

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monthly Board Meeting — March 9, 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, Paul Mutone, Sarah Adams, Erin Boyd, Ashley Woo, Sheilagh Smith, Sam Perry, Cara Ray (joined the meeting at 6:55 p.m.), Marisa Donovan (joined the meeting at 7:07 p.m.)

Trustees absent: Blythe Keane, Katie Saunders, Harry Kinne, Lucy Wagner, Rebecca Hanissian

Others present: Carrie Brennan (Head of School), Casey Huling (Teacher and Parent), Patty McIllvane (Director of Advancement), Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk)

1. Welcome & President's Report

Board President Donna Steinberg welcomed everyone in attendance. She opened by mentioning that when she voted on Town Meeting Day, one of the poll workers commented that she'd noted, at the girls' semifinal and final state championship basketball games, how polite and positive the Thetford Academy team members and fans were. Donna said that she hears that frequently.

She also noted that Julie Acker is no longer a member of the TA board; her term on the Thetford School Board ended as of the election of the new board members on Town Meeting Day, and with it her term as the Thetford representative to the TA board. Donna expressed many thanks to Julie for her service — for 10 years on the school board and for one year (“making a big impact in one year”) on the TA board.

Donna added that TA's Alliance for Social Justice (SARJ) is sponsoring another free, public film screening on Friday, March 10. The film this month is *My Name is Pauli Murray*. Donna said she plans to attend and hopes to see other Trustees there. She also mentioned that a new series of films offered by Thetford Arthouse Cinema, and screened in TA's Martha Jane Rich Theater, is about to start; these, too are free and open to the public.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Consent Agenda

- Meeting Minutes — February 9, 2023, Board of Trustees monthly meeting

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Paul Mutone

Seconded: Sarah Adams

The motion passed unanimously.

Note: After the vote above, Board Clerk Dana Grossman noticed that in the draft minutes of the February meeting, there was a typographical error in the date of the January meeting (the draft minutes had January 9 as the date of the meeting, but it was actually January 12). To ensure accuracy in the permanent record, she corrected the date before posting the final minutes of the February 9 meeting.

4. Head of School Report and NEASC 5-Year Report

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

- Intermittent internet outages at the school ever since the big December 16 snowstorm; a fix of the problem and an upgrade of the IT infrastructure is being pursued.
- Winter sports championship highlights for the indoor track, girls' basketball, and alpine ski teams.
- The ongoing partnership with Thetford Arthouse Cinema.
- Approval of the Thetford school budget by nearly 80% of those voting on Town Meeting Day, as well as results from other towns that send students to TA.

5. Select Town and Committee Reports

a. Lyme

Donna said that Rebecca Hanissian, the Lyme representative to the TA board, had decided she should attend the Lyme School Board meeting, scheduled for the same evening, rather than the TA meeting, as there were important and apparently contentious issues on the agenda there.

b. Thetford

Donna noted again that Julie Acker, until recently the Thetford representative to the TA board, is now off both the Thetford School Board and the TA board. She said the Thetford School Board will soon name a new representative.

c. Strafford

Sarah Adams, the Strafford representative to the TA board, said that the school budget had passed in Strafford, too, on a unanimous voice vote. In addition, she noted that Strafford will elect future town and school officers and vote on future budgets by Australian ballot; that there was discussion of the bills introduced in the legislature possibly limiting the kinds of schools public tuition monies can be paid to; and that one new school board member was elected to an uncontested seat.

d. Board Management Committee

Erin Boyd, interim chair of the Board Management Committee, said the committee is continuing to work its way through a review and revision of policies and to recruit potential new board members.

e. Resources Committee

Paul Mutone, chair of the Resources Committee, said the committee has been working on a preliminary budget for 2023-24; he expects to have a draft by the May board meeting, in the hope of getting it approved at either the May or June meeting. He said the committee has also been working with Ben Bailey, the new director of finance, to develop more robust monthly financial reporting processes. The committee also plans to engage a bond underwriting company to assess the school's debt capacity in anticipation of possible future building projects. In addition, he noted that a third signatory has been

added to the school's investment accounts at Merrill Lynch. Now, in addition to Head of School Carrie Brennan and Director of Finance Ben Bailey, the chair of the Resources Committee is a signatory.

f. Advancement Committee

Marisa Donovan, chair of the Advancement Committee, said she and Patty McIlvaine, director of advancement, talked recently with two development consultants and plan to talk with a third one soon regarding a potential feasibility study for a future capital campaign.

She also noted that the annual fund has raised \$24,236 so far this year, compared to \$32,463 at this time last year, and encouraged members of the board to help meet the board's fund-raising goal of \$15,000 and 100% participation.

She added said the Day of Giving this year will be May 10 and encouraged board members to share the word of it on social media. Finally, she said the committee has been considering holding events on campus that would be both fund-raising and friend-raising activities.

6. Bill S.66/H.258 Discussion

Donna referred to recent coverage of this issue — the use of public funds in Vermont to pay tuition at non-public schools, sparked by a U.S. Supreme Court decision on a case brought in Maine — that has been circulated to members of the board. She then asked Dana Grossman to explain what has been happening on the TA front.

Dana said she had realized the potential impact on TA of the Maine decision right away and had talked with Carrie and Donna about getting together a task force to look at the issue with TA's interests in mind. That process had been moving along, though slowly, but since the introduction of several recent bills the pace has sped up. She is now in the process of recruiting a team of well-informed individuals, and a strong group is shaping up. The plan is that the task force would gather information and generate ideas that would come back to the board and the administration. She hopes the work of the task force will be underway within a few weeks.

Carrie added that she had recently had a chance to speak about the issue with one of our state legislators, Rebecca Holcombe, and with the secretary of the Vermont Department of Education, Daniel French. Based on what they said, her sense is that S.66 and H.258 are now in the rearview mirror, but that new bills to address the situation are in process.

7. Executive Session

Motion: To go into executive session to discuss a confidential personnel issue and for a collective bargaining update, with Carrie Brennan remaining in attendance.

Moved: Ashley Woo

Seconded: Paul Mutone

The motion passed unanimously, and the board and Carrie went into executive session at 7:40 p.m.

The board came out of executive session at 8:02 p.m.

8. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

Carrie Brennan asked if the board would be interested in having the director of special education make a presentation at the board's April or May meeting, explaining that such presentations had been on hiatus since the onset of the pandemic. There was consensus that restoring that practice would be welcomed.

Paul Mutone mentioned that he has been hoping to arrange for a presentation at a board meeting by our representative at Merrill Lynch — perhaps at the August board meeting.

Cara Ray asked if it would be possible to sometime have students make a presentation to the board. Carrie said absolutely, and that doing so might fit well with the hope of the Board Management Committee to propose changes in the board's bylaws so that there could be a student as a (nonvoting) member of the board.

Dana Grossman asked if there had been any resolution on the question of TA possibly assuming oversight of Operation Day's Work in the U.S., since the presentation made by two students at the board's September 2022 meeting. Carrie said she had not heard anything further from the students involved and that she would check in with them.

9. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Seconded: Sheilagh Smith

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Drafted by Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk)

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk)