

**THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
**Thursday, October 13, 2016**  
**Thetford Academy Library**

**MINUTES**

Cameron Cudhea (President) convened the meeting at 7:04pm. In attendance were the following:

Trustees: Cameron Cudhea, Kate Hesser, Giovanni Bosco, Bob Christensen, Shannon Darrah, Karl Furstenberg, Zoe Keller (telephonically), Lindsey Klecan, Suzanna Liepmann, Hilary Linehan, Therese Linehan, Jonathan Stableford, Donna Steinberg, Andy Welch, Carrie Wells, Susie Weider, Ben Williams, Jim Wilson

Administration: Bill Bugg (Head of School)

Absent: Peter Boyd, Ann Bumpus

**1. Condolences for Harwood and Kimball Union Communities**

Following the tragic accident that claimed the lives of four Harwood Union High School students and one Kimball Union Academy student, the Thetford Academy Board of Trustees expressed its condolences to those schools, the families of the five students, and their communities. The Board observed a moment of silence in remembrance of these students.

Bill summarized TA's outreach to Harwood and KUA. He reported that this tragedy has impacted TA's students – some of whom had connections to the deceased students through sports, etc. – as well as faculty and staff. Students, by advisory group, are making a set of cards for each school, which will be compiled into a booklet to send to each school. Faculty have suggested sending a gift basket from our faculty to the other schools' faculty. Pending approval by the teens' families and the school, another suggestion was to purchase five maple trees that Brown's Nursery would plant at Harwood.

Kate asked whether there might be a way to address this experience proactively with students in Driver's Ed. Bill said that he could raise this idea with Mark Weigel (Driver's Ed teacher) for consideration.

Cameron shared with the Board that TA's resources were made available to both Harwood and KUA. Bill reported that he reached out to the principals of the respective schools and made this offer.

**2. Approval of September 15, 2016, Meeting Minutes**

Motion: Accept the minutes of September 15, 2016.

Moved: Hilary Linehan

Seconded: Cameron Cudhea

Abstained: Giovanni Bosco, Donna Steinberg

The motion passed.

**3. Public Comment Period**

There was no public comment.

#### **4. Faculty Presentation**

There was no faculty presentation. At the next meeting, Jolene Cadwell will lead a presentation by the math department about new methods that are being utilized to teach math.

#### **5. Head's Report**

##### UVEI update

The Upper Valley Educators Institute is continuing its work with TA faculty on "differentiated instruction," to help faculty reach all of our students most effectively and maximize students' learning. UVEI will be meeting soon with the Academic Council as well.

##### Safety

In an effort to make sure that TA is as prepared as possible for such an event, the school – together with state, county, and local law-enforcement officers as well as the local EMS and fire department – conducted an "active shooter" drill during the October in-service day. This simulated event was difficult and sobering, but helpful.

##### Upcoming November in-service

A "deep data dive" is planned for the in-service day in November. Faculty will be looking at data and drawing conclusions. Sources will include parent surveys and enrollment data. This data work also will feed into the NEASC accreditation process.

##### Outdoor Initiative

TA is designing a half-day program for combined blocks A/B or C/D. TA has contracted with an educator from the Hulbert Outdoor Center to work with the twelve faculty on TA's Outdoor Committee to develop this program.

##### Admissions Open House

Last night's Admissions Open House was successful, with seven prospective students from Lyme, seven from Waits River, and a smattering from other locations.

##### Enrollment

TA's enrollment had risen to 339 as of October 12th (although it is listed "officially" as 338 due to the reporting date of October 1st).

#### **6. Board Management: Policy Update**

Therese reported that the Board Management Committee is engaged in a systematic review of Board policies. The goal of the BMC is to bring a few revised policies to each meeting for Board approval and adoption.

##### Student Drugs & Alcohol Policy

Jonathan raised a question about privacy concerns for students who have to carry and administer prescription medications during the school day (such as emergency insulin). Bill will check with Sue Farrell about this.

Motion: Adopt the Student Drugs & Alcohol Policy.

Moved: Jim Wilson

Seconded: Donna Steinberg

The motion passed unanimously.

#### Nutrition and Wellness Policy

Donna reported that Sue Farrell was exceedingly helpful in revising this policy and in suggesting useful changes after attending a conference.

Bill made one edit in section III.B. to correctly name the "Vermont *Education* Quality Standards."

Under section III.E., regarding Counseling, Psychological and Social Services, discussion ensued about the need to make more clear that the school shall "reasonably accommodate" families as they are seeking assistance for their child.

It was decided that the BMC should bring this policy back to the Board at its next meeting, with the above changes incorporated, for adoption.

#### **7. Advancement Committee**

Kate reported that the Advancement Committee has met twice since the last Board meeting.

##### Annual Fund

Kate went over the action plan through the end of the year:

- Direct mail appeals to alumni and other constituents.
- Phone-a-thon in March.
- Kate and Jim are working on the annual appeal to the Board of Trustees. The Board historically has provided 30% of the Annual Fund, which is in line with peer schools. A letter will be coming soon in the mail to Board members.

Jim reminded the Board that its Annual Fund giving sets the tone for constituents, which also helps support TA staff who are working toward advancement goals.

##### Admissions

Kate reported that the Advancement Committee saw the beautiful print materials that Patty McIlvaine (Director of Development & Communications) has created. These will be used at the upcoming school fairs. The Advancement Committee also heard from Patty and Bill about TA's marketing plan, which will position TA well in sending-town markets. The new slogan is "Be challenged. Be inspired. Be yourself."

Bill briefly summarized what is new with marketing:

- the new website
- course guide
- viewbook
- logo on pop-up banners and elsewhere
- pushing into more advertising
- exploring Facebook and other social media

- repeat of Open House in December and maybe February

Bill also noted that there was an error in previously-reported data: To achieve the "status-quo" goal for next year, TA will need 333 students, which means the school must recruit 49 non-TES students. Last year, TA recruited 37 non-TES students, not 23 as previously reported.

Jim reiterated that the viewbook Patty created is "spectacular – very professional, thoughtful, and well done."

## **8. Financial Report**

Linda Lanteigne-Magoon (CFO) was absent due to the birth of a new grandchild. Suzanna pointed out that this financial report is through August 31, so the negative numbers are due to the fact that there are a lot of expenses at the start of school but not much tuition revenue yet.

Suzanna reported that the Resources Committee is changing the format of the financial information it presents, and she provided a template of the new format.

Therese noted that there is a particular format that financial reports must have for the Town Report. Suzanna will confirm that Linda is aware of this.

Suzanna reported that the Resources Committee will start reporting to the Board quarterly. Some information, such as food service, isn't in the new format, but that information can still be provided on demand.

Concern was raised by Board members about there being fewer details in the new format, and about the order in which yearly data is presented. The consensus was to keep the line items from the old format when switching to the new format. The Resources Committee will also consider how yearly data is ordered.

The Board expressed its thanks to Linda and its hearty congratulations on the birth of her grandchild.

Suzanna reported that TA's auditors will make a presentation to the Board at the next meeting and to the Resources Committee prior to the next meeting.

## **9. Partnership Agreements: Strafford and Lyme**

Cameron reported that TA's partnership agreement with the Strafford School District is about to expire and will need to be renegotiated this year. Copies of the existing agreement had been distributed to Board members for perusal.

### Section 1

A lengthy discussion ensued about part A, which describes TA's guarantee of admission for all Strafford students. TA loses approximately \$2,500 per student with an IEP. TA cannot shoulder this growing financial cost without additional regular-education students to counterbalance it. Various options for addressing this issue were suggested and discussed by the Board.

- Recruiting efforts will continue to get a boost.
- TA administrators will try to connect with Newton School administrators regarding better access for recruiting purposes.
- Cameron will reach out to the Strafford School Board to request time on their agenda to share TA's financial concerns and seek mutually beneficial solutions.

Bill emphasized that TA values Strafford and all of the students who come to TA from there, as well as the principal of the Newton School and his leadership.

#### Section 3

Hilary (Strafford Town Representative) noted that the plan of action described in this section of the partnership agreement – i.e., the formation of a group of TA and Strafford representatives charged with encouraging collaboration – isn't currently happening, and that this might be something worthwhile to pursue.

#### Section 4

Cameron will check with Linda regarding the accuracy of the tuition-rate information in this section of the partnership agreement.

Discussion of the Lyme partnership agreement was postponed to a future meeting.

### **10. Town Reports**

#### Strafford

Hilary reported that Strafford is part of White River Valley Supervisory Union's 706 study committee. The committee is studying having either a four-town, K-6, choice district (Sharon, Stockbridge, Tunbridge, Strafford) or two side-by-side districts of two towns each: Sharon & Stockbridge (K-6) and Tunbridge & Strafford (K-8). Strafford is voting against the choice option at this time.

#### Thetford

Shannon (Thetford Town Representative) reported that Thetford submitted a grant application to study forming an alternative structure, but it was rejected. Rep. Tim Briglin contacted Thetford to ask what the town might like to see changed in Act 46. The possibility has been raised of Thetford being a "side" single district (along with another single district, Waits River) with the Bradford, Newbury, Oxbow, Blue Mountain group. The costs of this group would be higher without Thetford included. Thetford is like Strafford in that there's no other entity around with which to merge.

#### Lyme

Karl (Lyme Town Representative) reported that enrollment in the elementary school is stable. However, six more high-school students are going to Hanover High School this year than anticipated. Some people seem to be moving to town for the sole purpose of sending kids to Hanover High, which puts pressure on Lyme's school budget.

### **11. Boarding Task Force: International Program Housing**

Jim reported that the motivation for considering an expansion of the international program is due to demographic trends: By 2020, TA expects to be down 30-50 students. Act 46 has the potential to make these numbers even lower.

The task force has visited all of the Vermont town academies, and all but two of these have added international boarding students for the same reason that TA is contemplating it. At the schools which have taken this step, every Head of School without exception said that it has been wonderful for the school culture and a net plus financially.

Last spring, five Tuck students (for their First-Year Project) did a financial study of TA having a boarding program. The bottom line was that it would require 35-40 students to make it pay, if the school were to build a dorm. However, the school is not in a position to make that financial move. Therefore, two choices remain:

Do nothing: In 4-5 years, TA can expect a significant decrease in enrollment based on current projections, possibly resulting in layoffs and a smaller school struggling to maintain its programs. The Boarding Task Force feels that it is naive to think that TA can make up the 30-50 student gap just with marketing and good luck. To maintain the programs we have and to grow, the school needs a different approach.

Buy a local property, start small, and grow from there: The "Lodge" on Houghton Hill is for sale at a reasonable price, and it would be ideal for housing 8-10 boarding students. The task force is investigating the cost of getting the house up to speed, including installation of sprinkler and alarm systems and renovations to create an apartment for a faculty/staff family to live there. Burr & Burton Academy started their international boarding program in this same small way about twelve years ago, and now they have five houses. B&B Academy was extremely helpful in sharing information with TA.

Jim and Linda will be talking about the revenues and cash outlay expected if eight boarding students are added to the international program, and about what would be the time frame over which TA could pay off any borrowed funds.

Jim emphasized that, while it is important to recognize that there is financial risk associated with pursuing this option, the Board should compare this scenario not to the status quo but to what TA will be if we fail to act proactively in some way now.

Bill reported that he will be investigating zoning issues. He also noted that there can be an added benefit of increased international admissions on domestic admissions: Having international students with more STEM needs requires the school to add more STEM opportunities, which then attracts more domestic students.

Jim added that the hope is that TA could buy a second house in a couple of years, because one house is not likely to be enough to make the boarding program truly profitable. There are economies of scale associated with the program: For example, Burr & Burton has an \$80,000 travel budget and a full-time recruiter, but these costs are spread across many international students.

Board members had several questions for Jim and Bill about the details of this plan.

- Bill explained that it is less financially risky to purchase a house than to build a new house on land TA already owns, because the school can re-sell the house if it decides to abandon the international program.
- Jim said that the task force hopes to have all questions answered by the beginning of 2017, most especially what the cost would be of getting the house up to code and remodeled.
- Bill reported that the Town of Thetford has said that the property can be rezoned fairly easily if the neighbors agree. Bill will be talking to the neighbors. Johnathan Brown (Director of Buildings and Grounds) has a lot of experience with these types of house conversions from work he did at Dartmouth College, so he will be able to provide some reliable cost estimates soon.
- Jim offered to send out the Tuck students' report to the Board, and he asked Cameron or Bill to send out the task force's report.

Motion: Adjourn the meeting at 9:25pm.

Moved: Kate Hesser

Seconded: Suzanna Liepmann

The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lindsey Klecan (Clerk)