

Shutesbury Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 22, 2015

Members Present: Gary Hirshfield, Eric Stocker, George Arvanitis and Jim Walton

Members Absent: Weezie Houle **Visitors:** Becky Torres

- A. Meeting called to order at 7:25.
- B. Minutes from December 8, 2015 meeting approved as amended..
- C. **Fire Department budget proposal** – Walter Tibbetts was absent due to a meeting conflict, but had submitted his budget in advance. There were no changes from last year.
- D. **Al Hansen's resignation** was announced and discussed. Everyone expressed their sense of loss and a few stated they would contact him.
- E. **Committee reports:**
 - a) Personnel – George: Changed the performance review for managers. Managers will use the same form as all employees, but will continue to set goals for managers. Also added Special Employee rules to the package provided to new hires.
 - b) School - Weezie submitted a written report which is an addendum to these minutes.
 - c) Community Preservation Committee – No report.
 - d) Capital Planning: No report as they have not met.
 - e) Broadband – Eric (and Becky): Lengthy report and discussion about developments in the points of disagreement between Wired West and MBI. Much of MBI's position is based on their consultant's report which Wired West (WW) believes is flawed because it's based on an urban rather than rural model. One focal point is whether the member town's ownership of the co-operative qualifies as town ownership. Another was that the consultant's report may have overstated certain costs. The report claimed that WW's proposal was flawed regarding the rate it would need to charge to reach profitability.
- F. **Solar farm hearings:** The town administrator reported that there are a number of cost overruns due to the solar farm hearings. The Conservation Commission is over spending the clerk's salary account as the clerk has been required to work almost double the budgeted hours. Legal fees are also running high as counsel has been attending the Conservation Commission and Planning Board meetings.
- G. **Expense report:** no report available. Significant progress has been made re-entering the lost data and the reports are expected to be available soon.
- H. **Tax Rate Approval** was reviewed. We briefly discussed again the relationship between the tax rate and assessed values, and why comparing tax rates between towns, is misleading. While the rate appears high compared to other towns, the average single family home's tax bill is close to the state average.
- I. **Regional assessment and regionalization** issues were reported by Eric and Becky and discussed. There is a compromise solution to the assessment method issue offered by Sean Mangano, Director

of Finance, Amherst Pelham Regional School District. He proposes a fiscal year 2017 regional assessment method that calculates 90% of the assessment based on the current alternative method and the remaining 10% of the assessment based on the taxable property values of the four towns. Unfortunately the meeting was running late and there was not time to reach a decision about accepting the proposal, counter-offering, or insisting on the rolling average Statutory Method. Some members were concerned that spreadsheets and other correspondence between Sean and Shutesbury were not disseminated to all members of the FinCom. We should review how information is shared with the FinCom and its members.

Agenda for 1/5/16 meeting:

- Meet with the Select Board and School Committee
- Review and approve minutes from 12/22 meeting
- Review expense report if available
- Review topics discussed with Select Board and School Committee
- Committee reports
- Select replacement for Al Hansen on CPC