

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

Spaulding High School Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
January 19, 2023 - 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:

Giuliano Cecchinelli
Alice Farrell
Chris Parker
Sonya Spaulding

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Chris Hennessey, Superintendent
Jamie Evans, Facilities Director
Rebekah Mortensen, Assistant Director of Special Services
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager

PUBLIC MEMBERS PRESENT:

David Delcore – Times Argus	Cassie Bell	Michael Boutin	Erin Carter	Bella Cecchinelli
Stephanie Collins	Michael Deering, II	Cassandra Demarais	Brendan Eaton	Sarah Helman
Josh Howard	Claire Isabelle	Meredith Kerin	Joseph Kill	Pat MacAskill
Jessica Maurais	Dan Morrison	Dean Preston	Tina Routhier	Diane Solomon
Rachel Van Vliet	Mindy Woodworth	Ashley Young	Pierre	

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mrs. Leclerc, called the Thursday, January 19, 2023 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. Lyons, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the agenda as presented.

3. Public Comment

Mrs. Spaulding queried regarding a question asked at a previous Board Meeting regarding Board Members who have signed a petition for BTMES, to withdraw from the District (which is a conflict of interest). Mrs. Leclerc advised that this question is not appropriate and that these inquiries should be made to Board Members directly. Mr. Malone reiterated that he has not signed the petition. Mr. Howard advised that he has reviewed the petitions and Mrs. Leclerc, Mr. Reil, Mr. Malone, and Mrs. Farrell have not signed the petition. Mr. Deering inquired regarding the reasons why the District is having difficulty retaining staff.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1 Meeting Minutes From January 3, 2023

On a motion by Mr. Reil, seconded by Mr. Lyons, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the January 03, 2023 BUUSD Finance Committee meeting.

5. New Business

5.1 Budget Flyer

Mr. Hennessey advised that the budget flyer is being worked on and will be similar to what was produced last year. It was noted that the flyer which has more detailed information, will be posted online. The document included in tonight's packet is a copy of last year's Annual Report for discussion under Agenda Item 5.2.

5.2 Annual Report

A copy of the FY23 Annual Report was distributed.

Mr. Hennessey advised that work is being performed to draft this document, noting that this document is more time sensitive because it needs to meet deadlines from the printer. A draft of the Annual Report will be shared with the Board. Mrs. Leclerc queried regarding the process for Board approval of the Annual Report (prior to it going to print). It was noted that in the past, the Board has provided feedback and amendments to the Annual Report.

6. Old Business

6.1 FY24 Budget

Copies of graphs relating to equalized pupil counts, surpluses, budget information, and CLA information were distributed.

Lengthy discussion was held, including; concern that administrators did not present the Board with a detailed budget for an increase of 1.5% (as requested by the Finance Committee), concern that a line item draft of the budget has not been distributed and that an across the board (by line item) increase of 1.5% will not work, concern that after increases in salaries and benefits, a 1.5% budget increase will not be sufficient to fund the District, clarification that the 1.5% budget increase does not eliminate any filled positions, a query regarding how long unfilled positions will remain in the budget (some have remain unfilled for 2 or 3 years), a perception that funds for currently unfilled positions can be used to fund the positions that are filled, efforts to recruit staff for vacant positions, the financial impact of outplacement of students (there are currently 7 students on wait lists for outplacement), the recent filling of 4 para-educator positions, concerns regarding IEPs not being met, a belief that surpluses should not be considered as part of the budget process, rather surpluses should be perceived as 'a gift', concern that surpluses could be easily depleted, a suggestion that areas in the budget that are not being used, should be reallocated to other areas of the budget, a belief that surplus funds from FY23 could be added to the Tax Stabilization Fund, a belief that the \$700,000 allocated as revenue for FY23 will not be needed (based on the projected surplus), the opinion that it would be better to overspend a little (in FY24), rather than have a large surplus, consideration of economic indicators, the loss of ESSER funds for FY25, concern that other districts are requesting money from the State Education Fund, the difficult challenge of balancing the needs of the schools and the needs of the tax payers, tax adjustments based on income sensitivity, a query regarding the balances in various funds, a query regarding identification of any line items that are significantly underspent, an overview of what occurs when the District runs a deficit (must use Tax Stabilization Fund / can't use Capital Improvement Fund, or add the deficit amount to the next year's budget), concern that public opinion is not being responded to, concern that salary increases will not be large enough, acknowledgement that salary increases are arrived at during the negotiation process, the correlation between per-pupil spending and academic achievement, acknowledgment that outplacement facilities are full and other outside contractors also have staff shortages, a query regarding how an FY23 deficit will be dealt with if the District is able to outplace students, concern that District employees are leaving the District to work for outside contractors, and are then hired back to work in the District (contracted employees) at a higher cost, concern that the proposed per-pupil spending amount (\$17,228) is significantly less than the state average (\$20,155), a suggestion that contracted providers may be more qualified to provide services, recognition that some individuals prefer to work outside of a school setting (year-round work) to increase their income vs a school setting (working 9 months per year), a query regarding current rates for para-educators, a request that the Finance Committee provide a written document to 'dumb down' an explanation of the proposed 1.5% increase, reiteration that the Board as a whole did not provide guidance regarding budget parameters, an overview of previous budget development work (including parameters set by the Board and subsequent meetings with administrators that included constructive/productive dialogue), concern that this process has not been followed this year and a request that a line item budget (with explanations for recommendations) be provided, a request for respectful, collaborative dialogue, a request (from Mr. Hennessey) for some direction from the Board regarding how to draft the budget to come in at 1.5%, concern that there was not enough collaboration with the Board or the Finance Committee, concern that the majority of attendees at the last Board meeting were employees of the District (rather than community members/tax payers), a query regarding whether or not employees were asked to attend the meeting, a suggestion that surplus funds be used to finance major facilities projects (rather than be used to support the budget), concern regarding upcoming, costly facilities projects (including mandated storm water run-off mitigation), concern that \$7,200,000 in ESSER funding was used for facilities matters rather than being spent on improving student education, concern that the Board voted to approve the budget, and 'owns' the budget, but the Finance Committee is being asked to explain the budget, concern that the Board Chair does not understand the budget and wants more information, concern that not enough individuals participated in budget development, but rather showed up at the '11th hour' to complain about the budget, a staff member's belief in what their responsibility is for budget development, concern that large text book replacements have been put off for ten years, a request for a 'summary' of 'where the budget is at', a belief that everyone involved does care about the children in the District, a query regarding the process moving forward, to work collaboratively in the best interest of the students, concern regarding the large surplus amounts from the past few years, a query regarding standards for surpluses and reserves, a request that Board Members put thought into what they believe is a 'good' surplus amount, a goal to hold a reflective session on FY24 budget development (at the February Finance Committee meeting), a request that the District discuss (and employees be provided with) the worth of the total compensation package (salaries and all benefits, HRA's, leave time, etc..) so that employees see the bottom line and know the total amount of money they are 'getting', a request that the Superintendent and administrators meet with the Finance Committee to possibly reach a different 'end' and consider a motion to reconsider the budget vote, Mr. Hennessey's understanding that the charge to he and administrators is to draft a line item budget with a 1.5% increase and they will begin to work on that, a query regarding possible discussion to consider a change to the number of student days, acknowledgment that the Board determines the number of student days and administrators draft the

academic calendar, and a query regarding the amount of unallocated funds (FY22 surplus is \$2,350,000 and is addressed in Special Articles for use on three large facilities projects),

6.2 FY23 Year-end Projections

The BUUSD Expense/Revenue Year-end Projection Summary Report – Updated 01/19/23, was distributed.

The BUUSD Expense Report (dated 01/04/23) was distributed.

The BUUSD Revenue Report (dated 01/13/23) was distributed.

The BUUSD Balance Sheet As of December 31, 2022 was distributed.

The projected surplus is currently \$690,367 and is subject to change as the year progresses. It was clarified that the surplus includes the \$700,000 being allocated from the Tax Stabilization Fund. It was reiterated that if outside placements are made, it's possible that the surplus could be reduced significantly.

6.3 5-Year Capital Plan

A copy of the BUUSD 5-Year Facility Draft Plan (updated 01/04/23) was distributed.

Discussion included a request to amend the document to be more robust (more information), a query regarding whether or not the document includes any information pertaining to possible consolidation of schools (no), a query regarding funds available for immediate need, concern that classroom temperatures are very inconsistent at BTMES, a suggestion that more detailed information regarding projects would be beneficial for budgeting purposes, acknowledgement that the Facilities Committee does hold more in-depth discussions on potential projects, a query regarding the existence of formal forms/documents that are utilized to outline projects, a brief overview of the process currently used, a query regarding possible underfunding of some of the identified projects, acknowledgement that the Plan is a living/evolving document, clarification that amounts listed in the document are estimates (hard numbers cannot be added to the document until projects go out to bid), and confirmation that procedures related to bidding and procurement etc. are available on the District's web site,

7. Other Business

In response to an offer that the Finance Committee work collaboratively with the Superintendent and administrators (on details of the FY24 budget); Mr. Hennessey advised that he will first work with administrators (on Monday 01/23/23).

In response to a query regarding the audit finding related to the overage that is not FDIC insured, Mrs. Perreault advised that she has worked with a representative from the Community Bank, and the District will be moving funds from the Food Service Account into the District's operating account.

8. Items for Future Agendas

- FY23 Year-end Projection
- Act 173 Update (if data available) – (Parking Lot Item D- keep in parking for additional discussion)
- Budget Cycle Reflection (Parking Lot Item G)
- Warrant Process (Parking Lot Item A)
- 5-Year Capital Plan

9. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting is Thursday, February 16, 2023 at 6:00 p.m., at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

10. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Reil, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the Committee unanimously agreed to adjourn at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Poulin