

Shutesbury Select Board Meeting Minutes
March 4, 2020 Shutesbury Town Hall

Select Board members present: Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil/Chair, Elaine Puleo, and April Stein
Staff present: Becky Torres/Town Administrator; Linda Avis Scott/Administrative Secretary
Finance Committee members present: Eric Stocker, Bob Groves, Weezie Houle, Jim Hemingway, Jim Walton, and Ajay Khashu
Personnel Board members present: Jim Walton, Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil, and Peg Ross.

Guest: Shelby Ashline/Greenfield Recorder News Editor; Chris O'Neil/Custodian

At 7:04pm, Makepeace-O'Neil calls the Select Board meeting to order; Stocker calls the Finance Committee to order and Ross calls the Personnel Board to meeting to order.

Agenda review: Torres requests the addition of an appointment to the Town Buildings Committee. Makepeace-O'Neil suggests a brief conversation about Town Hall coronavirus cleaning protocols.

Public Comment: None offered.

Discussion Topics:

1. Municipal Employee FY 21 Wage Increase: Torres reviews the "Annual Employee Increase" document, specifically, the elementary school union COLA (cost of living adjustment) increase of 2.25% plus step increases of 3-4.5% resulting in overall salary increases of 5.25-6.75%. Puleo verifies that these increases are part of the school union's three-year contract; negotiations for a new contract are underway. Torres to Stein's question: a 1% non-union employee COLA increase will cost approximately \$7,500. Groves notes the hard work done to address the regional assessment method and suggests that in the context of those in town with limited incomes, the money saved on the assessment go to reduce taxes not to salary increases; after the final payments on the fire and dump trucks are made, these funds should also go to reduce taxes. Per Groves, his goal is to push back against legitimate requests for funding in order to reduce taxes for those finding it difficult to afford living in town; the Town just made the "equitable argument" for the assessment method. Torres: in response to Groves objection to maintaining debt capacity, transferring the fire truck and dump truck borrowing to capital stabilization will help with the need for at least one million dollars in capital spending in the next year or two. Torres confirms for Khashu that the discussion is about non-union employees; the police union increase of 3% is via their contract. Torres: the new elementary school transportation budget numbers indicate that Shutesbury will see an increase from \$65,000 to \$87,000 for the coming school year; Leverett will see a 30% increase as well. Torres will be meeting with Leverett Town Administrator McGinnis and Regional Finance Director Doug Slaughter on 3.6.20 and expects to have additional information for the 3.10.20 FinCom meeting. Stein: the annual inflation rate is projected to be 2.5%; a 1-3% COLA range is usually discussed. Stein moves the town non-union employees receive a 2.5% COLA; the motion is seconded by Puleo. Torres notes that Personnel Board members Walton and Armstrong have created a new tool to track

salaries. Groves: health care is part of employee compensation. Torres: employees contribute 25% to the cost of health insurance; depending on the amount of the COLA increase, there have been some years when the health insurance increase was more than the COLA. Stocker: are employees being paid enough anyway; the whole situation may need to be looked at. Torres: FRCOG recently produced new salary charts; the Personnel Board needs to review the town's salaries. Torres notes that the Police Department mid-year salary increase has paid off and the Fire Department training funds are benefiting retention; taking action to be more competitive really helps. Stocker: retention saves money. Groves: how much can we afford to pay and which services are the most important? Stein: what percent of our budget is \$22,000? Scott asks those present to consider how it might feel for non-union employees to receive a lower COLA than the 3% police union employees will receive. Groves: the circular game needs to be addressed. Puleo: there was an agreement to try and follow the police contract. Stein: maybe 3% should be considered. Makepeace-O'Neil: a 3% COLA is .28% of the overall budget. Torres: some of our employees are hourly, some are salaried; part-timers generally do not receive overtime pay. Stein amends the motion on the table to a 3% COLA for non-union employees; Puleo seconds the motion. Walton: the 2.5% increase was related to the annual inflation rate. Houle reminds those present about the percentage increase received by school union personnel. Torres: contract employees agree to the COLA received by non-union, non-contract employees. Torres to Walton's question: the Police Department has three part-time officers and one full-time officer, in addition to the Chief; one-full time officer is still needed. Groves: the Chief has reduced coverage hours. Walton: the Police Department increase is a small portion of the budget. Houle again reminds those present of the significant increases received by school employees. Puleo: the elementary school is seen as a separate entity that decides what their union increases will be. Ross: some of their training requirements are paid by the school. Stein: Shutesbury's school teachers are paid less than Amherst's school teachers. Puleo explains how the school union negotiations work and that Shutesbury teachers are paid less than those in the other Union #28 schools. Stocker: the Social Security increase is 2.8%. Stein notes the need to support the Town's employees and that retention saves money. Puleo: newly hired employees will ask for more money; a small number of people in Town Hall are doing all the work. Stein appreciates Groves' point about those on a fixed income; 3% was saved on the regional assessment; a 3% COLA increase for employees is only a .28% increase in the total budget. Stocker: the overall budget increase is low. Groves restates his goal of fiscal responsibility to the tax payor. Stein: a 3% increase will give a message of appreciation. Stocker: most of that increase will be eaten up by inflation. Houle moves the FinCom support an increase in municipal employee salaries of 3%; Khashu seconds the motion. Five FinCom members vote in favor of the motion and Groves votes nay; the motion carries. For the Personnel Board, Makepeace-O'Neil moves the Board support a 3% COLA; Walton seconds the motion that passes unanimously. The Select Board motion passes unanimously. Walton suggests that to reduce the emotional component of future COLA discussions, concepts on which to base the discussion be developed. The Finance Committee and Personnel Board adjourn at 8:00pm.

2. Annual Town Meeting Calendar: Per Torres, the goal is to wrap up the budget and warrant during the 3.31.20 meeting, however, there may need to be an extra meeting on

4.7.20 or 4.9.20. Makepeace-O'Neil suggests considering quotes for the cost of printing the warrant to reduce staff time and pressure close to annual town meeting.

3. Election Worker & Registrar of Voters Appointments: Puleo moves and Stein seconds a motion to re-appoint Gail Fleischaker to the Registrars of Voters; the motion passes unanimously. Election worker appointments will be considered during the 3.17.20 meeting.
4. Town Buildings Committee Appointment: Stein moves and Puleo seconds a motion to appoint Frank D. McGinn, III to the Town Buildings Committee; the motion passes unanimously.
5. *Greenfield Recorder* News Editor Shelby Ashline interviews the Select Board.
6. Town Administrator Updates:
 - a. Puleo moves the Select Board sign the 3.4.20 letter to Jeff Lacy answering questions he submitted to the Board; the motion is seconded by Stein and passes unanimously.
 - b. Stein moves the Select Board sign the 3.4.20 letter to State Representative Natalie Blais regarding the Town's submittal of a Statement of Interest for the MSBA Accelerated Repair Program; the motion is seconded by Puleo and passes unanimously.
 - c. Makepeace-O'Neil requests Custodian Chris O'Neil to pay increased attention to disinfecting door handles, tables, and bathrooms which he agrees to do. To assist with education of Town Hall employees and visitors, Makepeace will forward signs/educational materials being used at Amherst College to the Town Administrator and Administrative Secretary.

At 9:43pm, Makepeace-O'Neil moves the Select Board enter an executive session for reason #3 to discuss strategy with respect to litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the government's litigating position, salt contamination/Watkins, only to review minutes then return to open session; Puleo seconds the motion. Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; Puleo: aye; and Stein: aye.

Open session resumes at 9:46pm.

At 9:46pm, Puleo moves the Select Board enter an executive session for reason #3 to discuss strategy with respect to litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the government's litigating position, regarding dog issue, only to review minutes then return to open session; Stein seconds the motion. Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; Puleo: aye; and Stein: aye.

Open session resumes at 9:47pm.

Continue Town Administrator Updates:

- d. Torres reports on her 3.2.20 meeting with Treasurer Ryan Mailloux and loan advisor Lynne Welsh: because the note will come due in early April, the plan is to apply for a serial 15-year loan necessitating moving quickly to sell the \$900,000 at 4% for an an

aggressive interest rate. Per Torres, Gayle Huntress/MLP Manager met with Bill Ennen and learned that the \$300,000 State reimbursement for the drops will arrive during the next fiscal year; these funds could be used against the \$900,000 or be used to repay the \$274,000 transferred from capital stabilization by town meeting vote. The Select Board supports using the \$300,000 towards the \$900,000 debt. Torres notes that the \$165,000 “make ready” grant remains pending and explains that Mailloux has the authority to move forward once the loan arrangements come together; the next step is for Mailloux to meet with the FinCom.

- e. Town Administrator office remediation began 3.4.20; the Police Department evidence room remediation will occur next; reconstruction will start after remediation is complete.

Administrative Actions:

1. Select Board members sign vendor warrants totaling \$63,182.76.
2. Select Board members sign payroll warrants totaling \$94,436.46.
3. Select Board members sign broadband warrants totaling \$2625.00.
4. Stein moves and Puleo seconds a motion to accept Barry Field’s resignation from the Conservation Commission; the motion passes unanimously. A thank you note for Field’s service is signed.
5. Approval of the 2.18.20 meeting minutes is carried over to a future meeting.

At 10:07 pm, Puleo moves and Stein seconds a motion to adjourn the meeting; the motion passes unanimously.

Documents and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

1. “Town of Shutesbury Annual Employee Increase” packet
2. 2.24.20 letter from Penny Kim, Shutesbury Town Democratic Committee
3. 2.28.20 email from Shelby Ashline “Selectboard Profile for Greenfield Recorder”
4. 3.4.20 letter to Jeff Lacy
5. 3.4.20 letter to State Representative Natalie Blais
6. 3.4.20 letter to Barry Field

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Avis Scott
Administrative Secretary