

Shutesbury Selectboard Meeting Minutes
October 22, 2024 Hybrid Meeting Format

Selectboard members present: Rita Farrell/Co-Chair, Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil/Co-Chair and Eric Stocker Staff present: Becky Torres/Town Administrator, Volunteers
Guests:

Makepeace- O'Neil calls meeting to order at 6:05pm

Agenda Review: As posted.

Public Comment:

Review of minutes: Minutes of the September 10, 2024, approved with an edit to replace "virtual" from top of the form with "hybrid"

VOTE: Farrell makes a Motion to approve September 10, 2024 minutes; Makepeace-O'Neil seconds. Roll call vote: Farrell: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil aye; motion carries.

Discussion Topics:

1. Highway Superintendent Contract

a. Makepeace-O'Neil mentioned that they have not gone through a contract yet for the new highway superintendent for Dave Grenier. Farrell said the sooner the better to finalize his contract since Dave Grenier has been working since September 26th. Farrell said that a member of the Selectboard, a member of the finance committee and a member of the personnel board to negotiate a contract with him. Farrell mentions that there are 3 personnel board members here, she asked if both the finance committee and the personnel board pick someone by Thursday. Farrell nominates Makepeace-O'Neil to represent the Selectboard. Farrell said they want to try Monday for the meeting with Dave to finalize the contract.

2. New Highway Equipment Operator

a. Makepeace-O'Neil mentions that they spoke to Dave and he recommended Mike. He is currently working; he was part time but has been working 40 hours. Torres said the way he works with people is very communicative and helpful.

VOTE: Farrell makes a motion to Mike as the new highway equipment operator, Makepeace-O'Neil seconds. Roll call vote: Farrell: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

3. Town Admin Updates

a. Early Election

i. Torres mentions that the town has been holding early election voting. She also wanted to thank Grace for letting us meet in the meeting room where the voting is currently being held. Torres mentions that last Friday they had 30 people come but

is encouraging everyone to tell their neighbors and friends that they can vote at town hall from 11 to 4 b. Elevator in town hall

i. The Elevator is not operational, Torres mentions that there was an inspection this morning with the alarm company trying to troubleshoot but they ended up leaving the elevator unconnected to the car. The inspector shut it down, Torres had the alarm company come back out and they reconnected it. Torres will get the inspector to come back out, she also mentions that they disconnected us because of the winter and into last spring, you might recall randomly, I came into town hall and the elevator wouldn't work. And so, we couldn't use the elevator until it was reset by the fire chief. So, we tried to solve that problem, and we had them both out 2 or 3 times, and they continued to blame it on each other. Torres said she will give updates as she gets them.

c. Town Admin transition period

i. Torres said that we are in the middle of a transition and that there is going to be a Selectboard and a personnel board meeting on Thursday to review the interim town administrator job description which Farrell prepared and sent to the Selectboard. Farrell asked if the template she drafted on updates if it makes sense. Torres said she has started to do her own description of the job details. Torres mentions that another issue is her issued computer that it is old and the new town admin will need a new one. ii. Farrell asked Torres can you just run through what those the major initiatives beyond TFS fire station Oil, GCA Lake, just submitted the Green Communities grant, right. Torres said it was for just about \$15,000 to complete. That led to work at the elementary school, the 50,000 units. She also mentions what the town will receive for the grant, there's an incentive, of about 17 or 18. So it's like 70,000, \$75,000 worth of upgrades. The MVP grant, Torres, will be working on that this week and will have a clearer update for them after this week about the problem with the lightning capacity. They're trying to track the truck's velocity. Torres has spoken with the gentleman, who is investigating for me whether there's any possibility of upgrading the with a comparable but similar kind of equipment that is not provided for the lightning. Farrell asks about the highway department notice of intent, Torres said it is an open project that Beth has done some work on but Torres needs to update David Renninger. Torres is going to set up a meeting with both.

iii. Torres mentions that there are several culvert projects open including the deadly mill culvert. She has been communicating with Susie Bresnik who is also working with other women in other agencies to help raise money. There are several culverts that have become concerning. Rita said if Torres can let her know if she needs to attend the meeting. Farrell said the Selectboard will serve as resource for the interim town administrator.

d. Classification hearing

i. Torres said that we will have this meeting on October 30th.

e. Halloween

- i. Torres said that the police will be joining the trunk or treat with decorated cruisers and they will also be patrolling and shutting down the road Leverett to Prescott section to keep it safer for the neighborhood that's at the top of the hill. Torres also mentions that trick or treaters are welcomed at the fire station, town members have already prepared lots of candy for the trick or treaters.

4. Wood top of the Wood Scientist

- a. Farrell mentions that he is here in person for the meeting today, Steven Small is our local expert. Farrell asks Steven if he could give us his own take on it. He recommends that it needs to be on some sort of permanent base probably a concrete slab that needs to be elevated off the base by an inch or two to have airflow coming through the bottom and out through the top so that it dries out when it gets wet. He also recommends lowering the rood so that you, unify the appearance of the sign board itself. He also recommends that any of the new trim that be applied be preserved and treated. Any materials that are added inside the guide board to fix it to this concrete base should also be preservative free and ready for direct contact. He also mentions that it will not be maintenance free, you can repaint it with water repellent paint oil based primer with stain blocking ability side and above two coats. Top coats are 100% acrylic latex wood stain blocker that should give us easily 10-20 years before any repaint is needed. He also says that he has no issues putting it back out there once repaired, it has held up in great shape over the years.
- b. Makepeace-O'Neil asks would the cast concrete be too porous and create some humidity inside? Would the cast concrete create a little bit of moisture inside? Steven replies with, soil moisture will come up through the concrete, but because the bottom of the sun board would now be elevated an inch or two off the concrete, you broken that connection between the two. Torres asks how do you elevate it an inch? Steven replies with an internal frame with bolts in the concrete.
- c. Randall mentions that he was involved in a jury that decided not to. I think it was 14 years ago in 2008. Randall also says, I don't disagree with that. Stephen has to say about this, except that is a statement that 14 or 15 years from a paint shop, because I'm dubious about that. But I think that if it's done the way that Steven describes it, it would be a good thing. Uh, and again, it is it's not a sacred object. It's a wonderfully charming object. It can be continuously maintained and weathered in the future, I think, and I think this effort is a little costly. It's probably a good thing to do it.
- d. Henry agrees that Steve's input has been very valuable. He thinks putting something over it is the best thing to do but the people don't want it. He asks who would be responsible for maintaining it and have a budget to maintain it. Farrell asks, could we get it incorporated into the historical commissions budget? Henry said the conversation with Peter Mahoney mentioned that it should be reassessed every two years. Bert asked what will need be done in 10 to 20 years, he asked if it will all need to be redone again or if it will be minor. Steve said it will be minor due to the paintable water repellent.

- e. Farrell asks if Henry or Bert have enough information to feel like all questions and concerns have been answered and if the Selectboard goes ahead or if they would prefer to wait until our next meeting on the 30th.

VOTE: Farrell makes a motion to move ahead to put the guideboard back into its original location and all the recommendations made by Steven be undertaken, Makepeace-O'Neil seconds. Roll call vote: Farrell: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

5. Shutesbury Town Administrator Search Transition Tasks

- a. Farrell said that the list she put together is a working list for what needs to happen from now until later in November. She also says that the plan is, that we would bring on somebody on an interim basis, it doesn't make sense to go immediately into a hiring process. We're in an environment where there are several town administrator jobs open, the current salary is not competitive. We need to do advertising. I think we need to have a search committee. She also mentions there is a whole network of TAs that are retired, including the person who worked on the job search for Sunderland. We would advertise that position and then have, Selectboard representatives from the personnel and finance Committee interview the candidates for the interim position and appoint an interim administrator. Torres and Farrell agreed that at the town meeting on the 19th would be a good time to talk about it. Farrell said that if we are going to attract people to the job the pay needs to be increased to up to \$10,000.

- b. Randall asks do you have any proposal exactly? For how much money you proposing? Farrell says that the max would be \$20,000 but part of the issue is we have to pay out Torres which is about \$9,000 as well. She also thinks \$20,000 would more than cover it.

(women not April) confirms that the town meeting would allow the town to spend up to \$20,000 to cover the TA. Farrell clarifies by saying it is cover the cost to pay out Torres, and to allow us to hire someone and pay up to \$85,000. Makepeace-O'Neil says we have the chance to be proactive instead of reactive where the funds go. (women not April) asks if the temporary position would not be a benefited position. Farrell replies that it would be part time 20 hours temporary benefited position. April (last name) asks if the current town administrator is involved in looking at any of these job descriptions. Farrell replies that yes her and Torres have been working on it together and putting together the roles and responsibilities, appointing a search committee and then initiate the hiring process. Makepeace-O'Neil asks if it would be a good idea for the Selectboard to meet with town administrator to come with updates on the transition process. Torres asked if the final decision will be made before December 6th? Farrell replied with no this is just an outline, there is a lot to do and there is no hard deadline, but we need to focus on an interim. Farrell asked (blue shirt guy) if he had a question. He replied with "why there is a wide calculated range of funds that would be need for this plan? Farrell replied with it depending on how long the interim is working, the Selectboard wants to have the ability to pay more if

needed and if we have a budget of \$20,000, we should have more than enough. (blue shirt guy) asked if they are trying to fill three buckets which are, paying out the benefits that has accrued, the interim to work on a part time basis of 20 hours a week, then marginal increase in the salary compensation? Farrell replied that it is correct. April asks how the other pieces of the workload are going to be redistributed? Farrell replied with the Selectboard will be filling in where they can and that with Abby as the new town administrative secretary, we will determine who can pick up what things. Farrell also says that the Selectboard doesn't know what all Becky does, and it is important to make a spreadsheet of everything. April asks what about when citizens come in with questions daily who will answer them? Farrell replied with Abby will be there and she will answer them as best she can as well as making sure that people understand that someone won't always be there since they are working part time so we're just going to have to make it clear to people if nobody's there, you know, put your questions in writing.

- c. (blue shirt guy) asks if Kathy or Jim have any questions about this proposed request for \$20,000. Kathy said it makes sense to her and Jim agreed.

VOTE: Stocker makes a motion for the finance committee to recommend approval of an article that will go to a special town meeting for a transfer of \$20,000 to the town administrator line to come from free cash, Makepeace-O'Neil seconds that. Roll call vote: Farrell: aye, Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Salvador: aye, Hemingway: aye,

6. Finance Committee budget

- a. (blue shirt guy) mentions that they discussed the opportunity to sponsor a warrant article that would increase our income, reserve balance to an amount that is more typical of what we have been doing in previous years. You will recall, we had a difficult budget year and one of the concerns we had was that based on early conservative assumptions, we anticipated exceeding our 2.5% increase in the tax levy, by utilizing excess levy capacity. Farrell asked if that was \$12,000 and (blue shirt guy) replied with yes and so for that reason, we had to find opportunities to reduce the tax levy so that that use of excess levy capacity will be smaller. He also replied with we now have new information from the assessor which included a higher projected amount of new growth than was assessed when we did our budget, that new growth amount, actually, means that we are not exceeding our levy capacity for FY 25, as we anticipated. So for that reason, we were keen on sponsoring a warrant article that would increase that, that would transfer an additional \$25,000 from either free cash if it's certified in time, or stabilization funds to kind of restore our reserve account to an amount that I think we're much more comfortable with, that would be able to deal with the kinds of emergencies and contingencies that come up. That will increase our reserve amount from 55,000 to 80,000 if the town approves this.

VOTE: Farrell makes a motion to adjourn meeting, Makepeace-O'Neil seconds that. Roll call vote: Farrell: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carried.

Administrative Actions:

1.

Document and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

1.

Respectfully submitted,
Abbigail Hernandez
Administrative Secretary

** A full version of the 10/22/24 SB meeting is available to view on the Town of Shutesbury's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpzUChTGXEY&t=327s>