

**THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
Monthly Board Meeting — January 12, 2023  
Hybrid (some attendees in person at TA, some remote via Zoom)  
**MINUTES**

Donna Steinberg (Board President) called the meeting to order at 6:48 p.m. Attendance was as follows:

Trustees present: Donna Steinberg, Dana Grossman, Harry Kinne, Sheilagh Smith, Julie Acker, Paul Mutone, Sarah Adams, Cara Ray, Erin Boyd, Marisa Donovan, Sam Perry

Trustees absent: Blythe Keane, Katie Saunders, Lucy Wagner, Rebecca Hanissian, Ashley Woo

Others present: Carrie Brennan (Head of School), Ben Bailey (Director of Finance), Casey Huling (Teacher and Parent), Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk)

### **1. Welcome & President's Report**

Donna welcomed everyone in attendance. She noted that she'd traveled to Philadelphia with her family over the holidays, and at the African American Museum there they were amazed to see an exhibit with a tie to TA. She said the exhibit featured life-sized digital avatars of prominent African Americans, each of whom said something about their life; one was Thomas Morris Chester, who moved from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to Liberia when he was 19 and then a year later returned to the U.S. to enroll at Thetford Academy, from which he graduated in 1856! (For more about this notable TA graduate, see <https://www.history.com/news/first-black-war-correspondent-civil-war-thomas-morris-chester>; <https://www.historynet.com/thomas-morris-chester-first-black-battlefield-reporter/>; and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Morris\\_Chester](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Morris_Chester).)

### **2. Public Comment**

None.

### **3. Consent Agenda**

- Meeting Minutes — December 6, 2022, Board of Trustees monthly meeting
- Tobacco Prohibition Policy (B7)
- Nondiscriminatory Mascots and School Branding Policy (F2)

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Paul Mutone

Seconded: Dana Grossman

The motion passed unanimously.

### **4. Head of School Report**

Head of School Carrie Brennan presented a slide show (archived separately); the topics she covered included:

- The enrichment provided to students through the extracurricular program, including athletics and robotics.

- The TA board's partnership with the Thetford School Board, which is especially important at this time of year as both boards are setting their budgets.
- A review of the state enrollment rules for independent schools, including TA.
- The much-increased post-pandemic use, by both the school and the community of TA's 180-seat Martha Jane Rich Theater.

## **5. Town Reports and Select Committee Reports**

### **a. Thetford**

Julie Acker, the Thetford representative to the TA board, said the Thetford School Board had met on Tuesday and conducted an in-depth review of their draft budget for the 2023-24 school year. She said expenses are projected to increase 7%, but they expect to be able to keep the tax increase below 3%, due largely to having surplus this year and rolling some of it over to offset next year's expenses. She noted that the draft budget includes funding for the staffing level that Thetford Elementary School Principal Bernice Mills feels is appropriate, as well as for some overdue TES building maintenance. Julie added that their draft budget assumes a 7% increase in TA's tuition, based on discussions over the past few months by the TA board and Resources Committee. Their budget needs to be approved by the end of this month. In addition, she noted that the TES ski program was due to start the next day.

### **b. Strafford**

Sarah Adams, the Strafford representative to the TA board, said she had attended a meeting of the Strafford School Board on Tuesday. They are looking at a 3.45% increase in their budget for 2023-24 and will also need to finalize it by the end of this month. She noted that Strafford's Newton School participates in the same ski program as TES, and they were the only school there the previous week, when the weather was not good. And she added that there is an effort underway to make all the Newton School's bathrooms gender-neutral.

### **c. Lyme**

Donna Steinberg noted that Rebecca Hanissian, the Lyme representative to the TA board, was not present tonight because she was representing the TA board at a meeting of the Lyme School Board during which they would be discussing their budget.

### **d. Board Management Committee**

Erin Boyd, interim chair of the Board Management Committee, said the committee has continued its work updating policies and will be including more policy revisions on the Consent Agenda for future board meetings. Their other focus has been recruitment of new board members. They are hoping to recruit three new trustees this year and as the first step in that process are codifying the current skills represented on the board and examining what areas of expertise should be added. She added that they also hope to seek more BIPOC board members, in accord with the board's strategic plan and input from the Antiracism Task Force.

### **e. Personnel Committee**

Dana Grossman, chair of the Personnel Committee, said that only a few points remain to be finalized in the faculty master agreement and that the faculty negotiators and the committee are on their fourth round of salary offers and counteroffers and that they have closed the gap significantly. Once the committee reaches agreement with the faculty, then they will start the same process with the staff negotiators.

## **6. Tuition Proposal for FY 2023-2024**

Paul Mutone, chair of the Resources Committee, walked the board through several spreadsheets, explaining these and other related points:

- The fact that funding for long-term maintenance needs to be increased, after several years during which maintenance was deferred.
- The fact that the rate of tuition increases in the previous three years had lagged a total of 2.74% behind the CPI.
- The fact that tuition makes up the vast majority of TA's income and that compensation and benefits make up the vast majority of its expenses.
- The TA budget projections underlying the Resources Committee's recommendation of a tuition increase of at least 6.85% (resulting in a tuition for 2023-24 of \$22,400) and preferably 7.0% (resulting in a tuition of \$22,430).

Marisa Donovan added that if giving to the annual fund could be increased from its current level of just under 1% of overall income, that could have a beneficial impact on finances in general. She said the Advancement Committee is hoping to raise alumni giving participation from about 2% to 3% of alumni for whom the school has contact information to between 5% and 8%. She also proposed setting a goal of 100% participation in the annual fund by board members, with a goal of bringing in \$15,000 from the board.

Julie Acker noted that a 7% tuition increase would still keep TA's tuition below the highest tuitions in the area, and that some schools had raised their tuitions last year by 8% or 9%.

Sheilagh Smith noted the importance of being sure that school boards in sending towns are aware of the tuition increase, and Carrie assured her that there is a process for conveying that news.

Motion: To increase tuition by 7%.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Second: Harry Kinne

The motion passed unanimously.

## **7. Executive Session: Personnel Issue**

Motion: To go into executive session to discuss with Carrie Brennan a personnel issue protected by confidentiality.

Moved: Julie Acker

Second: Paul Mutone

The motion passed unanimously.

The board entered executive session at 8:14 p.m. and came out of executive session at 8:29 p.m.

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

None.

## **9. Adjournment**

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Julie Acker

Seconded: Marisa Donovan

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Drafted by Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk)

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk)