

Shutesbury Board of Selectmen Tuesday August 13, 2013 Meeting Minutes

Members present: Chairwoman Elaine Puleo and members Al Springer and April Stein.

Town Administrator Rebecca Torres - absent, Administrative Secretary Leslie Bracebridge present and recording from 6:30 to 7:00 PM then excused to make a quorum at the Web Committee meeting.

Chairman Puleo opened the meeting at 6:30 P.M. at the Shutesbury Town Hall

Appointments

Police Chief Harding: Was not present.

Zoning Board of Appeals: Was not present.

Topics

1. Knotweed:

- Selectmen reviewed information taken from the Internet about knotweed.
- Selectmen need to send a knotweed removal funding recommendation to the Finance Committee.
- April would like to hear from the Conservation Commission. Selectmen requested that a copy of the information that they are reviewing tonight and the information from Elizabethann Lacy and Meryl Mandell be sent to the Conservation Commission and the Water Resources Committee for their respective feedback.
- Should there be a knotweed meeting? Elaine will go to the August 14 Finance Committee meeting and talk about how knotweed removal could be funded.

2. Cell Tower - RFP:

- The RFP was approved at the last meeting.
- It will not help with cell service at the Lake

3. Regionalization Update:

- Elaine: The “lightning bolt that hit” was that Amherst’s committee members realized that there wasn’t enough money for Amherst in the plan for them to sell regionalization to their voters.
- Al: Read in the paper months ago, that Amherst had hired a consultant to see how to save money. The consultant recommended they go to natural gas and regionalize.
- Elaine: If they regionalize, they’ll get transportation and they will reduce Superintendent Geryk’s focus because she wouldn’t have the Union (26) to work on; so, it’s still a positive with less duplication of administrative stuff. I don’t think it’s a done deal in Leverett either.
- How are we going to find out what Shutesbury wants without a straw vote? We will hear from people interested in finance and education. If there is interest, we will continue. We have to tell the silent group that if they have an interest at all they have to come and let us know what they want.
- It’s different in Amherst with 25,000 people and 25,000 students. It’s representative government.
- We could get a good representation if we got a cross-section of 300, or even 100 people, if that many would come out. We would know if someone is interested. We just don’t know.
- April: There seems to be some people who are interested. The majority don’t know what’s going on. The school community is afraid; they don’t really know what it is. None of us know what it is!
- Al: agrees that when people ask him, he says that he doesn’t know yet.
- April: What would help that process?
- Elaine: We’re focusing on processing and messaging. How can you focus on messaging when you don’t have a message yet?
 - The education report had nothing going forward in it to sell.
 - The only thing we’re talking about is administrative efficiency.

- There's really no local control when you have the state mandates as they are now.
- Basically it's efficiency, transportation, regionalizing special education – that's a big one.
- There is cross collaboration because you would then have 6 schools, not just a single 5th grade teacher as we have in the Union, in each of Shutesbury, Leverett, Erving and Swift River schools. You have multiple 5th grade teachers in each of the Amherst schools, so you can talk about curriculum in a cohesive way. It could be 10 people talking curriculum.
- April: I think that there's a fear that with the Amherst teachers' union, our teachers would be bumped out, but that's not a given. Elaine: Rob Detweiller showed us at a meeting that in Amherst the turn-over is such that they're never bumping, they are always hiring.
- Al: Why is there such turnover? Elaine: Because people come to the area with someone at the University and then move on; there are a lot of teachers that move from Amherst because Amherst has a good reputation and they can get higher paying jobs in places like the Boston area.
- April: Teacher salaries are something that people are afraid of. There will be a big bump in teacher salaries and that will have to be reflected in other town employee salaries. There is a fear that that will burden us. Elaine: In a way it is a burden. In a way it will smooth it out over the whole system; it's not just us picking up the increase of our school. April: There was push-back of trying to raise the salary schedule here at town meeting, people weren't jumping up and down about it. Al and April have not seen recent raises. There's no arguing it out, it's reality.
- April: You're coming up with all the reasons that regionalization makes sense.
- Elaine: It makes sense because when I look at Union 28 and how hard it was to hire Joan. Len Lubinski was here 25 years and he went to so many meetings; yet he was always in the office the next morning. This type of person is a thing of the past. He made a much lower salary than other superintendents. One of the things was that he did not have a PHD. He was dedicated. He still works at CES. He's teaching teachers. He is dedicated to education. He built the reputation of our school. He saw Ron Berger and said, "Let me him flourish in what he does." Once Len left, we have had a very difficult time keeping superintendents. So, now when we go out for a 75% or even 100% person, a pre-K to 6 Union is getting less and less attractive with all these school committees as your bosses. Bump that salary up to where a superintendent has vision, and we can't afford it.
- April: It's no longer a workable model.
- Elaine: All your different schools doing different things – that's in the past. There's no spend 3 months on Egypt, in depth learning.
- Al: People moved here because we had a good school system.
- Elaine: We still have a good school system, but you cannot teach the way you want anymore: you have to teach to MCAS. You have specific requirements for each grade that you have to meet. The new Massachusetts teacher evaluation is on whether you can prove that you have taught those things. The creativity is in teaching under that kind of a system; it's not, make it up yourself. Truth be told, we didn't do so well on many things. When our kids went to 7th grade, they knew how to think. They knew how to tackle a problem, but they did not have the tools in their toolbox.
- April: They had never seen a standardized test. They missed spelling books; they had mimeographed sheets.
- Elaine: So, it's a different beast. We're holding Shutesbury as a different beast, but it doesn't exist anymore, it's a thing of the past. April: We caught up.
- A lot of people interested in what is going on are interested in the bottom line, the dollars; which is relevant. April: We have to govern with less.
- We are probably the most solvent of the 4 towns. They think we are fighting it because of money issues. It was thought that the library was a financial issue that was going to put many people under. The library was going to cost most of the people \$50 to 150/year. It had nothing to do with real money. It was a totally different issue.

- April: It's how this town is being characterized – we're not "forward thinking."
- Elaine: It's, "You guys are going to say 'No' to everything."
- April: There is a strong conservative voice in our town and that needs to be paid attention to. There's a wide range of people. There's not a knee-jerk reaction to any change as "no." That's not how people feel.
- Elaine: I really want to get people in the room to talk about it. A straw vote is the only way to know how people feel.
- April: What are people being asked to vote on? Elaine: Continue the conversation or pull up stakes.
- April: Is there any possibility that we would be left standing totally alone? Elaine: We can't be left standing totally alone for 7 through 12.
- Elaine: They wanted to change the way we vote on any decisions in the region from a 4-town approval to a 3 (out of 4)-town approval. That means that Shutesbury, Leverett and Pelham could vote on something and force Amherst to do it.
- April: I think they're thinking right now that Shutesbury is wagging the dog, and that's (3 out of 4 towns voting) a way to deal with that issue. Elaine: But then we could wag the dog the whole time.
- April: We're trying to look at this in a way that takes into account the politics of all the towns. I think intellectually it makes a lot of sense and eventually if we don't choose it voluntarily; it will probably be forced on us. Elaine: I don't think so; I think there's enough going on in the state....
- Al: Makes a comparison to the Department of Transportation that didn't follow through on promised funding.
- The next meeting of the local Shutesbury Regional School District Planning Committee, which is "trying to figure out where we are as a group" is Thursday. After making some decisions, we'll try to bring the full Shutesbury Committee back together.
- There is no next meeting posted for the Regional School District Planning Board (RSDPB).
- There is a special RSDPB subcommittee that Becky, Jeff, Alissa and Julie are on, to look at the 4 models that we are still looking at:
 - PreK-12,
 - 2 PreK-12 hybrids:
 - One has Shutesbury getting services from the central office in Amherst for PreK to 6.
 - The other PreK-12 hybrid says Shutesbury will do whatever it wants for administrative services, and is not necessarily committed to Amherst's central office.
 - The 4th model that they all liked the best, is that they do a PreK to 12 and tuition Shutesbury in for 7 through 12, which would mean opening up the regional agreement. We said, "that's a silly thing," except for Becky who asked to see the numbers they would offer us. Elaine is not interested in that, because it is taxation without representation.
- That is the point when we were asked if we have a representative on the Regional School Committee right now? "Ouch." Hence, the letter: (See the text of the letter under Select Board action items below.)
- Al: Refers to Worthington's situation, where they are trying to get out of their region right now, with the help of Representative Kulik who is trying to change legislation to help them do so. Al feels that Worthington's situation is comparable to ours and could influence Leverett's, and Shutesbury's voters. Al quotes a woman from Worthington who said, "A town is not a town without your own school." The region shut Worthington's school down and took all the kids away.
 - Worthington voted to get out of the region, and all the other region's towns voted that Worthington couldn't get out, because it would cost some of those other towns an extra \$90,000 or more apiece. (Elaine – So can't you start your own school? Al – That's what

they're talking about doing. They'll have their own charter school, instead of their own public school. They wish they never joined the region.)

- They have to wait until Kulik changes legislation to get their kids out of the region, so they can go back to a public school; if Kulik can do it. (April: Because they have a regional agreement. Al: yes.)
- April: That frightens people here that we would be in the same situation.
- Al: You would be in the same situation.
- April: Except, how the regionalization agreement is written and agreed upon...
- Elaine: You're not going to keep a school open for 12 kids. Look at Pelham (Al and Elaine agree that Pelham has more than 12 kids) there does come a point, where the town says, maybe the town is better served to have a senior center because we're all seniors in this town.
- Al: But they don't go to the parents who have kids in the school and ask it is OK if we close your school? No, they say, "We're going to close your school, we're going to take your kids;" that's it. There's not a darn thing they can say about it. If we joined, Pelham, Leverett, and Amherst, could say, OK, Shutesbury, you're the furthest away, you just bring everybody from the top of the hill down here, so we'll have all our kids down here.
- April: It would cost a lot to transport people.
- Al: We're bussing 7 through 12 down every day already. There's room on the busses.
- Elaine: And with regionalization, you get transportation money.
- April: If we have a full school of 125 kids...Al: We have 150. Elaine: People laugh at it calling it a full school with 125 kids. April: How large are Amherst's schools. Elaine: You have 3 schools serving 25,000 population, you have between 300 and 400 kids in each school. April: Right.
- April: So the region could have one more school in Amherst and take all the kids from all 3 towns.
- Al: They could decide to make one big elementary school in Amherst, take all of those schools that need re-modeling, shut them all done and say we've got this brand new school in Amherst and all of you people bring your kids over here, because we have a big new school with a swimming pool. Elaine: Yes, they could. April: OK, they could do that. Al: There's nothing to stop them.
- April: We have the right to create a regional agreement that could protect the integrity of the schools. Al: We can protect them until all the towns vote. You have to have 4 out of 4. If you have 3 out of 4, the other towns could say, "You're going."
- April: Four towns have to vote for a 3 out of 4 vote.
- Elaine: When you write a regional agreement, it can't be written so that it ties the hands forever and you can't close a school. Whether you say it's going to be a moratorium for 5 years or 10 years. Once it's over, it's up to the School Committee to decide.
- Al: What did Alissa say? It's only a piece of paper. It's not written in stone.
- April: So why would any school want to regionalize?
- Elaine: Pelham wants to regionalize because they can't afford to keep their school open the way it is. Al: Yeah, and 260 grand (\$).
- April: Why would Leverett want to regionalize?
- Elaine: Because they're getting to that same point, they're shrinking. We're the only town in the region that is not shrinking.
- Al: Another 260 grand (\$). According to what they've got in the reports for numbers, that's what they'll be making. When you read all the articles saying how much money we're going to save, yes, Pelham is going to save; Shutesbury isn't saving anything.
- April: We need to keep our little town school.
- Al: And to think what all we went through to get our school, with 2½ overrides and people staring at us for which way were voting, we want to keep that school.

- Elaine: I think there are people in Shutesbury with a feeling about their school. I think there are people in Leverett with a similar feeling. I don't see that in Pelham, just because they are always much more interested in finances, and they are a much older community.
- April: Can we afford to keep this little school going?
- Elaine: If we tighten our belts and we are all willing to do it. I don't know, we will see.
- Al: There's room for belt tightening.
- April: I don't think Amherst knows how important it is to have a school in a little town.
- Elaine: So that's the gist of it.
- Al: This was a good conversation. Now everybody sees all angles of it.
- Elaine: There are positives to it, but there are negatives too.
- April: I'd been under the impression that a regional agreement would be designed to protect the integrity of each little town's school. Al: But it can be changed. April: But it has to be changed by 4 towns' votes. Elaine: Right 4 towns have to vote. Unless they go with the 3. If they go with 3, we're out of it. April: But they can't go to 3 because 4 towns have to vote to go to 3.
- Al: We haven't got anyone down there to vote.
- Elaine: Our Town is not going to vote to change the regional agreement from 4 to 3. Becky said, they were saying that if it wasn't for that 4 versus 3 vote in 1992, we would already be a region. I don't agree. I think the region would have disintegrated, because when you have to have all 4 towns agree, you have to take baby steps.
- April: It has also forced the 7 through 12 region; if there has really been a hardship on one town for the towns to work together, because we know that each town has to approve it.
- Elaine: Actually, only 3 towns have to approve the regional assessment.
- All Selectmen agree: We've given each other money, we work together.
- Elaine: But at the 7 to 12 region, there is only one school. We are sending all the kids to one school and we always were.
- April: As long as we can keep the agreement of 4 towns having to approve the closing of a school, that ensures protection for our little school. Elaine: There's only 1 school committee. April: If it's PreK-6 and 7-12. Elaine: They want to have the same people on both committees. April: They is us. Elaine: Right, but it is the way the regional agreement is being crafted, and what the committee is talking about is having the exact same people on both committees: having 2 from Shutesbury, 2 from Leverett and 2 from Pelham and 5 from Amherst. April: That's a 6 to 5 balance. Elaine: Actually it was going to be 4 to 5, because we weren't going to be a part of it. Al: So, if you have 6, 2,2,2, Amherst will probably want to go with 7. Elaine: Right, but that's 13 people and that's totally unwieldy. Right now the regionalization committee is 12 people and that's unwieldy. April: What would "unmess" it? Elaine: We've been talking about that for years, I don't know.
- April: So if we do nothing...Elaine: Then there is no change. We shall see.

Select Board Action Items

1. **Select men voted to accept the July 30, 2013 Select Board Meeting Minutes as written with Elaine abstaining because she was not present.**
2. **Letter to the School Committee:** Selectmen reviewed the regional school agreement process whereby the local school committees select their representatives to the regional school committee, in light of the fact that Shutesbury is currently without regional representation. Elaine composed and the Board signed the following letter:
We fully realize and respect the fact that you are a town wide elected board. We have no authority over your decision making. That said, we entreat you to provide representation for Shutesbury on the Amherst Regional School Committee so that Shutesbury will have a voice at the table.

3. **There was no Zoning Board of Appeals Clerk job description in the packets.**
4. **Selectmen signed vendor warrants totaling \$270,400.14**
5. **Select men signed payroll warrants totaling \$84,613.39.**
6. Selectmen reviewed and unanimously voted to sign a FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) contract for 75% compensation of \$9,998.06 in eligible costs for the February 8th and 9th winter snowstorm for a total return to Shutesbury of \$7,498.55.

Topics the Chairman Could Not Reasonably Have Anticipated

None.

The Select Board **adjourned at 7:55 P.M.**

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Bracebridge
Administrative Secretary