

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Tuesday, January 27, 2026 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, Susie Mosher, April Stein, Laura Soito, Molly Moss and George Arvanitis; Absent: Jim Walton; Non-Members Attending: Hayley Bolton – Town Administrator; Devon Pellitier – Police Chief; Mary Anne Anotonellis – Librarian; Brad Foster, Pam Ososky and Elizabeth Murphy – Library Trustees; Meryl Mandell – Recycling Coordinator

Meeting called to order at 6:31 p.m.

I. FY27 Police Budget Request

- A. Budget request is a decrease of \$8,733 from FY26. Lower salary for the chief and an increase of \$2,000 in Operating Expense line
- B. Holiday pay is compensation for the chief for holidays with the option to take the time if it's not used for holidays
- C. Chief salary and holiday pay is under contract
- D. Officer Wages reflects raises of 3%, but the chief will be able to fund officer wages for the same amount budgeted in FY26. Planning to have two full-time officers and varying part-time officers. It's become difficult to find part time officers. Currently one of the full-time positions is vacant
- E. Operating expenses have been increasing:
 - i. The increase is mostly for the many required subscriptions
 - ii. Body cameras subscriptions are \$4,000 per year. There are three years left on the current contract with an option to extend it another three years at the current price. If we extend the contract now, we can replace the cameras and the supporting technology with update-to-date cameras and technology at no additional cost
 - iii. The new full-time position will require new equipment and training
 - iv. Also, officers have equipment with expiration dates requiring replacement purchases. Bullet proof vests cost \$1,200 each
- F. The Chief plans to sell the oldest cruiser and not replace it. He will strip its reusable components for future cruisers. We currently have four cruisers, but he stated that we only need three. The current level of funding for the Cruiser Maintenance line is adequate for three cruisers
- G. No change to Community Policing. The Chief requested that a portion of the FY25 Community Policing budget be carried over to FY26 for a self-defense class for women
- H. Expecting to replace the 2018 cruiser in FY28. He will try to stagger the cruiser replacement schedule

II. Financial FY26 Snapshot – as of December 31, 2025

- A. This is a report summarizing the year to date spending and will be produced monthly by Hayley
- B. Hayley reported that the year to date spending is 43% of the total budget
- C. We're running a deficit on Snow Removal
- D. Highway maintenance and supplies are going to need a FinCom transfer

- E. Fire maintenance spent 88% of its budget and may need a FinCom transfer
- F. Hayley noted that the need for more long-term planning, especially for grants
- G. The total budget amount reported will be the approved operating budget
- H. The snapshot report will always show spending for key lines, but the trends section will include other lines that are materially overspending or underspending their budgets
- I. This snapshot report will be posted on the town website

III. FY27 Library Department Budget request

- A. Salaries will be determined once the town wide COLA is calculated
- B. Library Expenses budget request is \$500 higher (2.2%) than the FY26 budget
- C. The state requires libraries total budget (including salaries) to be funded by the tax levy, to increase by 2.5% each year
- D. Libraries are also required to spend 20% of their budget on new materials which includes things other than books such musical instruments, recreational items, technology...
- E. Reviewed estimated revenues which are expected to be higher by roughly \$2,000
- F. Janitorial cost for the library budgeted in the town hall section and not in the library budget
- G. The new building work is not fully complete, and the contingency fund has not been fully spent. It will be a year before the final cost and grant is determined
- H. The library trust fund has been used to support the operating budget. This fund and its interest will be fully spent in roughly seven years
- I. The library will need to purchase an AED device (\$2,400) and a snow blower for the new building
- J. Reviewed new and increased expenses associated with the new building:
 - i. Discussed which costs are to be funded by the library budget and which are funded by other town budget lines
 - ii. Many building supplies and building maintenance costs have been funded from the General Government budget lines
 - iii. Library budget will cover the following:
 - 1. Ice melt
 - 2. Internet security
 - 3. Drinking water supplies
 - 4. Window washing - until trustee fund is fully expended
 - iv. Mary Anne will provide estimates for costs to be added to the General Government lines for FY27
 - v. It was noted that there will be energy savings from this net zero building. A request was made to calculate the expected saving

IV. Trash and Recycling Committee – RFP for the Trash Hauling Contract

- A. The Trash and Recycling Committee established a subcommittee to prepare a request for proposal for a new trash hauling contract and to review the contract proposals. There will be issues such as toter sizes and recycling options to consider in preparing the RFP
- B. They've applied for a grant with the state DEP that would fund a consultant to help us analyze proposals
- C. Meryl offered to have a FinCom member participate to help with the number crunching.
- D. Meryl noted that it takes 18 months for processing a trash hauling RFP

- E. The current contract with Casella ends on June 30, 2027 with a one year extension option. The cost for the extension year is not specified in the contract with Casella
- F. The current contract increases annually by 5% each year. The committee is currently negotiating the extension and proposed a 5% increase which Casella is currently considering
- G. After the contract ends, contractors will want us to move to a totter system. During the last bid, Casella was the only contractor who didn't require totters in the proposals
- H. Contractors typically provide totters with their cost included in the contract. The DEP has grants for funding totters which could lower the contract cost if awarded
- I. Discussed whether to consider other options than curb side pickup:
 - i. In the past it was determined that the town buying a truck and collecting and hauling trash was too expensive
 - ii. Establishing a transfer station had broad push back from in the past: issues of location and inconvenience
 - iii. It was noted that trash hauling is a tangible service directly benefiting all taxpayers
 - iv. The concern of trash dumping in the woods was mentioned
 - v. The Recycling committee will be working on the RFP, but not on developing alternatives to curbside pickup

V. Amherst Regional Public School budget follow-up

- A. The school committee was meeting to review the FY27 budget today
- B. The committee's focus is determining how to cut up to \$2M from the operating budget
- C. We reviewed the budget timeline. Another four town meeting is not expected
- D. The Fiscal Sustainability Group is not including FY27 in the scope of their work

VI. Pelham is considering closing their elementary school

- A. Pelham is level funding all their departments' FY27 budgets
- B. They are expecting to fund their FY27 ARPS assessment increase by decreasing their Elementary school budget
- C. Large capital expenditures are needed for their school building which they can't afford. Therefore, they are considering closing their elementary school and sending their students to either Amherst or Shutesbury, after the 26/27 school year.
- D. The Pelham School committee is considering moving next year's six grade class to Amherst as a first step in closing the Pelham elementary school
- E. There is a meeting in Shutesbury to discuss accepting students from Pelham. The Union 28 Superintendent, Union 28 Finance Director, the Shutesbury Elementary School principal, Hayley and Ajay will attend this meeting
- F. It was noted that this closing is a symptom of the state education funding not keeping pace with school cost inflation and a warning to all towns regarding future education funding
- G. This situation is expected to incentivize towns to consider regionalizing

VII. Other Business

- A. Discussed scheduling the fiscal summit with town managers:
 - i. On February 10 we will review a draft of the FY27 budget and prepare for the fiscal summit
 - ii. The fiscal summit will be held on February 24

- iii. The Capital Planning meeting that was scheduled for February 10 was moved to March 10

Next meeting is February 10 at 6:30

Meeting adjourned at 9:11 p.m.