

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, October 15, 2024 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, Bob Groves, April Stein, Susie Mosher, Jim Hemingway, Kathy Salvador and George Arvanitis Absent: None Attending: Town Administrator Becky Torres

Meeting called to order at 6:35 p.m.

- I. Approved the minutes of the 9/28/24 meeting, as amended
- II. Approved the minutes of the 10/1/24 meeting, as amended
- III. Amherst Pelham Regional School Update:
 - A. Summary of October 8th APRS school committee
 - i. Strong support from the committee for the superintendent’s approach to the FY26 budget
 - ii. The development of a plan for attracting more students from charter schools had considerable support. The school is meeting with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for options.
 - iii. Superintendent was asked if there is a plan to pause the Middle School Principal search. The search is staying open because of uncertainty regarding consolidating the schools
 - iv. Considering the first weekend in December for the next four town meeting
 - v. There were no comments regarding the fire and sprinkler system requirements from the past, pertaining to the consolidation of the schools
 - B. Committee drafted questions for the superintendent before the next four town meeting as follows:
 - i. What are the superintendent’s intentions for school choice
 - ii. calculate the assessment schedules for the scenarios using the modified statutory method (five year rolling average)
 - iii. produce a scenario of “keeping 6% within the base” w\zero increase using the modified statutory method
 - iv. Calculate the assessments for each town using annual 2.5% and\or 3.5% increases from FY24 to FY25 and FY26 using the modified statutory method
 - v. What infrastructure modifications to the high school will be required for the consolidation of the middle and high schools
 - C. Discussed the importance of determining how much assessment Amherst is willing to pay for FY26
- IV. Town Administrator transition
 - A. Becky was offered a job by the Town of Sunderland and is currently negotiating a contract
 - B. A selectboard member informed Ajay of a tentative plan to hire a part time interim Town Administrators on a consulting basis. There are retired administrators who have helped other towns with these transitions and the town will conduct a search for one of them

- C. The committee would like to meet with the selectboard at their October 22 meeting to discuss the extent of funding for this transition
 - D. Asked Becky if she may be able to assist the town in this transition. She will check with Sunderland regarding her availability
- V. Discussed increasing the reserve fund in general as it appears to be low:
- A. A motion was made to increase the reserve from \$55,000 to \$80,000
 - B. The committee would have recommended a higher budget amount for the reserve if the tax levy was not expected to increase by just over 2.5% for FY25. The FY25 new growth is much higher than anticipated at the past annual town meeting when the budget was voted. It was agreed that had we known this, we would have requested a higher reserve. It was noted that this request will not impact the FY25 tax levy
 - C. The committee unanimously voted to submit a warrant article at the upcoming special town meeting, to request a transfer of \$25,000 from Free Cash or Stabilization Funds to the Finance Committee Reserve Fund in the FY25 budget
 - D. Becky will draft a warrant article for the special town meeting
- VI. Other Business
- A. Bob talked to the new Highway Superintendent and will follow up with him to build a budget request. They expect to be able to make their budget meeting currently scheduled for November 12
 - B. Becky will provide the town accountant with Ajay's email address for distributing expense reports in the future
 - C. The Elementary School can't meet on January 21 to discuss their FY26 budget request. They have been rescheduled to February 4
 - D. The budget meetings with the Collector and Accountant were rescheduled from February 4 to January 21. Ajay will confirm with them

Our next meetings are October 22 (w/ Select Board), and October 29, 6:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.