

Shutesbury Finance Committee  
Four Town Meeting  
Saturday, March 14, 2026 ; Amherst Regional Middle School Library

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, Susie Mosher, Laura Soito, and George Arvanitis;  
Absent: April Stein, Molly Moss and Jim Walton; Shutesbury representatives attending: Selectboard members: Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil and Rita Farrell and School Committee member: Anna Heard (regional rep.); Others in attendance: Representatives from the Regional School, Amherst, Leverett and Pelham

Meeting called to order at 9:05 a.m.

- I. Tonya McIntyre, Regional School Executive Director of Student Academic, presented Regional Data
  - A. Showed student enrollments and share of enrollments requiring special services
  - B. Showed overall academic performance
  - C. Provided an overview of the Summit Academy. The cost per student here is greater than the regional average cost
  - D. Reviewed enrollment trends. Noted that enrollments decreased by 13% over the last ten years while the proportion of special needs students has increased
  
- II. Shannon Bernacchia, Regional School Finance Director reviewed the FY27 ARPS budget
  - A. Special Education increase of 13.4% mostly due to more out placed students
  - B. Other Programs account increase of 14.1% due to increased charter school & school choice assessments
  - C. Central Administration increase of 47.4% due to legal costs, a scheduled audit by the state and a new HR platform
  - D. Transportation costs increase will be 8%
  - E. Health Insurance increase will be 8.5%
  
- III. Shannon Bernacchia, Regional School Finance Director reviewed the FY27 Assessments
  - A. Used conservative estimates for revenue
  - B. Adjustments & cuts to the budget amount to \$1.1m decrease from the level service budget
  - C. Added Homeless/Foster Care Reimbursements of \$14k to revenue because it has become a reliable revenue source every year
  - D. The E&D balance is greater than the allowed maximum amount and the excess of \$151,620 will be applied to (decrease) the assessments
  - E. The assessments before the application of the excess E&D will be the base for FY28
  
- IV. Shannon Bernacchia, Regional School Finance Director reviewed the \$1.1m Adjustments and Cuts
  - A. Reviewed the details of 1.4 FTE additions to the budget
  - B. Applied \$571k in grants, aid and revolving accounts to cover 7.29 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employee hours
  - C. Reviewed the details of the 9.17 FTE reductions

- D. She noted that the reduced FTEs will be achieved through attrition and retirements resulting in no layoffs
- V. Shannon Bernacchia, Regional School Finance Director showed how the budget adjustments & cuts aligned to the school committee priorities
  - A. For each budget action she showed the priorities and the justifications for the actions
  - B. Noted that the budget adjustments align with enrolment shifts
  - C. Budget actions will allow the school to meet the goals of maintaining the school certifications and meet all statutory educational requirements
- VI. Clarifying Questions & Answers from the town representatives
  - A. Reiterated the causes for the Central Administration expense increase
  - B. Substitute teacher increase is based on the five year average. Teacher absenteeism is higher than historical levels
  - C. Charter reimbursement revenue is not equal to the governor's cherry sheet of estimated state aid because historically it's lower in the final cherry sheet
  - D. Special Education costs fluctuate and are hard to predict
  - E. Central Administration will not have high increases in the future. FY27 has will has one time changes
  - F. Discussed the E&D account balance and costs impacting it. It was noted that costs funded by this are charged to the account they relate to, not to the E&D account.
  - G. Discussion regarding how the region provides services that lower the number of out of district placements.
  - H. Discussed the new HR platform. It will have an annual subscription fee
  - I. Chestnut Academy rent will lower the total budget
  - J. The capital spending plan is unchanged from the four towns last meeting. A short review showed estimated future costs. The costs for each project are before grants are applied
- VII. Shutesbury discussion regarding their response during breakout session for each town
  - A. Agrees with the budget and assessment amounts
  - B. Agrees to accept the assessments before the application of the E&D funds as the base for the FY28 assessments
- VIII. Town Comments
  - A. Amherst:
    - i. Pleased with how the adjustments and cuts were managed
    - ii. Concerned about using the assessment before the application of the E&D funds for the base for FY28
    - iii. Concerned about large budget increases in the future
  - B. Shutesbury:
    - i. Expressed appreciation for the detailed presentation
    - ii. Noted that the info provided by the school will be helpful for the citizens to understand the cost increases

C. Pelham:

- i. Thanked Shannon for the detailed presentation
- ii. The regional school budget increase will use almost all the town's new revenue
- iii. They will be level funding their elementary school and all other departments
- iv. If current trends continue, they will need to "partner" with another town

D. Leverett:

- i. They deferred to Pelham and accepted their assessment because Pelham accepts theirs
- ii. Their assessment increase of 3.59% will be larger than the 2.5% increase they are holding all their department to

Meeting adjourned at 10:37 a.m.