

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

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, Bob Groves, Susie Mosher, Jim Hemingway, and Kathy Salvador  
Absent: George Arvanitis and April Stein

Attending: Town Administrator Becky Torres

Meeting called to order at 6:34 p.m.

I. Minutes from 8/12/24 approved as amended

II. Regional School Budget Process

- A. Ajay and Susie met with Dr. Xi on Friday, 8/16 to communicate our support for education at the regional schools, , the urgency to start Four Town meetings early to improve the planning and communication process, and to explain the assessment formula. Ajay sent Dr. Xi the timeline document our committee compiled to provide some history for the current assessment formula which was not followed in FY 25. Dr. Xi has only been on the job for about 1 ½ months, has initiated an audit to get a handle on the finances, and is looking at the human resources piece to create a more efficient system
- B. The Regional School Committee also met on 8/27. They prepared a list of questions and discussion points for Tracy Novick, Field Director, of Mass. Association of School Committees, to get clarification and guidance on the school budgeting process and the roles for the Superintendent and the school committee. The topic of four town meeting is on the agenda so we hope to hear soon when the first four town meeting will be scheduled
- C. The Pelham Finance Committee sent a letter to the regional school committee urging a 2.5% range for FY26 budget increase, their concerns about capital outlays that will be required over the coming years and the burden on the residential tax payers. We will discuss our committee's concerns at our next meeting to prepare our talking points for the first four town meeting

III. Draft of FY 26 Budget Request letter and department meeting schedule

- A. Our discussion of the draft included whether we should communicate a 2.5% limitation on departments budgets, the role of the finance committee in balancing services the with impact of the costs to the taxpayers, the timing of knowing COLA increases as determined by the current formula generated by the Personnel Board in February, the role of excess levy capacity, the impact of other revenues such as new growth, rural aid, PILOT agreements and state aid. Any specific edits should be written for presentation at our next meeting when we will finish the draft
- B. The pre-populated department forms with the previous year's budget will be ready to go by our next meeting

- C. We looked at the proposed schedule of meetings with departments. The highway budget comes in for review early, before the snow flies which is the superintendent's busy season. Other departments will come later in the review schedule so they can have updated amounts to project. Sometimes a department will ask for a second review if they have new information on expenses
- D. We will follow last year's schedule, making sure our dates are in sync with the Select Board meeting schedule and any elections, Special Town meetings, etc.

IV Misc.

- A. The teachers' contract process is nearly completed at the elementary school. The contract is not projected to affect the FY25 budget passed at ATM
- B. The new library is now under construction. The tax impact is not expected to begin until a year after construction is completed.

Our next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, September 5 at 6:30**, in order to get back on the alternating schedule with the Select Board and to not coincide with State Election Day on Sept. 3. On the agenda will be to finalize the FY 26 Budget Request Letter and prepare our points to present at the four town. Our meeting adjourned at 7:44 pm.