

**SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
**Minutes for April 21, 2009**  
**Shutesbury Town Hall**

Members present: Eric Stocker, chairman, Rus Wilson, Patrick J. Callahan, Lori Tuominen, Bill Wells and Elaine Puleo. Guests: David Dann, town administrator, Gary Hirshfield, potential Finance Committee member; Al Springer and Ralph Armstrong, selectmen and Gabe Voekler, town treasurer.

The meeting convened at 7:06 p.m.

Gabe Voelker discussed a property at 5 Haskins Way, near Lake Wyola, that has been awarded to the town from state land court. She says the house and land are assessed at \$141,000 and the house is in generally good condition. Gabe says the town has been trying to get payment of the back taxes since 1992, but neither the owners nor their families have responded. Right now, the town is owed \$18,822 in back taxes on the property and the town has spent about \$20,000 in legal fees to acquire it. Gabe says the property is a liability for the town and suggests that it be sold through a public auction as soon as possible. She says if the property is sold, once the taxes and legal fees are covered, the rest will be a financial gift to the town.

Gabe says any money from the sale of the property could be used to offset the still unknown cost of the gasoline cleanup at the fire station and that the Finance Committee should view this sale as a revenue source for next year.

Overall, Gabe says she has been working for several years to clear back tax title cases in town and last year this effort brought the town about \$35,000.

Elaine reported that the contract negotiations with the teachers were proceeding slowly and the next session was set for April 27.

She says the regional school committee had voted to adopt the so-called Tier 1 budget, which contained the lowest level of budget cuts. But because Amherst is facing a budget shortfall of \$3.5 million overall, it may be necessary for that town to adopt Tier II cuts, Elaine says. And an unwelcomed complication could arise if Amherst refused to adopt the current per-pupil formula for the regional budget. David Dann was asked to find out if the current agreement requires annual approval of all four member towns, or just three of four.

Lori reported that the search committee for a new town administrator was continuing its work.

Al Spring told the committee that contract negotiations with the police union were also proceeding.

Turning to the current year's budget, David says there is a deficit of about \$52,086.47, but there are funds that can be used to cover the shortfall. He also says there will be little or no free cash generated this year.

Eric discussed the status of the gasoline spill cleanup at the fire station and says so far about \$60,000 has been spent for phase I of the process. He says the town's consultant, Alan Weiss, told him the total cost of the cleanup could be several hundred thousand dollars. At this point it's unclear what the total cost will be, or how the town will fund it. One possible scenario would be that the soil beneath the fire station is contaminated to the degree that the building has to be razed. In that case, the town could borrow to build a new station and could get funding through that process.

David then went over the latest iteration of the 2010 budget. He says he has budgeted \$117,870 for lottery aid next year, a decrease of \$25,000 from the House budget figure. He did this, he says, because it's unknown what the Senate budget will look like, but it is likely to be lower than the House budget. He asked the committee if everyone was comfortable with this number and the consensus was yes.

David, the finance panel and the two selectmen then began a line-by-line review of the budget proposal with intention of cutting another half of 1 percent to bring the total to \$5,414,025. Among the budget lines that were changed was an \$8,510 reduction for the elementary school. Elaine was asked to tell the School Committee about this latest cut prior to Annual Town Meeting so they would know their budget line had been reduced slightly, along with many other lines, to bring the budget into final balance.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Submitted by Patrick J. Callahan.