

REGULAR SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Barre Town Middle and Elementary School – Library
September 20, 2017 – 6:30 p.m.

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chad Allen - Chair
Jay Paterson – Vice Chair
Alice Farrell - Clerk
Jennifer Hutchinson
Kristin McCarthy

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

John Pandolfo, Superintendent
Scott Griggs, Principal
Jennifer W. Nye, Principal
Erica Pearson, Assistant Principal
Jacquelyn Ramsey-Tolman, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager

GUESTS PRESENT:

Video Vision Tech	Dave Delcore-Times Argus	Jeff Blow	David Cameron	Sandra Cameron
Giuliano Cecchinelli, II	Jaime Evans	Rachael J. Floyd	David Gritsavage	Regina Gritsavage
Chris Hull	J. Guy Isabelle	J. P. Isabelle	Phil Kolling	Stacey Lamberti
Becky Mackin	Bob Mackin	Paul Malone	Mark McCarthy	Francis McFaun
Mary Ann McFaun	Jack Mitchell	Ashley Morris	H Brooke Paige	Lisa Perreault
Robert Pembroke	Robert Phillips	Terry Reil	Dotty Ricks	Donna Russo-Savage
Emily Simmons	Megan Spaulding	Sonya Spaulding	Angela Valentinetti	Jon Valsangiacomo
R. Lee Walther	Sheila M. Walther	Kim Whitcomb		

1. Call to Order: Pledge of Allegiance

The Chair, Mr. Allen, called the Wednesday, September 20, 2017, Regular meeting to order at 6:35 p.m., which was held at the Barre Town Middle and Elementary School Library. The flag salute followed.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

None.

3. Visitors and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1. Approval of Minutes – September 6, 2017 Regular Meeting

On a motion by Mrs. McCarthy, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the September 6, 2017 Regular Meeting.

5. New Business

None.

6. Old Business

6.1 Act 46

Two documents were distributed; a copy of screen prints from a Power Point Presentation titled ‘Barre Town Revisits ACT 46’, and a document titled ‘Act 46, Sec.9 – Self-Evaluation, Regional Conversations, & Proposals for “Alternative Structures’’. Mr. Allen welcomed community members to the meeting and advised that Emily Simmons (from VSBA – the Vermont School Boards Association) and Donna Russo-Savage (from the AOE – the Vermont Agency of Education), were present at the meeting to answer questions from the community. Mr. Allen stressed that Act 46 pertains to consolidation of governance not schools. Act 46 involves sharing resources and curriculum and allows for transparency. Mr. Allen announced ground rules for the meeting.

Mr. Allen began the Power Point Presentation, (printed copies were distributed to attendees). The presentation included an overview of the evening's 3 part agenda, historical information relating to the 706 Exploratory Committee, and subsequent votes, and outlined options moving forward;

1. Form a new study committee with BCEMS (and create modified Articles of Agreement), 2. Form a new study committee with BCEMS and any other interested district, 3. Present a case to remain 'as is', and 4. Do nothing, and let the State Board of Education decide how best to consolidate BTMES,

Mr. Allen advised that a merger at this point would be considered a conventional merger and would need to be operational by 2019 in order to be eligible for tax incentives.

Mr. Allen advised that concerns raised at an earlier meeting had been addressed by the Board. BTMES Capital Improvement funds have been utilized for paving, roof repairs, and replacement of air conditioning, the majority of the Fund Balance will be spent in FY18, and ownership of the athletic fields land is being transferred to the Town of Barre. It was noted that the athletic fields are, and will continue to be, maintained by the Town of Barre.

Mr. Allen advised the community regarding the upcoming budget (unrelated to Act 46), warning community members that the FY19 budget will most likely result in a tax rate increase that is larger than in past years. The increase is due in part to utilizing the Fund Balance in the FY18 budget. Mr. Allen advised that the Board would like to receive input from the community regarding budget development.

Discussion returned to Act 46. It was noted that there is no evidence to suggest that property values would decrease as the result of a merger and it was noted that there was no known change to property values due to the formation of the SHS Union District. It was noted that Articles of Agreement could be modified (under a new 706 Study Committee) such that combining of city/town students would require voter approval from both municipalities. Mr. Allen shared data that documents similar student achievement levels between the two municipalities. Deadlines for action were shared with the community.

Mr. Allen advised that the question/answer portion of the meeting would commence. Emily Simmons (from VSBA – the Vermont School Board's Association) and Donna Russo-Savage (from the AOE – the Vermont Agency of Education), introduced themselves to the audience, advised regarding their Act 46 related roles and offered to answer questions from community and board members. Ms. Russo-Savage provided an overview of the options. It was noted that formation of a new 706 Study Committee requires agreement to do so by both the BTMES and BCEMS Boards. At this point, BCEMS has the same options available as BTMES, including asking the State to implement consolidation as it was originally submitted and approved by the State and BCEMS voters. It was noted that Special Education and Transportation are already consolidated at the BSU (a result of Act 153). It was also conveyed, that Barre City and Barre Town voters do not vote on the BSU budget. Under consolidation, both the city and the town would be voting on the SU budget. It was confirmed that the language in Act 46 refers to the merging of governance. Savings can be obtained with consolidation, though savings will most likely be minimal. Mr. Pandolfo advised regarding efficiencies, which include SPED, contracts (e.g. copiers, food service contracts), and ease of movement of staff, including technology integrationists. As staff members (excluding SPED and Transportation related) are currently hired by the district boards, they cannot be shared.

The Board of Education will give final approval of any merger. Criteria to approve a merger includes; adequate review of local school systems, a review of previously submitted information, and district size requirements (BTMES does not meet the criteria for student population).

In response to a query regarding what a merger achieves that isn't currently in place, it was noted that the biggest advantage is a single Board approving all business (there could be issues if the separate local boards disagree on issues) and tax incentives. In response to a query regarding economic losses, it was noted that the blended tax rate would be implemented to avoid that situation. It was reiterated that BTMES has already used most of their Capital Improvement Funds, will be spending most of their fund balance in FY18, and are in the process of transferring athletic lands. Mr. Allen advised that educational improvements are the first priority, with fiscal opportunities being secondary. If a voter approved merger does not occur, there will be a loss of the tax incentives. It was noted that BCEMS and BTMES continue to have one of the lowest cost per pupil amounts in the state. The greatest benefit to consolidation appears to be educational opportunities. Ms. Russo-Savage advised that consolidation would benefit transient students by allowing them to stay in their current school (BCEMS or BTMES) if they move.

Some statements from community members include; A single board, achieved under consolidation would allow for continuity when students switch schools. Local control was lost when legislators passed Act 46. Act 46 punishes Barre City and Barre Town. It would be better for Barre Town voters to be in control of their own destiny regarding consolidation, rather than have the State dictate the school's fate. Some community members perceive that this evening's meeting is an attempt to push for a third vote. Mr. Allen stressed that the Board is not pushing for a third vote. The purpose of the meeting is to gather community input, so the Board has a sense on how to proceed. If the Board takes no action, the State Board of Education will make the decision regarding if/how/with whom, BTMES will be consolidated. It was noted that the Act 46 Consolidation Study Committee meetings were very well

advertised, yet no one from the communities attended the meetings to provide feedback. Other concerns voiced by community members include, consolidation being a poor business decision, as BTMES would be contributing more monetarily, possible loss of local control, concern that students will be forced to change schools, and concern that staff hired for one school may be sent to work at the other school. Conversely, under consolidation, a staff member (whose position has been eliminated), would have the option to move into an open position at the other school within the consolidated district. With the current structure, the staff member would be unemployed. It was noted that the City of Barre conveyed half interest of Spaulding High School to Barre Town (for a nominal fee of \$10). This transfer was done for the better good of the community, and Barre Town came out ahead. It was noted that Barre Town had been paying tuition to have their children educated at SHS, but did not pay to build the structure. It was also noted that, in reality, it is very unlikely that anyone would ever be buying the school buildings (BCMES or BTMES), so the difference in the buildings' real estate values should not really be such an area of concern. Students from both schools merge into Spaulding High School. Relationships formed before high school can be beneficial in the transition from middle school to high school.

Concern was voiced regarding the significant discussion regarding the finances of consolidation, when the real issue is about the children, and the community which shares a unified high school. The children currently participate together in many activities, including sports and other community events. There have been disturbing undertones regarding 'those kids'. The earlier statistics show that children are basically learning equitably, and the negative undertones are harmful (children don't ask to be born into poverty). The level of discourse should be diminished, with community members focusing on what is in the best interest of the children.

It was noted that the State cannot change Articles of Agreement. It was also noted, that once districts are consolidated under a State and voter approved plan, the State cannot add other districts to the newly formed district.

Brief discussion was held regarding the Self-Evaluation document, including a brief overview of the 5 fiscal and educational goals listed in the rubric.

It was agreed to poll meeting participants regarding their preference moving forward. The results:

1. Form a new study committee with BCEMS (and create modified Articles of Agreement) – 26 votes
2. Form a new study committee with BCEMS and any other interested district – not voted on
3. Present a case to remain 'as is' - 10 votes (2 of the 10 votes were from meeting participants who departed early, but held strong opinions regarding this option).
4. Do nothing, and let the State Board of Education decided how best to consolidate BTMES – No interest/no vote

Mr. Allen thanked the community members for their attendance and input, and encouraged them to attend future board meetings and to continue providing feedback to the Board.

7. Administrative Reports to the Board

None.

8. Future Agenda Items and Upcoming Committee Meetings

BTMES Regular Board Meeting – Wednesday, October 4, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in the BTMES Library

9. Approval of Warrants

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Hutchinson, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Warrants.

10. Executive Session

No items were proposed for discussion in Executive Session.

11. Next Meeting Date

Wednesday, October 4, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in the BTMES Library

12. Adjournment

On a motion by Mrs. McCarthy, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin