Shutesbury Selectboard Meeting Minutes
November 10, 2026 Hybrid Meeting Format

Selectboard members present: Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil/Chair, Eric Stocker/ Vice-Chair, James Walton/ Board Member.
Staff present and Guests: Hayley Bolton: Town Administrator, Brennan Mailloux, Gail Fleischaker, Michael Miller, Michael DeChiara, Ajay Khashu, Jennifer Wallace, Shelly Damon.

The meeting was called to order at 3:30pm

1. The Select Board will vote to enter Executive Session for Reason #2. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel.

    a. The Board stated they would reconvene in public session upon the conclusion of the Executive Session at 5:00 PM.

VOTE**:** Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to Executive Session for Reason #2. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Walton: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

2. Executive Session Adjourned at 4:54 pm

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to exit Executive Session and enter into public session at 5:00 pm, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Walton: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

3. Public Session was called to order at 5:03 PM

Agenda Review: As posted.

Public Comment: No public comments made.

General Business:

4. Unanticipated Business- Michel DeChiara Wheelock Solar Site Update:
    a. DeChiara shared that he did some investigating into what components were in the inverter at the Wheelock tract (to better understand the effects of combustion). He contacted the manufacturer Toshiba Mitsubishi-Electric Industrial Systems Corporation (TMEIC). Their response was that they refuse to provide service manuals or product drawings to anyone other than their

customers as they contain confidential information. TMEIC advised asking NextEra Energy for the information, who also refused to share the data.

b. DeChiara stated that he had a phone conversation with the Director of the Massachusetts SMART Program, and they indicated to him that DOER lawyers would be looking into what information they could require of NextEra since the solar facility receives SMART subsidy funds. The Director, Samantha Meserve asked that the town submit a letter with whatever information they already have or can gather from a public records request.
c. DeChiara shared there is no real way to trigger an inspection when there are accidents at these facilities.
d. DeChiara asked the Select Board about paying for an assessment of the Wheelock Solar Site regarding possible contamination. Michael is actively seeking estimates from Tighe & Bond as well as O'Reilly, Talbot & Okun (OTO) Associates.
e. DeChiara also requested on behalf of the Planning Board's recent meeting discussion, that the Town of Shutesbury consider writing a letter to Cowls and Cinda Jones, the landowner, requesting permission for consultants to take environmental samples. DeChiara stated that Town Counsel believes NextEra should be notified if that letter goes out.
f. DeChiara shared that the Planning Board has right of access to the site, but not right of investigation or right of inspection.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to sign the letter for Samantha Meserve, the Director of the Renewable and Alternative Energy Division for the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Walton: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

5. <u>Approve Meeting Minutes for 10/27/26 and 10/29/26:</u>
    a. The Meeting Minutes for 10/29/26 were tabled until an upcoming meeting.
    b. No amendments were made to the 10/27/26 Minutes.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes for 10/27/26 as posted, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Walton: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

6. <u>Approve the Appointments of the Ad Hoc Highway Department Access Review Committee:</u>
    a. Town Administrator- Hayley Bolton
    b. Police Chief- Devon Pelletier
    c. Fire Chief-Leonard Czerwonka
    d. Highway Superintendent- Dave Grenier
    e. Garden Club Member- Meryl Mandell
    f. Garden Club Member- Rita Farrell
        i. The committee has a term expiration date of February 28, 2027.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the appointments of Hayley Bolton, Devon Pelletier, Leonard Czerwonka, Dave Grenier, Meryl Mandell, and Rita Farrell to the Ad Hoc Highway Department Access Review Committee, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Walton: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

7. Unanticipated Business- Sign Appreciation Letter to be sent to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority:
    a. The letter on behalf of the Town of Shutesbury formally acknowledges and expresses the town's appreciation for the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority's (MWRA) decision to withdraw their application before the Water Resources Commission for a 20-million-gallon-per-day donor-basin transfer from the Quabbin Reservoir.
    b. The letter is addressed to Secretary Tepper and Director Estes-Smargiassi and will be signed by the Shutesbury Select Board.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to sign and send to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority an Acknowledgement and Appreciation letter regarding withdrawal of the 20 million-gallon-per-day Interbasin Transfer Act Application, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Walton: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

8. Town Administrator Report:
    a. Bolton shared the town's budget timeline. Bolton stated budgets are due this Friday, November 13th. Capital Plans are due Tuesday, December 15th. Once Bolton receives the budgets, she will compile them into a master spreadsheet.
    b. Bolton read an Executive Summary from the Four Towns Fiscal Study Group. This Group is an informal collaborative of Selectboard, Town Council, and Finance Committee members representing Amherst, Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury, Massachusetts.
        i. The report warns that the four towns are facing a severe, structural fiscal squeeze driven by stagnating state aid, heavy reliance on residential property taxes, escalating non-discretionary costs, and mounting capital needs. Because the towns share regional ties including the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District and confront nearly identical financial pressures, the authors argue that their current budgeting approach has become unsustainable and requires cross-community collaboration and a fundamental rethinking of municipal finances.
        ii. As a percentage of total local revenue, state aid has declined markedly over the past two decades across all four towns (ex. dropping from 28% in 2008 to ~18% in Amherst, and from ~18% down to 10–15% in Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury). This shift has transferred the burden of funding schools and public services almost entirely to local property taxpayers.
        iii. Unlike nearby towns with larger commercial/industrial tax bases (ex. Hadley at 27.4%, Deerfield at 17.5%), the four towns have virtually no commercial or industrial tax base. The residential share of the local tax

levy is 88% in Amherst and Leverett, 93% in Pelham, and 94% in Shutesbury. Amherst is further constrained by having 30% of its real property valuation legally tax-exempt, primarily due to higher education institutions.

iv. Bolton shared that tax bills are severely outpacing inflation. Between FY1992 and FY2026, average single-family tax bills increased between 268% and nearly 400%, far exceeding cumulative CPI inflation (137.1%). Average tax bills in 2026 are 1.5 to 2 times higher than they would be if they had tracked inflation, placing disproportionate pressure on lower-income households, fixed-income seniors, and renters.

v. Budgets are largely out of local discretion. In all four towns, 55% to 62% of town budgets consist of mandatory, non-negotiable costs including debt service, retiree pensions/benefits, state assessments, Chapter 70 education pass-throughs, and regional school assessments. Local officials only have discretion over roughly 38% to 45% of total spending, from which all basic municipal services and discretionary school funding must be covered.

vi. Municipal operational costs are rising faster than revenues due to escalating employee healthcare costs, regulatory compliance burdens (PFAS, updated building and environmental codes), expanding service calls, and hyper-inflation in raw materials and fuel. Additionally, decades of deferred maintenance on roads and municipal facilities have created large capital backlogs that will drive up debt service if addressed.

vii. Incremental solutions like PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) agreements or Chapter 70 formula tweaks are slow and inadequate relative to the scale of the shortfall. Without a unified re-examination of service levels, spending habits, and revenue structures, the communities risk reaching a breaking point where they can no longer sustain core public services or avoid contentious, repeated Proposition 2 ½ overrides.

viii. Ajay Khashu stated they are seeking feedback from Select Boards and hope to gather votes stating that the information portrayed is accurate.

ix. The second Tuesday of December (December 8th) is the tentative date for the upcoming Fiscal Summit Meeting.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to support the “Thoughts on the Fiscal Conditions of the Four Towns,” dated October 28, 2026, that was prepared by the Four Towns Fiscal Study Group, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Walton: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

9. Meeting Adjourned at 5:49 pm

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Walton: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

Document and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

1. Meeting Minutes for 10/27/26
2. Appointment Letters for Ad Hoc Highway Department Access Review Committee
3. MWRA Acknowledgement and Appreciation Letter
4. Letter to Samantha Meserve

Respectfully submitted,
Brennan Mailloux
Administrative Assistant
Town Administrator/Select Board

** A full version of the 11/10/26 SB meeting will be available to view on the Town of Shutesbury's YouTube page: https://youtu.be/vU9gygfPIO8