

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

Via Video Conference – Google Meet  
May 6, 2021 - 5:30 p.m.

**MINUTES**

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Alice Farrell, Chair - (BT)  
Abigayle Smith, Vice-Chair (BC)  
Guy Isabelle – (At-Large)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

**OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Sonya Spaulding – joined at 6:02 p.m.

**ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:**

Josh Allen, Communications Specialist

**GUESTS PRESENT:**

Josh Howard

**1. Call to Order**

The Chair, Mrs. Farrell, called the Thursday, May 6, 2021 BUUSD Communications Committee meeting to order at 5:32 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 April 1, 2021 BUUSD Communications Committee Meeting**

On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Ms. Smith, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the April 1, 2021 BUUSD Communications Committee meeting.

**5. New Business**

**5.1 Promotion of Budget Revote**

Mr. Allen provided a recap of activity since the last meeting, including; the post card that was created and mailed, updates to the budget web page (with information provided by the Business Manager), and posting of a copy of a Letter to the Editor. Mr. Allen advised that he has been making a strong effort to promote the good things happening throughout the BUUSD, including students returning to full time in-person learning. The building principals are contributing a lot towards the effort to promote the great things happening in the schools. On 05/07/21 there will be another full page ad in the Times Argus. The ad mainly highlights students and includes a small piece on the budget. The budget vote is Tuesday, 05/11/21. It may be beneficial to continue with some social media postings and perhaps something in the Times Argus. Mr. Isabelle advised that based on his recent visit to the Town Clerk's Office, there may be some confusion regarding the budget figures on the ballot vs. the overall increase. It was confirmed that the ballot amount does include grant figures. Mr. Isabelle is concerned that some community members are using different percentages for increases, depending on whether or not they support the budget. Mr. Isabelle believes Barre Town has received approximately 1,600 absentee ballots. Mr. Isabelle believes there will be higher turnout in Barre Town as the Town is voting on several items, whereas Barre City is only voting on the budget. Mr. Howard reported that Berlin residents are receiving mailings relating to the budget. It was noted that Berlin uses the Barre zip code. Mr. Allen will look into this issue. Lengthy discussion was held regarding various reasons that the first vote failed to be approved by voters, including voters who do not have children in the schools, questions relating to the current fund balance, lack of understanding of how monies flow through schools (including grant funds), year-end projections, concern that additional cuts were not made, dissatisfaction with the current 'product', the number of tax payers on fixed incomes, concern that continued cuts to the facilities portion of the budget, coupled with the increase in prices for materials, will result in the buildings not being adequately maintained, and the need to communicate the value of the education offered in the BUUSD,

Additionally, it was noted that many community members don't understand that the Legislature mandated that the State take over negotiations for health care, and the State negotiations have resulted in a tremendous increase in health care costs for the BUUSD. It

was also noted that had Barre Town voluntarily merged under Act 46, there would have been substantial tax breaks. The previous Superintendent was blatantly clear that the State would impose a forced merger, if there was not a voluntary merger. The tax breaks offered under a voluntary merger were lost under the forced merger. Barre Town repeatedly voted down the merger, resulting in the loss of tax breaks for both Barre City and Barre Town residents. Frustration was voiced that many out of district students are being sent to another high school, rather than Spaulding High School. Discussion was held regarding the importance of marketing SHS to out of district sending towns, as much tuition money is lost to these districts. Out of district students could be a very large source of revenue. Frustration was also voiced regarding comments that the BUUSD is administratively top-heavy, and the importance of assuring that the schools are adequately staffed. Discussion was held regarding the Vermont Equity Snap-shot, including programs offered, teacher retention, and staff to student ratios. The State of Vermont reviews many factors, and reports that the BUUSD is meeting or exceeding most expectations. Mrs. Spaulding advised regarding a change in structure to oversight of Special Education, made in an attempt to decrease costs and improve services, and believes the BUUSD is being creative, while trying to support the large number of students in the District. Discussion was held regarding the benefit of promoting the budget year-round, including promoting how the schools are performing. Each Board and Committee meeting is an opportunity to promote the schools positively. Additional discussion was held regarding the benefit of recruiting out of district students year round. The choice to select a school other than SHS is deeply engrained in some of the surrounding communities and it will take much effort to change that pattern. Promotion of SHS should begin much earlier in the year, not in the month leading up to when students select their high school choice. Promotion should include, but not be limited to; existing relationships (through sports), transportation, and the Scholarship Fund. Promotion of SHS will remain in the 'Parking Lot' for the Communications Committee. It was noted that the bulk of the budget is 'teachers', and to make significant budget reductions would require cuts to teaching staff, resulting in increased class sizes and would not be beneficial to students. A community member requested that the Board work more effectively in negotiations. Mrs. Farrell will pass this suggestion along to the full Board and the Finance Committee.

## **6. Old Business**

### **6.1 Vision, Mission, and Strategic Planning Update**

The Design Team has not met since the last Board meeting, where an update was provided. Mr. Allen and Mr. Pope have been working on a draft to be sent to the stakeholder groups and the Design Team. Once the draft is finalized, it will be unveiled to the Board and the community. The goal is to make the information as 'digestible' as possible. Mr. Allen advised that he received from Mr. Pope, a revised draft of the Goal Matrix that is much more straight forward and easy to review at a glance. Mr. Allen does not believe the Goal Matrix is a good external document, and feels the 'Roadmap' is a better document for public distribution. In response to a query, Mr. Allen advised that he does not believe the Communication Committee needs to take any action at this time. It is anticipated that Mr. Goodrich will present a final version to the Board in May or June. Mr. Allen believes there should be a 'big reveal' of the Plan when it is first announced and believes the Plan should be highlighted to staff and the community shortly before the start of the 2021 / 2022 school year. Mr. Isabelle lauded Josh Allen, Michael Pope, and Sonya Spaulding for their efforts on this initiative.

## **7. Other Business**

Mr. Allen reported that though not 'set in stone', he is looking into ways to expand communications with grant funding. Mr. Allen advised that he is trying to consolidate where people get their information. Mr. Allen would like to make sharing of information a smoother process. Mr. Allen hopes to provide additional information in a month or two. In response to a query, it was reported that the Digital Media Arts 2 instructor, Cal Hopwood has resigned. Mr. Isabelle reported that CVCC promotion has been effective and enrollment has increased significantly.

Mr. Isabelle reminded community members to vote on the budget.

## **8. Items to be Placed on Future Agendas**

In addition to the 'Parking Lot':

- Budget 'After-action' Recap

## **9. Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, June 3, 2021 at 5:30 p.m., via video conference.

## **10. Adjournment**

**On a motion by Mr. Isabelle, seconded by Ms. Smith, the Committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 6:47 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,  
*Andrea Poulin*