State University of New York

College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Board of Trustees Meeting

May 14, 2021 - 9:00am

229 Bray Hall, Videoconference & Livestream

**Voting Members:**

Attending: William Fisher, Chair, John Bartow, Linda Brown-Robinson, Vita DeMarchi, Rick Fedrizzi, Daniel Fitts, Matthew Marko, Student Representative Melanie Berger

Not in Attendance: Stephen Sloan

**Non-Voting:**

Attending: Kent Syverud, Chancellor Syracuse University, Rob Davies, NYS DEC Representative

Not in Attendance: John Liu, Vice Chancellor and Provost, Shannon Tahoe, Commissioner of Education, Kathleen Hochul, Lieutenant Governor, Jim Malatras, SUNY Chancellor, Basil Seggos, Commissioner of NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

**College Personnel/Students in Attendance**:   
Joanie Mahoney, President, Kelly Berger, Malika Carter, Lexi Chipules, Brenda Greenfield, Mark Lichtenstein, Anne Lombard, Karen Moore, David Newman, Joseph Rufo, Gary Scott, Ragan Squier, Edward Wozny

**Call to Order**

Chair Fisher called the meeting of the ESF Board of Trustees to order at 9:00 am. Secretary Rufo did roll call. With eight voting Board members in attendance, a quorum was confirmed. Chair Fisher welcomed everyone and reminded the Trustees that the microphones were 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.

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

Chair Fisher went over two process items – 1) The meeting agenda and the consent agenda were sent out electronically Monday to Trustees by email in adobe pdf portfolio format. Although this format keeps all the documents in one place, it can be confusing. Chair Fisher sent an email to all voting trustees to see if they were able to open and review the documents and received no feedback to make changes to the consent agenda. He explained the consent agenda process and the need to review these documents in advance in order to save time during the meeting and be able to vote on them. 2) Chair Fisher would like committee meetings to be scheduled in advance so that participants can get the dates on their calendars.

**Approval of the Consent Agenda – previously circulated to Trustees**

* 2.1 Approval of the Minutes of the January 15, 2021 Board meeting
* 2.2 Personnel Actions Presented for Board Review
* 2.3 Candidates for Graduation Presented for Endorsement – May and August 2021
* 2.4 Sale of College Residence
* 2.5 Kettlebail State Forest Parcel Transfer

Chair Fisher invited a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented. Trustee Marko made a motion to advance the consent agenda, seconded by Trustee Berger. Discussion - Trustee Marko will be abstaining from the Kettlebail State Forest Parcel Transfer vote. Counsel Berger suggested there be two votes – one for the consent agenda without the Kettlebail State Forest Parcel Transfer and a separate vote for the Kettlebail State Forest Parcel Transfer.

Chair Fisher made an amendment to the motion to sever 2.5 Kettlebail State Forest Parcel Transfer from the consent agenda and vote on that item separately.

Chair Fisher called for a roll call vote of the consent agenda with item 2.5 severed – 8 yes; 0 no & 0 abstentions - the motion carries unanimously.

Chair Fisher invited a motion to approve consent agenda item 2.5 Kettlebail State Forest Parcel Transfer as presented. Trustee Bartow made a motion to advance, seconded by Trustee Berger.

Chair Fisher called for a roll call vote for consent agenda item 2.5 Kettlebail State Forest Parcel Transfer – 7 yes; 0 no & 1 abstention – the motion carries unanimously.

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

**Approval of the 2021-22 Meeting Schedule**

Discussion – Chair Fisher mentioned that today’s meeting should be the last meeting that will need to virtual. Meetings going forward will be in person. The goal for the BOT meetings is to have them 2 hours or less and to start at 9 am. More of the BOT work will take place within the committee meetings. Chair Fisher encourages committee chairs to schedule their meetings in advance and get them on calendars to be able to get full participation.

Chair Fisher invited a motion to approve the 2021-22 meeting schedule as presented. Trustee Brown-Robinson made a motion to advance; seconded by Trustee DeMarchi. Chair Fisher called for a voice vote – 8 yes; 0 no; 0 abstention - the motion to approve the 2021-22 meeting schedule as presented carries unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the 2021-22 Meeting Schedule is approved as presented.

Trustee Bartow suggested that the individual committee meetings not be scheduled so close to the full Board Meetings in order to be able to approve the minutes of the committee meetings prior to the BOT meetings. It was suggested that the committee members vote on the meeting minutes electronically so that the Committee Chairs are able to report out at the full board meetings. Reminder that the committees are subject to the open meetings law.

**Report of the Board Chair** – *William Fisher*

* ESF/SU Task Force update - President Mahoney asked Chair Fisher to lead this task force. The task force has 15 members. The kick off meeting was held on March 19 via zoom, and Chair Fisher recently finished one on one meetings he had with each task force member. The meetings were very informative. Chair Fisher talked about the college history written by Professor Emeritus Hugh Canham that is published on the digital commons at ESF. Really interesting in particular to the history of ESF/SU relationship. Begins in 1911 with the NY State College of Forestry at SU. Two major milestones after 1911 - in 1948 ESF became a unit within the newly formed SUNY and in 1972 when the college name changed to SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. The task force is looking at what phase 4 might look like. They will continue to work on what the task force will produce, and Chair Fisher will share the ongoing progress of the task force with President Mahoney and the Board.

**GSA Report –** *Trustee Berger*

* Looking forward to graduation tomorrow
* Elections are underway
* Looking forward to next year

**USA Reports –** *Eddie Wozny*

* Eddie wanted to thank everyone, especially the College as this is his last meeting as well last days as a student at ESF – he is graduating tomorrow. He will be doing campus ministry with Syracuse Chapter of Crew, so will be on campus next year.
* Recommendation - To help to ease the transition for the new USA BOT representative, Eddie is suggesting that for the last BOT meeting of the academic year both incoming and outgoing USA Board representatives attend the meeting.
* USA has changed the name of the BOT USA representative under USA to Head of External Affairs. There is currently no one taking that position next academic year, therefore the USA President, Lexi Chipules, will be the interim BOT representative for USA.
* Lexi shared USA updates
* Elections are complete
* Working to use an anonymous donation that USA received a few years ago to create a brave space on campus. They hope to have the space ready by the fall for students to use
* Getting a program called Anthologyto help organize clubs and events. USA would like to make this a campus-wide, one stop shop to help track club attendance and events and to assist students with finding information about the different department clubs.
* Chair Fisher mentioned there is a strong consensus in favor of the recommendation to have both incoming and outgoing USA BOT representatives at the last meeting of the academic year. It will be implemented at the next meeting.

**Governance Committee** – *Trustee Marko, Chair*

* Governance Committee met on March 16 with a full agenda of business. The committee accomplished quite a bit. Trustee Marko went over the minutes of the meeting
* Annual self-evaluation results - discussion about the responses and areas that need improvement – Statutory Obligations of the College and Risk Mitigation. The committee asked Counsel Berger to give a presentation to the full board about the statutory obligations of the College. It would be beneficial to make sure the Board is working with the administration to ensure risk management. Finance committee will look into it.
* Bylaws Amendment proposed – changes include the formal creation of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee as a standing committee; improved language on the description of charges for the committees and update to *article VI section 2,* *notice of bylaws changes*, to allow electronic submission to trustees. The proposed amended bylaws have been circulated to the Board members, and the Governance Committee would like to move this item for consideration to the full board of trustees.
* Policy for submitting information and agenda items for consideration by the ESF BOT at their meetings. Document intended to streamline engagement from the campus community to the board of trustees and to have a process that is transparent to everyone and gives advance notice. Some issues may be brought to the committees rather than the full board. The form will be on the BOT website. The committee approved a motion to bring the draft policy to the full board for approval. The document states there are three standing committees, however it should now be four – edit to be addressed in the resolution.
* Talked about ongoing business items.

**Approval of Amended Bylaws**

Chair Fisher invited a motion to adopt the modifications to the Bylaws. Trustee Marko made a motion to advance and Trust DeMarchi seconded the motion. Discussion on the importance of the process to amend the bylaws.

Chair Fisher called for a roll call vote– 8 yes; 0 no & 0 abstention – the motion carries unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the modifications to the Amended Bylaws are approved as presented.

**Approval of the Policy for Submitting Information and Agenda Items for Consideration by the ESF BOT**

Chair Fisher invited a motion to adopt the policy – Trustee Marko made a motion to advance; seconded by Trustee Bartow.

Chair Fisher called for a voice vote– 8 yes; 0 no & 0 abstention – the motion carries unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the Policy for Submitting Information and Agenda Items for Consideration by the ESF BOT is approved with the edit of four standing committees.

**Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee *–*** *Trustees Brown-Robinson and Bartow, Co-chairs*

* Trustee Brown Robinson thanked Chair Fisher, Dr. Carter, Ragan Squier, Robin Perkins, President Mahoney and Trustees Marko and Bartow for the work done so far to get this very important committee to this point.
* The kick off meeting on May 5 was to map out a framework on how the committee will operate and what the mission will be, which is to increase diversity for the main campus and satellite campuses to be more inclusive. It was decided the committee would meet six times a year, and will operate on the same guidelines as the BOT meetings. However, there will be smaller sub-groups that will work/meet in between the committee meetings. Counsel Berger will work on a document that gives more formal guidance regarding open meetings versus informal meetings to discuss and work on tasks. The committee members will collaborate with other organizations and committees on campus and beyond. The committee makeup will be as follows: three BOT members; the Chief Diversity Officer; both BOT student representatives, up to four community members, two ESF faculty and three ESF staff with a maximum of 15 members. The three staff representatives will be the Director of the Office of International Education or designee, the University Police Chief or designee, and the Committee Chair’s nominee. The two faculty members will be nominated by Academic Governance. All members of the committee will become voting members of the committee.
* Very excited to make SUNY ESF be the best it can be, and proud that they created this idea even before SUNY. Trust Brown-Robinson would like to introduce the members of the committee at the next full board meeting.
* President Mahoney expressed her gratitude to Trustees Bartow and Brown-Robinson for bringing their expertise to this topic. Dr. Carter and her team have done a great job, but the more hands on deck the better. President Mahoney offered her support wherever they may need it. Executive Cabinet meets on the 1st Monday every month and she can call special meetings as necessary.
* Chair Fisher inquired where will the information go? Most committees bring back their progress/updates to the full board which meets 4 times a year. Trustee Brown-Robinson mentioned they are looking to see progress much quicker than that – 6 meetings a year as a standard. Dr. Carter will keep President Mahoney updated on the progress of the committee.
* Dr. Carter echoed the thanks that was given. She wanted to make a correction regarding her comment at the committee meeting that Executive Cabinet doesn’t meet regularly; they indeed meet once a month. She gave warning to the BOT that the work is very political and very interpersonal. Dr. Carter highlighted all of the campus departments/committees that are currently working on diversity equity and inclusion.

**Sustainable Finance Committee** – *Trustee Fisher, Chair*

* The Sustainable Finance Committee met on April 29 – The duty of the committee is to review and make recommendations regarding college finances. The committee spent most of the time during the meeting on reviewing and getting a lot more clarity on the current fiscal year. The committee isn’t in a position at this time to make recommendations to the Board since the college doesn’t have any budget information from the Department of Budget for the next fiscal year.

**Sustainable Operations Committee** – *Trustee Fedrizzi, Chair*

* **Recommendation to Eliminate Sustainable Operations Committee.**

Trustee Fedrizzi explained that as he looked at the proposed Bylaw change information and the other documents he found related to the Sustainable Operations committee, he realized that the major employment decisions and enrollment should clearly be the job of the President and her staff and not necessarily the job of a committee of the BOT. Trustee Fedrizzi in talking with Trustee DeMarchi and COS Lichtenstein discovered that the committee came about when there was a lack of leadership at the College. We now have an engaging leader and staff, and it has become clear that this committee did not reflect its mission and therefore the elimination of the committee would be the best thing to do to allow for the freedom of the President and her team. He sought the advice of Counsel Berger to make a recommendation to further amend the bylaws to eliminate the Sustainable Operations committee and work towards supporting other existing BOT committees and task forces.

* Chair Fisher accepted Trustee Fedrizzi’s recommendation and forwarded this charge to the Governance Committee to update the Bylaws to reflect the elimination of the Sustainable Operations Committee.

**President’s Report*–*** *Joanie Mahoney*

Guiding principal – “Progress is more important than perfection.” Simon Sinek. We have a lot of work to do here at ESF!

* In the News
  + On April 22, Earth Day, Mayor Ben Walsh, County Executive Ryan McMahon and our student leaders came together on our campus to declare Earth Day as ESF Day.
  + The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education awarded ESF STARS platinum status. It took about 75 different people on campus and the support of the Board to reach this level.
  + Very proud that Dr. Robin Kimmerer is a newly elected member of the Academy of Arts & Sciences.
  + 50,000+ students enrolled in SUNY ESF’s Solar Energy Basics online course taught by Neal Abrams.
  + Governor Cuomo has announced that COVID vaccines will be required for all SUNY students in the fall.
* Searches/Appointments
  + We welcome Professor John Stella as our new Vice President for Research and Matthew Millea as Executive Director for Strategic Initiatives.
* Budget and Finance
* Impact of COVID
* Hiring freeze - exceptions health & safety and preservation of revenue – FTEs down 30.
* Elimination of non-essential, non-personnel spending.
* Delay in State support payments until very recently.
* Federal Assistance – HEERF 1, 2, & 3 (CARES Act) – HEERF 1 round complete; HEERF 2 student and institutional portions in process – deadline 1/18/2022; HEERF 3 awaiting guidance.
* 2021-22 State Budget – Joanie went over the budget numbers. Base critical maintenance numbers have not changed. Program Enhancement and expansion – there is 100M available through SUNY. SUNY will be looking for projects ready to go; the money will be competitively allocated through SUNY and we will be prepared.
* Cash Balance Projections (May, June, July 2021) – Joanie went over the cash projections for May, June and July. It will not assist us with our structural deficit, but will help to reimburse cash provided to us the past several months and pay delayed invoices.

Discussion

* Chair Fisher inquired about the vaccine requirement being contingent on federal approval of non-emergency status of these vaccines. Will it be documented or an honor system? Joanie mentioned that it will be documented and handled in the same way as other immunizations are. The details will be worked out with Dean Lombard. We have a contract with Crouse Medical Practice for immunizations. Faculty and staff will not be required to get the vaccine.
* Chair Fisher asked if ESF is trying to synchronize with SU. Joanie expressed ESF’s gratitude for SU’s generosity and assistance with COVID testing protocols for our students, faculty and staff. Chancellor Syverud said they are thrilled to be working with ESF on testing and all COVID stuff, and he wants the Board to know what a joy for the entire team at SU to work with the team Joanie assembled. Joanie and her team have caused extraordinary good will.
* Chair Fisher said we are poised for growth mode; applications are up – have we heard anything from Albany whether we are still in the austerity budget mode? Joe said the austerity budget directives came from the Department of Budget with the State and not from SUNY. We are dealing in a cash world rather than a financial state still. Nothing new at this time. We have been as aggressive as we can with hiring. Joanie mentioned we have to have a plan for our structural deficit. Trustee Marko inquired as to when can we get back to pre-pandemic where we can work on the structural deficit? They will reconvene working on the structural deficit in the fall.
* Enrollment
* President Mahoney went over the application, admits and enrollment numbers. Applications and accepts are up. Percent accepted is high, but the yield is down. We are not satisfied with these numbers, but could be due to residual uncertainty with COVID. Hearing from Kitty McCarthy that we are in the mix with other SUNYs, but privates are faring better – perhaps because they are not requiring SATs. Provost Newman discussed that there are number of things that hampered us: only a very few campus visits – most done virtually; students applying to a lot more campuses that are not requiring SATs. The concern is transfers; first year’s staying steady. Financial issues for students moving from two to four-year programs. Has been a very, very challenging year. We are hoping our recruiters will be able to go out on the road again soon. We will be tracking contacts and results, and feel confident for next year.
* Marshall Hall/Facilities Master Plan Update
* Marshall Hall renovations is a significant ongoing project on campus. Scheduled to be completed in January 2023. There will be a bridge built from Marshall to Bray which will be significant improvement to accessibility on campus. Joanie showed renderings of some of the renovations that will take place.
* Facilities Master Plan update – JMZ Architects did a great job. There will be a digital version available soon. Estimated cost of all projects within the ten-year master plan time frame is $182,472,000. We now have great information and can plan. Two projects Joanie wanted to highlight are: 1) But First Coffee will be a new coffee café that will be on the front of Moon library opening Fall 2021. We have partnered with NYS Commission for the Blind, American Food and Vending and Recess Coffee. 2) Have communicated with SUNY Construction Fund and JMZ to request an expanded scope for the Satellite Properties Phase II. The Facilities Master Plan will be updated to include Satellite Properties. Draft report due by May 2022.
* Water Research Science Center – SUNY 2020 Grant. We do not yet have the $20 Million grant that was awarded to ESF in 2014. Matt Millea is working with DEC to have a presence in the visitor’s center on Onondaga Lake, CNY Land Trust to have a presence in the Finger lakes, and the partnership with Empire State Development where a big chunk of the grant will be used to update the labs/research spaces in Illick to satisfy the goals of the Water Research Science Center.
* Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act – showed schedule from last year and is on track with the Draft the Plan phase.
* ESF is well represented on the NYS Climate Action Council’s Advisory Panels. Sue Fassler presented at the NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation Legislative Hearing on May 3. ESF is named in 68 components for delivery, 26 times as implementation lead and in four to five areas of focus.
* Summer Programming – Cranberry Lake Bio station will host students this summer. Mark Lichtenstein devoted a great deal of time to getting all the pieces in place. One of the main things needed was a new barge. Joanie thanked Dr Fierke and Gregg McGee. Mark mentioned Trustee Marko played a key role in identifying some DEC operations people to help us.
* ESF in the High School is one of the biggest priorities. Can be a much bigger tool for us in our strategy as to how we will grow at ESF and diversify. We are in the process of looking for a new director. Trustee DeMarchi very generously contributed $10,000 to underwrite the applications for students that come through ESF in the High School and who want to apply here.
* President’s Pod Cast – President Mahoney wants a platform to be able to highlight people who are affiliated with ESF. With the help of the digital story telling lab, she will start having conversations with people on campus beginning this summer.
* Commencement 2021 will be in person at St. Joseph’s Health Amphitheater tomorrow, May 15, 2021. County Executive McMahon, his team and those that manage the amphitheater have been extremely helpful, and we have a plan to celebrate our students in person. Joanie interviewed with a reporter from Spectrum regarding commencement being the first in person commencement in the area.
* Our Next Meeting may be held at the Newcomb Campus on September 24, 2021.
* Task Force Reports/Workshops – good information to build action items. Workshops will be held at the next board meeting to get the benefit of the work that was put into the task forces.
* Discussion
* Trustee Marko commented that it was nice to have JMZs deep dive into the details and provide a total estimated cost of $180M.
* Trustee Bartow inquired if materials prices have affected the Marshall project –Joanie mentioned we turned the building over to the SUNY Construction Fund, so we would hear second hand rather than first, but that we did come under budget when the bids were opened.
* Mark mentioned they anticipate engaging stakeholders in the Adirondacks for the Satellite Properties, such as town supervisors, mayor, etc. JMZ may reach out to Trustees Bartow and Fitts to see who those people are.
* Provost Newman mentioned we will also be having in person commencement at the Ranger school tomorrow. There will 53 students and two members of their families. Summer program for Department of Sustainable Resources management will send 64 students to the Ranger school for the month of June.

**Executive Session**- NO EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR TODAY’S MEETING

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

* Trustee Brown-Robinson mentioned that Dr. Carter is the NAACP top award winner at this year’s annual virtual dinner on June 19. She will receive the Harriet Tubman award. Trustee Brown-Robinson would like to send notice to the campus community to support and celebrate Dr. Carter. Congratulations Dr. Carter!

**Adjournment**

With no further business, Chair Fisher invited a motion to adjourn. Trustee Bartow advanced the motion to adjourn; seconded by Trustee Brown Robinson – unanimously approved to adjourn at 11:15 am

Respectfully submitted by

Robin Perkins