

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monthly Board Meeting — December 10, 2020
Via Zoom
MINUTES

Gio Bosco (Board President) called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. In attendance (all virtually) were the following:

Trustees: Gio Bosco, Dana Grossman, Donna Steinberg, Marisa Donovan, John Ziegler, Melody Burkins, Karl Furstenberg, Ann Bumpus, Robin Junker, Harry Kinne, Shannon Darrah, Lindsey Klecan, Mary Dan Pomeroy

Absent: None

Employees: Carrie Brennan (Head of School), Linda Lanteigne Magoon (Chief Financial Officer), John Brown (Director of Buildings & Grounds), Blendon Salls (Director of Athletics), Patty McIlvaine (Director of Advancement)

Members of the Public: Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk), Katie Saunders (Board Nominee), Jim Zien

1. Welcome & President's Report (Gio Bosco)

Gio welcomed everyone and introduced Jim Zien and Katie Saunders.

2. Public Comment

Gio invited public comments. There were none.

Carrie then used the time, in advance of the Consent Agenda, to invite John Brown to give an update on PFAS mitigation measures in the water system.

- John reported that the current filtration system is working well and it has tested as safe to drink. They are now investigating to see if it's possible to determine the source of the PFAS.
 - Otter Creek is doing testing around campus.
 - TA has been notified by the state that four quarterly tests need to be run before the water can be judged to be in full compliance; one quarterly test has now been done.
- Dana asked how likely it is that the source of the PFAS can be identified. John replied that it may not be possible to determine but there are a few suspects, including ski wax used on the trails and marking paint used on the fields.
- John was thanked for his diligence in dealing with the water situation for the last year.
- Karl asked if there are specific health risks associated with PFAS. John replied that the science is still developing and Vermont takes a cautious approach.

3. Consent Agenda

- a. Meeting Minutes – November 12, 2020, regular board meeting

Dana: On page 1, in the correction, change "town" to "towns."

Donna: On page 1, change "Therese" to "Theresa" and one or two meetings "before" December to "in" December.

- b. Approval of State of Vermont Rural Water grant (related to PFAS)

No discussion

Motion: Approve the Consent Agenda, with the edits to the November minutes.

Moved: Donna Steinberg

Seconded: Dana Grossman

Abstained from minutes' approval: Lindsey Klecan, Shannon Darrah,

Mary Dan Pomeroy

Except for abstentions, the motion passed unanimously.

4. Introduction and Vote on Board Member Candidate, Katie Saunders

Donna introduced Katie Saunders: Donna met her when she was a PhD candidate; Katie served on the Head of School search team. Katie said that she is delighted to be given the opportunity to serve. She and her partner moved to Thetford partly because of TA's public/private structure; she is eager to participate. Robin asked how she heard of TA. She replied that she and her partner were looking for a place to buy and sounding out the various towns. Part of the appeal of Thetford was that TA is not a pressure-cooker and that it produces holistic graduates and wonderful citizens. She also said that she likes the socio-economic diversity at TA.

A vote to confirm Katie was taken via Zoom's chat function to Gio, so that the votes were not visible to anyone but him. The result was confirmation – Katie became a trustee at 7:28 p.m.

5. Anti-Racism Task Force Update (Donna Steinberg)

The ARTF had its first meeting a couple of weeks ago. There are 10 members: Donna Steinberg and Gio Bosco from the board, consultant Theresa Hernandez, and Angela Lavoy, Sheila Smith, Keegan Harris, Holly Buttrey, Ray Chin, Siobhan Lopez, and Doug Moody. Gio added that they all are working on assignments – they were asked to review TA's antiracism declaration of a few months ago and to do homework based upon that.

In response to a question, Donna said that there are no students currently on the ARTF; they had been invited to apply, as the task force knows that the students have worthwhile insights, so an effort will be made to seek them out. Katie asked what the goal of the task force was, and Donna replied that, in its most condensed form, it is to create safety for BIPOC students and staff who work at TA. Dana asked if the goal also encompassed non-heteronormative issues; Donna clarified that the focus for this group is racism.

6. Head of School Report (Carrie Brennan)

Carrie gave a slide presentation.

- She described the upcoming schedule: They are pushing the fall term out one week. The calendar changes include moving the semester-break day from Jan. 15 to Jan. 25.
- Carrie has set a hard pause on decisions regarding winter athletics until January. There has been no recent guidance on this subject from the state and nothing will happen before the beginning of 2nd semester. That will leave plenty of time in January to make any decisions.
- She said that a 2nd round of stakeholder surveys and focus groups will be held to help plan for the next semester. The plan should be set by Jan. 14.
- She reiterated some of the original key design priorities of the pod structure, in addition to safety, such as the daily on-campus experience for students, flexibility for families, and pivot-readiness for the school. Added benefits of the structure have included the ability to allow faculty who need to work remotely to do so, either short-term or long-term, and the ability to cover all staff

absences in-house with no outside subs.

Gio asked who will be in charge of deciding how 2nd semester will be structured. Carrie responded that she is working on the decision-making process and timeline. She said that it is much more difficult to make these plans now, with school in session, than it was to develop the fall-opening plans during the summer months. This is especially true for including faculty, who were key in developing the fall program, in the current planning process. Gio offered that if Carrie needs help from board members, she should reach out.

Blendon asked where the Board stands on winter athletics. Carrie responded that at the last meeting there was Board consensus on not participating in basketball. Gio affirmed that the consensus was unanimous (as reflected in the minutes).

7. New Business

a. Discussion of TA Relationship with Strafford School Board

Gio outlined the formation of the working group and its results:

1. The working group included Gio Bosco, Dana Grossman, Carrie Brennan, Patty McIlvaine, Curtis Richardson, Therese Linehan, Charlie Buttrey, and Dan Grossman. Dan and Charlie, who are lawyers and familiar with the designation law, were particularly helpful – as was Therese, who hails from Strafford and is in touch with community there.
2. The group's consensus was to re-evaluate the relationship and not re-accept designation by default.
 - a. Gio clarified that TA remains very open to accepting Strafford students, but that there have been aspects of the relationship that have not been constructive.
 - b. In particular, despite its designation of TA, Strafford operates as a choice town.
 - c. To do that, families are asked to demonstrate that TA is inadequate for their needs. This has created a false narrative that TA is inadequate — which has harmed TA and continues to undermine the value the school provides to its students.
 - d. This also sends a subtle negative message to students who *do* choose to come to TA.
3. Dana added that the group felt like TA is being used financially: Strafford makes use of its "designation" of TA to set their remuneration rate for other schools. If they were legally a choice town, Strafford would likely need to pay full tuition to any school a parent chose. This would affect Strafford's school budgeting.
4. The group recognized that there is a risk associated with not accepting Strafford's designation, but they felt it would be beneficial on balance.

Both Blendon and Melody commended the group for looking into this issue. A discussion ensued. Consensus was that the working group did a wonderful job and their recommendation should be followed.

b. Action Item: Letter to Strafford School Board

Amended to include date correction of the year that Strafford middle-school students took classes at TA.

Motion: Approve the letter to the Strafford School Board.

Moved: Robin Junker-Boyce

Seconded: Ann Bumpus

The motion passed unanimously.

c. Action Item: Tuition Proposal for 2021-2022 School Year

John shared his screen and presented a spreadsheet titled "Draft & Confidential." The data included financial projections of 1%, 1.5%, and 2% tuition increases. The Resources Committee recommended a 1.5% increase; their advice was to keep increases as stable as possible to avoid big swings.

A discussion ensued about the relative merits of a 1.5% vs. a 1% increase.

Motion: Increase tuition by 1% for 2021-2022.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Seconded: Mary Dan Pomeroy

The motion failed with only one vote in favor and no abstentions.

Motion: Increase tuition by 1.5% for 2021-2022.

Moved: Ann Bumpus

Seconded: Dana Grossman

The motion passed unanimously.

8. Town Reports

a. Lyme, NH (Karl Furstenberg)

The Lyme partnership agreement expires at the end of this year. Key elements: TA will take all students; Lyme will pay the tuition rate. There are other conditions – all of which have been well met. The recommendation is for Karl and Carrie to go over the details and continue the basic agreement next year with Lyme. Lyme should be requesting renewal by Jan. 15. Ann asked whether anyone from the Board Management Committee was part of the discussion. The answer was that it was not needed this year.

b. Thetford, VT (Shannon Darrah)

- After mediation, the town has settled on a three-year contract with teachers.
- They have pushed their next meeting out to 12/29 in hopes of getting new financial numbers from the state by then.
- They should be able to recoup some of their COVID expenses – but probably not until next year.
- They are trying to plan for 2nd semester and next year – different scenarios and staffing models.
- There are trying hard to be bare-bones and cognizant of town tax increases from the road bond.
- The state is allowing towns to vote by Australian ballot this year (without a town meeting). The school board isn't sure how that will unfold.

- c. Strafford, VT (Gio Bosco)
No report.

9. Committee Reports

- a. Board Management (Donna Steinberg)

Katie is now on the Board. In response to Marisa's question from last month regarding recruitment needs, Donna said that BMC hasn't had a chance to come up with those criteria yet.

- b. Personnel (Harry Kinne)

Nothing to report; still working on a template for future negotiations.

- c. Resources (John Ziegler)

Nothing beyond the tuition discussion.

- d. Advancement (Karl Furstenberg)

Solicitations have gone out — 1,400 emails and 2,000 mailings. Gio noted that it's important for the Board to exhibit a 100% donation rate.

10. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

None.

Motion: Adjourn the meeting at 9:02 p.m.

Moved: John Ziegler

Seconded: Dana Grossman

The motion passed unanimously.

Recorded by Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk).

Respectfully submitted,

Lindsey Klecan (Clerk)