

**SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE**  
**Thursday, February 17, 2022**  
**Final Minutes**

**Present: Lauren Thomas-Paquin, Bethany Rose, Stephen Sullivan, Julie Martel, members; Dan Hayes, Chair; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Caitlin Sheridan, Director of Finance & Operations; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; Public Guests**

**A. Meeting Called to Order by Dan at 7:02 P.M.**

**B. Public Hearings: FY23 Budget**

Dan explained that the final FY23 Budget will be presented tonight; it has been worked on for many months by SSC, our new Director of Finance & Operations Caitlin Sheridan, and the Town FinCom. Caitlin is presenting it in a new format to try to clarify some parts of it. Positions funded by federal and state COVID grants are being kept separate. Caitlin walked through the budget; as usual, most of it is in personnel (salaries and benefits). Overall, there's an increase of about 2.43%.

Dan thanked Caitlin for all her hard work on the budget, and on the clear presentation. Jennifer thanked Caitlin as well for being so responsive and accommodating to all questions from the public, from U#28 staff, from everyone.

**LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE FY23 BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,250,948. BETHANY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.**

Dan invited public comment; there was none.

**C. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar: None.**

**D. Warrants and Gifts:**

315	1/24/2022	\$82,751
3016	1/25/2022	\$10,936
316	2/7/2022	\$84,852
3017	2/9/2022	\$4,764
3018	2/17/2022	\$26,268

**E. Approval of Minutes from January 20, 2022:**

**LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 20, 2022. BETHANY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.**

**F. Unfinished Business / Updates:**

1. Capital Projects/Building Process - Discussion:

Steve said the target date to finish the roof work is still in April.

2. FY23 Budget - Discussion and Vote on Final Adoption of Budget:

See Public Hearing above.

**G. New Business / Discussion Items:**

1. Phasing in of Non-Mandated Mask Plan - Discussion and Vote:

Dan thanked administration, teachers, parents, and especially students for being patient and cooperating with each other in order to keep everyone safe. He really appreciates it. He also recognized faculty and staff for putting in a lot of effort (sanitizing, contact tracing, etc.) that has been a significant factor in keeping students healthy and keeping them learning. He's reflected on a lot of information from many sources, including the community survey. The goal is complex: maintaining a healthy environment for students and teachers, which keeps people in the school, while striking a balance with safety measures so that they don't interfere with learning. We also need to be cautious about what might be coming in the future. We will leave it up to students and teachers whether they want to continue to wear masks after February 28, and we'll continue contact tracing. We will also make recommendations according to the latest guidance from the CDC. More than anything, we want to make clear that we're committed to making sure that everyone has their needs met.

The proposed Mask Plan has masks worn through 3/14 to account for travel and gatherings over February break. As of 2/28, masks outside will be optional. As of 3/14, it will be highly recommended that masks be worn inside. Masks must be worn on buses and in health offices until further notice, per federal order.

Dan invited public comment on the plan.

A member of the public asked if they could see the survey data from the parents in the community. Jackie said she can try to find it. Their concern is that dropping the mask mandate might not reflect the concerns of most of the community. Jackie said 41.4% voted for mandatory masks, 31.9% said they should be optional, 22% said they should be mandatory for two weeks, then optional. The concern expressed is that the school will be unable to support the choices of individual families in enforcing mask wearing for those who choose it.

A member of the public supports optional masking; the numbers seem to support it. Optional masking will be good for our children's mental and emotional health. They appreciate the difficult decisions SSC has to make.

A SES teacher disagrees with the decision: we should wear our masks longer. It's still flu season (which runs through May in Massachusetts). We should wear masks until it's warmer outside.

An SES teacher also disagrees with the decision. The evidence shows that high-quality masks for everyone help slow and stop transmission of the virus. We're still in a pandemic, and just recently, hospitals were overwhelmed by the Omicron surge. We have no sense of how bad future variants will be. Recent variants are among the most virulent of all viruses; if we had a measles outbreak, we would take every precaution necessary, so why wouldn't we do that with COVID too? Also, we don't know the long-term effects of infection. Wearing the masks also teaches children to care about the physical well-beings of their communities, cultivating a community perspective that we want them to absorb. If there are fewer people wearing masks, the viral load in the air will increase, also increasing the chance of infection. By and large,

students don't have a problem with masking indoors, although they want to take them off when outside. If masks are going to come off, we need clear guidelines and metrics (not just at the school, but everywhere).

An SES teacher supports dropping the mandate. Masks have helped us this far, but they need to end sometime. The plan SSC has come up with makes a lot of sense and gives a lot of individual choice for each family. It's important that we teach our students to respect different viewpoints, even when we disagree.

Julie said it's worthwhile considering what the metrics should be to trigger going back to masking. We should figure that out and add it to the plan, perhaps as an amendment.

Jackie said we do need clearer guidance in order to be able to implement this. Our School Nurse Katie Harrington has not missed a single day of school since last April, and Jackie wanted to thank her publicly for this amazing support she's provided as a result.

Board of Health member Arleen Read concurred that it's a complex picture. The metrics are likely to be under-representations, however, due to the availability of home test kits that are not reported.

**LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED MASK PLAN, EMPOWERING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION TO MAKE NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR JUDGMENT AND AS SCHOOL-WIDE INFECTION METRICS DICTATE. STEVE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.**

Dan thanked the public for all their comments and perspectives.

#### 2. Home School Application - Discussion and Vote:

Jennifer noted that this was the most detailed application she's gotten, and thanked the family for taking the time and care to put it together.

**LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE HOMESCHOOL APPLICATION AS PRESENTED. BETHANY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.**

#### 3. School Choice Discussion (vision usage/minimum amount):

Dan said we are continuing to discuss how best to utilize these funds to support school programs. Susie Mosher requested that updates on budgetary discussions be sent to her so that she's fully apprised at meetings.

### **H. Reports:**

#### 1. Superintendent's Report:

Jennifer said we're still in the midst of a lot of budgeting for U#28 towns, so she and Caitlin meet daily to tweak them. She's also in the midst of mask mandate meetings. Remote meetings have gotten an extension through July, so we can continue to meet as we have been. We have a very entertaining speaker coming

soon, hosted by SES. There will be some meeting about “accountability lite” (the statewide MCAS measures this year). Finally, boy does Jennifer miss Pam - everything runs so smoothly when she’s here!

Julie noted that meeting virtually increases accessibility for everybody, including the public. Jennifer encouraged SSC members to write to our legislators and the Governor that this really works for us, and we’d like to be able to continue with the option. Jackie added that we’ve never had so much participation from the public. Susie noted that in a limited way, the state did allow remote participation before the pandemic, and we’ll probably go back to that limitation afterwards.

Dan noted that several U#28 committee members nominated Pam for a MASC award to show how much the school committees all love her.

## 2. Director of Finance and Operations:

Caitlin said there’s a very slight increase in Chapter 70 funds proposed for next year. In terms of operations, Caitlin reviewed capital projects in the school, sharing pictures of water damage in the gym (the floor can’t sustain any more water damage; it’s already heaving on the sides), elsewhere in the school, and on the sidewalk. Dan has drafted an email detailing the process for addressing capital building projects and infrastructure problems at the school. This document will help streamline and clarify how SES and SSC have to communicate with the Town in order to sort out responsibilities. SSC shouldn’t have to figure out the logistics of how the roof gets fixed or how it’s paid for; those are the responsibility of Town committees. Susie added that MSBA grant funding plays a significant role in the process. Jennifer agreed: a lot depends on the budget allocation at the state level.

## 3. Principal's Report:

Jackie reported that report cards might look or feel different because of the challenges we’ve been having with social-emotional learning. If families have concerns, they should reach out to school administration. We’re also looking at an outdoor Artist-in-Residence. One of our paras is leaving to become a full-time art teacher in Orange, so we’re posting her position. We have to start preparing for MCAS, which is an additional burden and pressure after two years of interrupted learning, so she hopes “MCAS lite” will be a real thing. She’s very much looking forward to vacation!

## 4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report:

Steve reported that it looks like Amherst is moving forward with the 5-year rolling average, which is great for budget planning. There isn’t much Community Preservation Act funding available to rehabilitate the disused field and track. They’re turning to private funding instead.

## 5. Union #28 Report, including Budget & Personnel: No report.

## 6. CES Report:

Dan reported that we reviewed the CES financial report. Dan attended a human services forum along with legislators, where a number of important topics were discussed that relate to CES’s mission. Another issue is that there’s a constant revolving door for teachers working for CES who teach for the Department of

Youth Services, but we can fix that by increasing their pay. We hope to do this with monies that we already have, but don't have the flexibility to use for this purpose yet.

**I. Policy Review:**

First Reading On:

JRA – Student Records

Final Vote On:

IHBAA – Observation of Special Education Program

JI – Student Rights and Responsibilities

**JULIE MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY IHBAA – OBSERVATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM. BETHANY SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.**

**JULIE MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY JI – STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES. LAUREN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.**

**J. Future Business:**

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, March 17, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, March 17, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – March 21, 2022 - 6:30 p.m.
- Budget and Personnel Committee – TBD
- Future agenda items –

Dan thanked everyone for their participation tonight, though it was a bit challenging. He appreciates all the effort administration put into working on the Mask Plan with him.

**K. Adjournment at 8:35**