

Shutesbury Select Board Meeting Minutes
January 12, 2021 Virtual Meeting Platform

Select Board members present: Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil/Chair, April Stein, and Rita Farrell
Staff present: Becky Torres/Town Administrator; Linda Avis Scott/Administrative Secretary
Finance Committee members present: Jim Walton/Chair, Susie Mosher, Bob Groves, Jim Hemingway, Melanie Chartier, Ajay Khashu, and George Arvanitis
School Committee members present: Dan Hayes and Steve Sullivan

Guests: Police Chief Dan Fernandes, Miriam DeFant and Mary Lou Ferro-Conca/Historical Commission, Jeff Lacy, Ari K., Diane Jacoby, Bethany Rose, Leslie Luchonok, Jennifer Culkeen/Union 28 Superintendent of Schools, Bruce Turner/Union 28 Director of Finance and Operations and Jackie Mendonsa/Shutesbury Elementary School Principal

Makepeace-O'Neil calls the meeting to order at 6:24pm.

Agenda Review: No changes noted.

Public Comment: Not included due to the briefness of the Select Board meeting prior to the 7:00 three board meeting.

Jeff Lacy requests to make a brief public comment relative to the Shutesbury Elementary School budget discussion. Makepeace-O'Neil grants Lacy's request. Lacy: a couple of years ago, he created a graph depicting enrollment, budget and staffing levels over time and how they react to each other over the years; this a helpful tool to see trends over the years. Lacy recommends school officials be asked to maintain this data.

Discussion Topics:

1. Police Chief Fernandes' Update: Police Chief Dan Fernandes states his intention to pursue an opportunity outside of police work; he has submitted his resignation effective 1.6.21 with his last day being 3.6.21. Fernandes: this decision is the best for his future; appreciates the great people around him, the staff, officers, and Select Board; the opportunity to serve as chief has been a good learning experience; he has been lucky to meet a lot of nice Shutesbury people, to be in a department supported by the community, and thanks everyone in Town Hall; he has been working side by side with great people; the amount of participation in Shutesbury's town government is amazing, he will miss his work. Makepeace-O'Neil appreciates how well Fernandes has done; he has exceeded expectations. Stein appreciates Fernandes' philosophy of police work and his graciousness during the intense discussions regarding the Black Lives Matter banner. Farrell is impressed by Fernandes' willingness to engage with the public and being a good listener. Fernandes to Stein's question: he has an idea for a potential candidate; there is a dedicated place in Shutesbury for a full time chief, someone who is proactive. Torres and Fernandes are working on another open forum about the specifics of police work. Fernandes notes the impact the officers can have at the school by engaging with children at their level; officers understand the importance of being kind, friendly, and courteous. Fernandes will be available to assist with a smooth transition. Torres: based on input during the 1.5.21 meeting, folks are still eager for more information about the work

of Shutesbury's police. Fernandes: there are a lot of great things that can be done to move toward as much transparency as possible. Farrell moves and Stein seconds a motion to accept Fernandes resignation. Roll call vote: Farrell: aye, Stein: aye, and Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; the motion carries.

2. Letter Regarding Inappropriate Emails: Members review the 1.12.21 version of the letter to Rolf Cachat-Schilling regarding the tone and content of recent emails sent to town officials. Farrell moves and Stein seconds a motion to approve and sign the 1.12.21 letter to Rolf Cachat-Schilling. Roll call vote: Farrell: aye, Stein: aye, and Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; the motion carries.
3. Personnel Action Form: Stein moves and Farrell seconds a motion to approve the Personnel Action Form for Mary Ryan as Board of Health contact tracer. Torres: Mary Ryan will serve as a backup contact tracer for the Board of Health; Board member Arlene Read has been performing the contract tracing; currently, Ryan is conducting contact tracing for Leverett and will be on call for Shutesbury in case Read needs support. Per Torres, the Board of Health COVID-19 grant, in place through 6.30.21, will cover Ryan's salary. Roll call vote: Farrell: aye, Stein: aye, and Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; the motion carries.
4. Newsletter: Stein agrees to draft an article on behalf of the Select Board for the winter issue of *Our Town*.
5. Finance/School Committee: Jim Walton/Chair calls Finance Committee meeting to order at 7:01pm. Dan Hayes/Chair is the only member of the School Committee present at this time (member Steve Sullivan joins later in meeting). Bruce Turner/Union 28 Director of Finance and Operations oversees the review of the 11.19.20 version of the FY22 Shutesbury Elementary School budget via screenshare. Turner to Walton's question: to date, there have been no changes to the 11.19.20 version. Turner reviews the "Major Drivers" (pg. 2) contributing to the proposed 1.59% increase of \$37,107 and notes that Shutesbury's proportionate share of the Union 28 costs is less for FY22 than in FY21 because a central office is no longer being supported. Turner reviews the highlights of the specific drivers (pgs. 3-6).
Turner explains that Rural Aid (line 109) may not be needed this year and could possibly be rolled into next year. Turner to Khashu's question: the \$30,000 in Rural Aid was a FY20 State appropriation; because of the pandemic, the State allowed this appropriation to be rolled over to the FY21 budget; because we have not been "in school" regularly, there have been significant budget savings; if it is not used it will go into free cash, however, if rollover is allowed, it will offset next year's budget; at this point, it is not needed to supplement the budget and it is not known whether rollover will be allowed. Turner confirms for Groves that Rural Aid is a revenue source.
Jackie Mendonsa/SES Principal to Groves question: yes, preschool is meeting in-person in a smaller cohort due to COVID-19 requirements; a high number of the preschool students have special needs; for the hybrid program, they are in the school for a short time in the morning with a virtual component in the afternoon. Mendonsa to Walton's question: there is not a big jump in the salaries for special education staff, there have

been no new hires, and the paraprofessional line item was readjusted to reflect the actual. Mosher asks if the School Committee would be able to draw up a plan for the use of School Choice funds. Hayes: the School Committee will take the request under advisement; School Choice funds are relatively new and, as a Committee, we will work with administration on the best use of these funds; these times are very difficult; leftover funds are returned to the town; no contingencies are built into the budget and, in that respect, the school community has a great relationship with the town; we give you the nuts and bolts of what it takes to run the school. Hayes appreciates questions especially during the time of COVID-19; the para educators are based on the needs of the children; the preschool is a necessary program for these students and we do everything we can to keep our children in our school. Farrell asks for the balance in School Choice and an estimate of funds in the current budget that might be returned to the town. Turner: the School Choice account is \$140,000; about \$10,000-20,000 might be returned to the town. Mendonsa: there are fewer costs to running a virtual school, i.e., meals, supplies, substitutes, so there will be some funds coming back. Groves: School Choice funds should be seen as a revenue source; the FinCom needs the School Choice numbers in a timely way. Hayes: the increase in the number of homeschoolers does not affect School Choice funds; the School Committee will need to have a discussion about School Choice funds; we did not expect the choice funds to accumulate; in the past, we were reluctant to use choice to support costs. Groves asks the School Committee to come back to the FinCom with recommendations on the use of School Choice funds. Mendonsa: the amount in School Choice is trending up because the teachers' children are now counted; this speaks to the quality of our school. Hayes: what the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) allows is a part of this; the School Committee tries to be as transparent as possible regarding the budget and welcomes questions. Hemingway asks if ~ \$20,000 will be returned to town this year, what was returned in FY20 and how have CARES Act funds been used. Turner: CARES Act funds were used for work on air handlers, technology for one-to-one devices for remote learning and there are remaining funds to use. Mendonsa: we are grateful to the town for getting what was needed to have a safe and healthy school during such a really tough year; our students and staff are very lucky to have good air, drinking water sources and devices for high quality home learning; the school feels really supported. Hayes: as a School Committee member, it was a difficult decision to reopen the school; the Committee received letters with different viewpoints some of which were difficult. Hayes thanks the School Committee and Board of Health for their constant vigilance and access; a great example of how the town has come together. Torres clarifies that \$26,000 was returned to the town because CARES Act funds were utilized for the necessary computers. Mosher: the school is having a good financial year because of a very difficult year; we are looking forward to a normal FY22. Turner to Arvanitis' question: the salary increases are a combination of COLA and steps. Mendonsa: because of new enrollments, further increases to the salary lines may be needed. Turner: grants require a "maintenance of effort" which means budgeting enough in the right lines. Turner to Arvanitis' question: the \$30,000 in Rural Aid was a special appropriation by the state; it is important for small rural districts and may come back. Jennifer Culkeen/Union 28 Superintendent of Schools: twice yearly book keeping and reporting is required.

Arvanitis appreciates Turner's presentation as does Makepeace-O'Neil. Groves recognizes that there are unknowns and, as a FinCom member, recommends level funding and asks how level funding would impact services. Hayes: a review would be required to determine impacts; our goal is to have a budget for staffing to meet the needs of the school. Khashu: the school will have a unique challenge next year; despite the efforts of staff, some students will have regressed; the staff will need to meet these cognitive challenges and assist students to recover; given these challenges it does not seem to be the time to constrain the school; we need to preserve the resources the school has; it is not a time to level fund. Hayes: Khashu makes a good point; it is not only the Shutesbury Elementary School students, it is the homeschoolers and those that move to Shutesbury from another district; we are fortunate in the remote learning we have been able to implement; the state will be pushing the MCAS; we will be doing assessments when the students are back in the building; special needs students are being taught in-person to lessen their falling behind; we will do what we can to help students be successful.

Mendonsa to Walton's question: the budget is solid for what we need to provide right now; the question is will we have enough manpower for the future to recover what we need to make up, i.e., children trying to learn to read remotely; nothing takes the place of in-person learning; we are worried about what we are going to see when we get back to full in-school learning, i.e., academics, social and emotional needs, and kids not being with other kids for a year. Culkeen to Hemingway's question: per DESE, a smaller MCAS test will be done during a certain window in the spring.

Leslie Luchonok: as an elderly citizen living around the corner from the school, he appreciates Hayes' and Mendonsa's presentations as well as those of Turner and Culkeen. Hayes appreciates the complements; the administration has worked really hard during difficult times; everyone has this overriding stress and pressure and he sees the toll on Mendonsa in particular. Hayes: the School Committee will look at the School Choice question; uncertainty is difficult; appreciates Culkeen for moving the central office into the schools which is a win-win by reducing costs and having administrators present in the schools. Walton expresses appreciation on for all involved in running the school during the current challenges; they are demonstrating very good results. Hayes: it is great that the town and school work together; the school is integrated into the town. Culkeen is appreciative and most grateful for the town's support of their school. Makepeace-O'Neil is very impressed with the efforts of the school officials and all the committee members present; all the hard work is paying off with this wonderful budget and the education students are receiving.

At 8:01pm, the Select Board unanimously adjourns their meeting. The Finance Committee continues.

Documents and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

1. 1.12.21 letter to Rolf Cachat-Schilling
2. Personnel Action Form for Mary Ryan/Board of Health contact tracer
3. 11.19.20 version of the FY22 Shutesbury Elementary School

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Avis Scott

Administrative Secretary