

SPECIAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

Barre Town Middle and Elementary School – Conference Room

June 22, 2018 – 10:00 a.m.

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Alice Farrell - Chair
Jay Paterson – Vice Chair
Rebecca Kerin-Hutchins – Clerk
Chris Hull
Victoria Pompei

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore-Times Argus Gina Akley Kristen Martin Tyler Smith Sonya Spaulding

1. Call to Order: Pledge of Allegiance

The Chair, Mrs. Farrell, called the Friday, June 22, 2018, Special meeting to order at 10:11 a.m., which was held at the Barre Town Middle and Elementary School Second Floor Conference Room. Visitors were welcomed to the meeting.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

Add 4.2 Preliminary Survey Results

3. Visitors and Communications

It was agreed that visitors could provide commentary that was intermingled with Agenda Item discussion, and/or be provided at the conclusion of discussion of the Agenda Items.

4. New Business

4.1. Act 46

Discussion began regarding possible options for moving forward, including preparing a plan to go to the State in the event that no vote is held or if the result of a vote is ‘no’. At one meeting it was suggested that the Board move forward with preparing and submitting an argument to the State, opposing a merger. As the previous Board voted to form a 706 Study Committee, it is not known if that can legally be done while the 706 Committee is active. It was noted that Barre Town voters voted ‘no’ twice in the past; the original vote, and the second vote, which was held under the legal requirement to hold a revote when a certain percentage of voters petition to hold a re-vote. It was noted that the Articles of Agreement have been changed substantially since they were first put before the voters. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins believes the Articles of Agreement are changed and have been improved, but she still has concerns. One concern relates to site-based councils. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins would like more information regarding the role and involvement of site-based councils, and what authority site-based councils have. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins is not comfortable with ‘everything’ going through the Superintendent. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins advised that if there is a forced merger, it could create a ‘financial mess’. There is concern that budgets may be voted down in Barre City and Barre Town, ‘out of spite’. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins does not know how quality of education will be improved in a consolidated district. Mr. Paterson provided an overview of the process, advising that the 706 Committee decides whether or not a vote will be held. When the Board voted to form a study committee, they ceded that authority to the 706 Committee. The Board has 2 possible options based on whether or not the Committee decides to hold a vote. Mr. Paterson advised that he is unsure process wise, how the Board should proceed at this point. Mr. Paterson feels there may be some community animosity towards a 3rd vote. It was noted that the State has stated that community sentiment does not matter. Act 46 is law and must be followed regardless of community sentiment. Mrs. Akley advised that she believes the majority of the 706 Committee is supportive of holding a vote. Mrs. Akley believes that the outcome of a vote would come down to marketing, and suggested that the Board could communicate with the community and teachers regarding changes to Articles of Agreement and the State’s position regarding Act 46. Mrs. Akley advised that U32 made a great argument to the State, and the State still said ‘no’. U32 needs to be merged. Mrs. Akley believes the community needs to be advised regarding the loss of control if the State makes the merger decision. If the State forces a merger, the State will decide on the Articles of Agreement and who will be in the district. Mrs. Akley believes that it should be widely publicized that new Articles of Agreement are legally binding based on the way the new Warning was drafted. Changes cannot be made without voter approval. Mr. Smith advised that he is in agreement with Mrs. Akley’s statements, and cautioned that given the short timeline, the Committee will need to make a vote decision soon. No vote date has been determined by the Committee. Barre is on the Agenda for the 08/15/18 State Board of Education’s Regional Meeting. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins queried regarding whether or not the Board can be working behind the scenes on an alternative plan. Mrs. Farrell believes it is prudent to present beliefs to the State at the 08/15/18 meeting. Mr. Smith advised that Board and community members can speak at any of the State meetings. In the event of a ‘no’ vote, or if no vote is held, Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins and Mr. Hull would like BTMES to stay as

'status quo'. Mr. Paterson conveyed that he has been hearing discussion that BTMES already has 'most everything collaborated'. Mrs. Akley advised that 'that argument' did not work for U32, and suggested that the Board allocate it's time to educating the public regarding the changes to the Articles of Agreement, changes to the Warning, and the likely result of not merging voluntarily. Mrs. Akley advised that Act 46 is law and that the State is taking action quickly. The deadline for the Final State Plan is 11/30/18. Mrs. Farrell advised that she worked for 16 years in a consolidated district with 7,200 students in the district. Advisory councils were involved, and it all worked out very well. In the beginning there was a level of change and adjustment, but long term, things worked out very well. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins believes merging 'ties administrators' hands and does not want everything going through the Superintendent. Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins is not comfortable with administrators not attending board meetings. It was clarified that there are different models for administrators' presence at board meetings, and the original discussion of not having them present is one of many models. No model has been chosen and it is very possible that administrators will attend board meetings in a merged district. Mrs. Farrell advised that work is currently being performed under the Technical Assistance Grant regarding site-based councils, but those working under the grant are not creating the councils. Additional information is being requested regarding site-based councils, including; who will be on the councils, what work will the councils perform, and what authority will the councils have. How will budgets be addressed in a merged district? Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins believes that additional Articles of Agreement need to be written to outline roles and responsibilities of site-based councils and budgeting. Mr. Smith advised that not all issues can be written specifically in the Articles of Agreement, which would result in everything being locked in so that changes could never be made. It is not the work of the Study Committee to define how site-based councils and budgeting will occur. Mr. Paterson believes that if a vote is to be held, it needs to be held sooner rather than later to give the Board more time to deal with the results. If a 'no' vote occurs, it will not take much time to write an argument to remain 'status quo'. Some believe that early September is a good time to hold a vote, though some believe turnout would be much higher in November. Mrs. Akley stressed that most individuals do not want the State to take control of the district. Mrs. Farrell advised that a Communications Specialist is starting at the BSU on 07/01/18, and may be able to assist with getting information out to community members. Based on survey results received to date, there is no consensus from staff regarding feelings on how an Act 46 merger would impact them. Mrs. Farrell queried regarding the Board's preference going forward; make a decision after the 706 Committee meets on Monday (06/25/18), and/or convey to the 706 Committee that if a vote is held, the Board would prefer it be held sooner rather than later? Mr. Paterson believes the Board may need to meet prior to the scheduled August meeting. Clarification regarding the model for having administrators at meetings is desired. Concern was raised that a merger would possibly result in a loss of 'local discussion'. In response to Mrs. Kerin-Hutchins statement that a merger would result in BTMES 'heading towards financial disaster', Mrs. Farrell advised that under a merged district, each school would continue to create its own budget, and that the individual schools' budgets would then get merged into one budget. Concern was raised again that budgets might 'go down for spite'. In response to a suggestion that a merger happen gradually, it was noted that Act 46 mandates consolidation by 07/01/19. Mr. Hull believes it will be interesting to see how 'U32 plays out'. Depending on the outcome of the next 706 Study Committee meeting, the Board may need to meet again. In response to a query regarding how this Special Meeting was warned, it was noted that the meeting was warned on the BSU Facebook page, the web site, and was posted at the Town Clerk's Office, BTMES, and the Post Office.

4.2 Preliminary Survey Results

A circle graph type document of preliminary Climate Survey results was distributed. There are currently 61 responses to the survey. Mrs. Pompei provided an overview of the graph document, advising that responses are fairly evenly divided. A document containing written comments submitted as part of the Climate Survey was also distributed. Some on the Board did not want to share written comments in open meeting, and advised that written survey comments would be shared only in Executive Session. The distributed documents containing the written comments were collected. The recorder cautioned the Board that written comments, submitted as part of an anonymous Climate Survey, may not meet the legal requirement for items that may be discussed in Executive Session. The Board agreed to discuss the written Climate Survey results in Executive Session at the next Board Meeting.

5. Old Business

None.

6. Executive Session

No items were proposed for discussion in Executive Session

7. Adjournment

On a motion by Mrs. Pompei, seconded by Mr. Paterson, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 11:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin