

**SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
**Minutes for March 14, 2006**  
**Shutesbury Town Hall**

Members present: Eric Stocker, chairman, Al Beswick, Al Springer, Lori Tuominen, Russ Wilson, Russ Greco and Patrick J. Callahan. Guests: Rebecca Torres, selectwoman, David Dann, town administrator.

The meeting convened at 7:10 p.m.

The minutes of the Feb. 28 meeting were approved as amended.

Lori reported on the recent meeting of the Capital Planning Committee and commented on the interplay between that panel and the Finance Committee. She says it is unclear whether the best procedure is for the Finance Committee to say how much funding is likely to be available before priorities are made for each year's spending, or if the Capital Planning Committee should inform the Finance Committee first of its likely list of projects. This year, for example, the Finance Committee has at least informally agreed that about \$60,000 is available for capital projects with specifics to come from the other group.

Lori says the capital panel agreed not to spend \$26,000 for a new phone system at the elementary school or spend \$1,000 for a skating rink; approved spending \$30,000 for accessibility work at the library and add \$5,000 to the library capital fund; disapproved spending \$10,000 for the Conservation Commission land fund and \$18,000 for a skid unit for the Fire Department; the \$115,000 new dump truck will be paid for with borrowing so it comes off the capital list; spending \$2,000 for a new trailer for the highway department was approved as was spending \$23,000 to be added to the building maintenance fund. Lori says this list comes from an overall list of \$200,000 in requested items to be purchased over several years.

Becky Torres then briefed the committee on the Regional School budget situation. She says at this point all cuts are being made in personnel, staff and programs. There is a meeting set for March 25 for representatives of the four towns to discuss options. The meeting is set for the high school library.

Becky says all four member towns are in different financial positions this year. Amherst and Pelham are having the most difficulty and Amherst's situation is having a negative impact on the school budget. Becky argued for strong efforts to restore money cut from the budget. Becky and Eric put forth the argument that Shutesbury, because it is in better financial shape than Pelham or Amherst, should consider increasing its share of the regional budget by \$100,000 this year to prevent deeper budget cuts. Becky also says state support for local education is insufficient and that we should lobby for more money for the long run. The committee didn't take a formal vote on the matter. Patrick argued that the rhetoric on the issue was overheated and says some level of cuts is inevitable

because of Amherst's financial crunch, and that cuts don't necessarily mean severe degradation of the educational program.

If Shutesbury agrees to add funding to the regional budget, it would push the current proposed budget out of balance by up to \$200,000. David Dann reports that next year estimates are that free cash will generate \$160,000, so if free cash is used to balance the budget, much of that sum can be recovered. The committee was in general agreement that using free cash for operating expenses is bad practice, but didn't reach a final conclusion on how to close the current spending gap.

The committee then reviewed the revenue and expense reports. The building heating fund will need between \$2,000 to \$4,000 in new money before the end of the year, the Union 28 retirement account needs \$10,345, and the highway fuel account also needs \$2,000 to \$4,000.

David Dann was asked about the town's unemployment claims and says the town treasurer contests each claim, but is almost always overruled by the state.

The next meeting was set for March 28 at 7 p.m. Another meeting was set for April 11.

The committee adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Submitted by Patrick J. Callahan.