

Shutesbury Select Board Meeting Minutes  
September 29, 2015 Shutesbury Town Hall

Select Board members present: April Stein/Chair, Mike Vinskey, and Michael DeChiara  
Staff present: Becky Torres/Town Administrator; Linda Avis Scott/Administrative Secretary

Stein calls the meeting to order at: 6:42pm

Guests:

Jennifer Haggerty/Union 28 Superintendent of Schools and Aaron Osborne/Union 28 Director of Finance

Finance Committee members: Gary Hirschfield/Chair, Eric Stocker, George Arvanitis, and Jim Walton

Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee members: Becky Torres, George Arvanitis, Eric Stocker, Dan Hayes/School Committee, Paul Goodhind, Bill Wells, Jeff Lacy, and Steve Sullivan/School Committee and Regional Representative

Agenda Review: DeChiara requests that a quick update section be added to tonight's agenda

Public Comment Period: no attendance

Police Chief Harding: The Chief was not in attendance. Torres: a hearing may be needed for serious dog bite incident. Stein: what is the plan for the hearing? Torres: the purpose of the hearing is to have a conversation with the dog owner in order to obtain assurance that such an incident will not happen again. Stein asks if the dog has been restrained and notes that a proactive hearing will provide us with this information. Vinskey: after receipt of Chief Harding's email, what is the Select Board's procedure? Vinskey: we don't have a procedure in place for such occurrences; the police do the first response, then follow-up with dog officer; the procedure is fluid and vague; we need to have an outline of the steps to take. Stein: the only Select Board action is to call a hearing. DeChiara: agrees on the need for clarity in process. Vinskey: in this case, we need to have a dog hearing in order to learn what happened and what the parties expect. Stein: the dog officer, police, the victim and the owner need to be present.

Later in the meeting, Torres reports recent receipt of an email from the dog officer recommending the Select Board not hold a dog hearing. All Board members note the need for additional information about the situation. Vinskey recommends talking to the victim to determine their needs. DeChiara: suggests omitting the Chief's appointment from the agenda if there are no issues to be addressed by the Chief.

Union 28: Hayes introduces Jennifer Haggerty/Union 28 Superintendent of Schools and Aaron Osborne/Union 28 Director of Finance who are here to meet Shutesbury's leadership; Haggerty and Osborne are doing a great job; the school year is off to a great start. Haggerty: their goal is to work together for the school community; there is a commitment from central office to work together with the School Committee and the Select Board; the thrust of her career is the balance between the social needs of students

and the academic curriculum. Haggerty: Union 28, as an elementary only district, is of great interest to her; each town has its own personality; it is a loosely knit together district. Osborne: was originally a teacher then moved into school finance; his vision is to blend student and financial needs. Haggerty: Osborne understands the business and the student side of finance. Hayes: Osborne also served on the Leverett Union 28 School Committee; the central office is building a team; Osborne is visiting each school and meeting with school staff; the Special Education Director is now the Director of Student Support for all students; the services provided for special needs students can be of support for all; both Haggerty and Osborne are focused on student needs and working collaboratively. DeChiara: officially, as a Select Board member and as a former School Committee member, he appreciates their coming before the budget season and acknowledges their important recognition of the individuality and history of each town; Shutesbury works collaboratively to meet the needs of the children. FinCom members and other guests introduce themselves. Hirschfield: the FinCom is in the process of requesting budget submissions and scheduling budget meetings with all departments. Osborne: they start thinking about the next year in November. Arvanitis: subsequent to the first meeting with the FinCom in January, Haggerty and Osborne will be asked to come back again in March. Hayes: Osborne is in the process of streamlining things; here, the principal works with the staff and does a lot to control the budget. Haggerty: as a former principal, is impressed with how the principals in Union 28 tie their budgets to their curriculums. Hayes: the advantage of a small school is the bottom up financial management. Vinsky: it is important to look at what the school needs before setting the budget. Haggerty: because it has the backing from staff and the principal, the budget is solid. Osborne: budgets come straight from the principals and their staff; each school can build their own budget; each year is a unique year. DeChiara: notes the need for an efficient system for tracking payments, i.e. after-school and lunch, in the schools. Osborne: we have an automated system and are figuring out how we can better work with the towns; finding a way to mesh a paperless system with the towns'. DeChiara: to make it easier for parents, we need to facilitate payments. Haggerty: we need as accurate information as possible. Stein: we have a fabulous principal in our school; this is one of the best teams we have had. Hayes: processes are in place for stakeholders to have a strong role in decision-making. At 7:25pm, Haggerty and Osborne leave the meeting.

Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee Report (SRASSC): Hayes appreciates Torres and Arvanitis for their hard work and knowledge. Arvanitis: this was a big commitment and a lot of work, we had a lot of good input, and are pleased where we ended up; Stocker and Torres have a lot of experience; we all understand and support our recommendation; the report you've just received is jam packed. Arvanitis requests the Committee be disbanded and notes that members are willing to come back and answer Select Board questions. Hayes: the Committee is available to the FinCom and Select Board after they have had a chance to digest the report.

Arvanitis: the "Report from the Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee, September 29, 2015" introduction acknowledges work done by the Regional Assessment Method Working Group (RAMWG). Arvanitis: the report's analysis starts with the March 2015 meeting with Roger Hatch/Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) then gets into how the region makes its calculations using

the current “Alternative” method; the state uses the “Statutory” method; understanding how the two methods are calculated is very important. Arvanitis: it is widely recognized that schools cannot be supported on the local level and that we need state support; in the Statutory method, a town’s ability to pay is taken into account; in the alternative method, this is not the case; the RAMWG did not take into account the community’s ability to pay; the region’s approach is that we all pay the same. Arvanitis: the conversation that needs to happen is that we should only be using the Statutory method and the reasons why. Arvanitis: the current formula does not consider Shutesbury’s needs; on pages 7-8, there is a table showing foundation aid and Chapter 70 aid and the dynamics of grandfathering; it also includes income and property value EQV (real estate value per person) data used to create the FY16 foundation aid figures. Lacy: because of student anomalies, Amherst could be tossed out of the comparison. Torres: full time college students make up 40% of Amherst’s population. Arvanitis: it is hard to compare all four towns; it is best to use Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury; Leverett’s calculation is about 1/3rd of Shutesbury’s due to the Chapter 70 safety net that their aid will never go down. Torres: Shutesbury is the only one that is not grandfathered in; the other towns are grandfathered. DeChiara: what is the duration of the grandfathering? Torres: grandfathering remains in place until the formula is changed; the foundation aid will change because it is calculated on last year’s aid amount. DeChiara: Pelham has an income similar to Shutesbury’s but with significantly less population. Torres: we are very close to Leverett in population. Stocker: per capita, Pelham is significantly wealthier. Torres: these towns say they have 1-2 very wealthy people that skew their figures. Arvanitis: Leverett has been very vocal that they are not wealthier, they just have one extraordinarily rich resident; we don’t think that the change would affect their elementary aid; it is about sustainability for us. Arvanitis: the 2½% increment gets used up quickly; the RAMWG defined equity differently than our committee does; charging the same price is fair, however, the statutory formula considers the ability to pay. Torres: charging the same amount to all doesn’t take into account other factors affecting each town. Arvanitis, referring to the graph on page 10, notes that Leverett’s position is the lowest. Hayes: based on the ability to pay, there are subsidies for various programs, i.e. food stamps; we believe in a formula that is based on the ability to pay. Arvanitis: the state has the information about wealth; the statutory method should be relied on. DeChiara asks about how raising taxes may influence a town’s ability to pay. Torres: we did not go into how much we should tax as doing so does not address the argument; the graph on page 10 is only based on the tax levy; when the aid is stripped away, the others are spending a smaller portion on the regional budget. Goodhind: you could make that argument for Orange or Athol; we have a high tax rate compared to the other three towns. Arvanitis: if you want to talk equity and fairness, consider that the current formula allows Leverett to pay for other things because they are paying less for the regional school. Arvanitis: this is a conversation for the region, there is no consideration about our ability to pay in the alternative formula; we all live by the 2½% requirements. Torres: our costs will be higher when they are based on a per pupil formula. Stein asks about the number of students enrolled. Torres: enrollments are listed on pages 7-8. Arvanitis: the SRASSC would like the Select Board to talk to the region. Arvanitis, referring to page 3, if you want to press for the statutory method, Lacy has done some work on a “soft landing” minimum contribution; the graph shows the

difference between the alternative and statutory methods. Arvanitis, referring to “Appendix D: Method for the Transition to the Statutory Method” on page 18, emphasizes the importance of reading this table to understand what we are advocating as a transition method; by the fourth year of using this method, we will be at the statutory level. Arvanitis: we understand fluctuations in enrollment can have a big effect on towns of our size; these fluctuations make it hard to predict out into the future. DeChiara: because enrollment can change, recommends shortening the period for reaching the statutory level. Stocker: enrollment could go either way, so don’t push out too far; with the 50/50 method, we get ½ of the state benefit; sharing the two methods could hedge the effects of enrollment. Arvanitis: this is a matter for the Select Board to work out; will send a complete version to all as there is a paragraph missing in the appendix; this paragraph shows that if we go 25% in year one, we save \$50,000; Leverett will be the one to have the most financial trouble. DeChiara appreciates the quality of the hard work done by the Committee; they have presented a winning argument; if we assume that this, or a close version, is what we want to do, we need to talk about process for taking this forward. Arvanitis: Sullivan told the Regional Committee that we are meeting so they know a report is coming. DeChiara: will the Select Board and FinCom go to the other towns or should this go through the region? Stocker: we will need to talk with Sean Mangano/Director of Finance Amherst Regional Public Schools (ARPS). Torres: recommends talking with Maria Geryk/ARPS Superintendent of Schools about planning a forum. Vinskey recommends starting with Regional School Committee. DeChiara: it is the towns’ finance committees that will understand this. Hayes recommends going to the towns. Stein: the original assessment committee was to have done this; this is a necessary discussion. Goodhind: the former group hung their hat on the simplicity of the alternative method, which discounted the town’s ability to pay; it seems that the ease of explaining the alternative method promoted its use; the statutory method is elaborate, however, it is the equitable method. Arvanitis: we chose the five year rolling statutory method; the regional group and our committee used the same criteria however we weighted them differently, especially, the ability to pay. Arvanitis: are we going to compromise fairness, equability and the ability to pay for ease of explanation? DeChiara: do we need to vote on whether we are in favor of a four-town/regional meeting? Torres: yes, the Select Board and Finance Committee will vote, however, we are not yet prepared to do so. Lacy: all SRASSC voting was blind. Stocker: do we make assessments based on wealth as determined by the DOR? Torres: the Committee’s recommendation is a rational response and we need to find a way to have the conversation with the other towns. Goodhind: it all comes down to the ability to pay; the current method is not sustainable for all the towns. DeChiara states that he likes the five year average; one could come up with an “ability to pay” factor. Stocker: the state formula does that. Lacy: the statutory five-year rolling average is the most predictable of all the methods; it is not the most financially advantageous for us, though, it is the most predictable for the region. Goodhind: the state method is based on the ability to pay. Arvanitis: when based on income tax, we are paying on money we have; property tax is not the same case; Hayes is right, we want you to understand why we came to the conclusion we did; after you read the report, you will get a feel for how to proceed. Arvanitis states that he thinks you have to start at the top; there may be pressures from different places; the 50/50 method is a compromise and could be achieved in two years; the SRASSC has consensus about the ability to pay; it is

hard to predict the future. Lacy: if we go to any other method, it has to be agreed to by all the communities; any town could impose the straight statutory method. DeChiara: that is the motivation for all of the towns to have the conversation. Vinskey: after we read through the report, what is the next step? Arvanitis: let us know if you want to meet again with the SRASSC. Torres suggests the FinCom and Select Board have a discussion with the SRASSC present to answer questions. DeChiara: what is the timing relative to the budget? It is suggested that the Select Board attend the FinCom meeting on Tuesday 10.13.15 at 7:00pm for one hour; all agree. Arvanitis will inform the study committee; notes that timing is of concern as the region is working on their budget; a transition method is important. Stein acknowledges the work of group and notes the need for the transition to work for the other towns; we want to be good neighbors. Lacy: the analysis has been backed up by facts. Torres will check in with Mangano about his timeline. Arvanitis: there is talk about changing the foundation formula. DeChiara: if the state reforms the statutory method, we will stay with it? Goodhind: yes, it is the most equitable method. The Select Board members appreciate the work of the SRASSC.

Issue not reasonably anticipated by the Chair:

Steve Sullivan: regarding regionalization, this summer the document, Regional Agreement Working Group "Report to the Regional School Committee January 13, 2015," (available on the ARPS website) was sent to the lawyer and came back to the Regional School Committee on 9.8.15; the committee will meet this Thursday, 10.1.15 to discuss the matter; the Regional School Committee has asked for each town to hold a forum on regionalization. Sullivan: did not see any changes to the document; has reminded the Regional Committee that Shutesbury is not interested in regionalization; seeks guidance from the Select Board. Sullivan: in June, when we voted to send to the report to the lawyer, Shutesbury and Pelham did not vote for regionalization. Stein: the issue may be dead. Sullivan: there has to be a 2/3 vote of the Regional School Committee for regionalization before the issue goes to the towns. Torres: the School Committee does not have the votes. DeChiara: it would be interesting to call for the vote; there is no traction for regionalization in Shutesbury, so why go through the process, why don't we skip this step and see if there is another option? DeChiara: do we owe it to the voters to have a vote on the issue? Sullivan: the talk is to bring the regionalization question to annual town meeting. Vinskey: regionalization does not benefit Shutesbury. DeChiara: is it better to say, that from our sense of our community we won't get the votes needed to regionalize? Sullivan: the Shutesbury School Committee is against regionalization. Vinskey: if it is clear this will not go anywhere, send a letter to the School Committee regarding same. Sullivan: Leverett is in favor of regionalizing. Vinskey: all four towns vote on the assessment method? Stein: yes. Vinskey: maybe we should plan a forum. Torres agrees that we should go through the process in regards to regionalization and, in the mean time, we also need to plan for the conversation about assessment methods. Torres suggests that Sullivan set up the forum. DeChiara agrees that it makes sense to have a public forum in order for the Regional School Committee to get the pulse of our community. Sullivan suggests holding the forum in early November; Leverett is holding theirs on October 25<sup>th</sup> and Amherst's will be on November 6<sup>th</sup>. Torres suggests holding the forum closer to mid-November. DeChiara: we need to make sure folks know the report is available on-line.

### Discussion Topics;

1. Celebrate Shutesbury Review: Stein: the event was phenomenal; appreciates Pat and Mike Vinskey for all of their efforts; the weather was perfect and the event was well attended; Jessica Carlson-Belanger did an amazing job preserving an event that is important to people. Vinskey states that it is his impression that this year the event could have gone away; Carlson-Belanger did an amazing job; this is something the Board needs to encourage. Vinskey reports that he wrote up a review on Nextdoor Shutesbury and received responses that Celebrate Shutesbury will happen again. DeChiara: the event should happen again, do we need to formalize and create a committee? Vinskey: is Carlson-Belanger willing to do it again? Stein: what about the defunct recreation committee? Torres: it has not been active for some time; in the past, Celebrate Shutesbury has not been a Select Board event; this year the community came together to put it on. DeChiara: would the event continue to be held without a committee; on the front end, the Select Board could oversee use of the common? Stein: could the Select Board fund the event in some way? Torres: Celebrate Shutesbury was a financial loss for the Shutesbury Education Foundation. Stein suggests and all agree to send a thank you note to Carlson-Belanger and the significant others who helped organize the event and to consider inviting Carlson-Belanger to a future meeting to talk about next year. Vinskey will contact Carlson-Belanger and find out who else assisted.
2. Committees and Events Updates: DeChiara reports that he attended the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) Town Financial Management Review presented by Joe Markarian/FRCOG Special Projects and found the generic presentation helpful; asked Markarian about a Shutesbury specific presentation with recommendations about what we need to know. Vinskey: the Treasurer and Accountant create a series of reports every few months that should be looked at by the Select Board. DeChiara: such a workshop would be free. Stein: we could have our Treasurer and Accountant come and talk to us. DeChiara recognizes his need to learn about the process though is not attached to method.
3. Select Board Goals and Annual Priorities: Stein states that after reviewing DeChiara's list of potential Select Board priorities, she doesn't have anything to add, appreciates that he considered process, and suggests having topic #1 "Communication, Accessibility, and Transparency" as part of the All Boards Meeting. DeChiara states that he is learning about his role; if we all agree about #1, we could put it out as a priority for the Select Board. Stein: committees think about communication, accessibility, and transparency in different ways; how are we listening to the residents? Vinskey: how do we implement this, how and why would we talk about #1 at the All Boards Meeting? Stein: to open up a discussion with other committees, to ask them to step back and find out how they want the Select Board to get information. Stein: are there policies for how the boards are posting their meetings, taking minutes and then posting those minutes? DeChiara: we will be creating norms and expectations about how town government works; creating a norm that there is time for residents. Torres: we want to make sure that expectations are not created before committees have the necessary tools and resources. DeChiara: if volunteers cannot get their information out, what do we

need to do in order to provide the necessary infrastructure; is additional staff needed? DeChiara: the variation in town websites is astounding. Vinskey: is updating webpages one of the priorities we want to set? Stein: Nextdoor Shutesbury is a grass roots communication forum; we don't need that kind of forum, however, we need a way for people to access information. DeChiara: the first three are interlinked - if we provide more information and if we are more accountable, then we may experience more engagement. Stein: the SRASSC, with its diverse representation, totally worked. DeChiara: relationship building occurs when folks work together. DeChiara: some of his list is external and some is internal, such as, the policy manual. Vinskey: how do we move forward? DeChiara: if we like these priorities, we can weave them into the agenda over the next year, for example, the policy manual would be a tangible; in a manageable way, we can revisit the list every one to two months to see how we are doing. Stein: this is a "step back" process. Torres suggests, as a concrete goal, that the Select Board sponsor a volunteer/employee picnic-fun day some time this year. Vinskey appreciates Torres' idea and suggests the Select Board sponsor an event in the spring and fall. DeChiara agrees; this would be a tangible way to celebrate. Stein notes the need for appreciation of what we have. All agree to hold a volunteer/employee picnic sometime after town meeting in late May or early June. Stein notes that Vinskey's list of priorities is reflected in DeChiara's. Vinskey suggests working from DeChiara's list. All Select Board members agree to endorse DeChiara's list.

4. Personnel Committee Update: Stein reports that the update remains pending.
5. MassDOT letter re: "Super Troopers 2": Motion is made and seconded to sign the 9.29.15 letter to MassDOT approving the Daniel Shays Detour Map and the information about the filming and traffic detour for the film "Super Troopers 2." Torres: per Sergeant Masiuk, Police Chief Harding is aware of the detour plan. All Select Board members agree to sign the letter as described above.

Administrative Actions to Consider:

1. Special Municipal Employee Updates for the Attorney General: DeChiara moves and Vinskey seconds the motion to designate the following Boards, Committees, Positions as per the list read into the record by DeChiara with the addition of Zoning Board of Appeals Clerk added to list. All Select Board members agree. Torres will check on the need to add Municipal Light Plant members to the list. DeChiara asks if folks will receive a handout relative to being Special Municipal Employees? Torres: the Personnel Board is putting together such a packet. DeChiara: in the future, if we create a new committee, we will also designate the members as special municipal employees and provide that information to our Town Clerk.
2. Approval of 8.18.15 Select Board meeting minutes: DeChiara moves to approve, Vinskey seconds, and all members agree to approve the minutes as presented.
3. Vendor Warrants for \$91,355.36 were signed prior to the meeting.
4. Payroll Warrants for \$85,666.25 were signed prior to the meeting.

Future Agenda Items: DeChiara provides all with a list of future agenda items, agrees to be the keeper of list and requests it be part of the packet for future meetings. Vinskey: how will we work with this list? DeChiara: the list is for the “one after the next meeting” as Torres keeps track of the “next meeting” agendas. Vinskey confirms that this does not preclude submitting additional items.

The agenda for the All Boards Meeting will be considered at the next meeting; Torres will send out a reminder without topics.

All members agree to adjourn the meeting at 9:54pm.

Future Select Board meetings:

10.6.15, Tuesday, 6:30pm Shutesbury Town Hall meeting room

10.20.15, Tuesday, 6:00pm Shutesbury Town Hall meeting room

10.20.15, Tuesday, 7:00pm All Boards Meeting Shutesbury Town Hall meeting room

11.4.15, Tuesday, 7:00pm Shutesbury Town hall meeting room

Documents and Other Items used at the Meeting:

1. Report from the Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee, September 29, 2015
2. 8.18.15 Select Board Goals/Vinskey
3. 8.25.15 Possible Select Board 2015-2016 Priorities/DeChiara
4. 9.29.15 Select Board letter to MassDOT
5. 1.12.1998 Town of Shutesbury Designation of Special Municipal Employees
6. Draft 9.14.15 Special Employee List
7. State Ethics Commission Special Employee Summary
8. 9.17.15 FRTA Advisory Board meeting notes/Vinskey
9. 9.18.15 Select Board meeting minutes

Respectfully submitted,  
Linda Avis Scott  
Administrative Secretary