

SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes for Feb. 14, 2006
Shutesbury Town Hall

Members present: Eric Stocker, chairman, Al Beswick, Al Springer, Lori Tuominen and Patrick J. Callahan.

Also from the Board of Selectmen, Becky Torres, Joseph Jacobs, Debra Pichanek; from the School Committee, Dan Hayes, Michael DeChiara, Anne Lundberg. Tari Thomas, principal, Linda Driscoll, superintendent, Charles Paulin, Union 28. Guests: David Dann, town administrator, Leslie Bracebridge, secretary to the selectmen.

The meeting convened at 7:05 p.m.

Meeting jointly the three boards discussed the proposed Elementary School budget. Linda Driscoll says overall the budget plan calls for an increase of 4.79 percent, or \$70,404 to \$1,540,445. She called it a "pretty much level-service budget." Used in the calculation is \$54,000 in REAP grant circuit-breaker funds. There is money in a contingency fund for COLAs for teacher salaries and \$13,000 in new spending for a music program. The budget plan also calls for the School Committee to retain \$70,000 in the contingency fund for special education costs and to return to the town \$61,000 from the total of \$131,000 in that fund that is replenished by state circuit-breaker money.

The Finance Committee and selectmen told the school officials that uncertainty about the regional school budget makes it difficult to say whether the elementary school budget is acceptable at this level. Overall, it was agreed that if changes need to be made, further communications and meeting can and will be held. There was a lengthy discussion of possible outcomes of talks between the four regional towns and the chances of getting a new assessment formula. Becky and Eric will attend a meeting scheduled to discuss the new arrangement and will report back.

At around 9 p.m., the joint session adjourned and the Finance Committee continued meeting.

The minutes of the Jan. 31 2006 meeting were approved as amended.

Al Springer was nominated to serve on the police contract committee and approved unanimously.

David Dann reported that new revenue estimates for the coming fiscal year show that Chap. 70 aid is expected to increase by \$70,000; Lottery aid by \$49,000, for a total of \$109,000 in new state aid. Increases in the levy limit provide another \$80,000 and local sources would provide about \$10,000 in new money. Overall, there is about \$200,000 in new available revenue, he says, based on current projections.

In addition, there is \$363,000 in free cash and \$410,000 in stabilization.

The committee did a line-by-line review of the proposed budget with David and flagged specific areas for further review. Eric says at the next meeting he is hopeful the committee and begin refining the budget plan to see if budget reductions will be need to bring the spending plan into balance.

The next meeting is scheduled for Feb. 28 at 7 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 10 p.m.

Submitted by Patrick J. Callahan