

Shutesbury Finance Committee

Wednesday, December 14, 2022 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

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

Members of the Public: Library Director Mary Anne Antonellis

Board of Library Trustees Brad Foster, Tim Logan, and Kate Cell,

Steve Sullivan, Mike Vinskey, Amanda Alix, Jon Lawless, Jill Marland, Leslie Luchonok,

Meeting called to order at 6:36 pm

1. Minutes from 11/29/2022 meeting approved as amended.
 - a. There was a state grant mentioned in the newspaper to fund replacement of expired fire department equipment. George will follow up on finding out if that grant is available to fund AED replacements listed in the Fire Department request.

2. ARHS Track and Field update and next steps
 - a. Amherst Town Council (ATC) reconsidered their vote and approved \$900K from their free cash reserves for an amended appropriation of the track project that includes Option 2. The ATC already committed \$980k Community Preservation (CP) funds.
 - b. Doug Slaughter brought a request to Shutesbury's CPC for the first step of consideration – is this an eligible project for CP funds? CP committee is meeting tonight.
 - c. The next step for the track and field project is contingent on meeting the private fundraising target of \$1million by the deadline of January 16, 2023. The amount of private funds raised has not been made public. If that deadline is met, it is not clear what will happen if any of the remaining three towns voters vote against their portion of the funding.
 - d. Controversy around synthetic turf is on-going. Amherst Board of Health recommended against synthetic turf.
 - e. There may be some updated information discussed at Saturday's Four Town meeting

3. Preparation for 11/17 Four Town meeting
 - a. The 100% Statutory with a 5-year rolling average is the settled formula for the regional school budget apportionment. The meeting on Saturday may discuss the guardrail concept – a 4% cap on any increase or decrease of any town's assessment over the past year. This seemed to be part of the negotiation to get the current formula Shutesbury wanted passed in FY23. The four-town subcommittee that explored the guardrail concept in the fall did not endorse the idea for the future – it was seen as unnecessary by most of the towns. The regional school administration seems to still be promoting guardrails as a continuing part of the assessment agreement.
 - b. The pros and cons of continuing the guardrails was reviewed. It is unknown if the guardrails will have to be enacted, especially because Amherst is unlikely to support any budget anywhere near a 4% increase. We will see the draft budget released on Saturday and see if or how the proposed guardrails will affect us.

- c. The problem of significant leaks in the middle school roof will be on the agenda. The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) is “pausing” its funding for roof repairs. The cost of repair vs replacement will be discussed.
 - d. The Four Town meeting usually includes a check-in with each town for current issues. All towns had an increase in property values and therefore decreases in their tax rates.
 4. MSBA Boiler project update
 - a. Becky and Bob had a 4-way call with the state to get details and questions answered about the MSBA grant offer to replace the elementary school boilers. The grant cannot extend to HVAC concerns and the engineering costs for this grant would have to be borne by our town. Our current problems with leaks in the boiler room can be addressed with seals.
 - b. The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to inform the Select Board that we do not recommend pursuing the MSBA grant to replace the boilers. Bob will report to the Select Board about the reasons for our decision.
 5. Comment on the Expense Reports
 - a. There was a request that line items regarding the Library be consolidated in one section like the Broadband has. Currently there are library budget lines on multiple pages. Unlike the Broadband that is a municipal enterprise, the Library has multiple funding lines including grants, fundraising donations, state funding, and fund expenditures etc. so accounting-wise, the entries have to be on different pages of the report.
 - b. It will be helpful to have the new reporting format use page breaks such as the ones we were used to from the previous format.
 - c. Questions about the expenditures for Lot O32 were raised. Mary Anne Antonellis, Library director, has the comprehensive list and where the funds came from. She will send the Finance Committee that list. The current contracted amount is about \$52K. The funds are primarily from ARPA and some from the Friends of the Library.
 - d. The legal expenses line in the FY23 budget will probably be spent out due to personnel issues and Lot O32 consultations.
 - e. We received a heads up that DEP sent Shutesbury a Notice of Responsibility for the PFAS contamination found at the fire station. Tighe and Bond have been hired to conduct testing.
 - f. Would a review of expense reports be more efficient if rotating two committee members were responsible for an organized review to present at each meeting? Is it better to have more eyeballs reviewing instead of less? No new plan was made.
 6. Met with Mary Anne Antonellis, Library Director, to review FY24 Library Budget proposal
 - a. The proposal is a level funded budget for the town portion, \$94,445, the same amount as FY23. The proposal meets the state’s requirement to include an annual increase of the budget in last year’s salary lines. \$900 in longevity bonuses dropped out of the FY 24 proposal.
 - b. The grants that extend the services the library provides are currently estimated at \$787 lower than last year. The Council on Aging will have other expenses to consider and the Friends of the Library are raising money for the new library.
 - c. There was some discussion about the historical growth of the library budget over a ten-year period.
 7. Committee Updates

- a. Capital Planning will likely have the date for their first meeting established this week.
- 8. Next Finance Committee meeting(s)
 - a. We have the Four Town meeting on Saturday, 12/17 with a preliminary joint meeting with School Committee and Select Board at 8:30 am
 - b. Our next Finance Committee meeting is Wed. Dec.21. We will debrief the Four Town meeting, have a preliminary discussion of the elementary school draft budget, and hopefully learn what our free cash balance is.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.