

# THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Monthly Board Meeting — October 14, 2021

Via Google Meet

## MINUTES

Donna Steinberg (Board President) called the meeting to order at 6:51 p.m. In attendance (all virtually) were the following:

Trustees: Donna Steinberg, Gio Bosco, Dana Grossman, Karl Furstenberg, Sarah Adams, Marisa Donovan, Harry Kinne, Lindsey Klecan, Katie Saunders, Sam Perry, Cara Ray, John Ziegler, Sheilagh Smith (joined at 7:15), Robin Junker Boyce (joined at 7:20)

Absent: Paul Mutone, Mary Dan Pomeroy, Shannon Darrah

Employees: Carrie Brennan (Head of School), Linda Lanteigne Magoon (CFO), Patty McIlviane (Director of Advancement)

Members of the Public: Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk), Stephanie Daniels (member, Joint Thetford Energy Committee)

### 1. Welcome & President's Report (Donna)

Donna welcomed everyone and said she had two recent pieces of correspondence to share:

- Brian Emerson, the principal of River Bend Career and Technical Center in Bradford, which is attended by many TA students, wrote to say that it is a regulatory requirement that River Bend's regional advisory board include a board member from all sending institutions — including TA. Donna asked a member of the TA board to volunteer for this role.
- Tom Ward, a member of the climate action group 350 Vermont, wrote to say that their organization is asking for community leaders from across the state to sign a letter endorsing the organization's message, to be delivered to the Vermont Climate Council by October 30; he hoped the TA trustees would be willing to sign, either collectively or individually. Upon receiving a general affirmation of support for the effort, Donna said she would send all the board members the information she has and ask for opt-out responses; if she hears none, she will tell 350 Vermont that the TA board will sign the letter collectively. She said she will send the information to Carrie as well, as she is also a community leader. Donna added that the Thetford selectboard signed the letter collectively.

### 2. Public Comment

Stephanie Daniels, TA's appointee to the Joint Thetford Energy Committee (JTEC), talked about several ways that JTEC might support TA, including considering window inserts, heating system upgrades, and electric buses. Carrie invited Stephanie to give a presentation to the TA Climate Alliance, a student club.

### 3. Consent Agenda

The only item on the consent agenda was the minutes from the September 9, 2021, regular board meeting. Donna asked if there were any changes; there were none.

Motion: To approve the consent agenda.

Moved: Gio

Seconded: Marisa

The motion passed unanimously.

#### **4. Head of School Report (Carrie)**

Carrie presented a slideshow (which is archived separately). The topics she covered included:

- Mountain Day; she noted that this event was a fitting metaphor for the school year so far—in that the tradition did occur, but in a format altered to address disruptions caused by the pandemic, especially transportation challenges due to the lack of bus drivers.
- The fall inservice day.
- TA’s continuing reliance on guidance from the Agency of Education and the Vermont Department of Health to navigate the pandemic.
- TA’s employee and student vaccination rates.
- Data about enrollment trends by gender.
- The new weekly e-newsletter that’s being sent to about 2,000 alumni and community members; it has open rates of between 26% and 37% and is generating very positive feedback.
- Goals for this school year for all four standing committees of the board.
- Upcoming events.

Karl asked if there is any understanding of the reason behind the wide gender disparity in the 9th grade. The response was that this particular class has had a gender imbalance since kindergarten.

Dana said she has been impressed by the tone of the e-newsletter, and Karl said the pie chart showing the audience breakdown was interesting and might have other uses, such as in fund-raising.

#### **5. Committee and Task Force Reports**

##### **a. Resources (John)**

- The committee didn’t meet this month because they’ve been busy.
- John said the committee recently asked several real estate agents to offer estimates of the value of the Godfrey Road lots that TA owns. He shared this information on a slide (which is archived separately).
- For the benefit of the newer board members, John gave a presentation on the budget process.

Katie asked if TA has divested from fossil fuel investments. John responded that investments that are not socially responsible are prohibited, but that the term “socially responsible” isn’t defined. Linda noted in the chat sidebar that fossil fuel investments are not explicitly prohibited.

Gio noted that health insurance costs are still increasing at a rate of 10-15% a year. Dana pointed out that changing the school’s insurance provider isn’t something the board can do unilaterally, as it’s subject to negotiations with the faculty and staff. Donna asked how the percentage of TA’s budget going to faculty and staff compares to that of other schools. John responded that it’s high—that almost 80% of revenue goes to salaries and benefits. Linda added that our benefits in particular are much higher than those of other schools.

Sam asked if there is a plan to address transportation. Carrie said it's under active consideration—we need to address it, or we'll lose enrollment from farther-out towns. Sheilagh noted that recruiting in such towns is often about personal connections and offered to help make contacts in Chelsea and Tunbridge.

b. Personnel (Dana)

- The current three-year staff agreement (covering 2020-2023) addressed salaries only for the 2020-21 school year, and the committee and staff negotiators are now winding up the process of agreeing to salaries for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years.
- The thorough language review of the next faculty agreement (covering 2023-2026) is continuing to proceed well and is nearing completion. This review involves both cleaning up the punctuation, presentation, and flow of the document and also addressing a number of substantive issues, such as administration of the sick bank and the evaluation process.
- The next goal will be discussing financial issues (salaries, but also other matters with monetary implications) with the faculty negotiators.
- After that, the committee will work on a 2023-2026 agreement and financial issues for staff.

Lindsey extended thanks to the committee and the negotiators for their work to clean up the language in the old agreement.

c. Board Management (Katie)

Katie shared the committee's top-line goals:

- To come up with a trustee on-boarding process so newcomers can get up to speed quickly.
- To codify an explicit and transparent recruitment process.
- To streamline the process of how board documents are shared and organized.
- To consider streamlining the policy-review process.

d. Advancement (Marisa)

- The committee plans to examine where advancement has been, where it is now, and where they would like to be.
  - They have reviewed previous recommendations re staffing levels in advancement.
  - Great work has been done on communication, but fundraising has been largely flat.
  - They plan to make some recommendations in the coming months.

Katie asked what the board can do to support the committee's efforts. Marisa reminded all board members to make their annual giving pledge now, so the board's support can be shared in other fund-raising pitches. They'd also appreciate help connecting with alumni, to prompt a culture change.

Dana asked how the ROI on recruitment efforts (i.e., boosting tuition income) compares to fund-raising efforts (i.e., boosting philanthropic income). Marisa responded that the ROI on recruitment tends to be more immediate but to fluctuate, whereas advancement investments can be slower to reap a return but tend to be more stable.

e. Barrett Property (Karl)

- The membership of the task force has been recruited; Karl listed the 13 members (besides himself as chair) and noted that Carrie and Donna would also serve on the group in an ex officio capacity. He said the group plans to hold its first meeting within a week or two.

- A document is being compiled about the history of the property; it will be shared with board members.

#### **6. Date of the November board meeting**

Donna asked, in view of the fact that the date of the next board meeting falls on Veteran's Day, whether the members of the board would prefer to move the meeting to the following week. The board agreed to move the meeting to November 18.

#### **7. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items**

Karl asked Sarah what the reaction has been to the vote in Strafford to keep 7th and 8th grade at the Newton School rather than tuitioning those students elsewhere. Sarah responded that the vote was decisive but there hasn't been much discussion about it around town since.

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Gio

Seconded: Katie

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Drafted by Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk)

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk)