

SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes for Jan. 28, 2004
Shutesbury Town Hall

Members present: Chairman Eric Stocker, Al Beswick, Patrick J. Callahan, Russ Wilson, Rita Farrell. Guests present: David Ames, Russ Greco, possible new Finance Committee member, Tari Thomas, Dan Hayes, Anne Lundberg, Linda Driscoll, and Steve Bannasch. The meeting convened at 7:05 p.m.

The minutes of the Jan. 6, 2004 meeting were unanimously approved. There was a general discussion of the Shutesbury Elementary School budget proposal. Al explained that \$21,900 from the SPED circuit –breaker had been discussed at the last School Committee meeting. There is a question about whether the money goes to the town, or directly to the school.

There was a review of various line items in the proposed school budget. Some of the line items appeared to be consolidations, and reflected a changed format from last year. Overall, the current spending calls for a 3.6 percent increase for the next fiscal year.

The principal, Tari Thomas, and School Committee members Anne Lundberg and Dan Hayes arrived around 7:30 p.m to discuss the budget proposal. Later Steve Bannasch arrived.

Anne said many of the line items in the budget have been moved and consolidated to reflect new state regulations aimed at regularizing school budgets across the Commonwealth. She also passed out a newspaper clipping about the circuit-breaker legislation.

Linda Driscoll and David Ames then arrived. Linda said the circuit-breaker money should be put into a revolving fund that can be used by the School Committee for unanticipated costs, such as special education costs. She said it's unclear whether the money in the account can be rolled over from year to year. This may supplant the current \$30,000 reserve kept by the Finance Committee for the same purpose, she said.

It was revealed that the teachers this year are getting a step and ½ plus a 2 percent cost of living raise. This is to make up for last year's agreement not to accept step raises and to make sure the contract raises are realized during the duration of the teacher contract, Driscoll said.

Tari Thomas said there are two new positions at the school, but 1 1/2 won't carry over to next year.

Rita Farrell asked what proportion of the budget is dedicated to special education costs. Tari said it was about 1/3, or \$200,000 compared to \$434,000 for non-special education instruction.

David Ames said there are 28 students with independent educational plans – about 16 percent of the student body. Anne Lundberg said former School Committee Chairman Bruce Ecker told her there is a history of parents of Shutesbury students wanting special education plans for their children. Tari said the assessment of students for special education plans is done by a team of teachers.

Al asked if budget line 721 for the T-1 telephone line has been changed. Linda and Tari said it would decrease to \$6,800 from \$12,000. Steve said the School Committee is looking for funds to add Spanish language classes and instrumental music, and this may be a source of money.

Eric asked and was told the student population is 172 with 22 in the pre-school, and next year there are projections it will be slightly smaller. Eric told the school officials that at first glance, the budget appears reasonable.

There was then a discussion of what impact the Amherst Regional school budget might have on the town budget. A key element will be how costs are apportioned to the member towns either using last year's formula, or the one used the year before.

Steve said the Union 28 members have been discussing changing the proportionality of its school costs. He said they are agreeable to have each of the four member schools pay 25 percent. Currently, Shutesbury's share is 27.46 percent. Anne Lundberg said the members have been working on this issue for the past two years.

The school officials departed at 8:45 p.m.

Future meetings were set for Jan. 29 at the Amherst Middle School Library to discuss the regional budget, and Feb. 4 with Police Chief Charlie Bray, and March 2 with Fire Chief Walter Tibbets.

The committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

Submitted by Patrick J. Callahan.