

Shutesbury Select Board Meeting Minutes
October 13, 2015 Shutesbury Town Hall

Select Board members present: April Stein/Chair, Mike Vinskey, and Michael DeChiara
Staff present: Becky Torres/Town Administrator; Linda Avis Scott/Administrative Secretary

Finance Committee members present: Gary Hirschfield/Chair, George Arvanitis, Allen Hanson, Eric Stocker, Weezie Houle, and Jim Walton

Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee members present: George Arvanitis, Eric Stocker, Bill Wells, Jeff Lacy, and Becky Torres

At 7:00pm, Gary Hirschfield/Chair of the FinCom and April Stein/Select Board Chair call meeting to order.

Arvanitis, on behalf of the SRASSC, asks for Select Board comment on their report presented to the Board on 9.29.15. DeChiara states that he is impressed with the clarity and depth of the report. Vinskey asks and receives answers to several clarifying questions about the foundation budget and Chapter 70.

Arvanitis: as per the local target aid share, communities should be paying 46% of their budgets to education (p. 5 line 12). Torres: Shutesbury is paying 53%. DeChiara: every group has a different perspective on per capita income; because on paper Amherst is the poorest, how will they respond? Torres: Amherst's income has been rising as a result of hotel and meals tax revenue; depending on how they grow, they may not benefit from the statutory method; they have identified themselves as having a heavy social needs burden; Amherst's calculation is based on a population number that is 40% full-time college students; at the regional level, we all benefit from amount of aid Amherst receives.

Torres: Shutesbury wants acknowledgement of the grandfathering benefits others receive; of the three small towns, Shutesbury is the poorest. Arvanitis, referring to Appendix D "Method for the Transition to the Statutory Method" page 2: this shows what we would have paid in FY15 using the statutory method; sustainability is a very important factor; we have very good points that were missed by the working group, i.e., the ability to pay. Arvanitis states that he is impressed by the recommendation to start by meeting with the select boards and finance committees of the other towns as they are the most likely to understand the argument that there is a flaw in charging the same per pupil amount to each town. Stein: Leverett's income is skewed by one wealthy individual; are we the poorest? Lacy: if the wealth of Leverett's one person is deleted there isn't a significant change. Arvanitis: does the Select Board understand the proposal enough to be able to talk with the other towns? Vinskey: yes, the proposal makes sense and yes, we can convince the other towns although he doesn't feel he can present the case in a clear and concise way; we need some one who can answer the tough questions. DeChiara agrees and recommends saying we are interested in the statutory method and have come up with a new fair approach by using the five-year rolling average. Arvanitis: we need to get out early in the presentation that we are not there to go straight into the statutory method; we need to talk about why the statutory method is more equitable and fair and how a transition to the statutory method can be done in four years. Arvanitis: we would like to see some of poorer towns receive the economic benefit of the statutory method. Stein: we

are a collective of towns and, rather than imposing the statutory method, we want to work together. DeChiara: we are asking the other towns to consider a different alternative method. Lacy: the discussion about hybrid methods led to the percentage idea as a transition plan for getting to the statutory method over several years. Lacy: the SRASSC has presented the results of their research. Torres: both the Select Board and the Finance Committee need to vote. Stocker: whom will we need to convince? Torres: the regional superintendent and finance director, select boards and finance committees. Houle supports Shutesbury convening the meeting and suggests opening with Shutesbury's desire to transition to the statutory method over four years then explain the plan for doing so. Torres notes that it will take time for others to absorb the facts and calculations; a second meeting may be needed. DeChiara: the challenge is to shift the dialogue from what it usually is and to change the conversation; we are doing due diligence and reporting in. Hirschfield: to simplify, we are talking about everybody paying the same amount per student or using a method based on the ability to pay. DeChiara: what the town is able to pay is a different focus. Hirschfield: the starting point may be that Shutesbury feels the impact more heavily; suggests encouraging others to read the SRASSC report. Torres suggests asking Roger Hatch/Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to attend. Vinskey suggests having Hatch read the SRASSC report. Arvanitis: the report dispels some of the myths; this is about the concept of the ability to pay versus all towns paying the same per pupil amount; we have found a way to transition to the statutory method over several years though other factors may come into play that we are not able to reliably predict. DeChiara: we want this to happen next fiscal year; the region should not be concerned with getting less money because the bottom line is the same. Stein: how it is apportioned will be different. Hirschfield: what do we need to decide tonight? Stein: the Select Board and FinCom need to vote on whether to accept the SRASSC recommendation then plan for two presentation meetings. Stocker notes the need for Hatch to review the report before the presentation. Stein asks to hear a motion to accept the "Report from the Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee, September 29, 2015." The motion is moved by DeChiara, seconded by Vinskey and accepted unanimously by the Select Board. Stocker moves the Finance Committee accept the "Report from the Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee, September 29, 2015." This motion is seconded and accepted unanimously by the Finance Committee. After considering which parties to include in the meeting, it is recommended that the following will be invited: the Amherst/Pelham Regional School Committee, the finance committees and select boards from each town, the Regional superintendent and finance director, the finance director for the town of Amherst and Roger Hatch. Hirschfield suggests the report be sent to Hatch and the invitation letter be drafted. Stein, representing the Select Board and Hirschfield, representing the FinCom will meet to review any recommendations/changes suggested by Hatch. Hanson, noting the benefit of starting with a small group and preliminarily convincing folks, suggests doing an initial presentation to the Leverett and Pelham Select Board and FinCom chairpersons. Hirschfield states that he is inclined to agree with Hanson, as it will be more manageable to address the issue of equal pay/ability to pay in a smaller group. DeChiara recommends holding the meeting in the Amherst Regional Middle School library. Stein appreciates Hanson's recommendation as she feels a cooperative meeting will be better. Arvanitis:

select boards and finance committees will be better able to understand Shutesbury's report and then present it to others. Stein: Shutesbury will convene the joint meeting as we have a report to present. Hirschfield suggests beginning the presentation with a PowerPoint outline/summary and giving the full report later. DeChiara: the PowerPoint presentation will take folks through the information. Stein notes the importance of Arvanitis's presence for the presentation; in this first of two meetings the report summary will be presented and the report given out for review; questions will be answered during the second meeting. Vinskey suggests having the PowerPoint mirror the report. Torres: the report is a public document. Arvanitis agrees to use an outline to keep the presentation on track; the goal is to present in such a way those attending will have a background for understanding the report. Walton: we have the document as the source, the objective is to sell it; the key points in PowerPoint slides could be effective in presenting. Arvanitis: this is why we are starting with the leadership – those capable of understanding the report. Houle: condense the presentation into five slides; we are proposing a change in philosophy; do it in such a way that folks will want to see the full document at the end of the presentation. Hirschfield volunteers to summarize though needs someone who understands the material to assist him. Vinskey: Arvanitis will be able to do a polished presentation. It is agreed that Hirschfield and Arvanitis will work on the summary. Stein: the goal is to hold the meeting in November; the report needs Hatch's review first. All Select Board members agree for Torres to share the SRASSC 9.29.15 report with Hatch/DESE. Stein: if there is significant feedback, we will need a follow-up meeting. Target dates and timing are considered: 11.14.15 with 12.5.15 as a backup. Torres will verify space availability. Stein affirms the well-done work of the SRASSC. All present acknowledge the work done by Torres and Arvanitis.

Administrative Actions:

1. Select Board signs Celebrate Shutesbury volunteer thank you letters.

List of Documents and other Items used during the meeting:

1. "Report from the Shutesbury Regional Assessment Summer Study Committee, September 29, 2015"

Future Select Board meetings at Shutesbury Town Hall:

October 20, 2015 6:00pm; 7:00pm, All Boards Meeting

November 4, 2015 6:30pm

Meeting is adjourned at 8:32pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Avis Scott

Administrative Secretary