

Joint Shutesbury Selectboard Meeting with Finance Committee Minutes  
January 7, 2026 Hybrid Meeting Format  
6:30 pm

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

Finance Committee members present: Ajay Khashu, Susie Mosher, George Arvanitis, Laura Soito, April Stein, Jim Walton.

Staff present and Guests: Hayley Bolton: Town Administrator, Brennan Mailloux.

Khashu as Chair of the Finance Committee called their meeting to order at 6:31 pm.

Stocker as Vice-Chair of the Select Board called their meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

Agenda Review: As posted.

General Business:

1. Preparation for 1/10/26 Four Towns Meeting:
  - a. The four towns in discussion are Amherst, Pelham, Leverett, and Shutesbury.
  - b. Khashu shared that the Regional School Committee met earlier in the week and had preliminary discussions on the FY27 budget. Khashu displayed the preliminary budget sheet of the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District with a FY27 Operating Budget of \$40,603,818. FY26 was \$37,077,171 (\$3,526,647 or 9.51% increase). The major drivers for the operating budget increase are increases in special education expenses, support services, substitutes, administration, facilities, and risk and benefits.
  - c. Khashu showed colored bar graphs that display what different level of reductions mean for the four town's assessments. These ranged from level all the way up to a 2.06 million reduction. (Level, 800 K reduction, 1.2 M reduction, 1.6 M reduction, 2 M reduction, 2.06 M reduction.) There were no provided breakdowns of where those various reductions would come from. Both the Select Board and Finance Committee stated they would like to see them and hope they will be provided at the Four Towns Meeting. Khashu stated he would like to see future transparent reports from the Regional School that show the cuts that were made in previous years with clear breakdowns provided. (Staffing reductions)
  - d. Khashu shared we have new added expenses upcoming in the FY27 budget in the total of around \$750,000 and upwards. This is on top of the FY26 budget. (Health Insurance, cost of living adjustment increases, the Shutesbury Elementary School, New Library debt payments, dam maintenance, and potential building repairs)

- e. Arvanitis emphasized the need to communicate budget pressures to other towns and legislators, particularly highlighting the impact of underfunded Chapter 70 funding.
  - f. The group acknowledged and discussed concerns about recent tax bill increases causing public confusion, with Arvanitis noting he had received inquiries about tax bill errors and the large increase from previous quarter billings.
  - g. Khashu noted using Cash Reserves helped ease the tax impact.
  - h. Arvanitis shared that from his research, the average single tax bill increase in Shutesbury is also being seen by many other nearby small towns. They are too dealing with the same issues in places like Pelham and Leverett. He stated the increase of an average tax bill from FY25 to FY26 was 7.5%. In recent years, it was between 2 to 4%. Mosher is hoping that 7% will not be the new norm.
  - i. Mosher and Bolton both emphasized that it has always been the schools that have been asked to take cuts, and not individual town departments.
  - j. There was general consensus on going to the Four Towns Meeting with a guided, percentage of no more than 5% the town would like their taxes to increase. A number that shows that the Shutesbury's residents have endured enough and do not want to continuously and aggressively increase.
  - k. Mosher discussed the need to present a unified approach across departments rather than focusing on individual issues like PFAS or outer district costs at the Four Towns Meeting
  - l. At the end, the group agreed to maintain a soft approach in discussions with other towns and decided to prepare talking points for an upcoming meeting. They also confirmed attendance for the Saturday meeting.
2. Meeting adjourned at 7:48 pm

**VOTE:** Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:49 pm, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil aye; motion carries.

Administrative Actions:

1. Attend the Four Towns Meeting on 1/10/26.

Document and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

1. Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Budget Packet

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

