

SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes for March 13, 2007
Shutesbury Town Hall

Members present: Eric Stocker, chairman, Lori Tuominen, Al Springer, Al Beswick and Patrick J. Callahan. Guests: David Dann, town administrator, Becky Torres, Ralph Armstrong, Debra Pichanick, selectmen, Leslie Bracebridge, Town Clerk.

The joint meeting of the Finance Committee and selectmen convened at 7 p.m.

Eric reported that the Library Trustees are seeking a new line item for \$6,349 to fund an assistant director who will also help the library expand its open hours by two hours weekly. The total library budget would increase to \$37,000.

At 7:30, a group of school officials including, Joan Wickman, Union 28 superintendent, Michael DeChiara and Matt Hart of the elementary school committee, Bob Mahler, principal, and Charlie Paulin of the Union 28 staff, arrived. Joan reported that committee had drafted a budget that meets the 3 percent increase sought by the Finance Committee. Mahler says he is already recruiting children for the pre-school and is hoping to get a good idea of how many will attend next fall.

Wickman also noted that Shutesbury is one of the western Massachusetts towns that is undergoing a demographic shift and losing school population. She says smaller enrollment, however, doesn't automatically translate into reduced budgets for a variety of factors. The cost of keeping the building open and functioning, rising personnel costs and other expenses, coupled with uncertainty about state funding makes budgeting difficult, she says.

When asked about school choice, Mahler replied that it isn't always a good thing and that he and the committee are skeptical of its value.

The Finance Committee told the school officials that budgets in the range of 3 percent increases are likely in the next few years and to be prepared for that reality.

At 8:25 p.m., the school officials left.

There was a discussion between the two boards about how to close the current gap in the proposed budget. The budget gap is just under \$100,000 at this point.

It was agreed to borrow to pay for a new backhoe and for repairs at the DPW garage. In addition, it was considered whether to create stabilization fund for unemployment compensation and for the dam repair at Lake Wyola. The two boards also considered taking the \$20,000 for the library grant and other projects from stabilization. Under this plan, the town would retain about \$345,000 in free cash and \$311,000 in stabilization, or a total reserve of \$656,000 or about 12.8 percent of the budget, a healthy amount.

Patrick agreed to be on the review committee for David Dann's annual review.
The minutes of the Feb. 13 and Feb. 27 meetings were approved unanimously.

The next meeting was set for April 10 with the selectmen and library commission. Other meetings were scheduled for April 24 and May 1.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Submitted by Patrick J. Callahan.