

**SHUTESBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
**Minutes for March 2, 2004**  
**Shutesbury Town Hall**

Members present: Chairman Eric Stocker, Al Beswick, Russ Wilson, Russ Greco, Patrick J. Callahan. Guests present: Chairwoman of the selectmen Becky Torres, Joe Jacobs, selectman, David Ames, town administrator.

The meeting convened at 7 p.m.

The minutes of the previous meeting were unanimously approved. The text of a letter supporting the Shutesbury-Leverett Broadband Committee was approved and the Finance Committee signed the letter. David Ames hand-delivered the letter to the panel, which was meeting downstairs.

At 7:10 p.m., the Board of Assessors met with the committee. Members Amanda Alix, Steve Schmidt, and David Dann, along with Assessor Ken Holmgren. The assessors are asking for \$16,000 in next year's budget to fund the tri-annual revaluation of property in town. Ken says the work will be split between Amanda and consultants Vision Appraisal of Northboro. Steve says the cost will likely total \$13,200, with \$8,200 going to Vision Appraisal, and \$5,000 to Amanda. The board wants the \$16,000 amount, however, to roll over from year to year to avoid a spike in funding for revaluation years. He also says there are some contingencies built into the process and the addition funding could be used to meet those.

Eric asked what the board expected to be the outcome of the revaluation. Ken says it's likely there will be an average 10 percent increase in home values.

Becky asked if the board had considered using David Burgess of Amherst.

Ken requested money for a laser printer for his office.

The Finance Committee agreed to keep the line item at \$16,000.

David Ames left to get Ellen McKay, town collector. Eric questioned the expense figure she proposed for next year's budget. Ellen replied that last year her expenses were reduced, but her costs have increased. She says most of her expenses are fixed, and that there is little room for adjustment. She also cited a \$130 increase in postage and for the mailbox she uses for town business. After some discussion, the Finance Committee agreed to keep the figures Ellen requested.

Patrick reported on a meeting of Finance Committees, selectmen, and officials from the Amherst Regional School District held in Pelham. He says all four member towns face financial difficulties and that is putting pressure on the region to reduce its budget. Three

of the four member towns say they need to pass overrides just to fund part of the increase requested.

Becky, who also attended the regional meeting, says Amherst has agreed to a funding formula that allows each town to pay the same percentage.

Eric mentioned there was an attempt to have the local financial officials meet with the regional school committee on March 6. Becky also says the state is now drafting a new education reform formula that could affect us in the future.

Eric says the Shutesbury Elementary School Committee is now asking for \$13,500 in additional funding to pay for art, instrumental music and after-school classes. This would bring the overall request to a 4.75 percent increase. The previous request was lower.

David Ames then led a discussion of the current iteration of the proposed budget and conducted a line-by-line review. He says the Capital Planning Committee will seek \$50,000 to \$75,000 from free cash. Becky says the Personnel Committee is proposing to change the salary chart to reflect last year's budget and that the board has agreed to reinstate 1 percent to make up for last year, making raises this year at 4 percent for most town employees. Becky says the school contracts are making up for the difference and other town employees should see equal treatment. David Ames says the amount of money in question is about \$2,000.

There was a discussion of several line items, including those that have changed significantly.

There was a discussion of whether to give money to the Highway Department for summer help. The Finance Committee says it wants a former request from Tim Hunting to the selectmen before deciding this issue.

There was discussion of the current \$275,000 deficit in the draft budget and whether it will require an override, use of reserves, more cuts, or a combination of all three.

The elementary school budget was again brought up. The Finance Committee agreed to call for a rollback of the \$13,500 "at a minimum" and delegated AI to deliver this message to the school board on March 17. Patrick says he will also attend. Eric will not, citing a conflict of interest.

Eric also agreed to write a letter from the Finance Committee to the town newsletter about the budget situation explaining the likelihood of the need for an override.

David Ames requests that five items totaling \$854.86 be paid for by a transfer from the Finance Committee reserve. It was approved unanimously.

David Ames says he will be away from March 12-22.

The next meeting was set for March 30 with Walter Tibbetts, fire chief.

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Submitted by Patrick J. Callahan.