



# Fitchburg State University

## Special Board of Trustees Meeting

### Board of Trustees Meeting

Published on November 14, 2023 at 1:47 PM EST  
Amended on November 17, 2023 at 11:15 AM EST

#### Date and Time

Thursday November 16, 2023 at 3:30 PM EST

#### Location

Presidents' Hall, 291 Highland Ave., Fitchburg, MA 01420

Notice of a special meeting of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees on Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 3:30 p.m.

The meeting will take place in Presidents' Hall, Mazzaferro Center, 291 Highland Ave., Fitchburg, MA 01420

#### Agenda

	Purpose	Presenter	Time
<b>I. Opening Items</b>			<b>3:30 PM</b>
Opening Items			
<b>A. Record Attendance and Guests</b>			1 m
<b>B. Call the Meeting to Order</b>		Deborah Phillips	1 m

	Purpose	Presenter	Time
<b>C.</b> Approve minutes from the November 9, 2023 meeting - VOTE (23-23/24)	Approve Minutes		2 m
<b>II. Composition of the Presidential Search Committee</b>			<b>3:34 PM</b>
<b>A.</b> Discussion and VOTE (22- 23/24)	Vote		30 m
<b>III. Closing Items</b>			<b>4:04 PM</b>
<b>A.</b> Adjourn Meeting	Vote		1 m

## Coversheet

Approve minutes from the November 9, 2023 meeting - VOTE (23-23/24)

<b>Section:</b>	I. Opening Items
<b>Item:</b>	C. Approve minutes from the November 9, 2023 meeting - VOTE (23-23/24)
<b>Purpose:</b>	Approve Minutes
<b>Submitted by:</b>	
<b>Related Material:</b>	Minutes for Board of Trustees Meeting on November 9, 2023 VOTE Minutes.pdf

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# Fitchburg State University

## Minutes

### Board of Trustees Meeting

Special Board of Trustees Meeting

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#### **Date and Time**

Thursday November 9, 2023 at 3:30 PM

#### **Location**

Presidents' Hall, Mazzaferro Center, 291 Highland Ave., Fitchburg, MA 01420

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Notice of a special meeting of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees on Thursday, November 9, 2023 at 3:30 p.m.

The meeting will take place in Presidents' Hall, Mazzaferro Center, 291 Highland Ave., Fitchburg, MA 01420

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#### **Trustees Present**

A. Turner, C. Stimpson (remote), D. Phillips, D. Tiernan (remote), E. Gregoire, J. Flanagan, K. Spinelli, L. Barrieau, M. Fiorentino, Jr. (remote)

#### **Trustees Absent**

S. King-Goodwin

#### **Ex Officio Members Present**

R. Lapidus

#### **Non Voting Members Present**

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R. Lapidus

### **Guests Present**

D. Bellinger-Delfeld, F. Barricelli, G. Doiron, G. Doiron, J. Bry, J. Murdoch, J. Wolfman, L. Bayless, L. LeBlanc, M. Bruun, M. Hoey, M. McKenzie, P. Marshall, P. Marshall, P. McCafferty, P. Weizer, R. Diakite, R. Toomey, S. Dodd, S. Goodlett, S. Levine

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## **I. Opening Items**

### **A. Record Attendance and Guests**

### **B. Call the Meeting to Order**

D. Phillips called a meeting of the board of trustees of Fitchburg State University to order on Thursday Nov 9, 2023 at 3:31 PM.

## **II. Composition of the Presidential Search Committee**

### **A. Discussion and VOTE (21- 23/24)**

D. Phillips read a prepared statement:

As you know, appointing the university's president is the most significant responsibility of a board of trustees. As you also know, we do not need to create a process to accomplish this out of whole cloth. In the Commonwealth, the search process for a state university president is guided by the Board of Higher Ed. I've reviewed the Guidelines and I know many of you have as well.

I've also sought advice from other board chairs whose boards have conducted a presidential search. Those include board chairs from our own past boards, and those at other universities. I also sought input from BHE and our own university counsel. I learned that the BHE guidelines on the appointment process are intended to give local board chairs flexibility in crafting a list of appointees. I also learned that past practice here and at other institutions has been for the board chair to review the nominations from the employee organizations, non-unit self-nominations, the trustees willing to serve, etc., and after consulting with any other appropriate stakeholders, present a slate to the full board for its consideration. I was advised to keep the committee as small as possible within the Guidelines while still establishing a well-rounded committee. BHE counsel and other chairs also informed me that its customers for the board chair to provide the full board with a suggested 'charge' to be discussed, basically instructing the committee on any authority we are delegating to it and outlining our expectations.

I spent a great deal of time considering the composition of the search committee I'm recommending to you. I took into account the BHE's minimum membership requirements – 1 member from each employee organization, 1 student, 3 trustees, etc. This process

included a review of union affiliations, positions held at FSU, and years of service. I carefully reviewed not only the information provided by each person nominated, but peer and union recommendations. I seriously considered the makeup of the committee as a whole – it will act as a body, and I think its members should complement each other and challenge each other. I aimed to achieve a well-rounded group for your consideration, including not only traditional affirmative action/diversity guidelines, but looking at the unique or specific experiences and contributions each person could bring to the table.

You've been provided with the list of those people I believe can most effectively assist us in conducting a search for a new president.

L. Barrieau read a prepared statement:

- I would like to go on the record as stating that I am personally offended and quite frankly shocked at the way the selection for the search committee has been conducted. You have made it clear that our by laws allow you to proceed as you did but I would ask ...should you have?
- The selection process appeared to be driven by the board chair and a small, non-representative group, rather than an inclusive decision-making approach.
- Who made these decisions, was it solely you and if not who else was a part of the selection process? Your term on the board ends on March 1, 2024, therefore it does not seem appropriate that you have created and placed yourself on a search committee for a president that you will never be working with.
- No documentation was made available to track the selection process, creating doubts about fairness and integrity.
- The process did not appear to involve a competitive selection approach or consideration of multiple candidates for each position. Why do we only have one faculty member and one student when they are the lifeblood of the university.
- There was a lack of oversight by the BOT to ensure the process's fairness.
- The criteria used for evaluating potential committee members were not transparent, leaving room for bias or favoritism.
- Why were trustees not allowed to vote on which members were best suited for the committee?
- I think we can all agree that choosing our university's president is one of the most important tasks and shouldn't all of our collective community voices be heard.

D. Phillips responded that she was sorry L. Barrieau felt that way.

A. Turner also expressed concerns about not being able to see the recommendations.

M. Fiorentino stated that some good points were made and there was a flaw in this process. He thought the Board should meet to discuss the composition of the committee.

The Chair certainly has the right to put the committee slate together, but it would have been helpful if there was openness. If there was a preference for certain individuals, what were the criteria that the Chair mentioned? He said he didn't think the Board had the opportunity to weigh in on the Presidential Search Committee composition.

E. Gregoire stated that he was a little bit confused, and feels there has been a missed step in the search committee process. He was under the impression that the composition and discussion about the committee would be discussed at today's meeting.

The Presidential Search Committee was distributed by the Chair of the Board the evening before the meeting without discussion.

D. Phillips reiterated that she was sorry that some Board members were offended and did not understand why it was an issue.

E. Gregoire noted that technically, according to the by-laws, the Chair has a right to form committees within the Trustees. The Presidential Search Committee is different.

There was a discussion.

E. Gregoire stated that he was conflicted about how decisions were made in the formation of the committee presented, in the spirit of collaboration in both composition and as well as the actual individuals appointed, and those that expressed interest. How does it align with what the Board wants as a whole? In the absence of this conversation, the Board is not doing due diligence. The Presidential Search Committee is the screening committee to narrow down presidential candidates. We have the responsibility to shepherd this process forward. This is not something that comes up every year and it's important that we do it deliberately and respectfully.

D. Phillips stressed that she read the guidelines and every decision she made was well within those guidelines.

K. Spinelli stated that it was not the selection of the committee, but the Board did not have the opportunity to look at the nominations and provide input.

There was a vigorous discussion about the selection process, the criteria used for selection and the Chair's authority in this process.

M. Fiorentino stated that at the beginning of any presidential search, the committee selection is an essential step in ensuring everything goes smoothly. Communication is so important. He noted that he did not believe that the academic side of the house was properly represented on the committee and was concerned about the criteria when the selections were made. He said the Board was not fully informed.

D. Phillips again stated that she was sorry that some Board members felt this way but she knows how this works. She felt she did a deep dive. She asked for a solution.

D. Phillips suggested removing the vote for consideration. M. Fiorentino also said let's have a meeting and then go forward with bringing a slate of candidates to the full Board. L. Barrieau made a motion to remove the Presidential Search Committee selection vote presented.

M. Fiorentino, Jr. seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

L. Barrieau	Aye
E. Gregoire	Aye
D. Tiernan	No
S. King-Goodwin	Absent
J. Flanagan	No
M. Fiorentino, Jr.	Aye
A. Turner	Aye
K. Spinelli	Aye
C. Stimpson	No
D. Phillips	No

**III. Charge to the Presidential Search Committee**

**A. Discussion and VOTE (22-23/24)**

E. Gregoire was concerned about the evaluation process and how the decisions were made on the committee composition. He expected that would be the conversation that would take place at today's meeting.

A. Turner asked where the student nominations originated and who were the other nominations?

D. Phillips responded that the student nomination came from Dr. Laura Bayless, Vice President for Student Affairs. L. Barrieau said did the students not have the same criteria as the others? D. Phillips said they would have liked to have A. Turner, but she is graduating. L. Barrieau said that doesn't make sense because the Chair's term expires on March 1, 2024 and she is not eligible for reappointment. D. Phillips noted that trustees serve until their seat is assumed by a new Trustee.

E. Gregoire said if there is the ability to increase the committee membership, it is very important to have more than one faculty member. He expressed his opinion that it would be meaningful to bring the faculty's perspective to the process. He thought an additional student would be helpful. That is why we are here, to support the students.



M. Fiorentino shared E. Gregoire's concerns and to keep the committee at a manageable number, and at this time, it was extremely important to add an additional faculty member and a student. L. Barrieau echoed his sentiment.

There was a discussion about a community member serving on the committee.

K. Spinelli made a motion to have two faculty members and two students on the Presidential Search Committee.

D. Tiernan seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

L. Barrieau	Aye
J. Flanagan	No
M. Fiorentino, Jr.	Aye
A. Turner	Aye
K. Spinelli	Aye
C. Stimpson	Aye
S. King-Goodwin	Absent
D. Phillips	No
E. Gregoire	Aye
D. Tiernan	Aye

There was a vigorous discussion on the submission process for candidates to serve on the Presidential Search Committee. The Board discussed how the Chair reviewed the nominations.

M. Fiorentino said it is important that committee members have university history, what roles they serve on campus, leadership experience and do they have the time to serve on the committee. He did note that it is also important to have newer staff representation.

There was another vigorous conversation about the decision-making process, and the Chair's authority. The submission process for candidates was to send an email of interest to Ms. Jessica Murdoch, Vice President for Human Resources and Payroll Services and to Chair Phillips.

The Chair reviewed the nominations and made the selections to the committee without board consultation. D. Phillips asked if the Board members wanted to do the Chair's job?

E. Gregoire said "I am not trying to do the Chair's job". The reason that he was confused was not having the conversation and the criteria discussion about the composition. Our role is to vet the search committee and include our insight. The process and communication matters in a public way and transparency is crucially important. He had an issue with the sequence of how the committee was formed.

L. Barrieau said the members of the committee is not the issue, it has to do with the fact that none of the other steps were passed by the Board.

D. Phillips said the reaction from some Board members was not appropriate.

K. Spinelli asked is it the Board's will to have the Chair go back and add to the list and present a new slate in the future?

D. Phillips responded that she would not change the people that were chosen.

There was a vigorous discussion.

K. Spinelli made a motion to have the Chair go back and make modifications to the committee and present a slate of 13 members to serve on the Presidential Search Committee.

E. Gregoire seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

E. Gregoire	Aye
M. Fiorentino, Jr.	Aye
A. Turner	Aye
D. Phillips	No
K. Spinelli	Aye
D. Tiernan	Aye
L. Barrieau	Aye
J. Flanagan	No
S. King-Goodwin	Absent
C. Stimpson	Aye

D. Phillips reported that the charge to the search committee was sent to the Board.

There was a discussion.

D. Phillips talked about the search firm selection that would take place at the next Board meeting on Nov. 14. There was a discussion about search firms in general.

M. Fiorentino, Jr. made a motion to approve the Charge to the Presidential Search Committee.

K. Spinelli seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

D. Phillips	Aye
A. Turner	Aye
K. Spinelli	Aye
C. Stimpson	Aye
M. Fiorentino, Jr.	Aye
D. Tiernan	Aye
L. Barrieau	Aye
S. King-Goodwin	Absent

**Roll Call**

J. Flanagan	Aye
E. Gregoire	Aye

**IV. Closing Items**

**A. Adjourn Meeting**

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 4:39 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
D. Tiernan

**Fitchburg State University  
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

TO: Board of Trustees	DATE: November 16, 2023
FROM: The President	REQUEST NUMBER: 23-23/24
SUBJECT: November 9, 2023 Board Meeting minutes	

It is requested that the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees vote to approve the minutes from the November 9, 2023 Board Meeting.

# Coversheet

## Discussion and VOTE (22- 23/24)

**Section:** II. Composition of the Presidential Search Committee  
**Item:** A. Discussion and VOTE (22- 23/24)  
**Purpose:** Vote  
**Submitted by:**  
**Related Material:** VOTE Composition of Presidential Search Committee.pdf

**Fitchburg State University  
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

TO: Board of Trustees	DATE: November 16, 2023
FROM: The President	REQUEST NUMBER:  22-23/24
SUBJECT: Composition of the Presidential Search Committee	

It is requested that the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees vote to approve the composition of the Presidential Search Committee.