State University of New York

College of Environmental Science and Forestry

# **Board of Trustees Meeting**

September 25, 2020 - 9:00 am

Minutes

**Voting Members:**

*Attending:* Chair Matthew Marko, Vice Chair William Fisher, Trustees John Bartow, Linda Brown-Robinson, Vita DeMarchi, Rick Fedrizzi, Daniel Fitts, and Justin Beslity, Student Representative

*Not in Attendance:* Stephen Sloan

**Non-Voting:**

*Attending:* Judy Drabicki, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Representative; Edward Wozny, USA Representative

*Not in Attendance:* Kathleen Hochul, Lieutenant Governor; Jim Malatras, SUNY Chancellor; Betty Rosa, NYS Education Department; Basil Seggos, Commissioner of NYS Department of Environmental Conservation; Kent Syverud, Chancellor Syracuse University

**College Personnel in Attendance**:   
Joseph Rufo, Secretary to the Board, CFO & Officer in Charge; Maureen Fellows, Brenda Greenfield, Kevin Hayden, Brian Leydet, Mark Lichtenstein, Anne Lombard, Joanie Mahoney, David Newman, Gary Scott, Stephanie Specchio, Ragan Squier, Tim Volk, and John Wasiel

**Guests**

Rob Neimeier, Ramboll

**Call to Order**

Chair Marko called the meeting of the ESF Board of Trustees to order at 9:05 am. He welcomed everyone and reminded the Trustees that the microphones are now live and that all Board meetings are open meetings and are live streamed, digitally recorded and the video would be available soon after the meeting on the ESF web page. This meeting is held via zoom and guests can view the meeting via livestream. Chair Marko asked Secretary Rufo to begin roll call. With more than five voting Board members in attendance, a quorum was confirmed.

Chair Marko reminded those in attendance that the ESF Campus is located within the original territory of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and thanked the Centers for Native Peoples and the Environment for their leadership and traditions regarding stewardship of the earth and scientific ecological knowledge.

Chair Marko reminded everyone that although guests are welcomed and encouraged to attend board meetings, general discussion will be limited to trustees. When recognized by the Chair, members of the ESF administration and invited guests are able to participate in discussion.

**Approval of the Consent Agenda**

* Approval of the Minutes of the May 8, 2020 Board meeting
* Approval of the Minutes of the August 21, 2020 Special Board meeting
* Personnel Actions Presented for Board Review

Trustee Brown-Robinson made a motion to advance the consent agenda, seconded by Trustee DeMarchi. Chair Marko called for a vote motion carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the items in the consent agenda be approved as presented.

**Report of the Board Chair** – *Matthew Marko*

* Update on Presidential Search
* On August 21, 2020, the ESF Board of Trustees advanced the three recommended candidates from the Presidential Search Committee to the SUNY Office of the Chancellor for final consideration.
* The fall semester is well underway and the Administrative Leadership Team, currently led by the steady hand of Officer-in-Charge Joe Rufo, is diligently working to ensure mission critical functions continue. This summer, board leadership, including Past Chair DeMarchi, myself as Chair, and Vice Chair Fisher, have been meeting bi-weekly with the Administration.  We have been receiving routine updates from Provost Newman, Chief Operating Officer Mahoney, Chief of Staff Lichtenstein, and Officer-in-Charge Joe Rufo. I want to thank them, and all the faculty and staff that have been diligently preparing for this fall semester.  I also want to thank the students, for their diligence in adhering to social distancing guidelines as we continue to operate through the pandemic. As of this morning, we have zero active cases of coronavirus, and zero contacts in quarantine. We should be proud of this accomplishment, but we cannot let our guard down.
* I look forward to reports today on college finances; academic planning and enrollment; inclusion, diversity and equity; clean energy master plan; and hearing from our student representatives.
* Update on Nomination and Election of Board Officers
* In accordance with the ESF Board of Trustee Bylaws, my term as Chairman of this Board will come to an end at the Annual Meeting in 2021.  In anticipation of this transition, I am consulting with trustees and past chairs Fitts and DeMarchi to identify nominees to serve as Board officers.  These nominees will be presented at the December 11, 2020 meeting.

**Committee Reports**

* **Sustainable Finance Committee** – *Trustee Fisher, Chair*
* Trustee Fisher reached out to Joe for budget information, however he is still waiting on SUNY and does not have any additional information to share. As a result, the committee did not meet since there was not enough information to make any recommendations.
* **Sustainable Operations** – *Trustee Fedrizzi, Chair*
* Trustee Fedrizzi thanked Trustee DeMarchi for her incredible support with the committees. The committee met on September 10 and discussed where they could make the greatest impact in the shortest amount of time. They talked about many things, but thought the Presidential Search: A 100-day plan would make the greatest impact. This would give the new president an idea of what needs to be done and what the Board can do to help. The committee would like to schedule listening sessions with four groups of academia/staff and share some of the ideas gathered with the new president.
* Mark Lichtenstein suggested the following groups for the listening sessions: AGEC, Chairs Council, leadership of the two student governance groups and a staff group. Ragan will schedule in mid-October.
* **Governance Committee** – *Trustee Marko, Chair*
* No formal meeting due to being very active in the Presidential Search. The committee will meet before the December meeting to advance the items on the agenda: self-evaluation processes as best practices as trustees and grading on performance in addition to a few other items.
* **Land into Trust Ad Hoc Committee** – *Trustee Fisher, Chair*
* ommittee has been inactive. Chair Marko asked Council Hayden if he would share an update. Lands into Trust have not transferred from SU to an affiliate of ESF. Will discuss further in Executive Session.

**President’s Report*–*** *Joseph Rufo, Officer in Charge*

* **College Finances** – *Joe Rufo*
  + Noteworthy News
* ESF continues to be well represented in a number of various college rankings magazines and various other lists.
* Marshall Hall renovation is underway after over a year of planning. Kudos to Mark Lichtenstein and the Facilities Group.
* Dr. Jerry Belant’s Research - wolf pups were born in Isle Royale National Park. Dr. Belant received local and national attention.
* The Governor announced new partnerships with SUNY schools to reduce waste and improve recycling across NYS. The NYS Center for Sustainable Materials Management here at ESF is an important element of this initiative. Co-Pi’s on the grant are Mark Lichtenstein, Doug Daley, Bandaru Ramarao and Susan Fassler.
  + New Hires – Katherine “Kitty” McCarthy, Associate Provost of Enrollment Management, started on August 10 and Dr. Tondelaya George started on September 1 as Director of the Open Academy.
  + Finances – Not a lot new to report relative to what we talked about at the May meeting.
* Discussion ensued over the 2019-20 year-end results. The main point is in the State notified us in July they would be holding $2.9 million. The Governor announced that the State is waiting to see what is going to happen regarding federal money coming our way. Nothing in substance will happen prior to the November election.
  + Tuition – the $1.7 million negative variance is the result of non-resident numbers being lower than we forecasted due to COVID and closing of some of our summer offerings.
  + Expenditures – DOB put together a “keeping the lights on” plan - any spending must be related to enhancing revenue. Revenue vs. expenditures – $7.2 million deficit. If we had full state allocation, the deficit would have been $4.3 million. Key here is cash on hand and the state’s desire to save cash on hand. Today cash is positive because we received our state allocation to start-off the fiscal year.
  + 2020-21 Budget – SUNY requested us to submit a 6-month budget as simply a placeholder. The fact is we are still operating under the constraint rules.
* Questions
* Trustee DeMarchi – *With all this uncertainty, what keeps you up at night?* The unknown and the idea of how long can the SUNY system continue to operate with the enormous cash deficit. What will we look like this time next year?
* Trustee Fisher – *Have we had to borrow money from SUNY?* Haven’t borrowed yet; but if we were to borrow, the rate is the short-term rate of 1%. *We discussed at previous meeting putting a limit on our consumption of SU courses – were we able to do this?* We didn’t for this fall because we didn’t want to put further restrictions on our students at this time when they are dealing with remote learning and COVID. *Where are we at with the satellite properties?* Satellite Properties Task Force met recently about the 2nd phase and are working on looking at Cranberry Lake and Newcomb.
* Trustee Brown Robinson – *The Departments don’t have budgets?* Joe explained that at this time they don’t have the ability to unilaterally make decisions about spending their budget dollars – all spending requests are vetted as we follow the spending constraints plan. *How essential were the two new hires and could they have been delayed?* Could have been delayed, but enrollment and quality/diversity of class is very important. Both have revenue generating attached to them.
* Trustee Bartow – *Has the building aid been impacted?* Capital Projects are paid entirely by the State. The optics might look bad if people don’t understand operations vs. capital. No direct impact on our operating budget in regards to capital projects.
* **Semester Restart**
* Academic Planning and Enrollment – David Newman
* Matriculated Fall Headcount – Down 4.5% in total number of students.
* International students down almost 29%. Significant problem with bringing in international students with embassies closed.
* UG headcount - Reduction of 3.4% in new students; continuing students up a bit. Increase in NY state residents and 17% reduction of out of state students – expected due to COVID. Students of color and URM stayed solid. Actual application numbers relatively high for freshmen, but a much lower yield rate than the past. A reduction in transfer students from previous years.
* Graduate students – continuing decline as we have seen in previous years. Ph.D. stayed fairly stable. Staying very close to our required 20 graduates. Hoping for better success this year.
* Teaching – Discussed the teaching modalities for the fall semester – face-to-face courses are challenging because we need to maintain social distancing in classrooms; larger classes either fully online or blended flex. Invested in technology for live streaming for classrooms. Key numbers - 43.5% fully online, 11% fully face to face, 40% blended flex. Gave students the opportunity to sign up online only coursework this semester. As a result, Centennial Hall is operating at a 78% capacity.
* Request for the BOT– we are in the planning phase of Reaccreditation from Middle States. Actual site visit to campus 2022. On October 26, we are having a conversation with Dr. Kushnood Haq, who is the lead person for the accreditation. It is important for Dr. Haq to meet with the Board. David will provide information to the Board prior to the meeting.
* Questions –
* Trustee Fisher *– Sounds logical that COVID is the cause of many shortfalls; are we able to benchmark against like institutions where we can see if they are experiencing the same drop off in students?* Within SUNY the comprehensive colleges were particularly hard hit. The fact that we are holding our total enrollment down about 5% is consistent with what is happening around the country.
* Trustee DeMarchi – *On the 2020 Grad degree data it shows two as the number of degrees awarded.* That is for the summer only – 9 or 10 for the fall. There has been difficulty in scheduling defenses.
* Trustee Bartow – *Will there be any forgiveness due to COVID when they are looking at reclassifying institutions?* If we get to that point, we will be looking to Carnegie. Joanie met with Scott Shannon and Kim Armani and they are expecting to surpass 20 this year – they were on track to have 23-24 last year and COVID did interrupt those.
* **COVID Testing** – *Joanie Mahoney/Brian Leydet/John Wasiel*
* Joanie thanked John Wasiel and Brian Leydet - both have been extraordinary in helping to get our staff/students safely through this pandemic.
* COVID testing plan
* Brian Leydet talked about ESF’s restart currently and in the near future. Thanked ESF students, faculty and staff for the job they’re doing to help keep our campus safe. Safe Start started early in the COVID outbreak. Were able to safely open research early on. We were the first to take advantage of Upstate’s pooled saliva testing back in April. Kudos to Human Resources for instituting a daily health screening for all on campus employees. Have been very effective at de-densifying campus while offering online classes. Facilities has stepped up in the cleaning and disinfecting across campus. HVAC improvements in airflow and filtrations. Public health signage all over campus and John Wasiel has been stockpiling PPE. The Ranger School has implemented arrival testing for all students and staff as well as limiting travel. ESF has a COVID-19 Dashboard. Pool saliva sampling at a detection threshold of less than 1%. SU has required our students to be tested along with their students.
* We have students that are trained contract tracers and COVID-19 testers. Self-reporting forms through Student Affairs. Constant communication with Onondaga Co. DOH, Crouse Medical Practice, SU and Le Moyne. There is now a rapid test. ESF tested a second round of students in coordination with SU – 81% of resident students – 70% UG and 42% G – 0% tested positive.
* A safe future – continue to use pooled saliva plan pending approval from SUNY; continue to collect data and advise via self-reporting mechanisms, aggressively test around confirmed cases, rapid case investigation, contract tracing and continued communication with community partners.
* **Questions**

Chair Marko thanked Brian, John and Joanie for all the work that has been done and for sharing their expertise.

* Trustee Fedrizzi – Great presentation – thank you for the good work. *Were the improvements to HVAC in all the buildings with a dedicated plan or just the older buildings?* Facilities group improved the filtration to the greatest extent for the particular equipment. Throughout the buildings, the airflows were maximized to the greatest extent and focuses around the times the spaces will be occupied. Facilities staff are doing flow checks, greasing things, making sure belts are in good condition. Mark Lichtenstein mentioned older buildings have been a challenge, but they have looked at every single space. No hard upgrades in Bray Hall could happen, but purchased portable units for those offices. We are now looking at all the spaces we need to take out of service where the HVAC systems can’t be upgraded.
* Trustee Beslity –*Is there a set plan for testing for students going into classes? How will that be monitored and disseminated to students?* Our plan is under review by SUNY Central. Next week we will test over 600 students. If there are any positive cases, there will be a more robust testing. Going forward the testing will happen every few weeks for the remainder of the semester and we will revisit for the spring.
* **Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Update** – *Malika Carter*
* Mentioned ways to get in touch with ESF OIDE staff.
* Planning proactively for engagement with students and others regarding bias, discrimination, diversity, equity, inclusion and racism.
* Explained the OIDE Synergy Interns Designs Program.
* Developing and refining a discussion series - The New Normal in Focus: A Vision Forward for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
* Fall 2020 new programs and initiatives – Women of Color, Men of Color, Native American Community, LGBTQIA, Graduate Student Outreach and Women in STEM.
* Partnering with the Alumni Foundation to form a Racial Equity Committee
* Returning initiatives - Diversity @ ESF 24/7/365, 1st & 15th List serve – advertising opportunities to UR groups, In the know with CDO Blog, Resilient Oaks App, OIDE Affiliated Affinity Groups.
* Increase diversity of prospective student pipeline – CDO set forth a .05 percent increase of domestic people of color. New goal equates to 3-10 additional students in each category at minimum.
* Employee engagement – New elective and required online training on ESF HR and OIDE websites. Kevin Hayden is helping to implement the Title IX Cleary & Anti-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment trainings that are required. Safe Zone is elective and educates people about sexual orientation and gender identity/expression issues.
* USA and OIDE have partnered to provide Anti-Bias training and Title IX Cleary training for students as well as Safe Zone.
* Project Inclusion was launched this fall for assessing Diversity, Inclusion and Equity.
* **Question**
* Chair Marko -*What is the forum by which students that are distraught by current events can seek guidance/help?* Sending information in many different ways –via social media, Oakie Opps, diversity 24/7/365 and students are heavily communicating with OIDE.
* **Clean Energy Master Plan** – *Mark Lichtenstein*
* Kudos to faculty, staff and students for their efforts to keep the campus safe, and a shout out to facilities – cleaning, trades, HVAC, shipping & receiving. Continuing with other projects along with these tasks – Marshall Hall Renovation, Center for Sustainable Materials and Clean Energy Master Plan.
* Rob Neimeier with Ramboll – went over condensed version of CEMP from the April 21 Town Hall.
  + NYS Mandates & Acts - Executive 166, New Efficiency NY, Climate Leadership and Protection Act
  + SUNY Goals – Clean Energy Roadmap, Net Zero New Construction, Deep Energy Retrofits and 100% Renewable Electric
  + Explained the Process – reviewed energy use and greenhouse gas emissions trend, completed energy scenario modeling, high-level assessment of investment needs, identified further study needs, and collaborated with FMP team.
  + Explained the 5 key focus areas – Energy Efficiency, Resiliency, Renewable Energy, Stewardship and Engagement.
  + Low carbon campus for main campus – explained our current situation and our vision for the future.
  + ESF GHG Emissions Trends - talked about reductions from 2007-currently as well short term and long term ideas for reductions.
* Mark would like to schedule a meeting with the Board to discuss further the CEMP and FMP.
* **Questions**
  + Trustee Fedrizzi –*In the current reality with the pandemic, could this energy plan have implications related to COVID with more energy use or on the flip side less energy with students learning remotely?* It is so new that it hasn’t gotten woven into this plan yet. Looking at this as an anomaly. *Is there a formal process where students are engaged in helping develop these plans and using it in their course studies?* Mark – It is a living document that will be tweaked and updated and will take in effect the current situation. Dr. Volk mentioned that they had a plan for more student engagement, but with the current situation it didn’t happen.
  + Trustee Fisher –*Should we consider not having fossil fuel boilers in our vision to try to get ahead of other people?* There will be a period where we transition , but agree that the vision shouldn’t include the fossil fuel. Cost was considered and as an emergency backup.

**USA Reports –** *Eddie Wozny*

* USA has been hard at work meeting every week to try to keep the campus engaged online and in a safe way. Successful first movie night. Looking to do some outdoor yoga activities to keep students involved. This week in particular, very good and beneficial talks within the Executive Board and within the overall student body. Had an opportunity to meet with Chancellor Malatras. Discussed ways to help the student population, in particular the people of color and survivors of sexual assault and harassment. Two Instagram accounts have really brought this to light. Reading these terrible stories, we need to do better and would like the administration and the board to help with this process.
* **Questions**
* Trustee Fedrizzi – *Is there an increase in outreach relative to student’s mental health?* Anne said they were ready for an increase, but have seen a decrease instead. Which seems to be the same across the country.
* Chair Marko – *What is the best way for the Board or the Chair to engage with the UG student body?* *Would there be an interest in establishing a line of communication?* USA is meeting fully online via zoom or google hangouts. More than welcome to join those meetings. In terms of other lines of communication, he will discuss with USA and get back to the Board. Malika wanted to share how delicate the situation is for students relative to discrimination and harassment. Several different ways for them to report.

**GSA Report –** *Trustee Beslity*

* The Graduate Student Association completed the transfer of the BOT Graduate Student Representative position to Melanie Berger and will take effect next week.
* Hearing concerns about the transition to Banner – confusion on how to find things like bills, waiver for health insurance, etc. General trend seems to be a lack of communication with administration and student body.
* The transition to online learning format has been relatively smooth. Faculty should be commended for the work they are doing.
* Concerns regarding late paychecks – partially closed offices closed due to COVID. The delay of fees to the end of September was really very helpful. Would like to see that continue.
* **Questions**
* Trustee Fisher – *How are the students doing with their fears and anxiety before they came back to campus and now?* Those who can stay home are staying home. Students are concerned about whether the data can be trusted. In general mostly concerned about SU students not following the guidelines.
* Joe stated the fee due dates are driven by SUNY Policy, but sees this as an opportunity to look into whether we can make the delay permanent.

**AG Report** –*Dr. Gary Scott*

* Thanked Chairman Marko and the Board for allowing Academic Governance to participate in the presidential search interviews. Looking forward to getting over the hiatus of the past few years.
* Echoed student concerns about the Banner transition. Faculty have not been involved in the transition and have been using Banner minimally.
* Commended faculty and staff for the COVID transition to the online format to provide the best educational experience for our students.
* Looking at the bylaws and what changes need to be made for efficient and clear operations.
* Would like to invite the board to the AG meetings. Gary will send an invite to the next meeting.
* **Questions**
* Chair Marko– Thanked AG for the feedback - it was very timely and useful to the search committee members. The board has taken very seriously the comments.
* Trustee Fisher – *How are the faculty feeling about their work on campus? How are they approaching the upcoming semester?* *Is there anything the trustees should be doing for the faculty to be successful in these times?* From what he can see/hear faculty have adapted fairly well. Hopeful spring will be different with more in person classes. There is concern about budget and support of the programs and research.

**Executive Session**- Chair Marko called for an Executive Session to discuss personnel matters. All Trustees in attendance; Joseph Rufo, Secretary to the Board, Officer in Charge/CFO; Kevin Hayden, College Counsel; Mark Lichtenstein, Chief of Staff; Joanie Mahoney, Chief Operating Officer; Maureen Fellows, VP Government Relations and Interim VP for Research and David Newman, Provost; Judy Drabicki, NYS DEC representative were also asked to attend to discuss personnel and contractual matters. **Moved to Executive Session at 12:28 pm.**

**Returned from Executive Session at 12:58 pm.**

**New Business** –Chair Marko opened the floor for new business.

* Chair Marko proposed the following resolution:

Whereas Justin Beslity has served the SUNY ESF Board of Trustees admirably, with professionalism, dedication, and represented his constituency responsibly, be it resolved that the SUNY ESF Board of Trustees thanks Justin for his efforts and wish him well in all future endeavors both here at ESF and beyond.

Trustee Fisher motioned to approve; Trustee DeMarchi seconded. Chair Marko called for vote - resolution carried unanimously.

Next official board meeting - December 11, 2020.

**Adjournment**

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:01 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Robin Perkins.