

SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes for March 24, 2009
Shutesbury Town Hall

Members present: Eric Stocker, chairman, Rus Wilson, Patrick J. Callahan, Lori Tuominen and Elaine Puleo. Guests: David Dann, town administrator, Ralph Armstrong, selectman; Tom Harding, police chief; Leslie Bracebridge, secretary to the selectmen.

The meeting convened at 7:20 p.m.

The minutes of the Feb. 10, Feb. 24 and March 3 meetings were approved unanimously.

Tom Harding, police chief, told the committee he is considering applying for a federal grant under the COPS Hiring Recovery Program. He says officer Gelinas is now a part-time benefitted employee and could be moved up to full-time under this program. Tom says he is checking to get more details but didn't want to proceed without consulting the Finance Committee and selectmen. The Finance Committee advised him to proceed with the fact-finding and to apply for the grant.

Elaine reported that the Elementary School Committee has agreed to follow the recommendations of the Finance Committee and has trimmed its budget request to a 1.33-percent increase for the coming year.

The regional budget is still under discussion, but she noted that even with the mildest reductions in a three-tiered system, there will be losses of teacher jobs. Both Shutesbury and Leverett have agreed to support the so-called Level 1 budget reductions, but it is unclear if Amherst and Pelham can support that level of spending. Overall, Elaine says, the likelihood is for deep cuts and reductions in programs under any of the budget scenarios.

Eric says the four-town meeting in Amherst about possible regionalization of elementary schools was informational. Under discussion is whether Leverett and Shutesbury, currently members of Union 28, would benefit from joining Amherst and Pelham in Union 26. Eric says the group will meet again on June 20 to continue the process. Lori says there may be a better arrangement than the current alignment and the town should be willing to consider changes.

Lori reported that the library building committee report has been finished and is available online. The first step toward a new library would be to post an advertisement for a project manager, she says.

Patrick told the committee that contract negotiations with the police union are underway.

Rus says the Personnel Committee has received the resignations of Becky Torres from the Board of Selectmen and, Nick Chandler from the police department. He also says the

board discussed potential cuts to some clerical positions in town. He noted that the search for a new town administrator is also underway.

The committee reviewed the latest budget draft presented by David Dann. It has no funding gap but reflects only very small changes in spending for the year, he says. The committee also reviewed the expense report for the current year and noted shortfalls for fuel and snow removal accounts. This was expected, David says.

The committee agreed to transfer \$4,000 for tax title expense from the Finance Committee Reserve. Town Treasurer Gabe Voelker asked for the transfer to continue with court actions that are expected to bring some money back to the town.

The committee also asked Leslie to look up where the members are in their current terms. The town bylaw says that members can only serve three consecutive full terms before they are required to step down. She agreed to check and report back to the members.

The next meeting was set for April 7.

The meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.