

The 271<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Board of Trustees  
Mount Wachusett Community College  
Thursday, February 15, 2024  
Murphy Conference Room  
Meeting Minutes

- A. **CALL TO ORDER:** Chairman Antonioni called the meeting to order at 8:33 AM.
- B. **ROLL CALL:**  
Present: Chair Robert Antonioni, Patti Bergstrom, Tracy Hutchinson, Rick Walton, Denise Gosselin, Tricia Pistone and Sheila Murphy  
  
Present via zoom: Claire Freda, Doug Petersen, and Justina Johnson  
  
Unable to attend: Irene Hernandez  
  
Also, present from the College: President Vander Hooven, many members of the Leadership Team and Executive Assistant Laurie Snoonian  
  
Many others joined via live stream on Vimeo
- C. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – Chairman Antonioni asked for a motion to approve the minutes of December 14, 2023. Ms. Hutchinson made a motion to approve and Ms. Pistone seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.
- D. **CHAIRMAN’S REPORT** – Chairman Antonioni waived his time to President Vander Hooven for his President’s Report.
- E. **PRESIDENT’S REPORT** – President Vander Hooven
- a. Jim mentioned there will be no administrative actions to vote on, but there will be a finance update later in the meeting. The college had a very successful college transfer fair this week. We had over 50 universities representing on campus.
  - b. There has been a significant increase in enrollment as a result of MassReconnect.
  - c. Free community college for over age 25 has sparked an overall greater interest in community college.
  - d. Looks like we are heading for free community college for all by the fall semester.
  - e. Jim reiterated that if are students do not succeed, it is not due to just academic rigor, but the support systems that are needed to keep them focused on school.
  - f. Ms. Murphy wanted to know the cost of expanding free community college and where the funding will come from.
  - g. A proposal for the legislature has been put together and available for viewing online. There are three paths that could follow. The funding is expected to come from the Fair Share Amendment, also known as the “Millionaires’ Tax”.
  - h. Ms. Freda asked how our enrollment is compared to other community colleges. Jim stated that nobody is down and that everyone is seeing an increase.
  - i. Moving forward a big area of concern is the announcement of 9C cuts and money for student success fund. Due to these cuts the difficult decision was made to hold any new positions to support student success.
  - j. Responsiveness from the DHE has been challenging as they are facing their own staffing challenges.
  - k. Chair Antonioni’s term is up in March, but will serve until another chair is named.
  - l. Jim thanked Mr. Antonioni for his years of service and for his leadership and support.

- m. Chair Antonioni stated what a pleasure it has been to serve on the board and mentioned the caring and hardworking people of the college. Several well wishes were made for his contributions to the board.

F. **LEADERSHIP TEAM REPORTS** – Jason Zelesky – Dean of Students

- a. Jason provided an overview from a student services perspective as to what he is seeing in his area.
- b. He stated that this new increase in students has brought a welcome challenge and that the core of community colleges is about equity, access, and affordability.
- c. One big challenge of MassReconnect is that it did not come with a comprehensive plan on how to grow our services to continue to serve the students in the way they need.
- d. One trend that is being seen is a huge increase of parent/student population. With these numbers increasing we are already maxed out for spring with Child Watch.
- e. There has been an increase in need for disability support across all community colleges, as well as, challenges in technology gaps as some students have not been in the classroom for a while.
- f. Food pantry has had 124 new applicants, mental health support is needed and currently we have only one mental health counselor on campus.

G. **MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE** –

- a. Heather Layton has been holding sessions for next year’s operation plan based on the strategic plan.
- b. At LT meeting this week, Tiffany Parker talked about preparing interim report for NECHE.
- c. Stephanie Williams is going to be joining Jim in the next few weeks at his individual LT meetings to help everyone refocus on the initiatives that we have set forth in the strategic plan.

H. **NEW BUSINESS** –

- a. Sandra Quaye provided a financial update. Due to the college being closed on Tuesday, the finance and audit meeting did not meet.
- b. As of right now, Sandra is expecting to be short about \$500K in the current fiscal year after evaluating the numbers last night.
- c. For the upcoming 24.25 budget, the college is facing a \$1.7M deficit and the college community has been asked to hold costs as much as possible.
- d. The greatest unknown is the appropriation money.
- e. Moving forward with some other maintenance projects.
- f. Still waiting to hear on Fair Share funds and if those will be extended to June of 2025.
- g. The current Fitchburg CHC lease is expiring in May and will be extended.

- I. **ADJOURNMENT** – Chair Antonioni asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Gosselin and seconded by Ms. Bergstrom. All approved. Meeting adjourned at 9:44 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Snoonian