

Shutesbury Select Board Meeting Minutes
February 23, 2022 Virtual Meeting Platform

Select Board members present: Rita Farrell/Chair, Melissa Makepeace-O’Neil, and Eric Stocker
Staff present: Becky Torres/Town Administrator; Linda Avis Scott/Administrative Secretary
Fire Chief Study Group: April Stein/Personnel Board, Elaine Puleo/Select Board Representative, Fire Chief Walter Tibbetts, and Acting Police Chief Kristin Burgess, Becky Torres ex-officio
Guests: Leslie Bracebridge, Doc Pruyne/*The Reminder*, Rachel Schwab Rehorka, Paul Vlach, Penny Kim, Tim Logan, Wm Levine, Laura Napolitano/National Grid, and Gail Fleischaker

Farrell calls the meeting to order at 5:48pm.

Agenda Review: No changes per the posted agenda.

Public Comment: Scott: an email was received from Mary Lou Conca subsequent to the 2.1.22 public comment period, “Public Comment – Shutesbury Select Board – Please Read as I am Unable to Attend”. Select Board members duly note receipt of Conca’s email.

Discussion Topics:

1. Open Space Plan Letter of Support: Farrell: the Board’s letter affirms support for the updated Open Space Plan submitted to the State (Division of Conservation Services); having an updated plan allows the Town to be eligible for relevant grant funding.
 - Makepeace-O’Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to approve issuance of the 2.23.22 Select Board’s letter of support for the Open Space Plan (submitted to the Division of Conservation Services/Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs). Roll call vote: Makepeace-O’Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.
2. Senior Exemption Letter: Torres: State Representative Natalie Blais’ office requests a letter from the Select Board and Town Clerk verifying the 2021 annual town meeting vote authorizing the establishment of a (means-tested) senior property tax exemption.
 - Stocker moves and Makepeace-O’Neil seconds a motion to approve sending letter to Representative Blais confirming the 2021 annual town meeting vote affirming the Means-Tested Senior Property Tax Exemption. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O’Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.
3. Appraisal Report: On 2.24.22, Makepeace-O’Neil will learn when the appraisal reports for her three properties can be forwarded to the State Ethics Commission; the Commission will determine whether Makepeace-O’Neil has a financial interest in potential large scale solar installations that may be constructed on abutting properties.
4. Fire Chief Study Committee Presentation: Farrell confirms the Select Board received a copy of the “Fire Chief Study Committee Recommendations”. Puleo screenshares the document noting that members appreciated the opportunity to serve on the Committee. Per Puleo, the Committee reviewed the job description and what the fire chief does/does not do; the list of those responsibilities that go beyond what might be considered “normal” were reviewed; the current job description does not have a residency requirement however the current contract does; the salaries and structures for nearby and like towns were reviewed; most surrounding towns are seeking full time chiefs. Puleo continues: interviews with current members of

firefighting team were conducted; the team has confidence in their chief and emphasized the need for a full time chief and more volunteers; 22 non-committee members attended the 1.26.22 public forum during which participants stated great support for maintaining a full time chief, concern that efficient emergency response be maintained, the need for involvement with hiring and some stipulation with respect to residency. Per Puleo: the Committee recommends a “strong” full-time chief as per Mass General Law and that the chief live no more than a 35 minute commute from Shutesbury, be required to join the Franklin County Fire Chief’s Association, recommends joining the Western Mass Fire Chief’s mentoring program; if there are no qualified applicants, the Committee suggests hiring a part-time Deputy Chief and part-time Chief.

Makepeace-O’Neil thanks the Committee for their time and report. Stocker appreciates the Committee’s work; the recommendation effectively maintains the current status which is what the town wants; the town strongly supported a pay increase for a full-time chief. Puleo: the group entertained a shared chief model however such a model does not make sense at this time. Stein: a shared chief did not seem feasible for a number of reasons. Fire Chief Walter Tibbetts cites several shared chief models in Franklin County and notes that the situations vary and seem to work in each particular instance; what works in one town(s) would not work in another.

Stein: the Personnel Committee will consider how to adjust the job description to reflect what Tibbetts actually does; it is often the case in small towns that there is not a specific Fire Department maintenance person. Penny Kim suggests that, in the future, the Town be attentive to what might be emerging in the region, i.e., provision of emergency medical services and trends in sub-regional agreements. Stein: there are a number of local towns that subcontract their ambulance services; Shutesbury has agreements with surrounding towns to ensure quick responses. Tibbetts: this was a Fire Chief Study Committee; some towns found it hard to staff their individual ambulances so established the South County Ambulance Service; most places do not have enough staff to reach the paramedic level; all fire and police staff are first responders as required by law; the Amherst agreement gives Shutesbury the best coverage. Rachel Schwab Rehorka states her concern about maintaining a full time chief; the firefighters want a full time chief they can trust and will provide training; it is worrisome that a small isolated town would not have a fulltime chief; from her own experience, she greatly appreciates having a full-time chief.

Puleo to Farrell’s question about next steps: the Committee is handing our recommendations off to you for posting of the position. Stein will bring ways to review the job description to the Personnel Board. Regarding the job description, Stein notes that the most clarification has to do with the distance from town; there is not a lot for the Personnel Board to do before posting the position which needs to be done in a timely way. Torres: it is important the Select Board require the chief to live within 35 minutes from town as the police chief is required to do; Tibbetts brought up the need for consistency between the two chiefs; the Personnel Board is meeting 2.28.22 and will have a revised job description for either the 3.1.22 or 3.15.22 Select Board meeting. Tibbetts to Tim Logan’s question about the 35 minute factor and response time: closer is always better; a requirement for the chief to live in town may not result in an application; the 35 minute factor may result in not having a chief who responds on overnights; a larger fire may be a bit of concern; we may need to look at having a part-time deputy chief to cover when the chief is not present; there is no easy fix. Stein: cultivating a deputy chief would fall on the shoulders of the new chief. Torres notes the need to review the deputy chief job description.

- Makepeace-O’Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to accept the “Fire Chief Study Committee Recommendations”. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O’Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.
 - Tibbetts moves and Stein seconds a motion to approve the final Fire Chief Study Committee meeting minutes. Roll call vote: Stein: aye, Tibbetts: aye, Burgess: aye, and Puleo: aye; the minutes are approved.
 - Makepeace-O’Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to disband the Fire Chief Study Committee. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O’Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries. All members are thanked for their commitment and work.
5. Public Hearing/National Grid/Wendell Road: Torres explains the pole hearing is required in order for National Grid to move pole locations along a section of Wendell Road; Laura Napolitano/National Grid is present to review the design and take comments from the audience; abutter notices were sent out. Napolitano reads from the “Petition for Pole and Wire Locations”: “National Grid to install (7) SO poles on Wendell Rd. beginning at a point approximately 308 feet southwest of the centerline of Wendell Rd. and Ames Haven Rd. and continuing approximately 800 feet in a southeast direction for services of new residential home” and notes that the goal is to serve 585 Wendell Road. Per Napolitano, the pole installation costs are paid for by the homeowner and are located in the right of way. Wm. Levine/property owner is eagerly awaiting electrical service. Levine confirms for Fire Chief Tibbetts that the line will be tied into the feed from the Wendell end of the road. Farrell: as a result of the public hearing, the Select Board will execute the “Order for Wire and Pole Locations”.
- Makepeace-O’Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to approve and sign the “Order for Wire and Pole Locations” to be certified by the Town Clerk. To Levine’s question, Napolitano refers him to the “job owner”, the person his electrician is working with at National Grid, for timeline information. Levine has already signed a contract with National Grid. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O’Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.
6. Police Study Committee Update: Makepeace-O’Neil: so far, the Committee has focused on information gathering, i.e., shared chief options, other towns’ police study surveys, budgets and the makeup of Franklin County departments; formulating Shutesbury’s survey was time consuming; tallying survey data will begin 2.24.22; interviews with the current officers will be brought back to the Committee. Of about 1600 surveys mailed to residents, 300 response envelopes have been received. The next Committee meeting is planned for 3.3.22
7. Regional Assessment Method Update: Farrell notes that the four town meeting on 2.10.22 went well and credits leadership from the Region’s Superintendent and Finance Director in moving the assessment method toward Shutesbury’s position of 100% statutory with a five year rolling average. Per Farrell, Shutesbury’s share of the assessment will decrease this year by 4%; guardrails were put in place so that no town will experience more than a 4% increase or decrease in a year; the Region will use federal funds to decrease the burden on towns; the 100% statutory with a five year rolling average will become the standard assessment method. Per Torres, the Regional school committee has yet to vote on the assessment method; Steve Sullivan/Shutesbury’s Regional Representative reported to the Regional School Committee that there were no complaints from any of the towns regarding this method. Farrell: it is a great relief to have this finally settled.

8. Town Hall Closure Status: Farrell: Town Hall is currently closed; after conferring with Torres earlier 2.23.22, reopening is recommended; those coming into the building will be requested to wear masks to protect vulnerable individuals and there is a policy requiring employees to wear masks. Farrell recommends reopening Town Hall effective 2.24.22 with masking until we are sure we are beyond the difficult parts of pandemic. Makepeace-O'Neil: per Mass.Gov, Shutesbury is listed as having 1742 vaccinated individuals based on the zip code given at the time of vaccination.
 - Makepeace-O'Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to reopen Town Hall to the public effective 2.24.22. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries. Torres will send a Town Announcement regarding the reopening of Town Hall.
9. Annual Town Meeting Date: Farrell: the town voted to hold annual town meeting on the last Saturday in April, however due to the pandemic, for the last two years the meeting was held later and outdoors. Acknowledging the amount of work it takes to arrange an outdoor meeting and noting the uncertainty regarding the pandemic, Farrell suggests holding annual town meeting outdoors and later than the last Saturday in April. Torres: after conferring with Town Clerk Grace Bannasch, we propose holding annual town meeting outdoors on Saturday 5.21.22 which will allow time for Bannasch to prepare the necessary election materials. Rehorka appreciates an outdoor meeting later in the year and recognizes the hard work of all involved.
 - Makepeace-O'Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to schedule annual town meeting for Saturday 5.21.22 at 9am. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.
10. Mass Cultural Council Contract: Torres screenshares the Mass Cultural Council Local Cultural Council grant contract for \$5,000; the Shutesbury Cultural Council has a competitive application process and the grant funds are well spent.
 - Makepeace-O'Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to accept the Mass Cultural Council grant of \$5,000. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.
11. FRCOG Bridge Academy Earmark Contract: Torres confirms that the \$4,600 contract will reimburse the Town for the cost of the two officers currently attending the Bridge Academy; another officer will be eligible to attend the Academy on 7.1.22 and another FRCOG contract is expected for FY23.
 - Makepeace-O'Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to approve and execute the "Agreement for Services with FRCOG: Police Reform Earmark for Officers to Attend Bridge Academy Training". Roll call vote: Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.
12. State Police Dispatch Services Agreement Renewal: Per Torres, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) started in 1994 and was last renewed in 2013; the MOU describes the provision of State Police services at no cost to the Town.
 - Makepeace-O'Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to renew the "Agreement for Providing Public Safety Dispatch Services with the Massachusetts State Police".

Roll call vote: Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.

13. Town Administrator Updates: The updates are carried over to the 3.1.22 meeting.

Administrative Actions:

1. Select Board members will sign vendor warrants #22-18 totaling \$121,197.21.
2. Select Board members will sign payroll warrants #22-18 totaling \$119,972.03.
3. Makepeace moves and Farrell seconds a motion to approve the 1.19.22 meeting minutes. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stocker: abstain, and Farrell: aye; the 1.19.22 minutes are approved as presented.
4. Makepeace-O'Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to approve the 2.1.22 meeting minutes. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stocker: aye and Farrell: abstain; the 2.1.22 minutes are approved as presented.

At 7:05pm, Makepeace-O'Neil moves and Stocker seconds a motion to adjourn the meeting. Roll call vote: Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stocker: aye, and Farrell: aye; the motion carries.

Documents and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

1. 2.1.22 email from Mary Lou Conca "Public Comment – Shutesbury Select Board – Please Read as I am Unable to Attend"
2. 2.23.22 Select Board letter to Melissa Cryan/Division of Conservation Services/Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
3. Senior Exemption confirmation letter
4. "Fire Chief Study Committee Recommendations 2/9/22"
5. National Grid "Petition for Pole and Wire Locations" and "Order for Pole and Wire Locations"
6. FY22 Massachusetts Cultural Council "Local Cultural Council Allocation for Shutesbury Cultural Council"
7. "Agreement for Services with FRCOG: Police Reform Earmark for Officers to Attend Bridge Academy Training"
8. "Agreement for Providing Public Safety Dispatch Services with the Massachusetts State Police"

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Avis Scott
Administrative Secretary