

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING**
Spaulding High School Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
January 4, 2024 - 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sonya Spaulding (BC) – Chair
Paul Malone (BT) – Vice Chair
Michelle Hebert
John Lyons, Jr
Sarah Pregent (BC)
Emily Reynolds (BT)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Michael Boutin
Giuliani Cecchinelli
Nancy Leclerc
Chris Parker

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Chris Hennessey, Superintendent
Jamie Evans, Facilities Director
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager

PUBLIC MEMBERS PRESENT:

David Delcore, Time Argus	Jeff Blow	Alice Farrell	Michael Gilbar	Josh Howard
Victoria Pompei	Jan Trepanier	Rachel Van Vliet		

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mrs. Spaulding, called the Thursday, January 4, 2024 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

Postpone Agenda Item 4 (Approval of Minutes) as minutes were not included in the packet.
Discussion of Budget Informational Meeting will be held under Agenda Item 6.1 FY25 Budget Development

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

Postponed.

5. New Business

None.

6. Old Business

6.1 FY25 Budget Development

Seven documents were distributed;
A letter to the BUUSD Finance Committee dated January 2024
Proposed FY25 Expenses Budget – 12/28/23
Budget Modeling
Frequently Asked Questions to Understand Pupil Weights
FY25 Budget Development Narrative – Draft 2 – Updated 01/02/24
BUUSD Warning For March 5, 2024 vote – Draft

BUUSD Budget 2024 – 25 – Proposed & Estimated 1/4/24 Comparative Tax Rate Calculations Using \$700,000 Toward Revenue

Mr. Hennessey and Mrs. Perreault provided a brief overview of what is contained in the packet and an explanation of the documents. Discussion included; a query regarding information included in the draft Warning, appreciation for inclusion of per-pupil spending, concern that the budget is not palatable to tax payers, is not sustainable, and needs to be reduced, concern of absorbing numerous positions that have been grant funded, the lack of a confirmed CLA, the shrinking of the City Grand List due to flooding, a 10% income tax increase being considered by the State, other unknown factors, a suggestion that a number of items be reduced or eliminated, confirmation that the BTMES budget shows a negative increase due to shifting of positions to the Central Office and funding a sound system in FY24 rather than FY25, a query regarding percentage increases being missing for departments, a query regarding custodial overtime data (hours/expenses), changes to water/sewer and supply budgets (based on prior years' experience), the proposed grant writer position, a suggestion to consider outsourcing the grant writing position, acknowledgement that a portion of the tax rate increase is not within the control of the District, acknowledgement that the increase is daunting, and it would take significant cuts to lower the tax rate (due to the cap under Act 127) and that the District needs to address the needs of students, concern regarding the number of positions that were added to the budget, provision of some suggested reductions, audit results (total expended in FY23 and fund balances), support for the SRO position at SHS, unexpected revenue that was received for Special Education, a belief that the facilities budget does not need to go from 75¢ SF to 1.00 SF, a query regarding what would be a comfortable amount to keep in reserves, discussion of the new grant writer position vs the current grant manager position, concern that over half of ESSER Funds were utilized for facilities projects, a belief that there is no justification for a \$10,000 increase for legal services, amounts budgeted for staff appreciation and professional development day meals, leasing of vehicles (will be discussed at the facilities meeting), clarification of facilities line items in the Central Office budget (as well as other departments, a suggestion that some FY25 items be financed in FY24, a suggestion to drop the facilities line item back to 75¢ SF and put additional surplus monies in the Capital Improvement fund, concern that ESSER positions being added to the budget are needed, acknowledgement that the homeless population count has increased significantly over the last 5 years (resulting in higher needs), a belief that staffing positions should not be cut, the purpose of Act 127 and the resulting 'fiscal cliff' that will come into play in five years, acknowledgement that the monies above the Act 127 cap still need to be made up, concern that 50% of Barre City housing is rental housing and renters do not benefit from homestead rebates and landlords will need to increase rents to cover additional taxes, concern that renters will be 'priced' out of the city, acknowledgement that Barre has challenging demographics and the District is not trying to 'game' the system, a belief that for the past decade, the District has been 'kicking the can down the road' (under the belief that the communities can't afford high increases) and now is the time to correct the funding to provide services that students need, a preference to err on the side of what students' need rather than what makes tax payers happy, a belief that in previous years salaries were not competitive, the need to attract and retain employees, the importance of safety related positions, the belief that in the two years following consolidation, the construction line item was funded at \$1.00 SF, the need to finance for deferred maintenance, including playgrounds that are 'tired' and not ADA compliant, acknowledgement that though buildings are well maintained, two are over 50 years old, a new industry facilities budgeting standard (2% to 4% of replacement value), a belief that the District does not have the lowest spending per pupil if calculated using the actual dollar amount expended, divided by the physical number of students (equates to approximately \$30,000 per student), information regarding the State funding formula (dictated by statute) to determine cost per pupil, the intent of Act 127, community concern that the funding formula isn't accurately reflecting the cost, acknowledgement that State and Federal grants are also funded by the taxpayers, so grant funds are still being paid for by tax payers, reiteration over the concern of the fiscal cliff that was warned of in previous years, acknowledgement of \$16,000,000 in increases over the past few years, support and lack of support for the budget, concern over 20% salary increases, a request that the true tax impact be conveyed to tax payers and that tax payers can't afford an 11.7% increase, a request that the increase be capped at 5%, the importance of providing a safe academic place for students, a belief that if funds were available, there would be no question of approving the budget, but the proposed increase may not be passed by voters, a belief that the current budget reflects an increase between \$20 and \$50 per month and that due to the Act 147 cap, more than \$1,300,000 would need to be cut to impact the tax rate, a query regarding how much of the 12% increase is going towards new educational ideas, policies and educational outcomes, expression of lack of trust in administrators, a request for more targeted funding, and a community member's request that the Barre Town representatives on the Finance Committee take serious consideration to the affordability of the people in their community.

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Ms. Reynolds, the Committee voted 3 to 3 on the motion to move draft 2 as proposed by administration, to the Board for a proposal to the voters. The motion failed.

**Mrs. Pregent, Ms. Reynolds, and Mrs. Spaulding voted for the motion.
Ms. Hebert, Mr. Lyons, and Mr. Malone voted against the motion.**

Brief discussion was held regarding when to hold a budget informational meeting. It will be important to hold the meeting early (possibly early in February) to accommodate early voters.

6.2 FY24 Revenue/Expense

A document titled FY24 Expense/Revenue Summary Report – 01/04/24 was distributed.

A document titled BUUSD GF Finance Expense Report by Function (dated 12/31/23) was distributed.

Mrs. Perreault advised regarding the projection as of 12/31/23; a \$650,000 surplus. It was clarified that there was a suggestion to fund some FY25 items (wrestling mats, football uniforms, and sound system at BTMES) using the current year's funds (FY24 surplus), so the projected amount is likely to decrease as some line items will be knowingly over spent. It was noted that fund raising may reduce the amount necessary for these projects. It was clarified that the FY24 projected surplus does include the use of \$700,000 from the tax stabilization fund. Brief discussion was held regarding purchasing practices and a community member queried regarding how current monies are being spent to assure successful outcomes for the students and assure that they are prepared for fall of 2024 (use this year's money to prepare for next year). Mr. Malone queried regarding presentation of test scores. Mr. Hennessey advised that State assessment scores are still embargoed, but localized assessments are available.

7. Items for Future Agendas

- FY25 Budget Communication / Questions
- Understanding of Meeting Norms When Receiving Threats from the Public
- Policies F20 and F23
- FY24 Expenses/Revenue
- Total Compensation Package

8. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting is Monday, February 19, 2024 at 6:00 p.m., at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

9. Adjournment

On a motion by Mrs. Pregent, seconded by Ms. Reynolds, the Committee unanimously agreed to adjourn at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Poulin