

**THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
Monthly Board Meeting – October 12, 2023  
Hybrid (some attendees in person at TA, some via Zoom)

**MINUTES**

Donna Steinberg (Board President) called the meeting to order at 6:47 p.m. Attendance was as follows:

Trustees present: Donna Steinberg, Francine A’Ness, Katie Saunders, Lucy Wagner, Dana Grossman, Erika Hoffman-Kiess, Jeff Jamele, Sarah Adams, Cara Ray, Ashley Woo, Sam Perry, Erin Boyd, Paul Mutone, Darin Knaus, Marty Jacobs (joined the meeting at 6:53 p.m.), Sheilagh Smith (joined the meeting at 6:55 p.m.)

Trustees absent: Harry Kinne, Marisa Donovan

Others present: Carrie Brennan (TA Head of School), Patty McIlvaine (TA Director of Advancement), Casey Huling (TA Teacher and Parent), Stacy Barton (TA Teacher and Parent), Betsy Pond (TA Teacher), Tippi Oshoniyi (TA Staff and Parent)

**1. Welcome & President’s Report**

Board President Donna Steinberg welcomed everyone in attendance.

Donna noted that the board retreat just two weeks earlier had been a wonderful chance for the board to gather in person. She also commented on the coming-together of the school community the previous weekend to put on the big Woods Trail Run cross-country invitational, which brings thousands of people from all over the Northeast to the TA campus.

**2. Public Comment**

None.

**3. Consent Agenda**

- Approve meeting minutes — September 21, 2023

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:

- The fact that both Mountain Day and the Woods Trail Run felt like a “new normal,” after four years affected in whole or part by COVID
- The fact that she has committed to doing more “school walkthroughs” — short, informal, non-evaluative classroom visits, as a signal to both adults and students that

what happens in classrooms matters — and did five of them in 23 classrooms in September

- A staffing update; searches are underway for a position in the PE/Health Department, a long-term substitute teacher, and the Enrollment/Admissions Coordinator position in the Advancement Department
- A review of the campus master plan, including the formation of a new Planning Study Oversight Committee and recent input (including from students) into campus needs and vision
- Upcoming recruitment events for enrollment in the fall of 2024, including the team that is overseeing recruitment while the Enrollment/Admissions Coordinator search is ongoing

Brief discussion followed, including about whether dormitories are included in the campus master plan, given the limitation posed by lack of housing in maximizing the use of the campus, especially when school is not in session.

## **5. Capital Campaign Feasibility Study Update**

It was decided by consensus to move right into this agenda item, as it pertains to the campus master plan update, and follow it with the town updates.

Carrie Brennan listed the potential projects currently on the master plan: construction of a student center/café, accessibility modifications to the White Building Annex, conversion of the heating system to renewable energy, renovation of the art wing, renovation of the athletic field and construction of a track, renovation of Slafter Hall, and development of the South Campus. She noted that the potential timeline for the projects runs through 2033, and that potential funding sources include the endowment, revenue/savings, sale of assets, grants, long-term debt, and fund-raising.

There was brief further discussion about the priority order of the projects and the planning studies that have been undertaken to date.

Sheilagh Smith left the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

## **6. Town Updates**

### **a. Strafford**

Sarah Adams, the Strafford representative to the TA board, reported that the Newton School started the year with 110 students and that eight of this year's 8th-grade graduates had chosen TA. She said Newton has a new outdoor classroom with a firepit, which is getting used quite a lot, and they plan this year to add gender-neutral bathrooms for the upper grades. She also said that there are new teachers for Spanish, art and performing arts, and a lower-grade classroom, but that a middle school English/language arts position is still vacant. Additionally, they plan to boost the club and after-school activities for middle schoolers this year.

### **b. Thetford**

Jeff Jamele, the Thetford representative to the TA board, reported that the Thetford School Board has been reviewing feedback from the recent public forum on education and they hope to hold

such events more often — especially given the likely impact of upcoming changes in the town's tax formula. He also mentioned that work had recently been completed to install a chain-link fence around the outdoor basketball court, following recent vandalism of the court.

c. Lyme

Darin Knaus, the Lyme representative to the TA board, reported that the chair of the Lyme School Board said the board has begun negotiating a new master agreement with the Lyme School teachers and the process is going well. He noted that there will be some upcoming renovations to the school, primarily involving asbestos remediation.

Discussion followed about the relationship between the TA tuition rate and the tax rates in Thetford and in sending towns.

## **7. Enrollment Shortfall Action Plan Update**

Paul Mutone, chair of the Resources Committee, said the school's administration is working on a plan to address the FY24 budget gap of about \$300,000 as a result of the enrollment shortfall, but he had no specifics to report yet.

He also mentioned that the audit for the year ending June 30, 2023, is under way and his expectation is that there will be a small surplus. And he said the Resources Committee hopes to have an initial report on the FY25 budget by the board's November meeting.

Discussion followed about the importance in that process of the FY25 enrollment projection, especially given the role played in this year's shortfall by the higher than expected participation by TA students in CTE (career and technical education) programs.

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

Carrie Brennan noted that there will be a presentation on the school's DEI initiatives at the November board meeting.

Erin Boyd, chair of the Board Management Committee, reminded all board members to fill out, sign, and return to her the code of conduct and conflict of interest forms she had recently sent out. She also noted there have been some shifts in the composition of the board committees, and she would be sending a new board roster, including committee assignments, to everyone.

## **10. Adjournment**

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Katie Saunders

Seconded: Erin Boyd

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk)