

Shutesbury Finance Committee  
Tuesday, January 21, 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, Gail Weiss – Accountant, Ellen McKay – Town Collector and Leonard Czeronka – Fire Chief

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

- I. Town Accountant's FY26 budget review
  - A. Increased expense line budget to \$5,515 from \$5,500
  - B. Certification remains \$1,000
  - C. We asked the accountant her view of Open Checkbook:
    - i. Some expenditure details may be confidential and reporting them would be in violation of privacy issues, such as veteran benefit payments or health insurance reimbursements
    - ii. School details will not be shown because Union 28 and the region process their payments in their accounting systems. All Union 28 payments will have the same generic description
    - iii. Interim Town Administrator and Accountant expressed concern of not having details for the schools while having them for other departments' expenses
  
- II. Tree Warden Finance Committee Reserve Fund transfer request
  - A. This line item is running low with only \$779.52 left in the \$4,477 FY25 budget
  - B. The Highway Superintendent is requesting an additional \$5,000 to remove the trees that are currently considered at risk. This is mostly for dead Ash trees which require professional tree services for removal
  - C. If no other trees at risk are found and the town doesn't need to pay for disposal of the trees it will be removing, the \$5,000 will be adequate for the rest of the year
  - D. It was noted that in the past, some tree work came out of the Highway Department expenses line. Interest in learning how this worked before transferring funds to the Tree Warden line, was expressed. Bob is going to discuss this with the superintendent
  - E. Interim Town Administrator indicated that this is an unusual amount of tree cutting and she doesn't think he has the funds in his expenses, especially with the number of repairs needed to equipment. She believes the need is urgent and that we should make this transfer
  - F. Motion to transfer \$5,000 was approved unanimously
  
- III. Office supplies Finance Committee Reserve Fund transfer request
  - A. \$400 left unspent will not be enough for the year
  - B. Request is for a transfer of \$1,000 to Office Supplies
  - C. Motion to transfer \$1,000 was approved unanimously

- IV. Town Collector's FY26 budget review
  - A. Requested that the Collector Expense line increase by \$1,630 from FY25, to \$23,080. The increases are:
    - i. Banking Fees by \$100
    - ii. Office supplies \$500, toner cost increase
    - iii. Postage \$1,000, rates continue to increase
    - iv. MCTA membership \$30, dues increased for towns our size
    - v. New laws will affect tax-taking filings and advertising costs.
      - 1. Newspaper advertising is now only required for Commercial and Industrial property
      - 2. We will now need a to post notices on property and may need outside agencies to make these postings. \$1,000 will be added to the expense line for "Posting on Property for Tax Title"
    - vi. Total Collector Expense line will be \$24,080
  - B. Collector Certification will remain funded at \$1,000
  - C. Assistant Town Collector has not been working as many hours. Ellen suggested we decrease the funding for this line to \$1,000, down from \$2,500
  - D. Total budget amount for the three accounts noted will be \$26,080
- V. Fire Department FY26 budget review
  - A. Budget request is \$43,100, a \$5,400 increase
  - B. Increase is all in the maintenance line which includes repairs. This line had enough for yearly service, but not for parts or repairs and some maintenance and inspections have been delayed
  - C. The yearly service cost detail, amounting to \$11,395, was presented
  - D. Discussed the need for separate lines for required testing and inspections versus maintenance and repair
  - E. Training and Call Wages will be level funded
- VI. Reviewed and approved the minutes of the 1/7/25 meeting, as amended
- VII. Reviewed and approved the minutes of the 12/10/24 meeting, as amended
- VIII. Discussed a meeting with Aaron Saunders – State Representative, regarding PFAS mitigation
  - A. Aaron recommended we engage the Franklin County Council of Government (FRCOG) for support
  - B. There are currently no other funding solutions than the loan program we are utilizing
  - C. It was suggested that a subcommittee review this issue and contact the FRCOG and other state officials to determine what support is available for this work and to advocate for greater support for municipalities
- IX. ARPS Regional Budget update:
  - A. A new budget was issued dated January 14 and reviewed by the regional school
  - B. Four funding models shown:
    - i. Fully fund the budget. This had large increases for all towns

- ii. Cap Amherst's increase to 4% using the Modified Statutory Assessment method.  
This results in a \$1.0m deficit
- iii. Apply a 4% fixed guardrail for all towns. This results in \$1.4m deficit
- iv. A hybrid model with a 3% increase for Amherst results in a \$1.4m deficit
- C. The details of the cuts needed to balance the budget were also presented
- D. It doesn't appear that the regional school committee is considering a flat guardrail model
- E. The next four town meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 8

X. Other Items

- A. The rural aid for the Shutesbury Elementary School was decreased to \$76k in FY25, due to an error by the state. The school will decrease the FY26 rural aid in its budget. Some federal aid is also at risk and our state representative indicated that the state will not replace these lost funds
- B. Ajay will discuss the budget with the Interim Town Administrator in hopes of bringing a preliminary version to the Finance Committee to our next meeting
- C. The Annual Town Meeting will not be changed. It will be on April 26
- D. Bob and Kathy were assigned to monitor the town expense report and bring items of concern to the Finance Committee

Our next meeting is February 4, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.