

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, January 11, 2022, Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: George Arvanitis, Ajay Khashu, Jim Walton, Susie Mosher, Bob Groves, Melody Chartier, Jim Hemingway

Members Absent: None

Town Administrator: Becky Torres

Non-Members present: Mike Vinskey, Kevin Rudden (Assessor)

Meeting called to order at 6:31 PM

- 1) Agenda modification: Police budget will be reviewed on 2/8th along w/ the Town Accountant.
- 2) December 14th minutes discussion: Several changes are suggested. Final approval of the minutes will take place at the next meeting. SM is following up with Walter Tibbets to clarify some information regarding installation of an antenna on the new Vertex cell tower.
- 3) **Follow-up from Jan 8th Four Town Meeting**
 - a) BG states that he was surprised by Peter Demling's criticism that a progressive town such as Amherst is not more supportive of considering ability to pay as a factor in assessing towns.
 - b) SM suggests that we send a letter to the regional school committee to thank them for their discussion regarding Shutesbury's concerns about equity. GA responds that he would be concerned about the potential optics of that action.
 - c) BT points out that Mike Morris said there will be another Four Town Meeting before the budget is finalized.
 - d) GA was surprised there wasn't more pushback on the overall budget increase. AK responds that there was some criticism from the Amherst TC representatives that the proposed budget did not conform to their guidance that the budget not exceed a 2.5% increase.
 - e) JH asks if we have any idea how many Amherst students choice out of the district. BG states that he doesn't necessarily agree that the school should be competing with other charter schools for students.
 - f) The regional school committee will be meeting next on January 18th and will be discussing the budget and assessment method.
- 4) **Elementary school roof discussion**
 - a) SM brings up that Shutesbury's request for state funding for the school roof project has been rejected for a 4th consecutive time. We are going to put in yet another request when the next RFP comes out. BT is working with Natalie Blais to document the poor condition of the elementary school roof. BG asks about whether we should fund the project ourselves next year if the request is rejected again. If a special town meeting is not possible, we should consider preparing a warrant for the annual town meeting.

- b) SM asks if other towns have a roof of a similar vintage to ours. What towns are getting their roof projects funded? BT responds that her understanding is that this funding is going to large new school construction projects in affluent communities.
- c) BG states that regardless of whether the State funds this project or not, we need to build the school a new roof. The state has proven that they are not reliable as a source of funding for this project. If we use state funds to pay for the project, there will be special requirements that may make this a more expensive project.
- d) JW asks if any of the new federal infrastructure money can be used for school roof projects. BT responds that only HVAC and ventilation projects are eligible for those funds.

5) Follow-up discussion regarding the Senior's Tax exemption w/ Kevin Rudden

- a) Shutesbury's bill has yet to have a hearing in front of the revenue committee. They did review the statewide bill that would allow any jurisdiction to approve a means-tested seniors exemption at their annual time meeting.
- b) KR states that the language in the two bills is essentially identical.

6) Committee Reports

- a) BG for Buildings Committee: The elementary school slider project was completed over the winter break.
- b) BG and BT report that FRCOG is providing funds for Bridge Academy training for police department staff. Shutesbury's allocation is \$4,000. BT shares that these funds will be used to cover out-of-pocket ammunition costs.
- c) SM for Police Study Group: The group is going to meet this week to approve a survey that will go out to town residents. Surveys will be returned by Feb 14 and there will be future discussions about the survey results.
- d) BT states that our hauling contract is up at the end of the year. This is the company that had a significant injury to one of their drivers. They are now saying they will no longer do backload hauling. They will only do automated side hauling. The recycling committee is looking into all options. The Recycling Committee will meet w/ the Fin Com at a future date to discuss the available options. One of the options that is being discussed is for Shutesbury to hire staff and take over hauling operations. BG suggests another option: Shutesbury could develop a transfer station and have town residents haul their own trash. MC asks whether anyone has considered the idea of a regional agreement with neighboring towns to achieve some economy of scale.
- e) JW on Fire Chief search committee. There will be a meeting tomorrow. GA suggests that if the town is going to hire a full-time fire chief again, it behooves Shutesbury to hire someone who has a similar skillset, including the ability to perform maintenance on department vehicles.
- f) SM for the Municipal Vulnerability Committee. Looking at multiple projects and researching some grant opportunities. SM suggested to the committee that the group look into grant funds for an assessment of the town's roads

7) Future Meetings

- a) Jan 25, Feb 8, and Feb 22 @ 6:30: BT hopes to have some preliminary budget for the 1/25 meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM