

**BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**REGULAR BOARD MEETING**  
Aldrich Public Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet  
August 14, 2024 - 6:00 p.m.

**MINUTES**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Michael Boutin (BC) – Chair  
Giuliano Cecchinelli II (BC) - Vice Chair  
Sonya Spaulding (BC)- Clerk  
Nancy Leclerc (At-Large)  
Emily Reynolds (BT)  
Terry Reil (BT)  
Garrett Grant (BC)  
Alice Farrell (BT)  
Catherine Whalen (BT)

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

**ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:**

JoAn Canning, Superintendent  
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager  
Jesse Schattin, SEA Administrator  
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources

**GUESTS PRESENT:**

Adam Jacobs, AJ Jones, Alex Alexander, Allison Mills, Amy Scalabrini, Brodey Priddy, Cassandra Demarais, Chris Moran, Colleen Kresco, Courtnie Lange, Darby Hiebert, Dave Wendt, David Delcore - Times Argus, Denise Lavalley, Holly Hoyt, Jackie Wheeler, Jasmine Wible, Jessica Maurais, Josh Howard, June Babel, Karen Moran, Kristina Merrifield, Kristina Safford, Lara Merchant, Lindsey Wells, Mary Bowers, Megan Spaulding, Michaela Morris, Nicole Fuller, Paul Malone, Prudence Krasofski, Rachel Van Vliet, Rep. Peter Anthony, Roberta Melnick, Stephanie Collins, Steven Thompson, Susan Thompson, Tyler Graves, Tyler Watkins, Wendy Sell.

**1. Call to Order**

The Chair, Mr. Boutin, called the Wednesday, August 14, 2024, Regular meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., held at the Spaulding High School Library, Barre, and via video conference.

**2. Pledge and Mindfulness Moment**

The Board recited the Pledge of Allegiance. The Board held a Mindfulness Moment.

**3. Additions and/or Deletions with Motion to Approve the Agenda**

The chair recited the norms from the agenda

**Motion by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, to approve the agenda as presented, motion passed unanimously.**

**4. Comments for Items Not on the Agenda**

Mr. Boutin reminded these are comments that are about anything but the fuel and the budget.

**4.1 Public Comment**

- Mr. Watkins, please Appreciate any veterans online or in person, including spouses. Challenge each board member to spend an hour, at least once a month, in one of the schools to get a good feel of how things are working. He has faith in both sides of the aisle.
- Mrs. Thompson - Spoke about [Act 35](#), which took effect in 2022, banning suspension and expulsion for students under age 8 except when a student poses an imminent threat of harm or danger to others in the school. Barre Town handbook contains information about Act 35 but important items are absent. If an administrator is considering suspension or expulsion, they must follow the appropriate due process requirements. It is vital for families to be informed of this and other education laws so that everyone can ensure accountability from the institutions that care for our children. [VT AOE Guidelines](#)

**4.2 Student Voice**

None

## 5. Consent Agenda

- 5.1 Regular Meeting Minutes - July 24, 2024
- 5.2 Special Meeting Minutes - July 31, 2024
- 5.3 Warrant Approval: August 8, 2024
- 5.4 New Hires - No new hires

**On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mrs. Leclerc to approve the consent agenda, motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion: Clarification on Warrants? Will the Board receive a heads-up when large instructional programs are being purchased? Ms. Canning's experience if it goes through a full curriculum review is when it's purchased and approved by the administration. Are there any expenses on the warrant related to the overhead door replacement at Barre Town? Mrs. Perreault shared if it's over \$5000 it's a capital asset and would be documented.

## 6. New Business

### 6.1 Action Memo: Annual Fuel, Oil, Propane, Wood Chip contracts approval

Based on the action memo, this is giving authorization for the district to go for the lowest bid when it comes.

**Mr. Grant made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, to authorize the Business Manager to make the best decision for the lowest price for fuel, oil, propane, and wood chip contracts, motion passed 6 to 2. Mr. Reil and Mrs. Leclerc voted against the motion.**

Discussion: Comparisons, last year's process, copy of bids, and budgeted amount requested. Mrs. Perreault sent an RFP to 12 different vendors and expects to get bids back on the 19th, which are good for 24 hours. Ms. Reynold asked for a point of information. **Mr. Reil called Point of Order.** Ms. Canning assured in the future, if not prepared to give the comparisons, we'll provide RFPs. Bids are reviewed and approved by Mrs. Perreault and Mr. Evans looking at quality, price, working relationship, responsiveness, and invoicing. Ms. Reynold's point of information is a procedural question about how we're conducting our business, understanding board members direct their questions and comments to the chair. We're not engaging in discussion if we are; we're directing conversations to our superintendent. It was clarified that the superintendent directed the conversation to Mrs. Perreault. If we want to lock in at the lowest price, we will probably have to trust that the Business Manager is going to make the best decisions which is what's in this motion.

## 7. Old Business

### 7.1 FY25 Budget Discussion

Ms. Canning appreciated the level of detail and feedback from board members at the last meeting. Some had questions about some of the reductions, some had suggestions for those reductions, and some had concerns about reducing our budget any further. She went back and spoke to some community members. She will continue to be open to those discussions and will review the video.

- Provided a list of ESSER-funded positions (15 of them)
  - Some funded in different ways since 2021 according to the chart.
  - Some are in grants, some in the operating budget, and some are terminated or no longer part of the budget.
- Provided a list of reductions from votes 1, 2, & 3
- Defined unfilled positions in the previous presentation
  - Not filling Curriculum Coordinator/Math Coach (not literacy), individual move to another position.
  - Filling only one of two Intergration Specialist positions. Hiring for one and sharing amongst the schools
  - Will not fill the Grant Manager position; recent resignation. Responsibilities will be distributed to the Curriculum office, the Special Ed office, and potentially the Superintendent's office for management.
  - Support Services positions—There are a large number of openings in Special Education, ranging from teaching to support. Student populations change all the time. Kids move in and move out. At this point, we don't need two unfilled positions. If support is in an IEP, we will continue to look for those positions, and we will fill those positions to support.

Let it be known that these are changes in students' needs; they are not for our existing population, and we will fill every position to ensure that those IEPs are met.

The budget sent out yesterday is a 7.8% increase in the overall budget. Ms. Canning and the Admin team went specifically through recommendations and some of those are impossible because people are under contract. Some are areas where we've already done some level of reduction and some had some thoughts and ideas for future planning.

The following were taken into consideration:

- Cares program: We are aware that we can't hire with so many other positions open, so we intend to hire two Behavior Interventionists. Those are the most critical student-to-student positions. The original request was \$350,000; we're going to reduce that by \$210,000.
- Reducing custodial overtime by \$20,000, which occurred due to unfilled positions and not fully staffed.

- Vehicle lease - the plan to go out for another vehicle lease will not happen at this point and that expense will be a reduction of \$14,000.
- Reinstate \$50,000 for the SRO at Spaulding High School.

Additional cuts of \$194,000 changed the general fund expenses down to 7.4%. The information was appreciated but pointed out it wasn't shared in advance with the public, and the board is looking at something the community hasn't seen. Ms. Canning could table this document and bring it up next week for a full discussion after it becomes public. There are two more times to discuss this budget with the hope of a vote on the 21st. The board can vote that evening or wait until the 28th.

#### Questions:

- \$15,000 cell phone reimbursement. (The use of cell phones is part of contracts for some of our administrators.)
- Facilities - Projects, money needed, reductions, and maintenance. How do they affect this year's budget? (Ms. Canning has a 5-year plan, and there are questions about whether it contains all of the information that it should, but there is a document)
- Bus Riders - Budgeting \$150,000 but incurring 300,000 in expenses
- Custodial overtime - documentation supporting \$40,000. There is no justification for budgeting that amount.

Ms. Canning hopes the board allows her to get her arms around staffing and that is not an overnight task. Redundancy was not considered when the district merged, and there is redundancy in this budget. We need to decide whether we are going to tackle those redundancies, share some resources, and be able to do things differently.

Mixed feedback from the board included: Current increases seem very reasonable, and other communities are not able to put for such a low spending, low percent increase to their budget; Cares program why put it in at all, SRO - though important - should be in the category of not being able to fill for multiple years, list of reductions lowered increase listening to taxpayers and voters. Some feel there's more to do and this shows it's doable, surplus clarification to taxpayers, focus on moving forward by providing information and answers. Over \$2 million in reductions to date.

Ms. Canning agreed community engagement strategy would be a large part of the next meeting. We'll be talking to people and putting things up on our website, but what is the most important information that will give people what they need to understand? She will look into Special Ed extraordinary reimbursement, changed with Act 173, and bring the answer back to the board. She agreed to set up a question/answer page for the superintendent to answer questions specific to the budget, and the board will have access to answers.

Clarity provided by Mr. Reil: Tax stabilization comes into a budget essentially from two years before. FY24 surpluses wouldn't be able to be used until the FY26 budget. You can't use them until after they're audited so some monies that are in this current FY24 budget 686,000 came from the FY23 surplus. The remaining amount was leftover money in the tax stabilization fund from previous years. Also mentioned a report provided on June 30th says we had a balance of 692,000. In six weeks, what happened to 700,000? Mrs. Perreault explained year-end expenses, insurance, reconciling bank statements, and HRAs not included in the report.

## 8. Superintendent Report

- Bringing back Working Protocols to the next meeting
- Convocation (welcome back to staff) - Thursday 22nd, at SHS Auditorium, 2-hour program. Board members are invited to join. Let the superintendent know so seats can be reserved.
- The Interim Secretary of Education visited Barre Town a couple of weeks ago. She has started her Listen and Learn tour. She is planning a regional meeting with superintendents, various Central Office people, and some Agency of Education personnel on September 17th at U32. They'd like us to look at some state-generated data with a set of questions that they'd like us to answer to respond to what schools need now and in the future as a way to give that feedback to the Agency of Education.
- Energy is speeding up. School is about to start. Can't believe the staff is coming back next Thursday. Had my last summer meeting with the administrative team today and asked on a scale from 1 to 10 how well you think you're prepared for the new school year. As you can well imagine, when there are still open positions, people are not feeling like they're ready for the school year. I'm an eight because I'm defining readiness as a mental state. I am ready to get back, welcome the teachers, and get this school year started. Meeting the kids and the families so that level of energy is real.

## 9. Round Table

- Mrs. Farrell: Excited about going into this school year. Probably the first time in a long time, sitting on this board, to be excited about going into a school year. We're making good progress and continue to keep that level of progress going on. Recommended the superintendent ask the board about their level of readiness and see how we are doing at the next or future meeting.
- Ms. Reynolds: TOPSoccer Capitol Region Vermont is looking for athletes, buddies, coaches, and board members for the 2024 fall season. Join us for an hour on Sundays for smiles and fun, and earn volunteer hours while you do it. Beginning the first Sunday after Labor Day and lasting six weeks in Barre Town. Find them on Facebook at [TOPSoccer Capitol Region Vermont](#). Offering kids with unique challenges an inclusive opportunity to thrive and enjoy a sport they watch siblings and

peers have fun with every day. If anyone wants to volunteer, reach out to Cassandra Desmarais and Heather Slayton on Facebook or reach out to me and I'll connect you.

- Mrs. Spaulding: She often talks about balance between taxpayers and the student needs. Boiled it down to beyond taxpayers and student needs. Things she's struggling with most recently in this seat and the other seat she sits on is the idea that there's math and then there's people and sometimes it's hard to hold both of them at the same time. Encourages us to think about how, even though these are very carefully crafted cuts, they will impact people and students in some way, shape, or form. Recognize that every time we make a cut, it's going to have an impact on other people. When we reduce the Grant Manager we're now asking other people to take over the responsibilities for that role. Be aware that every single time we cut, that cut is going to have some kind of domino effect on other people and this isn't just a simple math equation that it's bigger than that. Just ask people to think about that.
- Mr. Grant: So apart from being on this board, he's also on the board of the Barre Community Justice Center. They are always looking for volunteers for the restorative justice panels, which, to put it very simply, is about repairing harm in the community, making sure that victims of lower-level crimes feel heard, and that we also put defenders on the right path instead of recommitting crime. So if you're interested in that or want to learn more about that, feel free to speak with him, or you can visit their website, [barrecjc.org](http://barrecjc.org).
- Mr. Cecchinelli: Very excited to start the school year and would consider himself at a nine.

#### **10. Future Agenda Items**

- Community Engagement Strategy
- Work Plan - not stagnant, it will move. In October, the Board will receive a report on solar credits
- There is no parking lot. Those items will become part of the work plan, which will be updated to reflect them.
- Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) - Update on how that's going with vendor payments.
- VSBA Resolutions

#### **11. Next Meeting Dates**

August 21, 2024, Spaulding High School Library/via Google Meet (Special Mtg)

August 28, 2024, Spaulding High School Library/via Google Meet

#### **12. Executive Session**

#### **13. Adjournment**

**On a motion by Mrs. Leclerc, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 7:19 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Tina Gilbert*