alternative features to be added if funding is found (lighting, goal posts, concrete pad for bleachers, etc.) The region will re-submit requests to Leverett, Shutesbury and Pelham for approximately \$300K of CPA funds

B. The intention is to complete this project by Fall of 2025. The timing may result in a warrant article at a Shutesbury Special Town Meeting scheduled for fall 2024 for approval of the CPA funds.

C. There may be other capital needs to fund with CPA money, but Shutesbury did not have any projects submitted at the 2024 Annual Town Meeting.

IV. The Regional School Budget – going forward

A. The ATC sent out a memo highlighting their concerns for the process and impact of the approved 6% increase for the regional school budget. The FY 26 budget will re-examine the base budget, the guardrails, all possible funding sources, and upcoming expenses and changes that need to be addressed.

B. Shutesbury and the other towns in the region are advocating for a process that begins earlier, takes a multi-year sustainable view, clarifies the process and timeline needed, and works collaboratively with other committees and staff involved budgeting. This includes the new Superintendent, Dr. E Xiomara Herman. It was suggested that Dr. Herman be invited to one of our Fin Com meetings.

C. Legislators need to hear us advocate for changes in the Ch. 70 formula to address inflation and labor costs, student populations, lingering COVID related problems, etc. MassEducate, an initiative to fund free community colleges, not K-12 schools, has been the main beneficiary new revenue from the Fair Share Tax.

V. End of year transfers

A. The Finance Committee 7-0, unanimously approved transferring from the Finance Committee Reserve Funds to:

*a. \$8,000 vehicle fuel budget

**b. \$14,300 to drill some new test wells for the Fire Station Gas remediation

*The full staffing levels at the highway and police departments has increased fuel use. We may have to revisit this budget line for the end of FY24 and for FY25. The Police Chief has been made aware of reducing idling time which may help save fuel for FY 25.

**Cost of drilling two more test wells, analysis, and consultant fees needed to continue establishing the extent of the gasoline pollution from the Fire Station.

B. Budget line transfers likely with the Select Board as FY24 is wrapped up.

VI. Committee Reports, Misc.

A. The contract for the new principal, Anne Magill Diaz at Shutesbury Elementary School has been negotiated by the Superintendent's office. The position will pay \$5K more than in the FY 25 principal salary line, and will be covered in the existing budget.

B. We thanked Jim Walton for his nine years of service to the Finance Committee, including his years as the chair. We appreciated his contributions to our discussions and his work with town departments and boards.

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, July 16 at 6:30. We will meet the newest appointee and take up assignments for our Finance Committee members. Meeting adjourned at 7:49 pm.