

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING**
Spaulding High School Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
February 16, 2023 - 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Michelle Hebert

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Giuliano Cecchinelli
Alice Farrell
Sonya Spaulding

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Luke Aither, SHS Co-Principal
Emmanuel Ajanma, Director of Technology
Stacy Anderson, Director of Special Services
Elizabeth Brown, Director of Early Education
Jamie Evans, Facilities Director
Karen Fredericks, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Pierre Laflamme, BCEMS Principal
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources
Mari Miller, SHS Assistant Principal
Rebekah Mortensen, Assistant Director of Special Services
Jennifer Nye, BTMES Principal
Erica Pearson, BTMES Principal
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager
Brenda Waterhouse, BCEMS Principal

PUBLIC MEMBERS PRESENT:

David Delcore – Times Argus	Mel Battah	Jeff Blow	Michael Boutin	Cassandra Demarais
Erika Dolan	Brendan Eaton	Nathaniel Fredericks	Megan Gonyaw	Chelsea Haberek
Karen Heath	Carol Hebert	Sarah Helman	Josh Howard	Agatha Kessler
Meredith Kerin	Joseph Kill	Brandy Kolling	Prudence Krasofski	Patrick Leene
Norma Malone	Dan Morrison	Kevin Richards	Maria Richards	Tim Sanborn
Megan Spaulding	William Toborg	Rachel Van Vliet	Emily Wheeler	Jan Z.

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mrs. Leclerc, called the Thursday, February 16, 2023 BUUSD Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:03 p.m., which was held at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

Add 6.3 FY24 Budget Line Item Adjustments
Remove 5.2 Total Compensation Packet
Some agenda items may be taken out of order.

On a motion by Mr. Reil, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the agenda as amended.

3. Public Comment

It was noted that the meeting link is not working this evening. It appears that more than one link was posted and not all links are working.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1 Meeting Minutes From January 19, 2023

On a motion by Mr. Malone, seconded by Mrs. Pregent, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the January 19, 2023 BUUSD Finance Committee meeting.

5. New Business

5.1 Budget Reflection

Discussion will be limited to the budget process, not the budget itself. Mrs. Pregent is satisfied with the current process. Mr. Reil would prefer to hold this discussion after the budget process had ended. Mr. Malone believes the dynamics need to change, and queried regarding more involvement by administrators' in the review of line items. Administrators are agreeable to line item discussions, but believe it would be more productive to hold those discussions in a less public forum (to assist with focus / less distraction). Mr. Laflamme believes that much more civil conversation all along, with some earlier different views on how the District is managed, would be beneficial. Mr. Laflamme believes there should be reflection on two items; that no one involved in these conversations wants to do harm to any child, and that all involved want the children's experience to be richer, and he hopes the District moves forward with a much more civil process. Mrs. Nye advised that each year, as part of the budget development process, she asks for definition of the District's values and beliefs, and that if common values and beliefs are agreed upon, it would assist with driving the budget conversations. Mr. Malone clarified that there are not 1500 line items at each building and that the Board finds it beneficial to hear directly from administrators regarding what they need in their individual buildings. Mr. Malone advised that in the past, there was more involvement between administrators and the Board. Mr. Malone reiterated his frustration that the Board did not reach a consensus regarding budget parameters. Mrs. Poulin advised that in her 16 years as scribe, she has never before seen a budget presented to the Board for approval, without seeing the line items and having discussion of those line items. That the line item budget was not presented to the Board for discussion and deliberation, Mrs. Poulin feels is unacceptable and inexcusable. That the Board was forced to approve an amount, without seeing any line items, has never happened in the past and doing so this year has caused a lot of problems. Additionally, the Board was told that the approval deadline was 01/20/23, when it was, in reality 01/30/23. Mrs. Poulin believes the District needs to stay on top of these important issues, and she hopes to not see this (budget approval without detail provided to the Board) again. Mrs. Leclerc would like to outline items that should be improved upon for future budget development. Mrs. Pregent advised that the last budget the Board was presented with had a 6.67% increase, and that when the Board was polled, there were many different preferences (ranging from 2% to 6.67%), and that the Finance Committee recommended a 1.5% increase. Mrs. Pregent believes that it is understandable that it took a long time to reduce a budget from 6.67% to 1.5%. Mr. Malone noted that the Finance Committee asked for a budget of 1.5% budget, not a 4.97% budget and though it would have been nice to see both scenarios at the Board meeting, the 30 day delay in receiving the 1.5% budget is what he finds most frustrating. Mr. Malone queried regarding why the requested budget was not presented. Mrs. Perreault advised that this year's budget process has been similar to previous years. Mrs. Perreault advised that it was very difficult to come back with a 1.5% budget increase and she does not believe there are a lot of budgets around that state that came in that low. Mrs. Leclerc believes the budget development timeline should be updated to assure enough time to include presentation to the Board. Mrs. Farrell advised regarding the style in which a budget is developed and queried regarding other styles of budget development.

—5.2 Total Compensation Package

A copy of a screen-print of a 'Total Compensation' statement was distributed.

6. Old Business

6.1FY23 Year-end Projections

Three documents were distributed:

'BUUSD FY23 Expense/Revenue Year-end Projection Summary Report (updated 02/16/23)'

The BUUSD Revenue Report (dated 02/09/23)

BUUSD Expense Report (dated 02/06/23)

Mrs. Perreault advised there is not a lot new to report. There will be monthly updates going forward. The District is trending towards a \$700,000 surplus. Mrs. Perreault advised regarding one error, which has been fixed, and will be reflected in next month's report.

6.2 Warrant Process

A copy of the BUUSD Warrant Procedures (dated 08/17/22) was distributed.

Mrs. Leclerc provided an overview of the Warrant Process and Procedures, advising that, based on her experience approving warrants, she is recommending a change from the current processes/procedures. Mrs. Leclerc recommends that warrants be presented to the Board, and the Board as a whole, approve the warrants. Mrs. Farrell advised regarding the process utilized years ago, whereby the warrants were brought to Board meetings, and she believes it would be too cumbersome to bring all invoices to the Board meeting. Mrs. Leclerc clarified that her recommendation does not involve bringing the invoices to Board meetings. Mrs. Leclerc advised regarding the number of approval steps that take place within the District, advising that she does not believe a Board Member needs to physically review all of the documentation at Central Office. Mrs. Pregent queried regarding how often the Board would approve warrants, and voiced concern regarding possible delays in payments. Mrs. Leclerc advised that currently the checks go out regardless

of any concerns raised by the individual approving warrants. Mrs. Leclerc advised that the new financial system does allow for electronic payments to vendors, which will reduce the number of physical checks. Mrs. Perreault provided a brief overview of the multiple step approval process. Mrs. Leclerc proposes creating a new warrant approval procedure. Mrs. Perreault will draft new procedures (in collaboration with Mrs. Leclerc), and Mrs. Leclerc will plan on sharing the new procedures at the Board Reorganization meeting.

6.3 FY24 Budget Line Item Adjustments

Four documents were distributed;

An undated letter from the Superintendent to the BUUSD Finance Committee

A document titled BUUSD Special Education Student and Staff Totals 2019 to Present

A document titled FY24 Budget, Draft 4, Finance Committee Recommendations, 2/16/23

A document titled BUUSD FY24 Proposed Revenue – Draft 4, 01/13/23

The document titled ‘FY24 Budget Draft 4, Finance Committee Recommendations’, are not recommendations from the Finance Committee, but are reductions from administrators based on the Finance Committee’s recommendation for a budget increase of 1.5%. Mrs. Pregent advised regarding her review of budget data and noted line items that could be reduced to assist with reinstating some of the proposed cuts (BC SRO, security cameras, bus riders, and approximately half of the cost of athletics and clubs). The total reductions identified by Mrs. Pregent total \$151,000. Mrs. Perreault provided additional detail regarding line items that can be reduced. Mr. Reil advised regarding some areas he would like to explore for reduction (based on budget vs. actuals) and suggested that there be a line by line review of the budget. Mrs. Leclerc suggested that Committee Members send lists of potential reductions to her so that the information can be compiled and presented to the Superintendent and Business Manager. It was noted that the line item report being discussed is not included in this evening’s packet. Lengthy discussion was held regarding various possible line item reductions. Mr. Malone advised regarding line items/positions (slated for reduction in the administrators’ budget) that he believes do not need to be reduced/cut. Mr. Malone advocates for reviewing all of the line items, and advised regarding past practices relating to the budget development process. Mr. Malone advised that a review of line items should have occurred a long time ago and that it would have been beneficial to have administrators present for those discussions. Mr. Malone reiterated that on 01/03/23, the Committee recommended that a budget increase of 1.5% be presented to the Board, and that line items for that budget be presented at the Board meeting. Mr. Malone advised that instead, the Board was presented with a budget that had a 4.97% increase (an amount that hadn’t been requested. Mr. Malone reiterated his frustration that it took 30 days for the Board to receive the requested budget. Mr. Malone wonders if this discussion would be necessary if the Board had been presented, in a timely fashion, with what was requested by the Committee, in order to allow for discussion and possible modifications to take place. Mrs. Spaulding is of the opinion that the budget should be created and presented by administration and believes this discussion creates tension. Mrs. Spaulding believes the Finance Committee is acting like it doesn’t trust administrators. A community member queried why it took 30 days for the budget to be presented to the Board, when it has been stated that it took 3 days to create. A community member queried regarding who makes budget cuts. It was noted that past practice involved the Board setting budget parameters, administrators presenting various possible cuts to meet the parameters, and then the Board reviewing the options and approving or disapproving some of the cuts. The Board has always had input regarding what cuts will be made. There has always been constructive discussion regarding the budget. A community member queried regarding the addition of a position for behavioral interventions. Mrs. Perreault would very much appreciate receiving a document outlining Committee Members’ recommendations, and advised it will take significant time to review and answer to the suggestions. Mrs. Perreault expressed her appreciation to Committee Members for their efforts in reviewing the line item budget. Mrs. Leclerc noted that the budget has been approved with a 1.5% increase and advised that she requested a line item review outside of a Finance Committee meeting. Mrs. Leclerc hopes to meet with the Superintendent and Business Manager to review the Committee’s suggestions and arrive upon mutually agreed upon reductions. Mrs. Leclerc noted that the Director of Communications (cut in the latest version) had already (prior to the latest budget version) tendered his resignation, though she believes the position may need to be filled. The addendum documents were displayed on screen and Mrs. Perreault provided an overview of highlights of the documents (Budget Schedule, use of surplus funds (committed, unassigned, assigned, non-spendable, and restricted), implications of deficits, and unfilled positions. Mrs. Anderson provided an overview of SPED funding requirements and staffing. Brief discussion was held regarding fund balances. Mrs. Perreault provided clarification regarding the general fund. Brief discussion was held regarding possible legal jeopardy, current and future, due to unfilled SPED positions. Mrs. Pregent noted the increase in the number of students on IEPs and the decrease in the number of para-educators. Mrs. Leclerc noted that all districts are having great difficulty filling para-educator positions. In response to a query from Mrs. Spaulding regarding last year’s 1.95% increase (\$901,000), Mrs. Spaulding was directed to look at last year’s budget packets, which do contain that information. Mrs. Pregent noted that during last year’s budget development, there was a teacher contract in place and salary increases were known. Mr. Toborg queried regarding how much money could be saved if the administrative raises that were not approved by the Board were rejected by the Board. It was noted that the amount of unapproved administrative raises is \$97,000. Mrs. Poulin requested some sort of commitment for a plan on finalized numbers and when that information will be provided to the public so that voters can make educated/informed decisions. Given that absentee ballots are already being distributed, Mrs. Poulin believes it is imperative that information be provided expeditiously. Megan Spaulding believes it is unfair to the community, as they begin to vote, that there is no clarity on the budget. Mr. Malone advised that the overall budget increase can’t change at this point, and that the matter at hand, is what line items will be impacted. Brief discussion was held regarding the possibility of adding middle school students to the SEA Program (utilizing a staggered schedule).

Mrs. Anderson advised that the District is in the process of moving some 8th grade students to SEA. Brief discussion was held regarding use of the Capital Improvement Fund. Mrs. Leclerc advised that she has learned a lot during budget development.

7. Other Business

Mr. Reil thanked Mrs. Pregent for her years of service on the Finance Committee and the Board and wishes her well in the future. Mr. Reil advised of the new procedure for two year Committee Appointments, and queried regarding Mr. Lyon's interest on serving for an additional year.

Mr. Lyons read a statement that 'tells why he is here'; The most important thing we can do, is to participate, to serve, attend, and get involved in town and school committee meetings. This is essential to insure that the town makes sound decisions for all of its residents. Mr. Lyons advised that he is willing to serve for another year.

Mrs. Leclerc thanked Mrs. Pregent for her service.

8. Items for Future Agendas

~~8.1 Act 173~~

~~8.2 FY23 Actuals~~

- Continuation of Budget Reflection
- FY23 Year-end Projection
- Total Compensation Package
- Warrant Procedures Revision

Add to Parking Lot:

- Overview of Solar Credit Process – Added by TR / February 2023

9. Next Meeting Date

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

10. Adjournment

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Mr. Reil, the Committee unanimously agreed to adjourn at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Poulin