

Shutesbury Finance Committee
Wednesday, January 7, 2026 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Members Present: Ajay Khashu - chair, April Stein, Susie Mosher, Laura Soito, Jim Walton and George Arvanitis; Absent: Molly Moss; Non-Members Attending: Hayley Bolton – Town Administrator, Eric Stocker, Meissa Makepeace-O’Neil and Rita Farrel - Selectboard Members, Brennan Mailloux – Assistant Town Administrator

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

I. Prepare for the January 10 Four Towns Meeting

A. The meeting was changed from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. to accommodate the Shutesbury members so that they can attend the Library Grand Opening

B. Reviewed the preliminary budget produced by the regional school administration

- i. It’s a level services budget
- ii. The total assessment increase is \$2.9M, an 11.89% increase from FY26
- iii. The assessment will be decreased by any excess E&D funds
- iv. If E&D funds are applied, Shutesbury’s assessment increase will be \$169,931, a 9.54% increase
- v. Various levels of cuts and their impact (percentage assessment increase) on each towns’ assessments was reviewed. Details of the reductions were not provided
- vi. Amherst issued a guidance of no more than a 3.5% increase in their assessment. This will require 2.06M in cuts from the level service budget
- vii. The large increases in the budget are:
 1. Salaries 7%
 2. SPED 13.5%
 3. Substitutes 40%
 4. Central Administration 48%
 5. Facilities 69%
- viii. This budget is preliminary and not likely to be what is presented at the four town meeting
- ix. Discussed our estimated FY27 budget and our ability to absorb a large increase to the APRS assessment
- x. There are many areas that are putting pressure on Shutesbury’s operating budget. The dam issues and building maintenance were noted as potential pressure points
- xi. Debated whether to provide an assessment increase amount that we can support at the four town meeting. Decided that determining an amount would be difficult, and that the other town’s ability to absorb large increases would limit the amount of our corresponding increase to an amount we most likely could manage
- xii. Noted that last year’s level services budget was cut by roughly \$800k
- xiii. Noted that we are never informed of the actual cuts made each year when the new budgets take effect, or how they relate to the cuts that were presented during the budget process
- xiv. Ajay will develop talking points for the meeting in case we need to discuss finances

II. Reviewed and approved the minutes of the 12/16/25 meeting as amended

III. Reviewed the Elementary School proposed FY27 budget

- A. The FY27 budget request is \$163,981 (6.32%) higher than FY26. The increase would be 2.39% without the out of district placement
- B. The current out of district placement (in FY26) is substantially larger than was expected. The placement had been in a public school setting, but now is in a non-public school setting
- C. The out of district placement cost will increase by \$114k in the FY27 budget
- D. An unfilled Paraprofessional position will not be filled resulting in a \$30k savings in FY26 and the savings will carry to FY27
- E. Union 28 is requesting an “extraordinary relief circuit breaker” which would be given in the current fiscal year and not delayed by a year like the standard circuit breaker aid
- F. Discussed the need for a SPED stabilization fund. We plan to recommend the establishment of this fund in FY27
- G. Discussed splitting the building repairs from building maintenance for extraordinary items

IV. Other Business

- A. Susie will bring a draft of the next FinCom newsletter to our next meeting, for our review

Next meeting is on January 13 at 6:30

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.