

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, January 25, 2022, Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

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

Members Absent: None

Town Administrator: Becky Torres

Non-Members present: Kevin Rudden (Assessor), Leslie Bracebridge (Assessor's Clerk), Gail Weiss (Accountant), Barbara Bigelow (Recreation), Doc Pruyne, Leslie Luchonok

Meeting called to order at 6:31 PM

1) Accountant Budget Review (Gail Weiss)

- a) \$5,000 for computer maintenance;
 - i) Gail has submitted a request to the Capital Planning Committee for a new cloud-based accounting system called VADAR. This will be a multi-user system to be used by both the treasurer and accountant. The VADAR system would be more secure than what we are currently using and since it is cloud-based, it can be used anywhere. If request is approved, the annual service fee will be fixed for the next six years.
- b) \$200 for conference fee.
- c) \$150 for office supplies.
- d) JH asks if the town has considered sharing IT services with other towns. Gail responds that accounting software is typically purchased for a single town and she is not aware of any other communities that share accounting services.

2) Assessor Budget Review (Kevin Rudden)

- a) Assessor's expenses will be level funded.
- b) Computer maintenance is increasing by \$813
- c) Class 504 Utility Valuations: Budget calls for a \$6,000 increase. This expense is mandated by the DOR. They are requiring external evaluations for public utilities. SM asks if this is an unfunded mandate and if it can be charged to the utility companies. Kevin responds that yes, this is an unfunded mandate.
- d) Personal Property Valuation services: budget includes a \$3,000 increase. This is an external vendor who does these assessments. Personal property valuations have been a big area of growth in terms of assessments. The cost of hiring a third party to conduct these assessments pays for itself.

3) Recreation Committee Budget Review (Barbara)

- a) This is the first time Barbara is presenting a budget.
- b) Barbara and the committee have created a slate of programs they hope to implement in FY23. Specifically, four events are planned:

- i) Orienteering (\$500): Includes the cost of creating a map that will be used by activity participants. Creating the map will allow individuals and groups to participate in the future.
- ii) 4 Educational Walks (\$1,000): Leaders will be reimbursed \$250 per walk. There is some historical precedent for doing public walks but the town has not sponsored one in a while.
- iii) Workshop on building dry stone walls (\$500).
- iv) Committee would like to offer a series of classes on vegetable gardening (\$1,000). To be done in coordination with the development of Shutesbury's Community Garden.
- c) SM asks what the Recreation Dept's goals for Shutesbury are. Barbara responds that the goal is to bring people together in outdoor activities and to promote education. SM encourages the committee to think about developing programming for families. SM states that there are a lot of new families moving into town and integrating those families into these activities would be important.
- d) GA asks if the committee will also be developing programming for children utilizing other town spaces including the elementary school.
- e) BG asks if these activities should be done more informally so that we don't incur costs. Do we need these activities to be led by professionals?
- f) JH asks if CPA funds could be used to fund any of these activities. GA responds that his understanding is that the CPA is designed to build things and is not sure the funds could be used for workshop activities.
- g) AK asks how Barbara would prioritize this list. Educational walks would be the lowest priority because there may be town residents who could pitch in to lead these walks. The top priority would be the educational programming associated with the Community Garden. And the next highest priority would be the Orienteering activity.
- h) BT asks what the plan is for advertising and communicating about these activities. Barbara responds that she will be seeking support from Maryanne (library director).
- 4) Elementary School Budget Update
 - a) SM shared with the committee a budget presentation that was shared with the school committee. This was put together by the new U28 finance director.
 - b) This preliminary budget does not match up with what was presented by Bruce Turner at a previous FinCom meeting. One possible explanation is that it does not include expenses that were paid for using Esser and School Choice funds. SM states that she has spoken with the Finance Director about preparing an additional budget document that details how these funds are being used and for what expenses.
- 5) **Motion to approve 12/14/2021 minutes as amended passes unanimously 7-0.**
- 6) **Motion to approve 1/11/2022 minutes as amended passes unanimously 7-0.**
- 7) Update on 1/18 regional school meeting
 - a) SM shares that at the 1/18 regional school committee, Peter Demling suggested that in the absence of the towns being able to negotiate a compromise assessment method, it

may be best to utilize the same method that was used for FY22 (i.e. 65% modified statutory). BT wonders if we may have missed our opportunity to move the needle. SM and GA suggest that we submit a letter restating our position and the rationale for advocating for the modified statutory method.

- b) GA states that the voters in this town are paying close attention and that ultimately, it's going to be up to them to approve the method.
- c) BG agrees that we have a strong, moral justification for our position.
- d) SM states that a big wildcard here is what is going to happen to Chapter 70 funds. If there is good news then maybe towns will be more amenable to compromise.
- e) **AK makes a motion for the Finance Committee to recommend an 85% modified statutory method for the next two fiscal years and that we share this position with the Regional School Committee in advance of the upcoming Four Towns Meeting. SM seconds. Motion passes with a 5-2 vote (GA, MC, AK, SM, and JW vote Yes, BG and JH vote No).**
- f) AK agrees to draft a letter for the Shutesbury Select Board to submit to the Regional School Committee.

8) Future Meetings

- a) Feb 1: Select Board meeting, to discuss upcoming 4 Towns Meeting
- b) Feb 8

Meeting adjourned at 8:59 PM