

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

Spaulding High School Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
November 17, 2022 - 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Nancy Leclerc (BT) - Chair
Terry Reil (BT) – Vice Chair
Michelle Hebert
John Lyons, Jr.
Paul Malone (BC)
Sarah Pregent (BC)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tim Boltin
Alice Farrell
Chris Parker
Sonya Spaulding

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Chris Hennessey, Superintendent
Luke Aither, SHS Co-Principal
Josh Allen, Communications Director
Stacy Anderson, Director of Special Services
Jamie Evans, Facilities Director
Karen Fredericks, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Mary Goodridge Miller, SHS Assistant Principal
Pierre Laflamme, BCEMS Principal
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources
Marlon Maylor, SHS Co-Principal
Ted Mills, BTMES Assistant Principal
Jennifer Nye, BTMES Principal
Erica Pearson, BTMES Principal
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager
Brenda Waterhouse, BCEMS Principal

PUBLIC MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dave Delcore, Times Argus	Mel Battah	Shadi Battah	Martha Blaisdell	Stacy Boltin
Michael Boutin	Alan Burnor	Brandon Campo	Michael Deering, II	Cassandra Demarais
Nathaniel Fredericks	Alice Harding	Carol Hebert	Sarah Helman	Jacob Hemmerick
Josh Howard	Ellen Kaye	Prudence Krasofski	Randall Kuhlman	Lisa Liotta
Joelen Mulvaney	Sue Paxman	Dean Preston	Donald Routhier	Tina Routhier
William Toborg	Ryan Torres	Jan Trepanier	Pierre Trepanier	R. Lee Walther
Jackie Wheeler	Mindy Woodworth	Ashley Young	802 ***-***04	

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mrs. Leclerc, called the Thursday, November 17, 2022 BUUSD Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., which was held at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

On a motion by Mr. Reil, seconded by Mr. Malone, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the Agenda as presented.

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1 Meeting Minutes From November 2, 2022

On a motion by Mr. Reil, seconded by Mr. Lyons, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the November 2, 2022 BUUSD Finance Committee meeting.

5. New Business

5.1 Listening Session: Community Input on FY24 Budget

Mrs. Leclerc thanked community members for their attendance. It was noted that Luke Aither will be this evening's moderator and time keeper. Mr. Hennessey thanked community members for their attendance and provided an overview of a Power Point Presentation titled "Budget Listening Session" (which was displayed on screen). The presentation included the District's Vision & Mission, Draft 1 (an increase of 8.65% for salary and benefits, facilities, safety and cyber security), the definition of "equalized pupil", basic information on local tax rates, how to calculate the annual homestead educational tax rate, income sensitivity adjustments (for approximately 66% of tax payers), and voting information. Mr. Aither advised regarding the 'Rules of the Road' for this evening's meeting. The listening portion of the meeting commenced.

Questions/Comments include:

Which COVID related programs are going to cease/to continue, or are going to be added to the budget?

How much money is being budgeted for the Foundation Program for Literacy?

What is the budget increase if the budget is level funded, knowing that the budget must also account for the rise in salaries and benefits?

Given the challenges of hiring staff, when does the District no longer budget for positions that have remained unfilled for an extended period of time? How many of these types of positions exist?

When does the District anticipate that the educational effects of COVID will be sufficiently addressed, and trends and expenses will settle back to pre-COVID rates?

Has the influx of staff to deal with behavior issues been effective, and if not, why? What is not working and what is the plan?

What would the budget be with higher salary increases for the negotiated contract? When does the District expect to settle the contract?

Concern regarding behavior related issues

Does the property tax credit impact the budget or the tax rate?

Are test scores improving and if so, are they improving at a sufficient rate? What is a sufficient rate? If scores are not sufficiently improving, what is being done to improve educational outcomes, other than increasing the budget?

What is going to be done to remediate the asbestos issue (in the SHS ceiling tiles)?

Concern regarding intensive behavioral needs and the lack of support staff to work with these children to assure that students and staff members are safe and that academics can continue in the classrooms. What is the budget impact to provide the necessary interventions to handle these situations?

What is the actual 'cash value' of the 8.65% increase?

It was noted that the District has had two years of large surpluses (2 to 3 million dollars each year). A request was received for the District to provide a summary of how these surplus monies were used and if those uses mitigated budget increases or tax bills.

What is the current budget surplus and what are the plans for that surplus?

What is the anticipated student enrollment for next year and how does that compare to past years, and does it correlate with the budget?

Concern that some teachers lack the ability to work effectively and build relationships with autistic students, and a request that additional training be provided to teachers.

Support for funding investments for students and concern that the cost per pupil is one of the lowest in the state.

Concern/alarm at the rate the school budget is increasing. Concern that due to inflation, many community members are struggling, and that some may need to move because they can no longer afford property taxes.

A suggestion that the District considering contracting with outside agencies for behaviorally challenged students.

A query regarding what SPED services are paid by Medicaid and where does the Medicaid money go?

Concern that the salary increase percentage for administrators (principals' offices & Superintendent) is greater than the increase percentage for general instruction.

A question regarding how the SPED budget is arrived at and why it is increasing when it has had a surplus because of vacant positions. Can the SPED budget be voted on separately? Are SPED surpluses being used as a slush fund for general education? Will the technology increase be used so that parents and community members can see what is being taught in the schools?

An expression of gratitude for this evening's meeting and opening up discussion to the public, and for the increase to the sub line.

The belief that incorporating grant funded positions into the budget is beneficial.

A query regarding the difference between the anticipated salary increase and the increase reflected in the budget.

Concern that the new salary metrics for principals and other administrators is above the budgeted amount and that these increases were given without Board guidance or approval. What is being done to cover the impact of these increases and how to cover the cost in the years going forward? Are these increases similar to those in Chittenden County and if so why?

Positions added during COVID were supposed to be absorbed through attrition. Is that happening?

What are the numbers that need to be received from the State (to finalize the tax impact) and how do these numbers impact the budget?

Concern that many community members are struggling to heat their homes, and that a large budget increase is not wise.

Concern that there have been multi-million dollar surpluses the past two years, yet the District wants to increase the budget.

A suggestion that the District 'tighten its belt' like so many other businesses and community members need to do.

Why is the budget constantly increasing when the student population is dropping?

A suggestion that the District look into more Federal Funding.

A suggestion that salaries be increased for support staff, who can receive the same amount of pay for jobs that do not involve the responsibility of caring for children.

How much money is in the Capital Improvement Fund? How much is 'earmarked' for designated projects? How much does the District propose to use from this fund and for what?

The importance of investing in children and what does the District have to show for a 'return on investment' from previous years?

Support for staff and students and willingness by some to pay more in taxes in an effort to support students. The importance of community support.

Concern over behavior issues and lack of support for students, whose behaviors are disrupting entire classrooms, negatively impacting the learning for all students. A concern that more positions are being added when the District can't fill the current positions.

A question regarding the 10% reduction in the Pre-k line item, and what progress is being made with pre-k students.

Support for additional monies, but only if it results in positive change.

Support for increases in teacher salaries.

Teacher salaries are 'set in stone' as they are in the teachers' contract.

How are students in SPED counted in the equalized pupil formula?

Why is the line item for the BTMES SRO less than the SRO line items at BCEMS and SHS?

Why are many line items (in the 2023 and 2024 budgets) budgeted higher than the 2022 actuals ?

Concern over the lack of personnel for providing services to students in SPED.

Concern that the budget is a bit misguided, as there are much higher increases for administrators than for teachers and support staff.

What is the barrier to providing services to SPED students?

Mrs. Leclerc polled the members of the Finance Committee regarding their thoughts on the budget. Input included; information relating to how various numbers (e.g. CLA etc) impact the tax rate, the issues that will arise if previously ESSER funded positions are not absorbed through attrition, the issue of the timing of budget votes which will most likely occur prior to the signing of a new contract with teachers, the need to recognize that these are serious times with serious problems, that everyone is 'all in it together, and the Board needs to take time to absorb and contemplate the best way to formulate a budget, recognition that this is a unique year (including pandemic recovery, a challenging economy, and record inflation), the need to find a balance on investing in our schools and the communities' ability to pay, acknowledgement that in the Barre community, the average household income is lower than any of the surrounding districts, enrollment trends, the challenge of the many unknowns (State provided numbers), not knowing if workforce challenges will improve, the need to find new and innovative ways to educate students in a cost effective manner, appreciation for participants/feedback, and the announcement that there is a FAQs page on the web site.

Mrs. Leclerc provided a brief overview of Budget Draft #1, advising that 55% wages, 20% health benefits, and 25% miscellaneous.

Mrs. Leclerc advised that the numbers do not reflect the actual increases for teachers as they have not been negotiated yet.

Mrs. Leclerc advised regarding the HVAC Project at SHS which has come in \$267,000 over the \$7,000,000 ESSER funded allocation.

The District recently learned of asbestos in ceiling tiles at SHS which may add another \$450,000 to the project.

6. Old Business

Mr. Allen advised that the budget development survey went out last Friday (11/11/22). Thus far there are 282 responses. The survey closes on Friday (11/18/22). Mr. Allen will begin compiling information on Monday (11/21/22) and will post the data to the web site. Paper copies of the survey are available at tonight's meeting.

7. Other Business

None.

8. Items for Future Agendas

- 10-Year Strategic Plan
- Financial Component of SHS Asbestos Issues
- FY24 Budget
- Review Updated 5-Year Capital Plan

9. Next Meeting Dates

Tuesday, November 29, 2022 at 6:00 p.m., at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

Thursday, December 15, 2022 at 6:00 p.m., at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

10. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Malone, seconded by Mr. Lyons, the Committee unanimously agreed to adjourn at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Poulin