

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, November 29, 2022 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu, Bob Groves, Jim Hemingway, Susie Mosher, Jim Walton, George Arvanitis, and ex-officio member, Town Administrator Becky Torres

Members Absent: Melody Chartier

Members of the Public: Miriam Defant, Mary David, Rita Farrell, Eric Stocker, Mary Anne Antonellis, John Montanari, Mike Vinskey, Amanda Alix, Jon Lawless, Michael Hootstein, Jill Marland, Leslie Luchonok, Tom Seifert, Ziporah Hildebrandt, Mary Lou Conca,

Meeting called to order at 6:33 pm

1. Minutes from 11/15/22 meeting approved as amended
2. Met with Fire Chief Lenny Czerwonka to review his department's FY24 budget proposal
 - a. All the same except the equipment line, which has a \$3k increase. The Chief said it is time to replace the four AEDs (defibrillators). He proposes they be replaced one a year for the next four years. They are nearly 20 years old and really should be scheduled for replacement at about 8 years.
 - b. Should this be an ongoing operating budget line? Should it be on a separate operating line like other fire equipment? Or should this go to capital planning? If the replacement schedule is every 8 years, after the current ones have all been replaced, should this expense be in the operating budget at half the cost every year, rolled over to replace one AED every other year? The Finance Committee will have further discussion on this.
 - c. The proposed budget is up by a \$3,000; an 8.6 % increase over FY23.
 - d. Lenny also noted that Engine - 2 is almost 25 years old. It is time to plan for its replacement; new or rebuild. He will take this up with the Capital Planning Committee.
3. Met with Police Chief Kristin Burgess to review her department's FY 24 budget proposal
 - a. The Chief explained the salary lines are increased in accordance with the agreed upon contracts. Those increases total \$5,866. The holiday pay did not change.
 - b. Operating expenses are increased \$1k due to concerns that the State may be reducing their share of the Central Square Portal fee. This provides data for criminal records, etc. This line has not been increased for at least 10 years and inflation has driven up costs.
 - c. Similarly, the Cruiser Maintenance line has a \$529. proposed increase due to rising prices on parts.
 - d. A new line this year is \$1k for Community Policing. Kristin heard from some citizens through the Police Study Group survey and in person, that they value community policing activities. With \$1,000 seed money, the chief hopes to increase visibility that will hopefully increase donations and citizen fundraising efforts. Gail Weiss said there can be a revenue line to receive donations. Currently the Chief spends her own money for popsicles, items to meet the immediate needs of some residents the department responds to, such as diapers, water, etc. The department sometimes makes referrals for services on these calls.
 - e. This line might be structured as a revolving account, dedicated to specific community policing activity.

- f. Aside from the contract obligations, the proposed operating budget is up by a \$2,529; a 10% increase.
- 4. MSBA Boiler Update
 - a. Efforts to get more information on the parameters of the MSBA grant have not been successful. The grant requires step by step engagement instead of giving an overview. Becky and Bob will try again to get more facts on a joint phone call to MSBA officials.
 - b. Shutesbury has already invested about \$270k in rebuilt controls, valves and software. Any MSBA grant should not waste this investment. There are still leaks and pump problems.
 - c. There is a trend toward electric heating systems, against fossil fuel use, and increasing efficiency. Heat pumps may be on the path forward.
- 5. Conservation Commission request
 - a. The Conservation Commission requests \$2,500 from the Finance Committee reserve funds to obtain separate legal counsel to advise it on lot O32 permitting issues. It would be a conflict of interest for Shutesbury's town counsel, Donna MacNicol to advise one town board relative to the actions of another town entity's, the Select Board. So the Commission is seeking outside counsel in their efforts for due diligence.
 - b. The Commission declined to spend from the \$7k fee funds they have. This fund accumulates slowly and they may have other consultation uses for it. A Finance Committee motion to recommend the Commission draw \$2,500 from their funds was not seconded.
 - c. The current budget on the Legal Expenses line is likely to be fully spent this year. It currently has about 55% left. The Select Board will be asking for outside counsel for lot O32 as well.
 - d. A motion to transfer \$2,500 from the Finance Committee reserve to the Legal Expenses for the Conservation Commission use was approved, 5 - 1. The transfer form will be in the Finance Committee hallway mailbox for members to sign.
- 6. Latest developments on ARHS track project
 - a. The Amherst Town Council deadlocked over an additional appropriation of \$900k for the track project. There was an extensive public comment period.
 - b. The Regional School Committee met on 11/29 to discuss their next steps. They have a letter from the Superintendent, Mike Morris, to the Town Council outlining the costs of upgrading and maintaining playing fields.
 - c. Concerns about artificial turf, PFAS, research, and the amount of use the fields sustains were raised. The topic is complicated.
 - d. The FinCom will wait until the Dec. 17 Four Town meeting to see what proposals arise. We will put the track project on our Dec. 13 agenda in preparation for the 12/17 meeting.
- 7. Shutesbury revaluation update
 - a. The Select Board endorsed a single tax rate at the Tax Classification hearing tonight. The tax rate will be \$18.44 and the average tax bill will increase \$96/yr. The Assessors' office listed the old and new values on the town website.
 - b. The Assessors' office has almost completed the whole process. Tax bills are likely to come out at the end of December.
- 8. Expense report review

- a. Carry over amounts need to be entered. There were some cherry sheet items that showed up on the expense report that need to be fixed.
- b. By the new year the expense reports should be fully set up.

9. Other Committee reports

- a. The Shutesbury School Committee shared their draft budget at their November meeting. It is in our Google doc folder. They will not meet again until mid-January, at which time they hope to have a final draft to approve. The Finance Committee rescheduled our meeting to review their budget to January 31. The biggest increases in their draft budget are in the fuel and electricity expenses. We will likely see these expenses rise in other parts of our town's budget requests.
- b. The Broadband Committee reports that the move to SHELd is scheduled for Dec. 7.
- c. Personnel Board met with the fire chief, Lenny Czerwonka, to discuss a deputy fire chief position. In an effort to attract more firefighters, there was discussion about establishing a minimum number of hours to be paid for response times.

Our next Finance Committee meeting is schedule for Dec. 13 at 6:30.

The meeting adjourned at 8:44 pm.