

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Thursday, October 23, 2025 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, April Stein, Susie Mosher, Laura Soito, Molly Moss, Jim Walton and George Arvanitis; Absent: None; Non-Members Attending: Hayley Bolton – Town Administrator and Nate Longcope – School Committee

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

- I. Reviewed and approved the minutes of the 10/7/25 meeting
- II. Debrief for the all department, board and committee meeting with the Finance Committee
 - A. Meeting Structure and Participation:
 - i. Four FinCom members attended in person, with Laura joining virtually
 - ii. Approximately 25-30 people participated, including representatives from schools (6-7 people from both regional and SES), highway, police, fire, library, and other departments
 - iii. FinCom members broke out into four separate groups – with the meeting participants. This created challenges for virtual participants who couldn't meaningfully participate in breakout discussions
 - B. Benefits of the meeting:
 - i. Participants appreciated meeting colleagues from other departments
 - ii. Susie noted valuable connections, like when the elementary school principal, The green communities and the building committee discussed their work on lighting projects
 - iii. The meeting successfully established transparent communication and collaborative approach
 - iv. Participants became aware of the fiscal challenges, including dependence on the tax levy and flat state funding support
 - v. Hayley reported overwhelmingly positive feedback, with people energized by the collaborative approach and opportunity to contribute ideas
 - C. Themes Identified:
 - i. All groups emphasized the need for better public communication and information sharing about budget priorities and trade-offs
 - ii. Groups identified the need for both immediate FY27 strategies and longer-term policy reviews (like benefits policies and trash collection)
 - iii. Participants noted public fears about financial issues such as litigation, PFAS mitigation and borrowing costs. The feeling is that the community needs a better understanding of these issues
 - D. Considerations for future meeting:
 - i. Virtual participants need a dedicated breakout room
 - ii. Name tags and formal introductions would help networking
 - iii. Technical planning will be required for the hybrid format
 - E. Actions for the FinCom:
 - i. Develop concise community communications of the town's financial issues including education\explanations of complex issues such as PFAS and the need for advocacy for

more state funding initiatives. Susie, Hayley, and Laura volunteered to develop this public communication

- ii. Review and consider implementing many of the strategies identified in this meeting – this will be a longer term process
- iii. George, Ajay and Hayley will complete a long term budget forecast
- iv. Schedule an all department, board and committee meeting when the draft budget is in its early phase

III. Developed the outline for the annual budget request

A. Discussed messaging in the request:

- i. Let managers know that we are reviewing the FY26 budget assumptions and analyzing variances
- ii. A zero based budgeting approach was suggested. This would mean asking managers to create their budget lines from scratch. The department liaisons would work with the managers
- iii. Concern was raised regarding freezing wages
- iv. Discussed developing a budget that keeps their non-labor lines level to FY26 and acknowledge the impact of inflation on their budgets. This may not amount to adequate savings
- v. Suggested showing the budget increases we know of and their impact on budget to present the bigger picture to the managers

B. Budget request outline decided:

- i. Highlight the budget challenges and towns financial situation
- ii. Point out that we are working on the COLA for wages
- iii. We intend to use all available tools to fund the budget such as the use of excess levy capacity or cash reserves
- iv. We would like the departments to prepare the budget that reflects what is needed to provide their services
- v. Ask departments to be prepared to make cuts to their requests given the current financial climate

C. The committee will refine\finalize the request letter at their next meeting

IV. Plan for Four Towns meeting

- A. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 8 at 9:30am
- B. A joint agenda is being prepared by the school committee and the four town working group
- C. Ajay will share a slide show for the FinCom to review and comment on at our next meeting
- D. We will prepare for the four town meeting at the next meeting

V. Other Business

- A. Susie reviewed a letter from a collective of rural schools to be sent to the governor and to the state legislature regarding education funding in the state. She offered members the opportunity to include their names on the letter

Next meeting is on November 4 at 6:30

Meeting adjourned at 8:39 p.m.