

Shutesbury Selectboard Meeting Minutes
January 6, 2026 Hybrid Meeting Format

5:00 pm Meeting

Selectboard members present: Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil/Chair, Eric Stocker/ Vice-Chair, Rita Farrell/Board Member

Staff present and Guests: Hayley Bolton: Town Administrator, Brennan Mailloux, Devon Pelletier, Ben Peters, Chris Footit, Christine Benvenuto, Lauren Thompson, Gail Fleischaker, Leslie Bracebridge, Matteo Pangallo, Amanda Alix, Michael Dechiara, Kathy Salvador, Penelope Kim, Kelly Searcy, Sharon Keyes, Tom Siefert, Chris O'Neil, Nathaniel Masse, Jon Lawless, Lucy Gertz, John Hersey.

Makepeace-O'Neil calls the meeting to order at 5:00 pm

Agenda Review: As posted.

Public Comment:

-Amanda Alix questioned the reasoning for holding the 4:00 pm meeting in Executive Session as well as the need to review the interview questions during it. She also questioned why the interviews would be held in executive session, and the Board stated they will be in public session. They acknowledged that the number for the executive session may be wrong on the agenda. The Board also stated that the reason for entering executive session is that there is no interference with the negotiating and deliberating. This has been the process that they have used recently, for example with the hiring of the Town Administrator.

- Tom Siefert shared that with Open Meeting Law, last names are not required to be displayed by attendees for the Minutes.

General Business:

- I. Review and approve Meeting Minutes for 12.17.25 and 12.18.25:
 - a. The 12.18.25 Meeting minutes will be amended to have GZA spelled out for the public.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the 12.17.25 Meeting Minutes as worded, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the 12.18.25 Meeting Minutes as amended, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

- II. Review and approve Special Event Permit- New Library Grand Opening
 - a. The grand opening event will take place on Saturday, January 10th at 10:00 am.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the Special Event Permit for the New Library Grand Opening, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

III. Unanticipated Business:

- a. The Town was awarded an ADA grant to execute an ADA evaluation of all town buildings. The amount they are quoting for the ADA evaluation is the amount that the town was awarded the grant for.

VOTE: Farrell makes a motion to execute the Memorandum of Understanding for the Franklin Regional Council of Governments regarding the ADA evaluation of all town buildings, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

IV. Other Discussions:

- a. Bolton discussed the Dam situation and how we have been approved to use the Dam and Seawall Grant to fund the scope of work for the designing and engineering from GZA. Bolton shared we will still need to identify a funding source for the actual repair work. A state of emergency was declared and all the required paperwork for repairs has been submitted to the state.
- b. Farrell stated that the M.N. Spear Library Reuse Committee has met a couple of times and has been actively researching the building and its potential future uses. She shared that they found that regardless of how the building is used either for offices or the location of a department, a bathroom will be required. The next meeting scheduled is for January 10th and Cat Hilton from the Board of Health will be in attendance to discuss septic systems. Farrell hopes to have the committee meet with the Select Board at an upcoming meeting.

V. Interview of Ben Peters for Police Chief position:

- a. The interview of Ben Peters formally began at 5:31 pm.
- b. The interview began with Ben introducing himself as an individual born and raised in Amherst. He began his career in Shutesbury being sent to the part-time, reserve academy, and then New Salem and most recently Sunderland. He shared that he has skills in crisis hostage negotiations through the Franklin County SRT Team. He has other skills in sexual assault investigations, as well as being a member of the Western Massachusetts Critical Incident Stress Management Team. He is the Vice President of the Franklin County Regional Cadet Program that has the vision of introducing youth cadet programs in Franklin County. Additionally, he has helped start up a fall public safety festival, is a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals in Sunderland and has experience working for the Amherst Survival Center as a member of the Board of Directors.
- c. Ben discussed his leadership style and how he sees himself as situational, creating priority lists, and taking every situation as its own instead of as all the same.

- d. Ben discussed using social media and the problems that arise with it, by stating that he would handle it carefully. He stated that social media is divisive but also extremely important. He sees its use as being powerfully beneficial if used carefully and correctly.
- e. Ben shared that his understanding of a Strong Police Chief is that the Chief is able to make decisions independently. He stated he does have experience with working with a Town Administrator, and that regarding them and the Select Board, he would be open and inclusive with them.
- f. Regarding budgeting, Ben shared that he would be careful, open-minded, resourceful, and would move things around as applicable. He stated budgeting would be taken on a case-by-case basis.
- g. Ben shared that in working in a stressful environment, he can rely on his negotiating skills such as staying calm, building positive relationships, and working through problems collaboratively.
- h. Ben shared that when he is forced to arrest people and drops them off at their destination such as the House of Corrections, it's a handshake, nothing personal. His strong suit is his communication skills.
- i. Ben discussed expectations and the need to have them with Town personnel as well as residents. They would open conversation. He stated it is important to cater to the residents that he would be serving. He doesn't like to be oppressive or overbearing but rather tries to promote community integration.
- j. Ben shared he does a lot of community initiatives and has a lot of relationships that he builds weekly, creating an overwhelmingly positive experience for him.
- k. Ben stated for community initiatives he would like to implement in Shutesbury, they would be hosting public safety festivals, a student internship program, and also a cadet program.
- l. Ben discussed in his first 90 days if selected for the role, he would like to absorb the current state of the town and department. There would be a lot of conversations had and a lot of questions to be asked. He would be patient and willing to listen. He would have conversations with town government and interview the current Police Department to see what is and is not working currently. He reiterated that he would love to implement the internship program, and he believes he would easily be able to do that and see its success through.
- m. For his last question, Ben shared that if he came across a reoccurring issue in Shutesbury he would implement applicable programs or policies as possible, or entertain other creative solutions that he believes would be effective and successful. Overall, he would gather all of the facts of the scenario before making an informed decision.
- n. The interview of Ben Peters concluded at 6:23 pm, thanking Ben for his time and participation.

VI. Interview of Devon Pelletier for Police Chief position:

- a. The interview of Devon Pelletier formally began at 6:26 pm.

- b. Devon's interview began by introducing himself and stating that he has been doing the Police Chief job in Shutesbury for the last six months and understands the wants and needs of the community and working in a small town. He stated he been with Shutesbury for the last three years, and prior was with the American Internation College for three years as their Administrative Sergeant. He stated he would like to bring stability to Shutesbury as there have been numerous Police Chiefs over the course of the last decade.
- c. Devon stated he has done organizing recently with Shutesbury's policing budget. He then stated he is trying to re-emphasize Shutesbury's community policing initiatives. He recently did a Community Giving Tree.
- d. Devon stated we need to be careful with social media use, but he does see it as a good tool for posting information. Personally, he does not use social media frequently. He acknowledged its beneficial use for investigations. He stated he is currently looking into different organizations that offer social media education for parents and the public on safe social media habits and parental controls.
- e. Devon stated that the role of a Strong Police Chief is to have operational control over day-to-day operations. He stated that when working with the Town Administrator and Select Board, there needs to be collaboration. He sees the Town Administrator as an extension of the Select Board. He shared he has been working with Hayley, the Town Administrator, closely and believes he has a strong working relationship with her.
- f. Devon shared he works closely with Shutesbury Fire Chief Czerwonka, and he has helped with reviewing and developing the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. He also stated he has attended Emergency Management meetings in the past. Devon stated he has FEMA trainings.
- g. Devon shared that if a major budgeting scenario arose, he would work closely with the Select Board and Finance Committee.
- h. Devon stated that crisis intervention training as well as sexual assault investigator training helps him use trauma-informed approaches when interviewing people going through stressful situations. He acknowledged that there are also many great resources in Franklin County that he would collaborate with to help individuals in need. Devon stated he believes in strong support systems and believes in counseling. He also sees the importance of crisis debriefings after big calls.
- i. In a scenario where a friend calls the Police Chief on his personal phone for being stopped while speeding, Devon shared that he holds his friends to high standards and would not want them to be treated any differently than any other resident. He would like the officers to do their job ethically and properly, using their best discretion.
- j. Devon stated he didn't have an exact scenario that has led to a policy change, but he stated in general, when he has responded to a situation and it didn't go the way he wanted, he took the time to analyze it after the fact and see what he could have done differently.

- k. Specific community policing programs that Devon would like to see implemented in Shutesbury would be the continuation of the Community Giving tree which proved to be successful this past December. He would also like to work on hosting a female self-defense class. He loves events and enjoys Halloween and doing the Trunk or Treat. He also enjoys the community bonfire. He stated he could gather feedback on these initiatives by doing surveys to see what the public wants and enjoys.
- l. If selected for the role, in the first 90 days Devon would like to address getting another full-time police officer. He would like to continue having a community-based approach and hearing the needs of the community. He stated that right now there is a great relationship among the Police Department, Fire Department, and Highway department. He would like to see continued collaboration among them. He also would like to look into the police budget and implement cost saving measures where applicable. He has already begun to do so with things such as printer ink.
- m. An achievable win Devon would like to see would be more speed trailers and that full-time police officer he mentioned earlier.
- n. For the last question, Devon stated he would like to collaborate with the Environmental Police and be out on Lake Wyola with them tackling reoccurring issues there. Altogether, he would be resourceful and work with other agencies he has relationships with to tackle common, reoccurring issues. He would keep an open line with the residents of Shutesbury, encouraging them to report issues.
- o. The interview of Devon Pelletier was concluded at 7:21 pm, thanking Devon for his time and participation.

VII. Meeting adjourned to Executive Session at 7:22pm

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:22 pm, and enter Executive Meeting for reason #8, To consider or interview applicants for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee if the chair declares that an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants; provided, however, that this clause shall not apply to any meeting, including meetings of a preliminary screening committee, to consider and interview applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening. Ben Peters and Devon Pelletier.

The board will return to public session.

Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil aye; motion carries.

VIII. Board Returned to Public Session at 8:00 pm

IX. Police Chief Decision Announced

VOTE: Farrell makes a motion to appoint Devon Pelletier as the permanent Police Chief subject to the appropriate reviews, background checks, a CORI check, and contract negotiations, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

X. Meeting adjourned at 8:01 pm

VOTE: Farrell makes a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:01 pm. Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil aye; motion carries.

Documents Used:

1. Meeting Minute Drafts for 12.17.25 and 12.18.25
2. New Library Grand Opening Special Event Permit
3. MOU for Franklin Regional Council of Governments

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

** A full version of the 1/6/26 SB meeting is available to view on the Town of Shutesbury's YouTube page: <https://youtu.be/PB3nQ9wPJBX> and <https://youtu.be/GgGPSfOHsR4>

