

**Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Special Board Meeting
Transcript – September 23, 2020**

Patrick McGrath: Dottie, can you hear? Oh there we go. Okay, Dottie, can you see La if Lakshmi oh there she is. Good we're all here because I think John said he wasn't going to be able to be here and we're recording so go ahead, Don.

Don Marshall: Okay I'd like to uh call to order the special meeting of the Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake School uh Board for September 23rd. Welcome everybody. Uh this relates to short agenda as you know so uh action items uh number b on the agenda number one under uh action items Consideration of Approval of the changes to the 2020-2021 Board Budget Advisory Committee. All in favor of that uh

Dave Versocki: We have to have a motion, right?

Don Marshall: What uh anyone want to make a motion?

Dave Versocki: Sure, so moved.

Jen Longtin: Second. Jen. Second.

Don Marshall: So moved and second. Any discussion? Any questions? What is this?

Patrick McGrath: So uh I guess, you know, maybe I'll turn it over to Dave because we spent some time uh in the finance committee and in long range planning talking about uh talking about this and Dave's gonna, has volunteered to chair this committee for the Board. So did you want to talk about it, Dave?

Dave Versocki: Sure. Um yeah, so the purpose of this committee is to take a look given the fiscal constraints that are already been put on us for this year mid-year you know post-budget adoption um and, secondarily, looking at the budget that we need to put together for next year. It's an effort to get community engagement in looking at ways uh that we might be able to look at doing business differently. Um it could be cutting, it could be just doing, we'll get programs differently. So um this is an attempt to get a large group of people relatively large like what was our count upwards of 40, 35 people, 40 people.

Patrick McGrath: Yeah, we have to get it could be as high as 50.

Lisa Morse: Even more about 50, I think.

Dave Versocki: I can get 50 people uh you know mostly probably uh done in a virtual environment here. We can't get 50 people together anywhere. So um they'll have to be done virtually. And um you know it won't be a top-down conversation from the Board. It'll be hey uh probably start with uh Chris giving an overview of and Patrick giving overviews of the budgetary you know kind of state of the state um and then us some form of we, myself and one another one of us um being co-chairs um and kind of leading structuring the conversation and kind of refereeing the uh the conversation and taking input from everybody and then making some recommendations back to the Board um for the administration for consideration and then ultimately there's a I think just given some of our more recent conversation that the charges are several charges there as well as the termination date of this committee you know so it's kind of just we added that in there based on some of our last week's conversations around Board committees. Uh Patrick or Chris did you guys want to or David did you guys want to add anything else to that?

Patrick McGrath: No it's exactly I mean I think that it's really unprecedented times that we're heading into when the potential exists for a budget to be cut so dramatically in the middle of the year after the budget's already been adopted and put into place. Um we obviously know we also have a huge fiscal pressure put on us by the return to school and the and everything related to the to the uh to the COVID crisis um and that has further strained our budget and then this the the possibility of such a large cut in our in our financial uh support from the state is something that um while we don't know for sure as the governor and the state has told us this isn't definite yet but it's it is uh certainly uh uh uh seems to be a strong possibility and we would be you know we've discussed as a Board that it would be foolish of us to just kind of wait and see but rather to try to work together with our stakeholders to say okay then what are we going to do if this comes to pass? If it doesn't come to pass, it'll be we'll have a more educated group in our community who can serve to educate those in their circles so I think it'll be time well spent and understood and at the same time when if we do have to make some very strong and dramatic uh moves that um we will they won't come as a surprise there'll be things that were discussed publicly and shared amongst and throughout the stakeholder community and uh and will be uh will be uh in a better place because of that. So I think it's a huge undertaking every bit as big as a Capital Project Committee but maybe more weighty in some ways and more uh um you know kind of glum feeling in a way but we're trying to get on top of it and be more positive about it and say what are the things that we can do to get out in front of it and not just let it happen to us so we just feel you know as a Board um you know I think I'm speaking for for everyone here because we've discussed this at previous board meetings that we want to engage everybody and get out in front of this uh instead of having it be something that happens to us yeah.

Dave Versocki: And I think it's important to know two things, Patrick, that you said um you know these things even if the best scenario happens where things get reinstated having these discussions you know listen we've talked about instructionally some of the things we're learning um about you know how things might have to change going forward maybe, right, and regardless of budget fiscal pressures, right? Um so some of these conversations may lead into some good thinking about just maybe the changes that should occur in the way we're thinking about things. So I think that's one and um you know. I think the other part of this is that we have to be super mindful in this particular um committee and not and probably even more so than some of the um uh positions people take like around our capital project work. Um this is this is a very sensitive issue I think we all know that and um you know part of our job in leading this you know this was a Board initiated committee, right. This is what one of those ad hoc committees we talked about um you know making sure that the conversations happen respectfully and um you know in an open manner so that everybody can, you know, get their opinions made on a highly sensitive topic. We're gonna there's gonna be ideas that come up that are you know, quite frankly, though they're gonna be hurtful to one group and yet seem like a good idea to another group but we're gonna have to be make sure that that happens as cordially as possible.

Don Marshall: Well, the content is is, as you mentioned, very difficult but the process you know we have a precedent with this kind of a process I think when we have to deal with difficult situations and difficult decisions getting stakeholders involved early and getting input and getting buy-in is is a tried and true process and kind of the Burnt Hills way, I guess. And so I you know I think that's a great idea you know and.

Lisa Morse: Uh I have a question surprising everyone um.

Dave Versocki: Tonight all questions cost a dollar, Lisa.

Lisa Morse: Alright, we're gonna only owe you a buck. Um are we gonna get updates as we go along or is it going to be at the end we get the final decisions.

Patrick McGrath: That's a great question I think that I mean unlike some of the other uh other committees you know where you guys are always respectful of the way that the administrator administration runs the committees and and you know this is gonna be completely, you know, completely your call and and we're open to supporting Dave, Chris and I will support this in any way giving suggestions, helping with um with with with the technologies necessary to gather the feedback we need. UIm also do we want these to be you know completely open meetings? Do we want them to be meetings that people can watch? Um there's a lot of interest right now about tuning in and uh you know the forums that we've had have been had just amazing participation thousands of views thousands of views within 24 48 hours um I think that when people realize the kinds of things that could be getting discussed in these uh you know anything from you know

Patrick McGrath (cont'd): uh from re alignment realignment of our elementary school grade level configurations to the way we teach classes to uh bargaining unit concessions to uh raising raising property taxes to uh to to selling property to um, you know, doing things completely different to cutting programs. Um there's so many possible ways to get from point a to point b that are dramatic that are that are potentially altering of the of the district but but does it so those are the things that I think people are going to really want to weigh in on talk to their representatives who are on this committee. I mean if we do this right, it should be generating a lot of conversation. And so I I mean my advice would be the more transparent we are the better. How we do that we can talk to Tara. She's gonna be here tonight she's actually in another meeting tonight but she um she will be on the committee to help with all that publication and and and uh and and information and communication um. So we probably want to have a meeting maybe kind of a leadership meeting of maybe at the next board meeting to talk about you know the actual mechanics of this that everyone would be comfortable with that as we head into planning for our first big committee meeting. What this will do is if you pass this tonight this will set in motion. We'll gather the all the the committee members for you publicly. We'll put out advertisements. We'll go to our bargaining units and groups and we'll we'll talk to people and we'll gather the names and get the committee put together. We'll try to do a lot of the legwork for you guys so that you know you have day jobs this is you know our day job so. We'll do the leg work. We'll do we'll serve as as your you know go-betweens and gophers and get get things done but we really want to take the lead from you on this um because ultimately as the Board, you know, and us as central admin like we're going to have the base of this whole thing and it's, you know, I think it's uh it's both an opportunity and it's a bit uh daunting for people.

Dave Versocki: Yeah Patrick I mean I would imagine you know you were talking about what our process was going to be and, you know, at least this question about updates to the Board itself I I would imagine at a minimum under reports and communications you know in our you know there could be certainly a simple what the committee did, you know, not necessarily every nook and cranny of conversation but certainly, you know, what they did, what next steps are, you know, may be informing people what kind of data might be being asked for surveys, right, you know, any of those things would be natural um additional follow-ups um for the Board, right, you know, that would be updates every two weeks certainly, you know, as we meet right now I'm not sure what our schedule gonna be yet but you know I think we would expect a minimum of those kind of updates.

Patrick Ziegler: I would agree and I think Patrick your point is well taken. I think the more transparency the better. I can't imagine anything worse for the people of this district whether it be parents or employees, anyone that works here is involved with the district to know that this kind of a committee is ongoing and the kinds of things we're talking about as Dave pointed out and said very well are extremely sensitive they're very delicate and yet things are happening in back rooms or behind closed doors. I think transparency is critical and I think in order for

transparency to be critical on important and sensitive issues like this the leadership is uh of this committee is going to be critical as well. I don't know what the appropriate process is for for voting on uh who should chair the committee. I I don't know if we're just going to follow the set process as as we may have agreed upon in the last meeting that the Finance Chair which, of course, is our vice president Dave Versocki would chair uh I wanted on the public record i support that 120 percent. I think he brings the right tone and temperament and approach to this. Um just i think everyone agree based on just the way he's approached tonight's conversation but i think those are the things will be important and uh obviously as I've said before, Dave, I'll support you however I can.

Jen Longtin: I totally agree. Is there a process or um how do we make sure that the that the committee is going to be diverse.

Patrick McGrath: Um so um there's there's a list right you see everyone sees the list of the committee composition. Um, you know, typically,

Jen Longtin: So is it like so many teachers so many.

Patrick McGrath: uh right so.

Jen Longtin: Okay.

Dave Versocki: Can we put that on the screen, Patrick, just to remind that do we have that in our document um.

Patrick McGrath: Yeah, give me a second and I'll jump on another on another.

Dave Versocki: I have it up if you want me to share it but.

Patrick McGrath: Oh yeah, go ahead.

Jen Longtin: So we take so many people from I'll say like each each uh like occupation or

Patrick McGrath: Right. We we worked on this but we're Dave Dave and I Dave Versocki and I worked on this and Chris um earlier and uh and Don to put this together. You guys uh can certainly oh no Don you this was uh this was finance this was uh Dave but I mean we we tried to get get a pretty good cross-section can you blow that up a little bit, Dave?

Dave Versocki: Oh sure.

Jen Longtin: Okay super. Okay so okay so just um I just think it's I just think it's an important question and it might just be you know super basic but say only one parent is on here will you bring that to our attention so that we know that it's not 10 parents it's one.

Patrick McGrath: Yeah, I mean I I think definitely we should be able to fill this. If people if you guys like this, we'll fill this. Um, you know, I already have sent this out to the print to the heads of the different uh bargaining units, the principals have seen this and they've already started to talk to their Building Councils. We talked about parents at large. We talked about uh representatives from the community groups, the BPA, rotary, Charlton seniors. We talked about additional at-large community members preferably who don't have children in the school district to kind of give.

Jen Longtin: Okay good, great.

Patrick McGrath: So yeah so we're really

Jen Longtin: I was gonna say don't I don't want anybody to take this the wrong way. This is just an example but if all 10 of those parents were parents that were born and raised and went to Burnt Hills, that's not really diverse.

Patrick McGrath: Gotcha, I understand what you're saying.

Dave Versocki: Sure.

Patrick Ziegler: Well said.

Don Marshall: What about students?

Patrick McGrath: Yeah, we talked about that Dave Versocki. We talked about that um thought it might be a little bit hard for a student to provide the amount of representation that's the heaviness of what some of these things are going to be and then to get someone enough of a cross-section without bringing in maybe 10 students or something and then thought that at this level but I mean that that's again that's up to you guys.

Dave Versocki: Yeah but you know you know what we could do is you know once we get kind of organized and start to you know certainly you know discuss with student a student group right uh maybe um talking about hey these are the things that are out there. You know would you guys like to give us your opinion about some of these topics that have been raised? You know, we could do that and certainly uh, you know, maybe the student government type of um, you know, uh conversation there's nothing top secret about it right and certainly we have we're going to

have um hey listen we're going to have a population of students who would be potentially voting uh in the spring you know they're always going to be voters right. So you know when that when we get to that part of it so you know what maybe there's a way to include them um as a you know important process.

Don Marshall: Yeah, effective obviously. I mean it might be valuable.

Patrick McGrath: Yeah, we want Michaela here tonight. Michaela, are you on? Do you have can you turn your mic on for just a sec?

Michaela Choi: Yes.

Patrick McGrath: Maybe Maybe the Board would want to have Michaela, you know, as as part of it so that she could then kind of be that liaison at least keeping tabs on the whole committee and kind of connecting back with to to provide that connection in her role as Board member that would be a logical person.

Dave Versocki: Well, we talked about the Board being welcome, right, but it would be at least two named people right um right

Patrick McGrath: That's true.

Dave Versocki: So Michaela as part of our Board but we could name her explicitly if we thought it was a good idea name the student rep to the Board explicitly. That would be a good thing we could add to the bullet if it was needed.

Don Marshall: That's a good idea yeah.

Dave Versocki: So maybe if we if we do go to vote on this, we could do that with assuming Michaela was willing and wanted to be part of that.

Don Marshall: Right, exactly.

Michaela Choi: Yeah, of course.

Patrick McGrath: Okay, good.

Dave Versocki: You could say Michaela or designee um, you know.

Michaela Choi: No, I'd love to.

Dave Versocki: Okay.

Jen Longtin: How many how many people does this total? Is on the committee?

Patrick McGrath: It looks like about 50 people.

Jen Longtin: Okay and then others will be able to watch also?

Patrick McGrath: That'll be up to the Board. We could either do that live or we could uh we could record it um and then uh and then make it available within 24 hours for people to watch if we wanted to. Um.

Dave Versocki: We're obligated at a minimum to have minutes that are shared out, you know, and so the video you know I guess can take the place of the minutes, right, Patrick? So you know at a minimum a recording of the meeting, right?

Patrick McGrath: Yes, another way we could do it is is we could stream the meeting out over YouTube that way nobody needs to um you know no one needs to subscribe to it or be logged in or allowed in if we were to have a bunch of people watching this somebody would have to be sitting there allowing all the outside addresses to enter. As it is, we're going to have some trouble because we're going to have half this committee is people that don't work for us so that's good but it's going to be a little a little bulky but at the same time also that there might be some thoughts and we can talk more about this maybe we put this as an agenda item on the meeting on the sixth because people have a chance to think about it um there there might be some value in not having it be a hundred percent live just in that there's something about being on camera and knowing that everyone's watching you out there that might inhibit people from just kind of having you know and I mean there is that could always be parts of it if there's a presentation or things we could put those out and not necessarily put our meeting all the time out.

Dave Versocki: This is a different ask from the Board being on camera which is you know requirement the meeting's a lot I mean right you know and it's a big ask of these people who are you know going to be making suggestions of things not that it's not open because we're going to make it available but to take that pressure off of people not their job to do what we're doing now.

Jen Longtin: Right.

Lakshmi Nagarajan: So we're asking people sorry, Jen, we're asking people to make really um decisions that might affect other people's livelihoods and I don't know that if I were just a community member that I would want that being televised that I was for or against something um just a thought.

Patrick McGrath: Right

Dave Versocki: And remember the recommendations it's not a decision-making body it's a recommendation-making body the committee makes recommendations you know this group right.

Patrick McGrath: But still to Lakshmi's point that people are going to be put in a situation of like someone might want to ask a question like Wait what does it mean realign the elementary schools, you know I think that's a great idea and then suddenly people are rallying around that poor community member who just said well I think that's a great idea and they're putting on Facebook and saying this is the face of change we don't want or something like that you know.

Lakshmi Nagarajan: Right, no exactly.

Dave Versocki: So, it might be you know we're supposed to as part of this tonight we have to name to Patrick's and thank you for your support, Patrick. Um we need to name a co-chair alright so from our Board uh members, correct? We didn't we didn't put that in the document, correct? So

Patrick McGrath: Yeah, we just put in

Dave Versocki: We're gonna nominate somebody so um to be a co-pilot on this one so.

Jen Longtin: Are you willing to do it, Dave?

Dave Versocki: What's that?

Jen Longtin: Are you willing to do it?

Dave Versocki: Oh, me? Yes, I think I was probably I think I was voluntold that I had to do it. No, yes I'm very willing

Don Marshall: You're vice president.

Jen Longtin: I nominate you.

Dave Versocki: Thank you.

Lakshmi Nagarajan: If nobody else wants to co-chair, I can co-chair with you but if Patrick would like to co-chair um I don't want to take that away from him so.

Patrick Ziegler: Lakshmi, you're very kind but I was really just like I said just looking to support the process. However, I could but I'd be very concerned with my schedule about making every meeting so if the timing works out for you to make the meetings I I just make the same offer to you. I got your back with whatever you need and I thank you for doing it.

Patrick McGrath: Like any Board committee as well every Board member's welcome to be at any meeting. So you know the Board the entire Board would be always welcome to be there as participating members. It's your it's your committee so you know this is kind of a it's just kind of a mechanical thing who's going to help Dave in case he has an emergency at work or he can't chair a meeting somebody could take over that, can help with the setting up the agenda, to help with the logistics of the gathering. It's going to be quite a challenge to gather feedback from people. It's not going to be able to just be everyone talking at every meeting it's it won't it's just way too many people. So it'll be we'll be looking at some tools that might be out there for people to crowdsource information and gather it while we're discussing things. You know, there might be worth looking at some of the tools um that they use like Dave at BOCES. They have some some good tools that I've seen them in use where people are gathering real-time information from the members of a group as they're talking.

Patrick Ziegler: Yeah I I would say Lakshmi if that seems like something you know you have the time and ability to handle I would again I'll nominate you and support you however uh however I can whenever I can be there whatever I can do.

Lakshmi Nagarajan: I can make the time and my schedule, you know, I make my own schedule so um you know unless somebody else wants to.

Dave Versocki: I don't see people fighting through the screen so.

Jen Longtin: I think you guys will be great.

Don Marshall: Yeah, thank you, thank you, Lakshmi.

Patrick Ziegler: Absolutely, thank you.

Dave Versocki: Sure, alright. Okay so there ya go.

Don Marshall: Okay so we have on the floor it's been a motions been made and seconded to consider the approval of uh the change in the 2020-2021 Board Budget uh Advisory Committee. We've had the discussion any more questions or ideas?

Dave Versocki: Don, just make a note in your in your um before we take the vote that it's with two changes you know one naming our student representative on the Board as a bullet and then putting in Lakshmi's name as the co-chair so those are with two to addition to corrections or changes.

Don Marshall: Thank you thank you.

Patrick McGrath: And, Dottie, can you just make those changes on the Googledoc and then we can get um we can get that to Tara so that she can publicize this tomorrow. The the charge will become public and it'll have those changes incorporated into it.

Dave Versocki: And I think for those watching, Patrick, um the reason why we're having this Board meeting this special edition is because of the what we perceive as the significant uh nature of the timing of the need to get this group moving. So that's why we're having a special meeting.

Don Marshall: Yep good point. Okay. All in favor of the motion indicate by saying aye.

Board (in unison): Aye.

Don Marshall: All opposed. Any abstentions? Great, thank you. Motion passed. Nice work. Um number two under the action item in this short agenda special meeting uh is personnel uh what's that about?

Dave Collins: Uh just very quickly. Just appreciative of the Board uh knowing that we worked

Patrick McGrath: Can we get a motion first before

Dave Collins: Sorry.

Dave Versocki: So moved.

Jen Longtin: Second. Jen.

Don Marshall: Thank you uh just very quickly very appreciative with everyone getting together tonight um as we discussed at the last meeting with some of the hiring that was done last minute and with some of the individuals who are being hired um at this time of the year being in situations where they had employment in other areas and there was timing issues to get started. We were able to have an opportunity with with certain individuals and certain subs to now get them moving more quickly so these are individuals one who is able to start earlier than we had originally thought who was previously appointed um and can support a special education long-term vacancy um and with the substitutes and tutors those are individuals who are supporting um, again, our situations at the elementary level where we have um you know multiple situations of pods and needing to support absences. So um we have an opportunity for some building subs who can start for us and do some tutoring for us so um you know nothing really of note but appreciative that this will help us get moving more quickly in some of those instances so much appreciated.

Don Marshall: Any questions? All in favor and uh what exactly is the motion though what do we what exactly is the motion?

Dave Versocki: Approving the personnel and personnel postings or hirings.

Don Marshall: Okay sounds good. Right. All in favor of doing that.

Board (in unison): Alright, all opposed. Any abstentions? Great, motion passed. If there's nothing else, I entertain a motion for adjournment.

Lisa Morse/Jen Longtin: So moved.

Don Marshall: Made and seconded. Made is there a second?

Jen Lontin: Second

Patrick McGrath: It was Jen.

Don Marshall: Thank you. Thank you. These are good rules. Um all in favor of adjournment indicat by saying aye.

Board (Unison): Aye.

Don Marshall: Any opposed? Any abstentions? Great. Great meeting. Thank you, guys. Appreciate it. Good good work.

Dave Versocki: Good. Thank you.

Jen Longtin: Thank you, guys.

Dave Collins: Thank you.

Patrick McGrath: Night everybody.

Don Marshall: Good night, everybody.

Jen Longtin: Have a good night.

Patrick McGrath: Good night.

Lakshmi Nagarajan: Good night.