

The 286<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of Trustees  
Mount Wachusett Community College  
Thursday, February 19, 2026  
Murphy Room  
Meeting Minutes

A. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairperson Freda called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

B. **ROLL CALL:**

Present: Claire Freda, Rick Walton, Tricia Pistone, Denise Gosselin, Rozanna Penney, and Sharmese Gunn

Present via Zoom: Doug Petersen, Irene Hernandez, Beckett Caisse, and Lawrence NFOR

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

Unable to Attend: Patti Bergstrom

Many others joined via live stream on Vimeo.

C. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the minutes as amended of December 8, 2025. Mr. Walton made a motion to approve, and Mr. NFOR seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.

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

- a. Chairperson Freda welcomed everyone and deferred her time to the president for his report.

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

- a. President Vander Hooven welcomed attendees and noted this was the first meeting since December.
- b. Spring enrollment remains high. Anticipated leveling of enrollment beginning in fall due to the temporary boost from MassEducate and MassReconnect initiatives.
- c. He emphasized fiscal responsibility given demographic shifts and long-term enrollment projections across 15 community colleges.
- d. The second and third floor asbestos removal project is projecting well, and class relocations were managed successfully for spring semester.
- e. Jim shared the four community college priorities: continued funding for free community college, support for Success program, competitive faculty and staff salaries and support for the BRIGHT Act.
- f. Work is underway on the NECHE five-year interim report, continuing through the calendar year.
- g. Commencement for this year will be different due to the increase in students. There will be two ceremonies scheduled for one day: 10:00 a.m.: School of Nursing & Health Sciences and 2:30 p.m.: All other academic programs. The pinning ceremonies will also take place on this same day. These changes will allow students to invite more than two guests. BOT members are welcome to join for both ceremonies, but we need representation at each one.
- h. There is continued implementation of the grant vetting process. New five-year grant budget projection meetings have been implemented to assess long-term institutional financial impact. Process allows proactive planning and improved fiscal management.

Trustee NFOR suggested standardizing leadership reports to align clearly with strategic plan goals and outcomes. Requested additional information on: retention rate metrics, workforce diversity data trends and clarification regarding reported “no challenges” in workforce diversity section. The president requested written follow-up to address questions comprehensively.

**F. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM** – Magnus Carlberg, Executive Director of the Wachusett Incubator

- a. Serves as regional entrepreneurship and small business development hub.
- b. Provides advising, business planning, marketing support, AI workshops, and prototyping space.
- c. Currently working directly with 10 incubator businesses.
- d. Partnerships with chambers, regional organizations, and local schools.
- e. Supported through grants and sponsorships.
- f. Trustees discussed student engagement and opportunities to expand student participation.

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

- a. Heather Layton provided an update on the key phases of the strategic plan timeline including community input sessions (faculty, staff, students), STEEP and SWOT analyses and thematic analysis of feedback.
- b. Summer 2026 – leadership team analysis and development of planning framework
- c. Fall 2026 – integrated planning work group engagement and goal and priority development
- d. Spring/Summer 2027 – Draft plan submission to Department of Higher Education and board approval process
- e. A brief discussion ensued in consideration of 3-year vs. 5-year strategic plan. The trustees noted that whatever we do needs to also be reflected in the by-laws and consistent with legal mandates. President Vander Hooven will review how other institutions address this requirement.
- f. It was announced that Trustee Gosselin had resigned from the finance and audit committee but will be staying on the board. Trustee Petersen will be joining the committee in her place. Chairperson Freda and Trustee Pistone both thanked her for her years of service and hard work on the committee.

**H. ADMINISTRATIVE ORDERS OF THE DAY**

- a. **AD 1342 – Approval of Second Quarter Trust Report FY26** –Trustee Pistone reported that the Q2 is showing a net operating loss due to accounting classification of state appropriation as non-operating revenue. Net position increased to approximately \$60M. Banner re-implementation on track for July 1 launch. Dam project is paused until spring, and the ceiling replacement is on schedule. The banking RFP is in progress. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the second quarter trust report FY26. Ms. Gosselin made a motion to approve and seconded by Mr. Walton. All approved. Motion carried.
- b. **AD 1343 – Approval of Endowment Incentive Procedures FY26** – Annual approval is required. College is eligible to access \$333K state match upon raising \$666K. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the Endowment Incentive Procedures FY26. Ms. Pistone made a motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Gosselin. All approved. Motion carried.
- c. **AD 1344 – Approval of Endowment Match** – Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the Endowment Match. Mr. Walton made a motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Gosselin. All approved. Motion carried.

- d. **AD 1345 – Approval of Hybrid/Electric Vehicle Certificate** – Dean Sweeney discussed the proposal submitted through fast-track Board of Higher Education process. The program supports workforce demand and aligns with the 2035 EV requirements. It is also part of NSF grant. Chairperson Trustee was concerned this agenda item was not within the timeframe of adding it to the agenda. A motion was made to add this AD as an agenda item. Approved by roll call. Chairperson Freda made a motion to approve the Hybrid/Electric Vehicle Certificate. Mr. Walton made a motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Gosselin. All approved. Motion carried.

**I. NEW BUSINESS**

- a. Melissa Croteau – Campus Security Update (see attached)
- Chief Croteau provided an overview of her department, coverage on Gardner and Leominster campus, safety measures, areas of concern and how they are actively working with students to foster trust, approachability, and a safe campus environment.
  - Trustees stated that it is imperative that money is set aside to improve safety measures on campus. Mount Fitness was mentioned as an area of concern with zero cameras at the facility and issues with people sneaking in unalarmed doors. Other areas of concern include numerous unlocked doors and easy access to vulnerable areas on campus.
- b. Governance Leadership Institute Summary from November 7, 2025
- Trustee Penney noted participation in the Governance Leadership Institute provided valuable national perspective on best practices in community colleges. It helps with clarifying trustee roles and responsibilities and reinforces the fiduciary, strategic, and policy making roles of trustees.
  - Discussion emphasized the importance of continued trustee professional development and the value of bringing back insights from national governance training to strengthen board effectiveness, policy review processes, and strategic oversight of the college.
- c. Professional Development Plan
- President Vander Hooven reported the college is developing an improved, more equitable professional development plan for faculty and staff. The plan is designed to ensure that all divisions have better access to meaningful professional development opportunities and that the process for requesting and allocating funds is more structured and transparent.
  - He emphasized that strengthening professional development supports employee growth, institutional effectiveness, and alignment with strategic priorities.

- J. ADJOURNMENT** – Chair Freda asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Pistone and seconded by Ms. Gosselin. All approved. Meeting adjourned at 5:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Snoonian