

SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes for Oct. 21, 2003
Shutesbury Town Hall

Members present: Chairman Eric Stocker, Rita Farrell, Al Beswick, Patrick J. Callahan.
Guests present: Selectmen Becky Torres, Ralph Armstrong, Joseph Jacobs. Also, David Ames, Leslie Bracebridge, Julie Taylor, Barbara Goodhind, Kathy Carey.
The meeting was called to order at 6:37 p.m.

Patrick agreed to be the recording secretary for the committee.

The committee reviewed documents prepared by Eric outlining the town's current level of reserve funds, free cash and stabilization. Included was an analysis of what would be the impact if the town agreed to spend \$166,300 from current free cash to fund the engineering plans for the Leverett/Cooleyville/Prescott road project, and what level of reserves would remain if the project is rejected. Committee members discussed what level of detail should be included in the fact sheets that were to be made available at the upcoming special Town Meeting. It was generally agreed that the town currently has a healthy amount in reserve. Eric agreed to make a public presentation at the special Town Meeting. Al expressed his adamant opposition to using free cash for this purpose and said he would present his views to the voters at the special Town Meeting. A motion was made and seconded to recommend the use of free cash for the L/C/P road project. It was approved 3-1, with Eric, Rita, and Patrick voting yes, and Al voting no.

The committee briefly discussed a proposal from Penny Kim, chairwoman of the Personnel Committee, to make salary adjustments in a few salary lines. The consensus of the committee was that the 2 percent salary increases granted to town employees last year should remain unchanged. There was also a brief discussion of sentiment on the personnel committee that it should suspend operations because their recommendations were often ignored or overlooked by the selectmen and other boards.

The committee reviewed the latest expense reports for the first quarter of the year and concluded there didn't appear to be anything out of the ordinary in the report.

Eric and Rita agreed to continue as the committee's representatives on the Capital Planning Committee.

The committee agreed to retain the current budget forms that are to be sent to department heads and that they should be returned for review in late November or early December.

Under new business, Eric said members should review the committee's bylaws. This was prompted by a public letter sent by Michael Pill in which he said the process for the upcoming special Town Meeting was flawed in part because the Finance Committee had failed to make its recommendation on the road project 7 days in advance as required by the committee bylaws. Eric said in recent years, that timeline had not been followed.

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Al updated the committee on a recent School Committee meeting. There was discussion of the continued difficulty the Finance Committee is having in getting some key information from school officials. Al said there is considerable tension between the teachers and Tari Thomas, the principal. There was also brief discussion of what the Regional School Committee might be planning for the coming year's budget and what impact it will have on Shutesbury and the other two small towns in the district.

The next meeting was scheduled for Nov. 18 at 6:30 p.m. in Town Hall.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Submitted by Patrick J. Callahan.