

**SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
THURSDAY March 19, 2015  
FINAL Minutes**

**Present: Dan Hayes, Mare Fox, Fred Steinberg, Steve Sullivan, members; Sean Woodard-McNiff, chair; Matthew Galman, Accountant; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Bob Mahler, Superintendent; Public Guests**

**A. Meeting Called to Order at 7:05 P.M.**

**B. Public Hearing – FY16 Budget: No comments.**

**C. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar**

Steve requested to add to the agenda discussing finding another committee member, since there will be an opening come the new school year. Dan discussed several changes to the perpetual calendar, including the timing of the school budget process.

**D. Warrants and Gifts**

Warrants signed:

320: \$63,643.80

3024: \$46,246.73

**E. Approval of Minutes from February 26, 2015**

Several emendations were offered for the minutes.

**DAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 26, 2015. MARE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

**F. Public Comments and Announcements: No comments.**

**G. New Business / Discussion Items**

1. Electric Bill

Bob reported that in February, the supply rate was 26.7 cents / kWh. In March, after changing to Major Energy, that rate dropped to 8.1 cents / kWh. So far, the savings has amounted to around \$1,900.

2. Academic Calendar 2015/2016 (drafts) – Vote

Bob discussed the consequences of different calendar options and recommended that students come September 2; this would mean that we would be in sync with Amherst, potentially alleviating child care issues. Mare said she would prefer starting the last week of August because of the calendar ending so late in June as a result of snow days. Jackie recommended the September start calendar because of the coordination with Amherst's calendar. As far as the committee could determine, parents who have expressed a preference all seemed to prefer September as well. Sean echoed this recommendation.

Fred asked whether all U28 schools had to approve the same calendar; Bob said he preferred that all U28 schools choose the same calendar, since we're all in this together and it makes scheduling easier, but towns have to approve calendars individually.

**DAN MOVED TO APPROVE DRAFT #1 OF THE 2015/2016 CALENDAR (THE ONE STARTING SEPTEMBER 2). FRED SECONDED. FOUR VOTES YES, ONE NO. MOTION PASSES.**

### 3. Open Committee Position

Mare noted that as she is not running for the committee again after her term ends this June, her seat will be open. However, no one has filed papers to run for the seat, so any potential candidate will have to be elected as a write-in. Mare will write something to make the situation clear to the public.

Also, Mare discussed whether Sean would be on the Policy Subcommittee; he could only participate telephonically. Bob noted that the committee's own bylaws state that the committee will include no more than two committee members, so a single member could be sufficient. Mare brought the issue up in preparation for her impending departure from the committee.

## **H. Unfinished Business / Updates**

### 1. FY16 Budget – Vote

Bob directed the committee's attention to the kindergarten grant (line 136), which is being level funded although the statewide grant (in this case, in the amount of \$11,000) has been completely defunded for FY16. If the governor's current budget goes through, we will have to find a way to make up this money somehow.

Additionally, the electricity line item (line 92) has been increased by \$9,000 (34%) based on current year usage as well as National Grid's rate hike.

Dan asked whether service contracts were built into the budget for the MAKER labs. Bob said that it's not cost effective at this point to go in for a maintenance contract, since the 3D printers we're looking at range in price from \$500 to \$1,500. The only maintenance contracts that are cost effective right now are for the copier and for Apple products.

Susie Mosher asked whether the required NAEYC monitoring / assessing in the early childhood education program that was tied to grant monies would disappear if the state grant did. Bob replied that the cost of assessment is now found everywhere, but there is mounting discussion around the idea of dropping this assessment if the grant money dries up. Massachusetts is the only state that requires accreditation at this level through NAEYC. Right now, the kindergarten grant subsidizes paraprofessional salaries, while the preschool grant subsidizes the teacher's salary.

**DAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE FY2016 SHUTESBURY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BUDGET IN THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF \$1,875,216. MARE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.**

**I. Policy Review: None to review.**

**J. Reports**

1. Principal's Report

No new enrollments, so we're still at 157. There are nine kindergarteners and twenty-three applicants for preschool. After discussing this situation with the early childhood educators, we've decided to add the five oldest and developmentally advanced Pre-K students to the Kindergarten class to form a hybrid class; the respective curricula will remain distinct, however, respecting the developmental needs of both age groups, and there remain a number of questions about logistics. The parents at the Kindergarten Orientation on 3/16 expressed happiness at the idea of an enlarged cohort. Looking ahead, if the group remained strong, it could transition into a K/1 group, or if other K-age students came to town, the Pre-K students in the cohort could simply move into a full kindergarten instead.

Mare asked whether the Pre-K kids in the mixed-age cohort would be charged preschool rates (yes). She voiced some concern over how the kindergarteners would understand or perceive the differences in curricula. Nancy pointed out that the group is blended as it is, and the students have no issues with this. Jackie added that the younger students understand that they're preschoolers, not kindergarteners. Mare wondered whether we're setting up a potential problem for students who might be more advanced and require greater challenges. Jackie responded that the students wouldn't be confined to their grade level for their reading needs; there's some flexibility to address the kids where they are and meet their needs. Mare asked whether this would be done for math as well; Jackie said the summer focus is getting

the Response To Intervention (RTI) and reading blocks set up, and we're moving to the same setup for the math curriculum. Dan added that differentiated instruction seems to be best practice anyway. Also, he emphasized that the plan should be made clear at all points to parents in order to allay any fears. Jackie said that parents appreciated creating a larger cohort, since classes of nine children can be very tricky.

Jackie continued by reminding the committee that PARCC testing begins Monday 3/23.

She also met with Fred and Matt to create a Capital Planning list of school needs. Not all of these can or will be addressed this year, but the Capital Planning Committee did vote to recommend money for new carpets. The school will talk with the Fin Com about getting a new washer/dryer, stove, and warming box. Jackie also drew the committee's attention to the YTD maintenance on the HVAC system, particularly the boiler, which totals \$10,257.98 so far. Additionally, there was significant leakage in the Principal's Office from ice dams.

As for shoveling the roof / parking lot, Jackie said she understands the town is supposed to shovel the lot. She and Matt can usually take care of sidewalks and the entrance. However, when there's a school delay and the lot has not been plowed, Matt can't handle the job himself with the small tractor the school has (it took seven and a half hours to do the whole lot on this); on the other hand, the town plows prioritize the roads. Jackie inquired whether a part-time person could be hired to clear the school lot in such a case – that, or supply Matt with equipment that would let him do it. Dan said it doesn't seem like buying and insuring a new plow truck just for this purpose would be cheaper than simply contracting to clear the lot several times a year. The committee spent a minute or so commiserating over how harsh and difficult this winter has been. Dan then suggested that this falls entirely within the town DPW's purview; there needs to be a plan in any case, and the school needs to be prioritized along with roads. Sean insisted that the school is the heart of the community, and if the lot cannot get plowed in time for the arrival of 157 students plus staff, there should be a delayed opening. Mare asked Steve whether other town employees could be asked to do the work; surely that would be cheaper than hiring out. He replied that while the IRS sees the town as one big, happy family, there are fiscal barriers there that prevent that solution.

Jackie continued by discussing the issue of roof shoveling. She contacted the Fire Chief and the DPW, and was told about times when community volunteers went up to shovel; also, Matt should rake the roof to avoid ice dams. Walter came and helped once, but said that he thought he shouldn't have to come and do that, and that the town should hire someone to come take care of the problem during hard winters. Dan said that only someone paid and insured should be going up to roof rake – not volunteers. Mare asked about the roof's topography, which is varied enough to make clearing it difficult; Jackie said the roof over the gym is flat, but other parts have

peaks and valleys. Dan suggested there might be other town buildings that might be having the same issue with roof snow, and that they should talk to the DPW about this responsibility. Mare praised the Fire Chief and the DPW for going above and beyond this winter.

Dan asked how we should proceed. Jackie said she's had these conversations without any resolution and would appreciate the backing of the committee on the matter. Sean said he didn't think it was the purview of the committee to write a letter about the issue, since it is an administrative rather than budgetary issue. Mare said we should support her if she's running into roadblocks and not getting any traction on the issue. Bob offered to go with Jackie to the Town Administrator, and then to the Selectboard if necessary. Now is certainly the time to be discussing this issue, rather than this November. Susie pointed out that because of the turnover in town officers, process in Shutesbury can be tricky. It would be better to go to the Town Administrator instead. Bob said that most problems get band-aided over because of immediate emergencies, whereas what they're trying to do here is put something new together going forward. Bob proposed that they would get back to the committee by the end of the school year, if not before.

Jackie continued by discussing Spirit Week, which included all kinds of fun-sounding days and which seemed to delight students and staff alike. School Council has revamped its survey, which will be reopened 4/6-4/30. Jackie commended the Council for their hard work, energy, motivation, and interesting ideas.

Dan asked about the laptop cart item on the Capital Planning list; Jackie said that this was recommended because instruction is rapidly changing to make use of technology (not to mention the use of computers in standardized testing), and the Apple computers currently in the school are running an outdated operating system that Apple will stop supporting next year. The portability of a laptop cart offers more flexibility for all these purposes. Bob added that the operating system problem is significant and faced by all the schools. Steve added that there's a technology gap because at Amherst, they use PCs. Dan noted that going to the Collaborative for technology purchases might be prudent, since there would be more purchasing power.

## 2. Superintendent's Report

Bob reported that this year, SES was audited on just over 80 standards for special education and English language learners as well as civil rights. The school met all but three SPED standards, one of which will be covered through a waiver. The others had to do with reviewing evaluations of the program. As for the civil rights standards, the term "gender identity" was missing from several school documents, and has since been added. It's excellent news that the audit is this clean. Bob commended SES staff for doing a fine job.

Last Friday was Curriculum Day, when a culminating program was offered to staff around the Professional Learning Community model and staff were able to get feedback on their practices immediately; it was a powerful day and the momentum from this professional development will be carried forward into the coming year. Bob noted that one of the observed groups was a Shutesbury group, and their intelligence, creativity, and professional skills were on display for all to see.

### 3. Regional School District Planning Board Report

Dan attended the four-town meeting and reported that Amherst is looking at a lot of different options, including tearing down schools and moving 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade to the high school. The town faces continuously declining enrollment and diminishing resources. Dan thinks that closing Marks Meadow was a mistake. All in all, there seemed to be a lot of open questions, but what is certain is that enrollments and revenue continue to drop while costs continue to rise. It seems a tall order to make rational decisions about the system that will create a sustainable future.

### 4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report

Steve reported that the committee chose not to have a vote on the regionalization proposal. He spoke about the perception that Shutesbury's academics are subpar compared with the other three towns', and acknowledged that SES students feel there is a culture shock going down the hill, but did not think they were ill prepared for the academics. The budget was also approved; Shutesbury's portion is \$1,655,434, an increase of 5.2%. Dan wondered whether Steve could make a motion to nix the idea of regionalization entirely; at this point, so many things have changed, especially in Amherst, that it would essentially be going back to square one. We'd have to get more experts in to collect the current, relevant information rather than working on outdated information. Steve was happy to do so, after other committee members voiced their support for Dan's proposal.

### 5. Review of Expenditure Report

Mare asked what point the budget was supposed to be at at this point. Bob replied that the school was in good shape at this point; Jackie emphasized that she has been very tight with the budget because of all the unanticipated expenditures at the start of the year. Bob has instructed Matthew to meet with the principals to identify which monies need to be encumbered at this point in order to be safe moving forward. Also, there will be some circuit breaker money available if needed.

### 6. Union #28 Report – including Budget and Personnel: No report.

### 7. CES Report

Dan said they will be discussing the evaluation tool for the Executive Director at the meeting next week.

**K. Future Business**

1. Shutesbury School Committee – April 16, 2015
2. Budget and Personnel Committee – Wednesday, May 20, 2015 6 P.M. SRS
3. Union #28 Joint Supervisory – Wednesday, May 20, 2015 7 P.M. SRS
4. Future agenda items – Electric Bill

**MARE MOVED TO ADJOURN AND ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION WITHOUT RETURNING TO PUBLIC MEETING. DAN SECONDED. ROLL CALL ALL AYES.**