

BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
Spaulding High School Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
August 21, 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) (left at 6:45 p.m.)
Garrett Grant (BC)
Alice Farrell (BT)
Catherine Whalen (BT)

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

JoAn Canning, Superintendent
Lisa Perreault, Business Manager
Michael Martin, Director of Technology
Carol Marold, Director of Human Resources
Jesse Schattin, SEA Administrator
Laura Ortiz, Benefits & Leave Manager

GUESTS PRESENT:

Adam, Jacobs, Alex Alexander, Allison Mills, Ben Matthews, Brodey Priddy, Carey Miller, Chris MacRitchie, Chris Moran, Christie Omodeo, Christine Bell, Christine DiCicco, Colleen Kresco, Colleen LeFebvre, Dan Morrison, Darby Hiebert, David Delcore - Times Argus, Denise Lavalley, Eirene Mavodones, Ella Lyford, Emily Thomas, Erika Dolan, Guy Isabelle, Heather Slayton, Jackie Wheeler, James Carpenter, Jane Watson, Jasmine Wible, Jesse White, Jessica Maurais, Joan McMahon, Jude Brister, Julie Burns, Karen Heath, Kristina Merrifield, Lara Merchant, Mary Bowers, Megan Spaulding, Melissa Metayer, Michaela Morris, Nicole Ladd, Paul Malone, Prudence Krasofski, Rachel Greenfield, Rachel Van Vliet, Raylene Meunier, Samantha Lawrence, Sarah Attig, Sarah Brownell, Sarah Capron, Sarah Hill, Stacy Emerson, Stephanie Collins, Steven Thompson, Suzie Jacobs, Thomas Koch, Tyler Watkins, Wendy Sell

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Mr. Boutin, called the Wednesday, August 21, 2024, Special meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., which was held at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

Mr. Boutin explained that public comment is welcome but limited to two minutes per item. The board will hear public comments and questions but won't respond directly during the comments. We will ask the superintendent to respond to the comments. Mr. Boutin read the board norms.

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

Remove Consent Agenda - no new hires

Motion by Mr. Reil, seconded by Mrs. Leclerc, to approve the agenda with amendments, motion passed unanimously.

4. Public Comments for Items Not on the Agenda

Comments for something not on the agenda.

4.1 Public Comment

None

4.2 Student Voice

None

~~5. Consent Agenda~~
~~5.1 New Hires~~

6. Old Business

6.1 FY25 Budget Discussion

Ms. Canning answered two questions proposed during the last board meeting.

- Cell phone use: only one administrator has it as part of their contract, 37 people paid a small stipend for using their phones after hours/weekends, and positions included - custodians, administrators, directors, and people in the business office. It is necessary for the superintendent to be able to reach people if things go wrong or if there's an emergency and needs an answer before the school week starts. It is not uncommon for this to happen across districts. Recommending not removing it from the budget.
- In reference to the Special Education question for extraordinary cost. The Special Ed Director and the Business Manager work together to determine and analyze a group of students whose programs reach a threshold of over \$60,000 each fall. State-placed student information is given to the Department of Education, and reimbursement is 100%. For the first category of students with extraordinary costs, we get some support for all of their programs, but once they hit the threshold, we get even more money reimbursement from the agency. A new Spreadsheet Calculator is in place which calculates what reimbursement we will get based on the information. Used for budgeting in the following year. The information in question was collected in the fall of 2023; in our case, because the budget vote will be late, we have an opportunity to look at that prediction versus our CIRS Special Ed Expenditure report given to the state. At this point in time, those numbers represent some of those high costs, such as tuition, transportation, OT/PT services, and all of the services that go into serving that student. So the information is an estimate, and we use it in budgeting for the following year. Going forward, we expect more predictability.

Ms. Canning brought back the same budget presented last week to deliberate over this evening in hopes of full board support. If that cannot happen, the hope is they can agree in the end to operate as one board and speak with one voice as we go forward.

Comments from Board members:

- Fine with and supportive of this presented budget
- Not supporting any more cuts
- Superintendent recommends it, then I can support it
- Supported budgets that were more than this, and I can support this one too.
- Additional questions about affordability, and transparency, 5.4% last year versus 7.4% this year.
- Exceeding what the needs are results in a surplus
- Revenue of 3.2 million is a guesstimate high compared to past comparisons
- The discrepancy with the bus riders/monitors budgeted for \$150,000, but your actuals for the last two years have come up to almost \$300,000
- Facilities - planned projects, equipment purchases, or any facilities needs, the expenses that are going to be needed
- 6.5, Barre City taxpayers would not see a tax increase it would be flat. Barre Town would recognize a .02 cent increase.
- Special Ed extraordinary historical numbers 2.1 to 2.6 don't jive with the 3.2 estimate, deficit spending?
- The bottom line number is what matters. 56 million is a huge number. Why is increasing our budget by 6.5% from last year not acceptable?
- Two million dollars later in cuts, less than 1% in Barre City and less than 4% in Barre Town. Won't support looking at 6.5%

The chair asked Ms. Canning, "If we were to dig any deeper, Do you think we could do that without having an impact?"

Her comments:

- She started the job two months ago, made some promises to all of them, and intends to keep those promises.
- She needs to look more fully at the staffing patterns and how things are done in this District.
- She has emphasized that she can't do that in 90 days. She needs the year to do that, and when we put this to rest, we're heading into a new budget cycle.
- She's asking there be some trust that will happen. She intends to learn more about the district
- She was a Special education Educator for many years, a Special Education Director, and has completed a zillion service plans.
- I have full confidence that by using that calculator and the parameters around us, we're going to get better information going forward
- She believes in the budget that she brought forward

Mrs. Reynolds asked **Point of Information** while Mrs. Leclerc was speaking. Mr. Boutin asked to hold on and let her finish. Mrs. Spaulding called **Point of Order**, stating the point of information is she asks the speaker if she can ask a question and the speaker can decide whether she will allow it or not. Board members reviewed Robert's Rules to verify the point of information. It is a request for

more information about a motion or process. It's a way to obtain information about business, and it's directed to the chair, then the chair directs the question to the member through the chair.

Point of Information requested: Ms. Reynolds was curious about where the \$68 million number came from, and who's the "we" that's getting together and working on the budget that Mrs. Leclerc spoke of. Mr. Boutin asked Mrs. Leclerc if she'd like to answer that and she agreed to. The \$68 million was the last audit, the total funds that were used for education. She works independently to get her information but still considers us all "we." Does that answer your questions? Ms. Reynolds stated "We," the board, didn't get together and do that tax rate calculation. Mrs. Leclerc was referring to whoever she was getting together with, not the board.

Mr. Boutin acknowledged that Ms. Canning has been doing this for over 40 years. There's a point where you have to defer to people with experience, and she has the experience. She's set on this budget, and she feels confident that she'll be able to work within it without going over.

7. Current Business

7.1 FY25 Budget Approval

Motion made by Mr. Cecchinelli, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding to approve the FY25 Budget

Discussion: Future Budget to see an instructional plan, buying plan, and facilities plan so it is based on something. Have we done an inventory? What are we basing this budget on? If we are investing all this money, What should be the expected growth that we should see in our students? Have we cross-hatched what was supposed to be done under the COVID plan with what's happening now? What can the public expect for their community? What can parents expect for their children? Hopeful she can come back next year with a budget that realizes some of the concerns that folks may have in this budget. Maybe everyone in the community can get behind the budget. How people vote really matters. We need to move forward with this proposal and do the best that we can, and give JoAn a chance to give us her best option for next year.

Motion on the table

Motion made by Mr. Cecchinelli, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding to approve the budget at \$56, 808,338, motion passes 5 to 3. Mrs. Farrell, Mrs. Leclerc, and Mrs. Whalen voted against it. Mr. Reil was not present for the vote. Mr. Boutin expressed his support for the budget.

7.2 FY25 Budget Warning

Motion made by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Ms. Reynolds, to approve the FY25 Budget Warning for September 17th at the Barre Auditorium and Barre Town School, motion passes 6 to 2. Mrs. Whalen and Mrs. Leclerc voted against it. Mr. Reil was not present for the vote.

7.3 Affirm Working Protocols

Recommendation by Tracy, now that it's public, she took your comments and added this to the final document. So that's why I'm asking for it to be reaffirmed. The chair read through the Working Protocols.

Motion made by Mr. Grant, seconded by Mr. Cecchinelli, to affirm the Working Protocols.

Discussion: There is confusion about providing Tracy with additional comments and having them approved beforehand. A suggestion was made for number 5—change "called before" the meeting to "prior to" the meeting because the essence of calling somebody before a meeting can have a negative meaning.

Motion made by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mr. Cecchinelli, to amend the first motion to affirm Working Protocols with modification saying "prior to the meeting" for number 5, motion passes 7 to 1. Mrs. Leclerc voted against it. Mr. Reil was not present for the vote.

7.4 Community Engagement Plan Development

- Created a postcard to send out.
- Work with some of you who are willing to join the school events with me
- Be present in the public to go to the Music Festival in Currier Park
- Look at voter lists and see if we can determine, based on who's voted, what the strategy might be
- Respectfully ask we work together on messaging so it's from all of us, not just one of us.
- Recommendation to use Podcasts in the Community (Barre Beat, Aired Out, WDEV, Pat McDonald)
- Contacted by VPR and Vermont Digger
- Recommendation to use emails to parents, school newsletters, and websites

We can have this discussion now, or we could form a small group and work on it outside of a board meeting. I'm open to other suggestions, such as Rotary, Elk Club, and what's happening in our towns and cities that would allow us to reach out. Send an email if anyone is interested in working with her with your availability, and she'll pull something together.

7.5 Open Meeting Law Complaint

The issue with the website has been dealt with. The point of order was called during the public comment section, as it felt like she was speaking about the budget. She waited to speak during that discussion. There was another point of order brought up for talking about National politics. The chair asked her to discontinue speaking multiple times, and she did not and he muted her. He realized the comment was to set the context of her comments about the budget. He offered her to continue and she declined. We, as a board, have to determine if it's a violation. Questions?

Discussion included: Complaint not valid, unprofessionally done, Robert's rules - point of order read, Vermont statute - Open Meeting read, Not an open meeting Law violation. Wrongfully muting is excluding their public right to have a comment, it is an Open Meeting Law violation. Out of order to continue speaking after repeatedly being asked to discontinue. Interrupting simply because someone didn't like what was being said isn't a reason to mute someone, and that's why it's an open meeting law violation. Our role as a board is to hear public comment we are to serve the public, to serve our community. It was the subject matter she was speaking of that triggered that point of order. That kind of action does create a violation.

Ms. Reynolds made a motion to acknowledge the violation. As presented in the email and state attempt to cure it within 14 calendar days, seconded by Mrs. Spaulding, motion failed 4 to 4, with Mr. Boutin voting no. If the board does not acknowledge, it is considered, not a violation.

So the motion is that the failure of the body to respond to a written notice of the ledge violation within 10 calendar days shall be treated as a denial of the violation for the purposes of enforcement of the requirements of this subject number B. Two A and B state that the public body has determined that no violation has occurred. Number 3 - a failure of the public body to respond to a written notice.

8. Round Table

Mrs. Spaulding: My word for the night is disappointed and I'll leave it at that.

Ms. Reynolds: I just want to remind everyone that we are revoting our budget on September 17th. The polls will be open from 7 AM to 7 P.M. Barre City votes at the auditorium, and Barre Town votes at the Barre Town Middle and Elementary School. So please mark your calendars, plan to vote, and talk to your friends and neighbors.

Mrs. Farrell: Career center, which I am happy to be the representative from this board to that board, and there are some interesting activities coming up at the career center. We have a welding program that will be opening this year. We also have the continuation in a unique form of our Design and Fabrication program, which is basically Granite design and carving, and individuals who might be interested in that type of work and education can certainly contact my fellow board member Mr. Checcinelli, who is the instructor of that. We have opted to keep that program available for this coming year and look forward to many students and their parents asking questions and possibly joining that program.

Mrs. Leclerc: With the first day of school next week, I want to give my best wishes to all our staff and students and to the superintendent. I hope your year is all about growth, learning, and success, and I hope you have a great first day.

Mrs. Whalen: Thank everybody that's here and that even though we don't always see eye to eye. I think that it's great to do the work that we're doing, and everyone's voice is coming out I think sometimes it feels like it doesn't give people something to put their hope in because there are a lot of differing opinions, but I look at our board as that's a good strength of ours because we have so many different opinions. and thank you all for hanging in there and we're working through it.

Mr. Boutin: Echo what Emily said September 17th is the budget. Hope folks come out and vote yes for it so that we can move forward and start talking about the next budget. I also want to echo what Catherine said I do think that our board has a very diverse set of opinions, and I do think that it is good for our community to have those different opinions, and I know that it can be very difficult at times as the person in the middle I can assure you it can be very difficult. So with that, I do want to say thank you to everybody for tonight. I think two hours is not too bad when we were talking about the budget and we did pass it.

9. Future Agenda Items

[\(Board Work Plan\)](#)

10. Next Meeting Date

August 28, 2024, Spaulding High School Library/via Google Meet (Special Meeting)
September 11, 2024. Spaulding High School Library/via Google Meet

11. Executive Session

11.1 Student Matter 1 VSA 313 (a)(7)

Motion made by Mr. Cecchinelli, seconded by Mrs. Leclerc to enter into executive session at 8:10 p.m, motion passed unanimously.

The Board Clerk provided the following.

Mr. Boutin recused himself a few minutes into executive session.

Motion made by Mrs. Spaulding, seconded by Ms. Reynolds to exit executive session at 8:04 p.m., motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Boutin returned

12. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Grant, seconded by Mrs. Farrell, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Tina Gilbert