

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Thursday, March 9, 2017
Thetford Academy Library

DRAFT MINUTES

Cameron Cudhea (President) convened the meeting at 7:05 pm. In attendance were the following:

Trustees: Cameron Cudhea, Giovanni Bosco, Peter Boyd, Ann Bumpus, Bob Christensen, Kate Hesser, Zoe Keller, Lindsey Klecan, Suzanna Liepmann, Hilary Linehan, Therese Linehan, Jonathan Stableford, Donna Steinberg, Susie Weider, Carrie Wells, Ben Williams

Administration: Bill Bugg (Head of School), Linda Lanteigne-Magoon (CFO)

Absent: Shannon Darrah, Karl Furstenberg, Andy Welch, Jim Wilson

1. Approval of February 9, 2017, Meeting Minutes

Motion: Accept the minutes of February 9, 2017.

Moved: Donna Steinberg

Seconded: Cameron Cudhea

Abstained: Peter Boyd, Ann Bumpus, Zoe Keller

The motion passed.

2. Public Comment Period

Cameron reported that the Town of Thetford's school budget passed. On behalf of the Board, he expressed thanks to Kate, Bill and Linda for attending Town Meeting and representing Thetford Academy so well.

3. Faculty Presentation

The Timber Framing class of the 2017 spring semester — represented by instructor Chris Schmidt and students Kai Hotelling-O'Connor and Silas Pollard (both seniors from Corinth), Chris Sanso and Hugh O'Donnell (both sophomores from Thetford), and Keegan Erskine (a sophomore from Hartland) — gave a presentation to the Board about their current project. The presenters took turns providing a thorough and very interesting explanation of their work to date and what is yet to come.

The Timber Framing class will construct an Outdoor Classroom for Thetford Academy, which will also be able to serve variously as an outdoor activity space, a meeting space, a storage space, and a summer camp location. Additionally, it will create a gateway between the school and the adjacent state park. The Outdoor Classroom has been designed, with assistance from architects, to coordinate with the potential outdoor center to be located next door, but the Timber Framing class's project also could stand alone. Due to the scale of the project, it will take two years to complete.

The class is in the process of applying for four permits — local zoning, Act 250, state building, and occupancy. The students had developed three different possible designs for the building, complete with scale models which they exhibited to the Board. In consultation with architects, a final design has been chosen, and a state engineer has confirmed the accuracy of the class's load calculations. The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$27,000, which has already been covered by two matching grants. The students will start cutting timbers (joinery) this month; cement is to be poured for the foundation in May; and by the end of June 2018 the project is expected to be fully completed.

Board members had a number of questions for the presenters, which the students ably answered, with the assistance of Mr. Schmidt when a question involved something which they had not yet encountered:

- Potential for expansion? (Yes, laterally, not up.)
- Sun angle? (Natural light all day, no glare, south-facing with view of Mt. Ascutney, potential for solar panels.)
- Furniture can stay outside all the time? (Easy to move; will probably operate like the lunchroom, where students stack and put away chairs when done.)
- Wi-fi? (Initially no electricity due to permitting. If Outdoor Center is built, then electricity would be brought to the site, allowing for wi-fi, projector, solar panels.)
- Raising of structure? (Partly by hand with the eleven students together, but a crane will be employed to lift the approximately-1,000-pound roof trusses.)
- How can this impressive "raising" event be documented? (Will take photos, contact Valley News, perhaps it could be a student project to video it.)
- Could TA's own timber be used? (Not easily, because it is hard to coordinate the timing of all of the steps required to do this.)

The Board expressed its sincere thanks to the Timber Framing class for a fascinating and edifying presentation.

4. Head of School Report and Review of Parent Survey

Bill reported on a number of topics:

- The Course Guide has five new courses for next year: Economics, Computer Science, Civil Rights Literature, Debate, and a half-day program in Outdoor Studies & Environmental Education. The master schedule has gone out to faculty, and student signups will start soon.
- Faculty contracts are going out March 10. One math teacher will be leaving, and special-ed coordinator Lynne O'Hara is retiring (for a second time), but otherwise the faculty, staff, and administration are very stable for next year. In addition to hiring for the two aforementioned positions, the Academy will be seeking a 2/3 outdoor-program instructor and a director of the outdoor program (which could be combined with the outdoor-program instructor position; the director position is supported by a stipend from the Woodbury Foundation).

- Enrollment numbers for 2017-2018 are uncertain at this time. The numbers from some towns are trending higher than average, while others are trending lower, but it is too early in the admissions season to know how the final numbers will end up. The number of students "shadowing" from Lyme was up this year, and Ann speculated that this might have been due to TA's excellent presentation to families in Lyme earlier this year. Board members asked questions about whether TA solicits feedback from kids' shadow experiences, how data is collected about families' intentions to enroll, and whether uncertainty about Act 46 is creating uncertainty for families in making their school decisions. Bill invited Board members to send any additional suggestions to him regarding admissions topics.
- Bill has been contacted by Vermont Digger about being interviewed soon for a story on admissions, open enrollment, and special education.
- Annual Fund numbers are running well ahead of the numbers at this same time last year, both in terms of total dollars and total number of donors. Bridget Dugan-Sullivan (Assistant Director of Development & Communications) has been utilizing social media effectively to reach more first-time donors. Therese asked whether we have 100% Board participation this year, and Bill said that he will confirm this.

Parent Survey

Bill provided copies to the Board of the results of the parent survey, which contained all questions except the ones that would publicly identify a particular individual or department. Bill went over some of the more significant findings:

- The independent school association that creates this survey for national use has stated that they consider the "positive school spirit" question to be the most important indicator of school health. TA scores way above the national average on this question. There has also been a big uptick since 2012 in parents' view of "the reputation of the school."
- There was a big drop in the ratings for the "effectiveness of the school website" with the introduction of the new website. Feedback from Board and faculty members in attendance was that the new website is beautiful but frustratingly slow. Kate Owen (Librarian) pointed out that another factor causing low reviews may be the natural reaction of people to learning to work with anything new.

Cameron asked for Board feedback, and the consensus was that the Board will discuss the results of the parent survey next month after having had time to digest the wealth of information provided.

Lastly, Bill reported on his recent trip with 48 other Vermont principals to the Greensboro, North Carolina, headquarters of the Center for Creative Leadership. Bill shared that this was by far the most effective professional-development experience he has ever had. It will be a nine-month program in all, including last week's four days in North Carolina and two three-day segments coming up in July and October in Vermont.

Bill expressed a desire to meet with the Board Management Committee to discuss priorities for implementing ideas from this program. He also suggested to the Board that it may be worthwhile to consider simplifying the Strategic Plan.

5. International Program Tuition

Bill shared with the Board that in the budget for this year is the possibility for a tuition discount for up to two international students, to allow for the possibility of more diversity of country origin. Tuition for an international student is \$45,000, plus a \$7,500 fee for students that come to TA via a recruiting organization. However, this tuition is too expensive for students from most countries except China. For example, to attract students from other Southeast Asia countries, tuition can't exceed around \$35,000; and from Europe or South America, tuition can't exceed approximately \$20,000–\$25,000.

Kate asked about the consequences of having different price points for different countries. Bill and a couple of other Board members explained that this is the norm among schools, and that it is driven by a desire for diversity and the variation in demand from different countries. Gio suggested that donors could be asked to sponsor a student from a specific country, to avoid the need for tuition discounts. Bill also noted that other educational institutions are concerned about whether the U.S. political situation will affect recruitment of international students, but it is unclear whether TA will feel an impact.

6. Q2 Budget Review Report

Suzanna pointed out some highlights from the budget report (through December 31):

- The low Reimbursements number is due to a timing issue, because there is a lag in these payments.
- The Annual Fund numbers are looking good, as Bill previously reported.
- Personnel expenses may end up a little over budget because some nonbudgeted people are included in that number; however, as a result, Advancement/Admissions may come out a little ahead.
- Direct instructional expenses are front-loaded, so this number will even out later.

Linda continued pointing out highlights from the financial statements:

- Accounts receivable are high because town reimbursements have been lagging for special education and tuition.
- For Property and equipment, net: Depreciation is outpacing fixed-asset additions. TA is not spending much on its physical plant, which will lead to deferred maintenance issues later. This will be a topic for a future Board meeting.
- Today, Mascoma Bank renewed TA's line of credit for 12 months if we need it, although the school has not relied on it much in recent years.

7. Board Management Committee

Trustee Profile

Therese presented the BMC's profile for use in recruiting prospective trustees. The profile describes the skills and strengths that the BMC is looking for in Board candidates for this year.

Kate asked whether the list was in order of priority (it was not). It was suggested to make the list alphabetical, and to change "Giving capacity" to "Giving inclination." Therese explained that professional experience is the most important need this year. At Zoe's suggestion, "development" was added to the list of types of professional experience.

The announcement that TA is seeking Board candidates will be posted soon on the listservs and in other places.

Policies

Donna explained that the four policies brought to the Board at this meeting had all been previously reviewed by Siobhan Lopez (Dean of Students), and additionally the Tobacco policy had been reviewed by Sue Farrell (School Nurse).

- Transportation

Some statements in the policy were found to be outdated: Linda explained that cost-sharing with towns no longer happens; and Hilary said that transportation is no longer a school-district responsibility. It was decided that the Transportation policy would be revisited at the April meeting.

- Limited English Proficiency Students

Motion: Adopt the policy on "Limited English Proficiency Students" with the suggested minor edits.

Moved: Therese Linehan

Seconded: Kate Hesser

The motion passed unanimously.

- Education Records

Motion: Adopt the policy on "Education Records" with the suggested minor edits.

Moved: Therese Linehan

Seconded: Ann Bumpus

The motion passed unanimously.

- Tobacco Prohibition

Motion: Adopt the policy on "Tobacco Prohibition" with the suggested minor edits.

Moved: Therese Linehan

Seconded: Jon Stableford

Abstained: Kate Hesser
The motion passed.

Trustee Survey

The results of the Board's self-evaluation survey had been distributed several days prior to the Board meeting. Therese explained that the immediate goal was for the BMC to hear trustees' feedback and comments. The BMC will then consult with other committees and bring back to the Board in April or May its recommendations for how to address any issues.

Gio explained how the results were displayed, both as graphs and as comments. He reported that the survey had a 100% response rate, and he expressed his thanks to the Board for their participation. Although he had already apologized privately, Gio also wished to go on record publicly with a sincere apology to Jim Wilson for inadvertently including his name when printing his (anonymous) comment.

Jon expressed a wish that the questions had teased out better whether negative responses were due to a trustee being new or whether it was due to someone actually feeling poorly about something.

Zoe expressed how useful she found the qualitative comments, but she observed that there weren't that many of them. She shared that she had filled out her survey electronically, and she felt that she wrote more due to the lack of time constraints than if she had been sitting in the Board meeting. Kate agreed that she herself would have written more if she had been able to type her responses electronically rather than writing them by hand. Gio reported that the BMC had already discussed moving to an electronic format such as "Survey Monkey" for the future. Zoe suggested that, to ensure continued 100% participation, trustees could be offered the electronic version first, but then be given a paper version at the Board meeting if they hadn't yet responded.

Peter noted that the comments seemed to indicate an issue with the amount of talk going on in committees relative to in the larger group at Board meetings. Gio said that the BMC will dive deeper into that.

Cameron asked that the BMC come back to the Board with recommendations in April, or in May at the latest if more time is needed for discussions with other committees.

8. Executive Session: Personnel and International Program Tuition

At 9:42 pm, the Board chose to go into executive session.

Motion: Move into Executive Session to discuss personnel and international program tuition issues.

Moved: Donna Steinberg

Seconded: Therese Linehan

The motion passed unanimously.

Out of executive session at 10:35 pm.

Motion: Authorize the administration to discount tuition for a specific extraordinary situation in the international program.

Moved: Therese Linehan

Seconded: Donna Steinberg

Abstained: Peter Boyd

The motion passed.

Motion: Adjourn the meeting at 10:36 pm.

Moved: Kate Hesser

Seconded: Cameron Cudhea

The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Lindsey Klecan (Clerk)