

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Thursday, September 5, 2024 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, April Stein, Bob Groves, Susie Mosher, Jim Hemingway, Kathy Salvador and George Arvanitis Absent: none Attending: Town Administrator Becky Torres, Frank McGinn III and Tom Siefert

Meeting called to order at 6:33 p.m.

- I. Approve the minutes of the 8/27/24 meeting, as amended
- II. Finalize FY26 Budget request letter and form
 - A. Struck a statement regarding the passing of the FY25 budget with a small number of dissenters
 - B. Struck the sentence for our goal being to keep the total budget to 2.5% increase and kept the goal for the budget season as a level services budget.
 - C. Agreed to keep a comment regarding property taxes being regressive and adversely impacting low income households and moved it to the third paragraph of the letter right after the sentence requesting a level service budgets
 - D. Agreed to adding actual FY24 spend to the budget forms with a note that they may not be final because this data will not be complete before the budget forms are distributed
- III. Prepared the tentative calendar of the departmental budget meetings for the FY26 budget
- IV. Tracy Novick, Field Director of Mass Association of School Committees, gave a detailed presentation of school financing in Massachusetts
 - A. Ajay will send a link to the presentation and requested that we all watch her presentation
 - B. He requested we watch this before the next four town meeting
- V. Update on the Amherst Pelham Regional School Committee's budget process and preparing for the first Four Town Meeting
 - A. The first meeting is expected to be in September
 - B. The region has been debating the process for developing the FY26 budget and the benefit of starting this process earlier
 - C. Discussed the position that the Shutesbury Finance Committee would assert to the regional school committee at this time:
 - i. Amherst and Pelham sent letters to the regional school committee requesting that the FY26 assessment increase be no more that 2.5% from FY25. Amherst further stated that they want to decrease the FY25 base by the amount of ARPA funds used to fund the FY25 budget for the 2.5% increase limit.
 - ii. The Committee discussed whether to state Shutesbury's position regarding Amherst and Pelham's requests and regarding Shutesbury's guidance. The committee decided that because it's early in our budget process and because we haven't seen preliminary regional budget and assessment calculations, that it is too

early to state a position regarding the other town's requests at the first four town meeting

- iii. We will state that region shouldn't consider using any method other than the modified Statutory assessment method for FY26

VI. Funding request for the Amherst Pelham Regional School track

- A. The ARPS Finance Director has requested a meeting with the Shutesbury Community Preservation Committee to request \$136,000 of Open Space\Recreation CPA funds for the track
- B. The meeting will be on September 19th

VII. Opening meeting law violation

- A. A resident submitted an Open Meeting law complaint to the state Attorney General's office stating that on July 30, a quorum of the Finance Committee attended and participated in discussions at a Selectboard meeting but had not posted a Finance Committee meeting.
- B. This complaint was correct as recent changes to Open Meeting laws don't allow for a quorum of a committee\board members to participate in discussions at any other committee\board meetings even if they only interact with the members conducting the meeting and not each other, unless they posted a meeting for their committee\board
- C. We need to plan for these situations and post the meetings, otherwise if four or more Finance Committee members are in a meeting where they did not post one, no more than three members can participate in the discussions in the meeting
- D. Finance Committee reviewed the response to the complaint and each member will sign it

VIII. Other Business

- A. The committee was reminded that not all transfer request forms have been signed and were asked to please do so
- B. There will be a fall town newsletter and April will write an article for the committee
- C. A concern was raised regarding the value of the spending by the Board of Health for monitoring mosquitoes and other insects and of the related reports. No action taken

Our next meeting is September 17, 2024 6:30pm

Meeting adjourned at 8:23pm