

Select board minutes
Town of Shutesbury
Four Town Meeting
Saturday, December 05, 2015
9:00AM to 12:00PM
Amherst Regional Middle School Library

Present: Select board-April Stein, Michael DeChiara, Michael Vinskey, Finance committee-Gary Hirshfield, George Arvanitis, Eric Stocker, Wheezie Houle, Allen Hanson, School committee/Regional School committee representative-Steve Sullivan. Various members of select boards, finance committees, school committees from Amherst, Pelham, Leverett. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Finance-Roger Hatch. Towns' residents.

Meeting opened at 9:05AM by Maria Geryk.

- a. Welcome and introductions. Maria stated this is a working meeting and questions/comments would only be taken from board/committee members. All present introduced themselves.
- b. FY17 Budget Projections. Sean Mangano presented the proposed budget. Looking at a 3.4% increase. Main increases from charter tuition (\$493,650), Hampshire County retirement (\$103,854), payroll (\$652,794). Revenue forecast indicates an approximately \$460,000 gap. Added to other current unknowns this will probably increase to \$600,000. Attempting to bridge the gap via regionalization (projected savings \$350,000 to \$650,000), consolidate Middle and High school students (projected savings \$850,00 to \$1,650,000).
- c. FY17 Capital Plan. Listed completed projects, approved projects, and proposed FY17 projects. Total proposed FY17 projects will cost \$655,000. Reviewed towns' payment schedules from FY16 to FY26.
- d. Regionalization update. Forums to discuss the proposed draft agreement changes have been held in all towns. Regional School committee (RSC) will discuss feedback from forums at December 15, and January 12 meetings. RSC will vote on the draft agreement on February 23. If approved, draft approval moves to town meeting. Two votes required: first- to allow changes to current regional agreement, second- whether that town will join the new region (second vote needs yes vote from Amherst and one other town to actually form the new region).
- e. 7-12 Consolidation update. High school building capacity is 1,700. Current middle school and high school enrollment is 1,400. Nine hundred and fifty surveys completed from residents. Major concern: student safety, i.e. mixing younger students with older students. Teachers and staff from both buildings queried regarding concerns/needs/desires regarding reconfiguring high school building. Determining ability to re-purpose middle school building. A report incorporating all these considerations will be given to the RSC in January 2016. Five options will be suggested for RSC review:

1. No change-middle school students stay in middle school building, high school students stay in high school building.
2. Seventh and Eighth grade students formed into a school within a school.
3. Seventh grade academy. A location in the building where these students can spend the year being guided through a transition into the “bigger” school.
4. Seven through twelve all in one building.
5. Town 6th graders moved into middle school along with 7th and 8th graders. Not favorably received by school administration, but on the consideration list because of parent request.

RSC will chose one of these options in Feb/Mar 2016. Decision implemented in school year beginning Sep 2017.

f. Guidance from member towns.

Amherst-Revenue up 2.9%, but costs going up in various areas: retirement, OPEB, capital projects. Finance director leaving. Can handle a 2.5% increase in assessment.

Pelham-Long term viability of town is tenuous. Working on a town center plan, and affordable housing plan. Building a master plan to chart direction to better financial footing. Need a breather from increases this year.

Leverett-Uncertain year. Abatement request for \$200,000 is on hold. Regionalization will assist in cost reduction. Broadband is a strain on resources. Requesting a 2% decrease from all departments for FY17 budget. Received a 3% decrease from all departments in FY16. Will be able to accept assessment increase from region.

Shutesbury-Just starting to look at budget. Will be asking voters for standard 2.5% tax increase.

e. Shutesbury Presentation. April Stein, Gary Hirshfield, George Arvanitis, Eric Stocker presented a summary report from the Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee, September 29, 2015. They presented the reasons why the current alternative assessment method disadvantages Shutesbury owing to Shutesbury’s lesser ability to pay in relation to the other towns. Returning to the statutory method all at once creates large changes in assessment for all towns. Shutesbury suggested a four year transition period to the statutory method.

The three other towns did not respond favorably to this report and suggestion. Issues brought up included Shutesbury’s unwillingness to regionalize which would allegedly save money for all towns. The fragile financial environment of Leverett and Pelham and how this would place more financial burden on them. The concern that this was a cultural shift away from “we’re all in this together” to “what is best for my town only”. The concept that one wealthy individual in a town skews the aid received from the state.

Discussion continued for more than an hour with no conclusion. A question left with Shutesbury was, “What are you going to do now?” Shutesbury wants to continue to discuss this issue and there was some talk about follow up meetings, but no dates were set.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40AM.

Submitted by: Mike Vinskey