

Shutesbury Selectboard Meeting Minutes
September 15, 2026 Hybrid Meeting Format

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

Selectboard members absent: James Walton/ Board Member

Staff present and Guests: Hayley Bolton: Town Administrator, Brennan Mailloux, Leonard Czerwonka, David Grenier, Penny Jaques, Leslie Bracebridge, Michael Miller

Recycling and Solid Waste Committee members present: Meryl Mandell, Gail Fleischaker, Mary Glavin.

Finance Committee members present: Ajay Khashu, George Arvanitis, Frank McGinn, Laura Soito.

Planning Board members present: Michael DeChiara, Dean Gendron, Keith Hastie, Ashleigh Pyecroft, Jeff Weston, Tom Siefert.

Makepeace-O'Neil calls the meeting to order at 5:01pm

Agenda Review: As posted.

Public Comment: No public comments were made.

General Business:

1. Approve Meeting Minutes for 9/2/26:
 - a. One amendment was made by Stocker.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes for 9/2/26 as amended, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

2. Review and vote on appointments of Ann Ward, Chantelle Davis-Gray, and Sue Essig to the Cultural Council:
 - a. Ward, Davis-Gray, and Essig will fill the three vacancies on the Cultural Council and further allow them to meet a quorum. They will be serving their first three-year terms, due to expire 6.30.2029.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the appointments of Ann Ward, Chantelle Davis-Gray, and Sue Essig to the Cultural Council, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

3. Discussion with the Recycling and Solid Waste RFP Sub-Committee about basic RFP assumptions. (Request for Proposal):
 - a. The Recycling and Solid Waste RFP Sub-Committee called their meeting to order at 5:07pm.
 - b. Meryl Mandell and the Select Board reviewed the Recycling and Solid Waste Committee's (RSWC) basic assumptions and rationale for development of the upcoming solid waste collection RFP, with a proposed contract start date of July 1, 2028.

- c. The RSWC is assuming that the Town will continue town-wide weekly curbside collection of trash and recycling. Trash will be collected weekly, with dual-stream recyclables collected on an alternating schedule. Funding for the service will continue to be included in the budget approved at Annual Town Meeting. The RSWC noted that residents view town-wide curbside collection as an important town service and generally prefer it over arranging for individual collection.
- d. The RSWC is also assuming a transition to automated collection. The committee noted that local haulers are moving toward automated collection due to labor and safety concerns, which requires materials to be placed in wheeled carts capable of being mechanically lifted into collection vehicles. As part of this transition, the Town would move from PAYT bags to PAYT wheeled carts. The RSWC is continuing to evaluate options for handling trash in excess of the 35-gallon cart capacity, including PAYT bags placed on top of the cart, an additional trash cart for a fee, or use of Leverett PAYT bags for disposal at the Leverett Transfer Station. The RSWC Subcommittee will meet with haulers to further discuss these options.
- e. The RSWC recommends continuing dual-stream recycling, noting that dual-stream collection produces higher-quality recyclable materials, residents are accustomed to separating materials, and the Western Massachusetts MRF operates as a dual-stream facility. The committee also noted that the current cost to the Town for dual-stream collection is lower per ton than single-stream collection.
- f. Under the proposed system, one 35-gallon trash cart and recycling carts would be provided to residents at no charge. The cost of the trash cart is expected to be approximately equivalent to the Town's existing allotment of 50 PAYT bags. Recycling carts would remain free in order to avoid discouraging recycling. The Town is still determining how excess trash volume would be charged.
- g. The proposed RFP would include the purchase, distribution, maintenance, and eventual ownership of the carts as part of the hauler contract rather than requiring the Town to purchase the carts separately. The RSWC noted that this approach would reduce the administrative burden associated with purchasing, storing, distributing, repairing, and replacing carts and may provide economies of scale. The Town would own the carts at the conclusion of the contract.
- h. The RSWC anticipates that the cart purchase would be a one-time cost during the first year of the five-year contract, while routine maintenance, repairs, and replacements would be incorporated into the annual contract cost. The RSWC will work with the Select Board and Finance Committee to structure the RFP so that the annual collection costs and one-time cart costs are clearly separated, providing flexibility in determining how the cart purchase is funded.
- i. Under the proposed system, businesses would receive the same basic collection containers as residential households rather than receiving additional PAYT bags. Businesses would receive a 35-gallon trash cart and their choice of recycling cart size. Excess trash from businesses would be handled in the same manner as excess residential trash.
- j. Ajay Khashu Clarified that the Finance Committee's role is to advise on funding mechanisms, not to determine whether curbside pickup should continue. He noted that funding options may include operating budget absorption, excess levy

capacity, or a debt exclusion. Khashu confirmed the Finance Committee will not obstruct the RFP process.

- k. The Recycling and Solid Waste RFP Sub-Committee closed their meeting at 5:28 pm.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the Recycling and Solid Waste Committee RFP Basic Assumptions with Rationale, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

4. Joint Meeting with the Fire Department and Planning Board to discuss the Wheelock solar installation on Pratt Corner Rd:

Planning Board called their meeting to order at 5:28 pm.

- a. DeChiara described the August 13th site visit, during which it was surprisingly revealed that an inverter fire had occurred in April of 2026. NextEra Energy's regional manager and site manager disclosed the fire casually during the visit.
- b. He stated that NextEra Energy told Fire Chief Czerwonka that their protocol does not require notifying first responders for an inverter fire. Fire Chief Czerwonka had to drive around town looking for the source of smoke before locating the fire.
- c. DeChiara stated that there has to be better town communication, as the Planning Board was never made aware of the fire at the site for quite some time.
- d. DeChiara stated that mowing around the area should be increased, the gravel and non-flammable distance should be increased, and the perimeter route on the edges should be easily passable. Chief Czerwonka stated that if the fire had happened in August when vegetation was taller, it would have required mutual aid and been significantly more dangerous.
- e. It was noted that current special permit conditions limit mowing to once per year and prohibit herbicide/pesticide use (by agreement). There is no required vegetation-free buffer in the permit conditions. A thicket of trees approximately 30 feet tall has grown in the soil protection zone between the panels.
- f. The Select Board discussed adding a crushed stone buffer zone around the critical infrastructure.
- g. Chief Czerwonka stated the day of the fire he had to wait an hour for the capacitors to de-energize and then lobbed water directly onto the inverter cabinets.
- h. There was discussion that if a fire does occur, the Town should require NextEra to call Shelburne Dispatch. A camera could also be an option for monitoring the site, that ties into the fiber optics in the area.
- i. Chief Czerwonka stated there is only heat sensor monitoring in the battery buildings, not the inverter buildings, as they did not believe they were a high fire hazard when they were installed.
- j. Pyecroft stated she has an email from NextEra that has their suggestions. NextEra has inspected the two remaining inverters since the fire. The damaged inverter has not been replaced (the unit is discontinued and under warranty dispute), leaving the site at a reduced capacity.

- k. Bolton asked the Planning Board to send a letter to NextEra as soon as they hear from Town Counsel, saying they need to notify the Town if there is ever an issue with any of the circuitry or alarms, so that they can be proactive right off the back. This should be done during the Special Permit reopening process.
- l. Planning Board adjourned their meeting at 6:03 pm.

5. FY28 Budget Process Check-In

Finance Committee called their meeting to order at 6:04 pm.

- a. Khashu stated that a Budget Request Letter was drafted and sent out to Committees/Boards asking them to draft and submit realistic FY28 budgets, noting any drastic increases by November 13th.
- b. The Finance Committee plans to host two fiscal summits with one in the Fall (late October, early November) and one in 2027 (late January, early February) after draft budgets are received. Each department will have an assigned Finance Committee liaison.
- c. The Finance Committee is working on a five-year financial planning forecast tool that projects budgets out to FY32. This will help generate estimates for state aid and local aid. It uses historical information for its basis and helps generate the tax levy, as well as identify trends.
- d. Khashu stated they used \$200,000 of free cash reserves to moderate the impact of the levy on taxpayers for the FY27 budget. Khashu mentioned PFAS is no longer a one-time cost, but rather is a recurring thing, so they will be looking at building it into the Town's Annual Operating Budget as a PFAS Mitigation line.
- e. Khashu stated the Town will need to strategize and work on building up the Capital Stabilization Fund in a way that is sustainable.
- f. Arvanitis stated that FY28 is going to be a challenge, and managing tax bills is going to be hard. There has been a \$500 increase per average single-family tax bill annually. Arvanitis clarified that \$500 is not a fixed goal but a reference point; the actual impact varies by property value.
- g. Bolton stated our Free Cash projection is currently in the six figures, which is good news. The bad news is that it cannot be used for the Warrant Articles at the upcoming Special Town Meeting. Stabilization funds may need to be used.
- h. Khashu emphasized the importance of communicating fiscal challenges early and repeatedly so residents are not surprised at Town Meeting.

Finance Committee adjourned their meeting at 6:30 pm.

6. Review and vote on a Special Event Permit Application for the Friends of the Shutesbury Library to hold a Roadtown Turkey Trot on 11/21/2026. (Leverett Rd, Pelham Hill Rd, Leonard Rd, West Pelham Rd, Shutesbury Elementary School, and West Cemetery.):

- a. Penny Jaques shared information pertaining to the Roadtown Turkey Trot.
- b. When and Where: Saturday, November 21, 2026 from 7:00 am to 12:30 pm.
Locations to include Leverett Rd, Pelham Hill Rd, Leonard Rd, West Pelham Rd,

Shutesbury Elementary School, and West Cemetery. Parking will be available at the Shutesbury Elementary School and West Cemetery.

- c. Other Details: There is estimated attendance of 300 people or roughly 50-100 vehicles. Jaques stated the event raises money for the Shutesbury Public Library. Food will be provided. Restrooms will be available at the Shutesbury Elementary School. The Board of Health, Fire Chief, and Police Chief all signed off on the application.

VOTE: Makepeace-O'Neil makes a motion to approve the Special Event Permit Application for the 11/21/26 Roadtown Turkey Trot, Stocker seconds. Roll call vote Stocker: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; motion carries.

- d. Jaques asked if one or two of the picnic tables behind the M.N. Spear Library could be moved to the new Library. The Board stated they would put it on an upcoming meeting agenda.

7. Review Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) May 29, 2026 Site Visit Assessment of Leverett Rd near the Shutesbury Library. (Their notes and recommendations):

- a. The Select Board reviewed the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) site assessment of Leverett Road near the Shutesbury Public Library. The May 29, 2026 assessment identified speeding and pedestrian safety as primary concerns, particularly given increased bicycle and pedestrian activity associated with the Library. FRCOG observed vehicles traveling above the posted speed limit and noted that the roadway has narrow shoulders, no sidewalk, and no crosswalk to the Library.
- b. FRCOG recommended several potential improvements, including adding or relocating radar speed feedback signs, improving the visibility of Library signage, and designating parking spaces at the Fire Station for Library overflow parking. The report also recommends exploring the installation of a sidewalk and crosswalk with a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) to improve pedestrian safety.
- c. The assessment also identified a visibility concern at the Highway Department garage, where vegetation along the roadway (the berm) obstructs the view of vehicles exiting the driveway. FRCOG recommended removing or relocating the vegetation. Additional recommendations included replacing the existing radar feedback sign with a more reliable model, conducting additional traffic counts, and exploring whether the area could qualify for a 20 MPH Speed Safety Zone.
- d. As next steps, FRCOG recommended that the Town pursue MassDOT Local Early-stage and Actionable Planning (LEAP) technical assistance to further evaluate the proposed improvements and develop conceptual plans. The Town could then pursue implementation funding through the MassDOT Complete Streets program or other appropriate funding sources.
- e. Stocker proposed the idea of establishing a committee that looks at the whole safety picture of Leverett Rd.

- f. Grenier asked the Select Board to consider voting on removing the berm and instead replacing it with a lower, set-back planting area with stone work that would preserve gardening space while improving sightlines.
 - g. The Select Board stated they would put it on the upcoming Select Board meeting agenda, where it can be posted and there can be community engagement with others such as the Garden Club.
- 8. Town Administrator Report:
 - a. Bolton shared that accepting the bequeathed property of 41 Cooleyville Rd needs to go before a Town meeting to fulfill legal requirements. The plan is to put it on the upcoming Special Town Meeting Warrant for October 17th. Winterization could be accomplished by draining the pipes, if need be.
 - b. Bolton shared that a resident reached out inquiring about changing the date of the Special Town Meeting, as there is a No Kings Rally scheduled for that same date. Makepeace-O'Neil stated it is not a religious event, but rather a political event, so she does not believe it requires changing the date.
 - i. The Board stated that they could change the start time to earlier, 9 AM.
 - c. Bolton stated she sent all department heads their job descriptions for review by end of month, ahead of the October Personnel Board meeting.
 - c. Bolton stated that Personnel board meeting the following night will focus on the salary alignment study; recommendation is to not alter salaries yet pending review of the data and methodology used.
 - d. Bolton stated on Thursday she is going to the John Oliver Transit Center for a Select Board 101 training.
- 9. Meeting Adjourned at 7:05 pm

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

Document and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

- 1. Meeting Minutes for 9/2/26
- 2. Turkey Trot Special Event Permit Application
- 3. FRCOG Site Assessment
- 4. (3) Cultural Council Appointment Letters
- 5. Recycling and Solid Waste Committee RFP Assumptions List

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

** A full version of the 9/15/26 SB meeting will be available to view on the Town of Shutesbury's YouTube page: https://youtu.be/i_YmQicZ7ZQ

