

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, January 7, 2025 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

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

Attending: Gabe Voelker - Interim Town Administrator, Ryan Mailloux - Treasurer, Leslie Bracebridge – Administrative Assessor, David Burgess – Principle Assessor, Howard Shpetner - Board of Assessors, Amanda Alix, Diane Jacoby and Mary Lou Conca

Meeting called to order at 6:29 p.m.

- I. Treasurer's FY26 budget review
 - A. Health Insurance – \$78,000 (15%) increase:
 - i. A substantial increase in the use of weight loss medications is causing the Hampshire County Insurance Trust to use their reserves. Ozempic was cited as one medication that has contributed substantially to the medication cost increase. This is resulting in an expected increase of 12-13% for next year.
 - ii. This budget request assumes that the employee makeup and plan options will remain unchanged
 - B. Medicare – Assuming a 3% cost of living salary increase for the town employees
 - C. OPEB Actuarial – annual buildup, there will be a price increase. The next actuarial report will be produced near the end of calendar 2025 for FY24 and FY25
 - D. The Finance Committee will determine the FY26 OPEB fund contribution
 - E. Short term Borrowing – no change
 - F. Tax Title – Requesting a \$3,000 increase:
 - i. The increase is due to a change by the state making this process more costly
 - ii. Another cause for the increase is errors with parcels in town. Resolving these errors is causing more billed attorney hours and this work will spill into FY26
 - iii. There are currently about 15 properties in tax title which is our yearly average
 - G. Treasurer's operating expenses – 3% increase for changes to the payroll system for onboarding activities. This will provide several benefits to the town
 - H. Veterans' Benefits – Requested level funding:
 - i. There currently is a veteran receiving benefits
 - ii. \$6,460 has been spent so far in FY25 and a Finance Committee Reserve Fund transfer will be needed this fiscal year
 - iii. Any public assistance or income a veteran receives will decrease their monthly benefit
 - iv. The state reimburses for a portion of this expense, but it takes up to two years to receive the reimbursement
 - v. Any unemployed veterans moving into town would cause a substantial increase
 - vi. We will fund FY26 at \$11,000
 - I. Unemployment – Ryan calculated we would have paid \$3,300 under the employer tax option. He recommends continuing to use the self-insuring method

- J. For the three capital items currently funded with short term notes, Ryan will be working with bond council and may use a short term note for another year if interest costs are too high. He will update the Finance Committee
- K. The Treasurer has been certified by the state, therefore we will fund the Treasurer Certification expense for \$1,000. This will be an annual charge

II. Assessor's FY26 budget review

- A. Assessor Expenses account:
 - i. This is used for running the office and the assessors are requesting level funding
 - ii. Currently spent \$800 year to date but will spend at least another \$1,000 to update field cards
 - iii. Will fund at \$2,500
- B. Administrative Assessor Certification – will not need this in FY26. We may need this \$1,000 in the future, but will not fund in FY26
- C. CAI GIS costs – fees are increasing
- D. Vision software - fees are increasing. Data is backed up to protect from security breaches
- E. Revaluations – Funds the outside agencies and the consultant who values utility property. Level funding requested
- F. The Vadar software that our accounting systems use has robust security including regularly scheduled data back ups

III. Public request: Open Checkbook

- A. A request was received from two town residents asking the Finance Committee to consider sponsoring the purchase of "Open Checkbook" which is a software platform that provides the public access to the town's spending activity
- B. The purchase estimate is \$5,200 and the annual maintenance fee will be \$1,200
- C. Potential benefits noted are public transparency to town spending and it may generate public interest in town activities, among others
- D. It was also noted that this may provide benefits to financial staff and town committees
- E. There is a demonstration site where it can be reviewed
- F. Ajay noted the town expense reports are posted on the web site and are accessible to the public
- G. Finance staff and the Town Administrator will need to be involved in the purchase analysis
- H. The system is integrated to the Vadar accounting systems, but we need to determine if there are additional costs to the town such as increased staff time to keep the data up to date

IV. Shutesbury Elementary School FY26 budget update

- A. A reformatted version of the elementary school budget was presented
- B. The Union 28 Finance Director was informed during her training that grants and aid should be subtracted from the applicable expense lines in the budget presented
- C. In the past the total cost of each line was shown in the detailed budget
- D. Total expected spend in FY26 will be \$3,037,009 (3.3% increase) and the town appropriation (budget) request is \$2,591,352, a \$121,842 (4.93%) increase
- E. The new format shows the total spending by the school, which was not the case in prior years. This is due to the inclusion of School Choice funding

- F. Concern was expressed that the total costs for the expense lines aren't being shown in the detailed section. Some members find it confusing and cumbersome to look at the other revenue section to understand the full budget details
 - G. The school has been recognized by the state as a high performing school
 - H. Ajay asked everyone to prepare questions in advance of the meeting with the School Committee
 - I. The committee recognized and expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Union 28 Finance Director in preparing this budget format
 - J. The committee will not request a change to the format presented for our meeting with the School Committee
- V. Select Volunteer for Police Chief negotiating group:
- A. Susie and April are interested, but April will ask the Personnel Board if she can be their representative
 - B. Susie was approved to be the Finance Committee representative by a unanimous vote
- VI. Annual Town Meeting date:
- A. The Selectboard would like to move the ATM to sometime in May
 - i. Difficulties with the regional budget may require more time
 - ii. Also a new town administrator may need more time to prepare for this meeting
 - iii. The committee recommended moving the ATM to May 10, 2025
- VII. PFAS update and other FY25 budget issues
- A. Constant testing is draining the funds we borrowed
 - B. We pay \$800 for maintenance and testing plus \$259 for reports, for each home. There are currently 70 homes with filters which are tested quarterly
 - C. By year end more funds will be needed
 - D. The committee needs to determine how we will fund these ongoing costs
 - E. Susie will discuss this issue with our State Representative, Aaron Saunders, who has been helpful in managing this issue in the past
- VIII. Administrative Secretary\Assistant
- A. Requesting an increase to 32 hours per week resulting in a budget of \$41,600, up from \$29,640
 - B. Many times there is no one available in town hall to help the public. The Town Administrator has provided the public with assistance, but this is not this position's role
 - C. The Personnel Board has updated the job description to provide support to the Town Administrator, maintain the town web site and assist town hall visitors
 - D. The title will be changed from Administrative Secretary to Administrative Assistant
 - E. It was noted that a person who had been in this role did not accept an offer to return and fill this position citing that the wages offered is too low
- IX. Highway Tree Warden Budget
- A. This line item is running low with only \$700 left in the \$4,477 FY25 budget
 - B. The Interim Town Administrator asked if this work should be stopped

C. The committee requested that the Highway Superintendent determine how much more would be needed to continue the tree work for the remainder of the year

X. Other Items

A. Noted that the state provided an added \$109,000 in Chapter 90 highway funds

B. Resumes have been received for the Town Administrator position, but mostly from individuals who do not have experience as a Town Administrator

Our next meeting is January 21, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.