

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING**

Via Video Conference – Google Meet
March 4, 2021 - 5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Alice Farrell, Chair - (BT) – departed the meeting at 6:02 p.m.
Sonya Spaulding, Vice-Chair - (BC)
Guy Isabelle – (At-Large)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chris Parker – (BT)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

David Wells, Superintendent
Josh Allen, Communications Specialist

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore – Times Argus

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mrs. Farrell, called the Thursday, March 4, 2021 BUUSD Communications Committee meeting to order at 5:33 p.m., which was held via video conference.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

None.

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1 Meeting Minutes for February 4, 2021 BUUSD Communications Committee Meeting

The Committee agreed by consensus to approve the Minutes of the February 4, 2021 BUUSD Communications Committee meeting.

5. New Business

5.1 Budget Vote After-action Report

Mrs. Farrell reported that the budget vote was not positive and that a revised budget will need to be drafted and promoted. It is anticipated that the re-vote will occur on 05/11/21, the same date as the Barre Town Municipal Vote. Administrators will be reviewing the budget from 03/11/21 – 03/16/21. The Finance Committee meets on 03/16/21 and will be presented with options identified by administrators. This timeframe allows for thoughtful decision making prior to the 03/25/21 Board meeting. The failed budget vote will be discussed at the 03/11/21 Board meeting. Mrs. Farrell queried regarding what input is expected from the Board and if information should go out in advance to help Board Members prepare for that meeting. The budget vote dovetails nicely with the Vision, Mission & Strategic Planning work. The forums have resulted in valuable feedback. Feedback indicates that community members want a rich experience for students, including arts, sports, and foreign language classes. Feedback also indicates that the community does not see having the lowest cost per pupil as an asset. Prior to budget revisions, it may be beneficial to see preliminary feedback from Mr. Goodrich. The majority of the budget increase (75%) is due to salaries and benefits, with approximately 25% of the increase used for students. Some individuals have inquired as to how that 25% benefits students. Mr. Allen advised that there were 28% less votes for the FY22 budget than for the FY21 budget. The higher number of voters for the FY21 budget may be because that vote was held at the same time as the presidential primary election and was prior to COVID-19. It was noted that the budget split (48% for the budget / 52% against the budget) is the opposite of the FY21 budget vote. Mr. Isabelle voiced concern over the voting difference between the City and the Town. Mrs. Spaulding theorized that the budget failed due to parents being disgruntled over hybrid and remote learning and is concerned that parents won't pass the budget until students are back to in-person learning. It is believed that parents are frustrated and there is not a lot that can be done at this point. It is believed that the bigger issue is not the financial aspect of the budget, but rather frustration over learning modes. There is concern that Barre Town will have a larger turnout for voting because the vote date coincides with their Town Meeting date, whereas Barre City voters do not have other voting on the same day. It is believed that those who received an absentee ballot for the March vote, will also receive an absentee ballot for the

revote. Mr. Wells reiterated that the distancing guidelines prevent more in-person learning at this time and Secretary French does not believe the social distancing guidelines will be changed in the near future. It may be beneficial to simplify the tax calculation explanation. Mrs. Farrell voiced concern that community members (home owners and renters) are concerned over the tax increase. Brief discussion was held regarding the amount of reductions necessary to make significant tax reductions. Mrs. Spaulding is concerned that making draconian cuts may not influence voters who are voting against the budget due to frustration with learning modes. If large cuts are made and the budget fails again, it will be difficult to make further reductions. It is believed that there are many different factors in play that are influencing voters. In response to a query, it was noted that Secretary French has not announced that the anticipated vaccination of school staff will result in a reduction of the distancing guidelines. It was noted that vaccination of employees may assist with keeping grades 'open' when COVID exposures have occurred. Mr. Wells advised that he has received much negative feedback regarding switching to remote learning for vaccination days. It was suggested that if PTO meetings are still being held, budget promotion could occur during those meetings, which usually involve parents who are 'invested' in the schools. Mrs. Spaulding does not believe BCEMS PTO is meeting. It was confirmed that the BTMES PTO is not meeting regularly at this time. Mrs. Spaulding has email addresses for the Vision/Mission/Strategic Planning stakeholders and could contact them regarding their thoughts on the budget. Mr. Isabelle believes the public forums were dominated by Barre Town community members and reiterated that he believes parents are not currently happy with the 'product'. Mrs. Farrell believes that emotional and financial issues resulted in the budget failure, and that both of those areas need to be addressed for the budget vote to succeed. Brief discussion was held regarding promotion of the next budget vote and it was suggested that post cards be mailed. Mr. Allen believes the cost to mail post cards is very affordable (9¢ per card). Promotion should also include information being posted to the BUUSD web site. Mr. Wells advised that middle school administrators are researching ways to provide more in-person learning to 7th/8th grade students and Mrs. Waterhouse is doing the same at the high school level. It was suggested that it may be beneficial for PTO groups to sponsor budget informational sessions. It was suggested that administrators be involved in the informational sessions, rather than information being provided solely at the financial level. It was also suggested that there be positive promotion from students who have been successful under the remote and hybrid models. Mrs. Spaulding cautioned promoting remote/hybrid models too much, because there are many students who have not thrived in those modes of instruction. Mr. Wells advised that a very robust Summer Program will be run out of BTMES, at no cost to parents, and that Mrs. Waterhouse is working on a robust summer program for high school students. Ms. Parker advised regarding a Social Work position currently posted for BTMES and believes this position will be of great benefit to students. Mr. Allen advised that individuals should be mindful of the current negative culture, and should strongly promote the positives at all meetings. It was noted that there is just a little over 2 months until the revote, and due to absentee ballots (early voting), it will be necessary to begin promotion as soon as possible.

6. Old Business

6.1 Vision, Mission, and Strategic Planning Update

Mrs. Spaulding reported that the third round of forums started this week. Common themes and threads are being identified. It was noted that participants are being asked to provide input/feedback from outside of COVID times (pre and post COVID).

Mrs. Spaulding advised that she hasn't received the notes that Mr. Goodrich usually provides post-meeting.

Mr. Wells will contact Mr. Goodrich regarding sending out the usual write-up/notes, so that input can be shared with the Board.

Mr. Allen advised that a positive culture shift is necessary and that recent forums have identified a lot of good ideas and initiatives.

7. Other Business

Mr. Allen advised that on Friday, March 12, 2021, another full page ad will be in the Times Argus. This ad will include student accomplishments. The next full page ad will appear in the May 7, 2021 edition. This date may be beneficial as it is shortly before the anticipated budget re-vote. It was clarified that these ads are provided as a courtesy of the Times Argus and there is no cost to the BUUSD. It was suggested that a bi-line be added to the ad advising that the ad is provided by the Times Argus. Mrs. Spaulding advised that some individuals have reported that the last ad was difficult to read in paper format. It was suggested that perhaps a larger font be used for future ads.

Mr. Allen advised that he will be attending a state-wide meeting with other Communications Specialists from around the State. Additionally, Mr. Allen will be attending a 3 day virtual conference by Finalsity (the BUUSD website provider).

8. Items to be Placed on Future Agendas

- Promotion of Budget Re-Vote (April)
- Vision, Mission, and Strategic Planning Update (April)
- SHS Promotion to Out of District Schools Update – Spring 2021
- Logo/Branding (TBD)

9. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 5:30 p.m., via video conference.

10. Adjournment

The Committee agreed by consensus to adjourn at 6:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin