

Shutesbury Finance Committee  
Tuesday, April 8, 2025 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, April Stein, Bob Groves, Susie Mosher, Kathy Salvador, Jim Hemingway and George Arvanitis Absent: None Attending: Kristin Burgess - Police Chief, Hayley Bolton – Town Administrator, Gabe Voelker - Interim Town Administrator

Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.

- I. Reviewed and approved the minutes of the 4/1/25 meeting, as amended
- II. Capital Planning voted on April 3:
  - A. Approved the zero turn mower. Cost estimated at \$11,400
  - B. Approved the Dam project. The FY26 phase is expected to be covered by CPA funds and a state grant
  - C. The Capital Planning Committee voted to repair the grader and not to replace it. In the fall of 2025 the repair cost was estimated at \$16,600
  - D. Approved replacement of the alarm system at town hall. First bid (and high estimate) cost is \$8,648.09. No funds are available in the building repair account. A warrant article for a transfer from cash reserves will be created for the annual town meeting
  - E. Future anticipated projects:
    - i. Rebuilding of one of the fire trucks
    - ii. Elementary school parking lot
  - F. Chapter 90 funds are awarded annually. Unused funds are rolled over to the next year for future road work. These funds cannot be used for wages
  - G. The Interim Town Administrator presented a request of \$10,000 for repairs\renovations to the large meeting room in town hall - the addition of sound boards and cabinets were mentioned. A warrant article for a transfer from cash reserves will be created for the annual town meeting
  - H. Jennifer Wallace, chair of the Lake Wyola Stormwater Erosion Committee, and Interim Town Administrator Gabe Voelker submitted a grant proposal for a \$80,000 Rural Development grant that will require a match of \$8,000. This is for road work and culverts affected by washouts around Lake Wyola:
    - i. The Lake Wyola association offered to pay half of the match. They need to approve this at their next meeting
    - ii. The request is for the town to pay the other half of the \$4,000 match
    - iii. We will create a warrant article for \$8,000 and lower it to \$4,000 if the association approves their \$4,000 contribution
- III. Police Department FY26 budget
  - A. The committee reviewed the Police Department proposal with the Police Chief, Kristin Burgess
  - B. Peace Officers Standards and Training commission (POST) sets standard for education and qualification to certify Police officers
  - C. There were two academies: Part Time academy and Full Time academy
  - D. POST now wants all officers to be certified by the Full Time Academy and the Part time academy will be closed

- E. There are now much fewer part time officers available as all new officers are full time certified. Full time officers are not willing to work part time
- F. If we hire new part timers, then we would have to fund their cost of the academy – Estimated cost \$6,000. Officers don't want to go to the full time academy to work part time
- G. The state police indicated it does not have the resources to cover our town when part timers are out
- H. The chief indicated that we cannot fulfill 7:00am to 11:00pm coverage as required by the town due to the new state regulations, because of the unavailability of part time officers
- I. The Chief wants our town to shift from part time officers to three full time officers. There would be savings on the costs of uniforms and training, less use of overtime, and better coverage for vacation and sick days
- J. The officers' new contract raises are 10% in FY26. This will help with retaining officers
- K. It was noted that the police budget is 4% of our total town budget
- L. At this time, we are not considering regionalizing with New Salem due to the result of the police survey in town a few years ago. The town of New Salem also conducted a public survey, and they also wish to maintain their own department
- M. The Chief informed the committee that she secured five body cameras:
  - i. The cost is \$12,000 which was approved at the FY24 annual town meeting
  - ii. The purchase provides five licenses, user documents, a full redaction system (considered very important) and storage space on the cloud
  - iii. There is a \$3,000 (small town discount applied) for an annual subscription fee which needs to be added to the police department budget. This will include the replacement cameras every five years. We will be locked into the annual fee for five years

IV. Amherst Public Regional Schools FY26 Budget Update

- A. The Amherst town council unanimously voted to refer the recently approved budget to the Amherst Finance Committee who must report back by April 28
- B. The town is required to have a budget hearing at the end of the month
- C. It appears that there is support for the 4.81% increased budget in Amherst
- D. The Leverett Finance Committee indicated that they will be recommending the budget approved by the regional school
- E. The budget needs approval by three towns

V. FY26 budget

- A. Ajay displayed the current draft budget
- B. Continued review of the draft budget
- C. We plan to have a final vote on the budget on April 29 and we will meet with the Selectboard to approve all the relevant warrant articles on May 6. The Selectboard will meet to approve it on May 6
- D. Discussed conducting a meeting with the department heads before town meeting, tentatively May 13
- E. Administrative Assessor line: Regional Resource cannot do this for the town because they don't have the resources. We will need to hire a part time assessor. Currently budgeted at \$35,000
- F. Added \$1,000 to Assessors certificate for new Administrative Assessor

- G. Added \$3,000 to the Police expense line for the annual body camera subscription
- H. Added \$5,000 to the Police Chief Salary and decreased health insurance by \$5,000
- I. Any contracted employee in the state doesn't need to fall under the town policies. These employees may negotiate to increase their salary if they don't need health insurance through our town
- J. Applied \$50,000 of cash reserves to fund (roughly half) of the Health Insurance budget increase
- K. The total budget is now \$7,793,662
- L. The deficit, unfunded portion of the operating budget, is currently \$188,770.
- M. Discussed the use of varying levels of excess levy capacity and the impact on property taxes
- N. It was noted that most towns are dealing with unusually large budget increases. We discussed the need for a schedule to track the budget activities of other towns. We will create a google sheet that committee members can update with this information

Our next meeting is April 15, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.