

The 276th meeting of the Board of Trustees
Mount Wachusett Community College
Thursday, October 24, 2024
Murphy Conference Room
Meeting Minutes

A. **CALL TO ORDER:** Chairperson Freda called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

B. **ROLL CALL:**

Present: Claire Freda, Rick Walton, Tricia Pistone, Denise Gosselin, Sharmese Gunn, and Oren Cohen

Present via zoom: Doug Petersen and Irene Hernandez

Unable to attend: Patti Bergstrom

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** – Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the minutes of August 15, 2024. Ms. Pistone made a motion to approve, and Ms. Gosselin seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.

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

- a. Claire mentioned that our board member, Patti Bergstrom, is retiring from her business, The Velvet Goose, at the end of the year. She will be remaining on the MWCC Board of Trustees.
- b. Claire welcomed Sharmese Gunn to the board and thanked Sheila Murphy for her service.
- c. The Johnny Appleseed Festival was a good day in Leominster with lots of students showing up. Claire thanked Marcia for organizing, and Katie and Curtis, from Admissions, who worked the booth. It was an excellent opportunity to promote our Leominster campus and to answer questions about the free community college.
- d. The DAR recently honored 2 of our staff members, Judy Fredette and Janice Huff, for their service in the nursing community.
- e. Claire acknowledged Bob LaBonte for returning to the college to help while in transition between CFO’s.
- f. Board Retreat is coming up on November 3 at Chocksett Inn. This will be an opportunity to discuss goals, obligations as board members and how they will continue to work with the president. This is an open meeting and will be open to the public.

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

- a. Jim thanked the board for their commitment and mentioned his enthusiasm for planning and moving forward as an institution.
- b. Welcomed Jay Bry as our new VP of Finance and Administration. He brings with him many years of state and DCAMM experience.
- c. Enrollment is up 17% from last fall mainly due to Mass Reconnect. This is the program from last year that offers free community college for age 25 and above. Work of our faculty, staff and retention team are also a big part of these numbers.

- d. Mass Educate is the new program that offers free community college. We expect a bigger increase in the spring due to this program.
- e. These programs do present a new set of challenges for the college.
- f. Students are presenting with greater needs for support including academic, mental health, housing, transportation, and food.
- g. Later in the meeting, Jody and Jay will presenting a balance budget with no use of reserves.
- h. AFSCME union is having a professional day today. Jim wanted to acknowledge the unit members and the work they do.
- i. Jim will forward the board a FAQ about Mass Educate and Mass Reconnect.

F. **MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE** – Heather Layton

- a. Heather provided an update on her office and the operation plan. (see attached)
- b. The college has \$11.2M in grants from 48 grants that have been submitted.
- c. Heather mentioned many aspects of the grant process including sustainability, budget review and organizational impact to sustain a grant.

G. **ADMINISTRATIVE ORDERS OF THE DAY**

- a. **AD 1318 – Final Budget FY25** – At this time, Jay Bry spoke of his excitement to be at MWCC. He talked about his background in student housing and being the CFO at FSU for the last 12 years. He also thanked Bob LaBonte for his contributions and assistance with the state audit. He also thanked the rest of the accounting staff for bringing him up to date on everything. Jody proposed that the provisional budget be accepted as the final budget. Claire asked for clarification of the \$1.3M in strategic plan/deferred maintenance funding. Jody stated that isn't available money but is accounted for in the budget. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the Final FY25 Budget. Mr. Cohen made a motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Gosselin. All approved. Motion carried.
- b. **AD 1319 – Sabbatical Request** – Jim mentioned that this request for Professor Elmer Eubanks is a great opportunity for him and for the college to gain from that experience. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the Sabbatical Request for Elmer Eubanks. Ms. Pistone made a motion to approve and seconded by Mr. Cohen. All approved. Motion carried.

H. **New Business**

- a. The next Board of Trustees meeting will be held at the Leominster campus on December 12.
- b. Three names have been submitted for additional board members that are awaiting approval with the governor's office and the Board of Higher Education.
- c. We are also in the process of looking for a liaison to the vocational schools which is part of the BOT by-laws and state regulation.
- d. The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) is cutting the current \$80 a month to \$20 a month. This program is part of SNAP benefits to encourage buying healthy foods. Jason Zelesky stated this change will impact our student population but are halfway through on the application to be the 1st community college to have a SNAP representative on campus.
- e. Sharmese invited the board to the racial equity justice institute conference on November 18 at Bridgewater State University. This conference is really going to help with the mission of the college and help understand the racial equity initiatives within higher education.

I. ADJOURNMENT – Chair Freda asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Cohen and seconded by Ms. Gosselin. All approved. Meeting adjourned at 9:56 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Snoonian