

The 282nd meeting of the Board of Trustees  
Mount Wachusett Community College  
Thursday, June 5, 2025  
Murphy Room  
Meeting Minutes

A. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairperson Freda called the meeting to order at 8:31 AM.

B. **ROLL CALL:**

Present: Claire Freda, Patti Bergstrom, Rick Walton and Beckett Caisse. Sharmese Gunn (arrived 8:34), Lawrence NFOR (arrived 8:41), and Irene Hernandez (arrived 9:19). All three were on zoom prior to their in-person arrival.

Present via Zoom: Doug Petersen, Tricia Pistone and Denise Gosselin

Also, present from the College: President Vander Hooven, many members of the Leadership Team, several faculty, and Executive Assistant Laurie Snoonian

Many others joined via live stream on Vimeo.

C. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the minutes of April 10, 2025. Mr. Walton made a motion to approve, and Ms. Gosselin seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the minutes of May 14, 2025. Ms. Bergstrom made a motion to approve, and Mr. Walton seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.

D. **CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT** – Claire Freda

- a. Chairperson Freda opened by commenting positively about the commencement.
- b. She acknowledged the complexities and concerns regarding funding and the unknowns ahead. She then mentioned that she would let President Vander Hooven give a detailed update.

E. **PRESIDENT’S REPORT** – President Vander Hooven

- a. President Vander Hooven described commencement as excellent, well-run, and emotionally impactful.
- b. Jim praised faculty, staff, facilities, dining services, and media services for their dedication.
- c. New student trustee, Beckett Caisse, was formally introduced. She shared background and excitement about serving on the board. Claire apologized to Beckett for not welcoming her first.
- d. Enrollment continues to rise. Summer enrollment has reached 125% of their goal (36.4% increase over last summer). Fall enrollment is already at 80% of their goal. Leominster campus enrollment is up 74%.
- e. There was mention of staffing strain due to increased volume of student support needs.
- f. Serious concerns were raised about ongoing and future federal funding (TRIO, GEAR UP and CCAMPIS).
- g. Jim was recently in Washington DC to meet and emphasize the needs of these programs. Unfortunately, the general response was that they would not be happening.
- h. Some colleges have received letters abruptly ending grant funding mid-cycle. Some grants are being canceled, in some cases, due to DEI efforts.
- i. Legal actions may be pursued in cases of grants already mid-cycle, but legal action would be more difficult if a grant is eliminated.
- j. Jim stated that we need to be proactive and rethink and improve how the college supports students. We need to figure out how to maintain and elevate the way we serve students going forward and cannot assume consistent funding.

- k. Proposed federal changes to Pell eligibility (higher required credit load) may disproportionately harm community college students.
- l. There could be potential major cost implications for the state if federal Pell support is reduced.
- m. Advocacy efforts are ongoing and will be a topic at the upcoming President's retreat with the commissioner.
- n. Lastly, Jim mentioned that free community college has generated more revenue than expected. Growth will eventually plateau.

**F. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM – Peter Sennett – Affirmative Action Update (see attached presentation)**

- a. Pete provided the board with a PowerPoint presentation that included an update of workforce diversity, student demographics and the recruiting process for hiring a more diverse population.
- b. After the presentation a discussion ensued among the board members. They expressed concerns about the college's long-standing lack of progress in diversifying its workforce and creating an inclusive environment.
- c. Trustee Hernandez thanked Pete for the information, but would like a historical perspective, ideally for the last five years. Emphasis was placed on aligning with the strategic plan and evaluating whether the college is being laser focused and intentional in its hiring and diversity efforts.
- d. Key points mentioned –
  - Qualified diverse employees have been overlooked or left due to a lack of support
  - The college must recruit with the same intentionality it uses for students.
  - Campus culture is seen as “toxic” as stated by student trustee, Beckett Caisse. This toxicity discourages both students and staff from staying. She stated that from a student perspective, the negative environment is felt daily.
  - The board agreed that meaningful cultural change is critical to success and urged immediate, focused action.

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

- a. Heather Layton and her team have begun working on the blueprint for the timeline of the new strategic plan.
- b. A bridge strategic plan has been developed that will be formally presented to the board at the next meeting.
- c. Regarding accreditation, the college received a strong positive response to the recent 3-year progress report.
- d. Tiffany Parker is leading the work on the 5-year interim report. Faculty and staff will begin engaging in the process once they return in the fall.
- e. The 3-year report is available for review. Laurie will provide it upon request.

**H. ADMINISTRATIVE ORDERS OF THE DAY**

- a. **AD 1325 – Approval of Second Quarter Trust Report FY25** – Finance and Audit committee met earlier in the week and reviewed the updated report. The report no longer includes accrued tuition and fees for future terms, as per the committee's recommendation. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the second quarter trust report FY25. Mr. Walton made a motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Gosselin. All approved. Motion carried.
- b. **AD 1335– Approval of Third Quarter Trust Report FY25** – On target to close fiscal year in the black. Investments are showing a slight loss. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the third quarter trust report FY25. Ms. Bergstrom made a motion to approve and seconded by Mx. Beckett. All approved. Motion carried.

c. **AD 1336 – Approval of FY26 Provisional Budget** – A conservative approach was taken when preparing this budget due to uncertainty in the state budget process. This budget includes a balanced budget with no use of reserves. The budget includes a planned contribution of \$500,000 to reserves. A final budget will be presented to the board once the state legislature finalizes its budget. Until then, the college may operate under a 1/12th budget, though such a method is risky and not ideal. Senator Brewer praised the conservative budget and noted that past budgets required reserve funds, but this budget does not. He also commended the leadership for managing financial uncertainty effectively. After Senator Brewer spoke, Chair Freda mentioned the board is reviewing the by-laws to potentially allow public comments at board meetings. The final revised budget is anticipated no earlier than October, depending on state action. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the FY26 provisional budget. Mr. Walton made a motion to approve and seconded by Mr. NFOR. All approved. Motion carried.

I. **ADJOURNMENT** – Chair Freda asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Hernandez and seconded by Mr. NFOR. All approved. Meeting adjourned at 10:07 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Snoonian