

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monthly Board Meeting – February 8, 2024
Hybrid (some attendees in person at TA, some 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, Jeff Jamele, Marty Jacobs, Paul Mutone, Darin Knaus, Ashley Woo, Harry Kinne, Francine A’Ness, Erika Hoffman-Kiess, Marisa Donovan, Cara Ray, Erin Boyd, Sam Perry, Lucy Wagner, Sheilagh Smith

Trustees absent: Katie Saunders

Others present: Carrie Brennan (TA Head of School), Ben Bailey (TA Director of Finance), Ehrin Lingeman (TA Teacher/Staff), Scott Ellis (TA Teacher), Stephanie Joyce (TA Teacher), Betsy Pond (TA Teacher)

1. Welcome & President’s Report

Board President Donna Steinberg welcomed everyone in attendance. She mentioned two recent events at TA that she had attended and found very impressive — the community potluck to begin discussing the creation of an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Statement, and the Founder’s Day banquet. She said it was great to see so many trustees at the Land Acknowledgement gathering and referred to Founder’s Day as an inspiring, high-energy, uniquely TA event.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Consent Agenda

- Approve meeting minutes — January 11, 2024

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Marty Jacobs

Seconded: Paul Mutone

The motion passed unanimously, with one abstention.

4. Head of School Report

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

- The project-based learning skills imparted by the classes’ work on the various Founder’s Day committees.
- The review and selection process to choose a new student information system software platform — a 12-month process that is nearing its conclusion; the current system has been in use for 14 years.
- The offsite partner programs open to 11th and 12th-graders — including a STEM internship with two local technology companies, college-level classes at Dartmouth,

dual enrollment at several Vermont colleges, and the Oxbow and Hartford career and technical centers.

- Recruitment and enrollment activity for the fall of 2024.
- Elements of the school’s strategic plan that relate directly to these and other recent activities.

Brief discussion followed about fluctuations in the student population of some sending school districts and variations in attendance at recruitment events held virtually versus on-campus.

5. Thetford Outdoor Program (TOP) Report

Scott Ellis (Outdoor Program Coordinator) and Ehrin Lingeman (Farm to School Coordinator) gave a presentation about TOP. The mission of the program, they said, is “to ignite academic curiosity and foster environmental stewardship through outdoor exploration, recreation, and project-based, experiential learning.” The TOP programming is very popular with students and works academic subject matter into various outdoor activities.

TOP has worked to amplify the use of the school’s South Campus (formerly referred to as the Barrett Property) by building a disc golf course, a ropes course, a compost system, a garden, and a heated greenhouse. The program has also implemented several cross-disciplinary initiatives, including with the culinary arts program and the Thetford Academy Climate Alliance, a student group. They’ve led student trips, including an overnight retreat at the Hulbert Outdoor Center. And they run summer programs open to students not only at TA but from any sending town.

Scott and Ehrin concluded by noting that TOP has become part of TA’s culture and is widely recognized throughout the region. Scott pointed out that a recent snowshoe-making initiative — involving cutting down a big ash tree (with support from several volunteer community members), then bending and shaping the wood, lacing the snowshoes, and actually using them — received front-page coverage recently in the *Valley News*. Ehrin also mentioned the receipt of a recent \$15,000 Vermont Farm-to-School grant.

Brief discussion followed, including a mention by Carrie of the school’s appreciation for TOP’s funding partners, including a family foundation that has been investing in TOP for nine years and an alumni donor who has supported the garden for three years; she also noted Ehrin’s success at bringing in a number of mini-grants for the garden, including from Vital Communities.

6. Select Town Reports

a. Thetford

Jeff Jamele, the representative from the Thetford School Board, said the Thetford board has adopted a school district budget for 2024-25 that reflects an increase of just over 5%. Thetford’s “weighted average” for per-pupil funding was not as bad as had been feared, and he said taxes were expected to rise only about 1%. He noted that the annual school district meeting (and town meeting) will be held at Thetford Academy this year. He also mentioned the current discussion in the state legislature about potentially delaying school budget votes statewide.

Brief discussion followed about the expected impact of the discussion in the legislature. Jeff said he didn’t think Thetford would be impacted by it.

b. Lyme

Darin Knaus, the representative from the Lyme School Board, said the Lyme budget has also been adopted and reflects a 6% increase. In addition, he said there are several warrant articles regarding asbestos and lead remediation that the town will vote on.

7. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

Paul Mutone noted that the Resources Committee is working on the FY25 Thetford Academy budget and will present it to the board in another couple of months.

Sheilagh suggested having a discussion about board management policies, particularly standardizing process flows. The Board Management Committee will develop questions for the full board to discuss.

Carrie noted that further updates on the campus master planning process, including the lift project in the Annex, as well as the campaign planning study report, will be ready to share with the board at upcoming meetings.

Francine A’Ness noted that she knew of a foundation that might be worth approaching for grant funding for the potential Annex lift project.

8. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Sheilagh Smith

Seconded: Francine A’Ness

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk), with note-taking support from Erin Boyd