

SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes for Feb. 28, 2006
Shutesbury Town Hall

Members present: Eric Stocker, chairman, Al Beswick, Al Springer, Lori Tuominen, Russ Wilson and Patrick J. Callahan. Guest: David Dann, town administrator.

The meeting convened at 7:07 p.m.

The minutes of the Feb. 14 meeting were approved as amended.

Eric gave an overview of the ongoing discussions on which version of the regional school funding formula is to be adopted this year. Amherst officials had balked at the equalized assessment agreed to at a previous meeting of the special committee set up to discuss the issue and the matter remains unresolved. Al Beswick noted that the regional school committee had said it would make a decision by Feb. 28 at the latest to keep its budget deliberations on track.

Reporting on the Personnel Board, Eric and David Dann reported that the job descriptions for the fire chief and highway superintendent were undergoing revisions to reflect changes in the duties of those two individuals. David says the idea is to increase weekly hours for Walter Tibbetts by five hours per year until he reaches full-time, or 40 hours. The increased time, and increased pay, would reflect work Walter is doing for the town on emergency preparedness issues. In the case of Tim Hunting, the new job specifications take into account the fact that he is doing more non-highway related work, overseeing town property, for instance. In both cases, the salaries will increase due to the changes in duties, David and Eric say.

Eric then brought up the idea of drafting a letter to the elementary school committee that lays out the Finance Committee view that any raises granted to teachers should be in line with other town employees. That means, 3-percent increases, including step raises. It was also noted that the School Committee has autonomy within its budget and can allocated funds as it sees fit once a final budget figure is passed by the town. David Dann says it is important to send that message to the school early in the budget process. Eric promised to have a draft letter sent to the committee for review by the end of the week.

The committee approved the following transfers: \$15 to the veteran's program; \$154 to the health district; \$13.95 to the water quality district; and \$500 to the tree warden account. The money comes from the Finance Committee reserve. It was approved unanimously.

The committee then reviewed projected expenses and revenues for the coming year's budget. After a line-by-line assessment of the budget, that included cutting \$26,504 from the elementary school request, adding \$5,304 to the fire chief's salary line, adding \$1,345 to the highway superintendent's salary line, adding \$5,000 for highway tools and

equipment and \$20,000 for gravel road maintenance, the budget showed an increase of \$183,764. The shortfall, based on expected revenue was \$123,460.

The committee also discussed setting this year's capital budget at \$60,000 with priorities to be set by the capital planning committee. Current requests include: \$26,000 for new phones at the elementary school; \$1,000 for a skating rink; \$10,000 for the library capital campaign; \$10,000 for land purchases for the conservation commission; \$115,000 for a new dump truck; \$2,000 for a highway department trailer; and \$25,000 to go to stabilization.

Current free cash is \$368,000 and stabilization is \$411,000.

The next meeting is set for March 14 at 7 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Submitted by Patrick J. Callahan.