

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monthly Board Meeting – September 21, 2023
Hybrid (some attendees in person at TA, some via Zoom)

MINUTES

Donna Steinberg (Board President) called the meeting to order at 6:49 p.m. Attendance was as follows:

Trustees present: Donna Steinberg, Francine A’Ness, Darin Knaus, Dana Grossman, Sarah Adams, Paul Mutone, Ashley Woo, Katie Saunders, Sheilagh Smith, Erin Boyd, Marisa Donovan, Lucy Wagner, Jeff Jamele (as of his election to the board—see agenda item 3)

Trustees absent: Harry Kinne, Cara Ray, Marty Jacobs, Sam Perry, Erika Hoffman-Kiess

Others present: Carrie Brennan (Head of School), Ben Bailey (Director of Finance), Patty McIlvaine (Director of Advancement), Casey Huling (Teacher and Parent)

1. Welcome & President’s Report

Board President Donna Steinberg welcomed everyone in attendance.

Donna noted that Jeff Jamele has swapped assignments with fellow Thetford School Board member Mary Chin, so Jeff will now be the Thetford representative to the TA board instead of Mary. Donna asked Jeff to introduce himself to those present. He said he is a 1998 graduate of Williamstown, Vt., High School; lived in the D.C. area for about 15 years before moving back to the Upper Valley; works in cybersecurity and IT infrastructure; and has three sons—two at Thetford Elementary School and a 16-month-old. Then the rest of the board briefly introduced themselves to Jeff.

Donna also noted that Stephanie Daniels is stepping down as the TA liaison to the Thetford Energy Committee and asked members of the board to think of someone who might be interested in filling that role.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Consent Agenda

- Approve meeting minutes — June 1, 2023
- Approve A1 Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy
- Approve B43 Non-resident Employee Children Policy
- Approve C14 Section 504 and ADA Grievance Protocol for Students and Staff Policy
- Approve F02 Non-Discriminatory Mascots and School Branding Policy
- Election of Thetford representative candidate Jeff Jamele
- Election of Board Vice President candidate Ashley Woo

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Paul Mutone

Seconded: Erin Boyd

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:

- Various summer projects, including faculty work on curriculum, some classroom upgrades, the summer concert series, and the Thetford Outdoor Program sessions
- The middle school orientation and 9th grade retreat
- Modifications to the midday “Power Hour” schedule (which includes an all-school assembly, small-group advisories, and clubs and activities)
- The Thetford Community Forum on Education, held the previous evening and attended by about 45-50 people
- An enrollment update:
 - For the first time in several years, TA’s enrollment has fallen below the projected, budgeted total
 - Recruitment was strong, but attrition over the summer (due to family moves, early college, higher than expected enrollment in tech programs, etc.) was higher than usual
 - Enrollment of tuition-paying international students has fallen to zero, for the first time in some years (due to both political issues and the pandemic)
 - However, regional private-pay enrollment is about the same as in recent years
- Homecoming activities, for students and alumni
- An update on campus master planning

Lucy Wagner left the meeting at 7:48 p.m.

5. Committee Updates

a. Advancement Committee

Marisa Donovan, chair of the committee, reported that the summer concert series went well for a first-time effort. She said the committee plans to revisit the concept and will likely continue do something to bring community members onto the campus, though perhaps not concerts again, as there has been a recent up-tick in live music in the area, so there was competition for attendance. She said the Homecoming events were also successful.

The committee has also been working on annual fund outreach. In addition, the search for a new admissions coordinator had been reopened and there is a strong pool of candidates.

b. Board Management Committee

Erin Boyd, chair of the committee, reported that the committee has been planning the annual board retreat, scheduled for September 28; she reminded board members that they will be asked to sign the conflict of interest and code of conduct forms at the retreat.

She noted that the committee is looking at the format for the monthly board meetings—whether to retain the hybrid format or return to all-Zoom. They are also trying to recruit a new volunteer note-taker/recording clerk for the board meetings, as Leif LaWhite, who has done it for the past three years, has stepped down from the role. Finally, she noted that they will be asking all committees to develop a work plan for the year.

c. Personnel Committee

Dana Grossman, chair of the committee, reported that the board signed a new master agreement with the faculty at the end of June; it includes two years of salary grids (for 2023-24 and 2024-25) and completely revamped, cleaned-up wording—with the exception of two areas, which will be wound up in coming months: alignment of the fiscal-year and payroll calendars and an updating of the provisions for faculty evaluations.

She also noted that staff negotiations are now underway, and that the board had already signed a memorandum of understanding with the union to offer staff the same dental insurance provisions as are included in the new faculty agreement (that is, coverage of 60% of the standard dental premium in 2023-24 and 80% in 2024-25 and subsequent years).

d. Resources Committee

Paul Mutone, chair of the committee, said the committee has signed a new agreement with the CPA firm of Tyler Simms & St. Sauveur to again serve as TA's auditor and tax preparer. He noted that Mascoma Bank, where the school's accounts are held, recently experienced a security breach, and TA's bank account numbers were compromised; the school didn't lose any funds but opened new accounts as a precaution.

He reported that TA's endowment—\$5.2 million—had a net increase of 2.7% for the period ending June 30, 2023. The committee is considering putting out an RFP for a new investment firm. He also said the committee has begun to work with the administration on a budget realignment plan in light of the enrollment shortfall.

7. Executive Session

Motion: To enter executive session to discuss the annual Head of School evaluation, staff negotiations, and the trustee annual giving goal.

Moved: Paul Mutone

Seconded: Katie Saunders

The motion passed unanimously. Everyone except the members of the board left the meeting, and the board entered executive session at 8:09 p.m.

Katie Saunders left the meeting at 8:33 p.m.

Ashley Woo left the meeting at 8:39 p.m.

The board came out of executive session at 8:44 p.m.

8. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

None.

10. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Sheilagh Smith

Seconded: Paul Mutone

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk)