



Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time

Thursday December 7, 2023 at 8:15 AM

Location

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

Notice of a special meeting of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees on Thursday, December 7, 2023 at 8:15 a.m.

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

Trustees Present

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

Trustees Absent

C. Stimpson, S. King-Goodwin

Guests Present

A. Tourigny, E. Takehana, F. Barricelli, G. Doiron, G. Doiron, G. Duyck, J. Bry, J. Hanselman, J. Murdoch, J. Wolfman, K. Lundgren, L. Bayless, M. Bruun, M. Hoey, P. Marshall, R. Crawford, R. Toomey, S. Dodd

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 Dec 7, 2023 at 8:19 AM.

II. Listening session with WittKeiffer

A. Agenda attached

D. Phillips announced that Trustee Eric Gregoire will serve as the Chair of Presidential Search Committee. She next introduced Greg Duyck and Ryan Crawford from WittKieffer. They each provided their extensive background in these types of executive searches.

G. Duyck next talked about the search process and timeline. He noted that we are now at the intake phase and reported on the meetings with the various campus colleagues. We will put together the leadership profile with the history of the school and tell the story. He asked the group what specific pieces of your story are important? They are hoping to get the advertisement out before the December holiday and their research team will go through candidates behind the scenes using every marketplace. The search firm will be out in the world talking about Fitchburg State and touch base mid-way with the Trustees. The end of February, we will be presenting candidates to the search committee and they can identify who they are interested in. Those early interviews will be held in March via zoom. After that, they will make decisions and bring candidates to campus. He stated that we are in a good point of the hiring season.

D. Phillips introduced each Board member and provided their background. She next opened the meeting up for discussion regarding desired candidate qualifications, qualities, and experiences, opportunities and challenges, and points of pride.

J. Flanagan commented that the family perspective of first-generation college students coming from economic challenges is important for the next President to understand. Also, the degrees conferred here mean something to the community. Our graduates remain in the area and give back.

M. Fiorentino talked about the person applying for the position should have experience across all sectors, and a thorough understanding of leadership. He talked about fundraising, and advancing the institution as a whole, along with recognizing we are in an ever-changing world. The person will need not just academic experience, but a myriad of experience.

K. Spinelli stated that understanding the role of the university within the City of Fitchburg and surrounding area is crucial. The town has struggled and has not grown like a lot of other cities. Fitchburg State is helping the city grow. Whoever is brought in must understand the community.

D. Phillips said that Fitchburg State is a major economic engine for the area. There are often town gown issues, and this university works really hard to be cooperative and collaborative, and we want that relationship with the city to continue.

D. Tiernan noted that experience, and diverse expertise, and we want someone seasoned. That means coming in with an open mind and this job is not a stretch for their capabilities. Fitchburg State is viable part of the city, and the next President is going to have to work well with community partners.

J. Flanagan talked about thinking outside the box, and we need a creative leader. She said Fitchburg State is a focal point within the region.

M. Fiorentino stated that there are mixed feelings about the institution and we can do a better job of telling our story, someone who has extensive experience is needed. The President needs to be the face of the institution, and needs to be out on campus and in the community. We need to be the leaders in the community with our students and alumni. He acknowledged that it takes a great deal of attention. This is why institutional advancement work is so important.

R. Crawford asked beside being the economic engine for the community, what are the other criteria that should be included.

M. Fiorentino said that there are a number of programs that have a direct connection to the community such as health care, and education. We need to tell the story and tell it in a positive way. The community has a transient population and a move to become a real community within the school would help.

J. Flanagan talked about the efforts made to bring the train station here and getting a better schedule. The trend with the new Governor is more affordable housing. She said with Fitchburg's location, there is much opportunity for growth. The newest academic programs show growth, Fitchburg State continues to evolve.

G. Duyck stated that when he spoke to people in the various sessions yesterday, that there is a remarkable story of adaptability.

D. Phillips stated that when she served on the Foundation Board, there was significant investments in structure and infrastructure on the campus. Now where do we go, we need a person that has experience in finance, ability to be flexible, and need to garner the support of various constituents, on campus and off campus.

M. Fiorentino said the next President needs to be very nimble. This institution came through Covid well. He expressed his belief that we need to renew our long-range planning activities. Where we are today and what areas are under consideration for the future. The ability to remain flexible and change where change is needed and not tied to a particular agenda. The next President needs to be able to make those changes quickly, and guide the staff and keep the Board informed.

A discussion ensued about lack of funding from the legislature, diversity, strong leadership, and the team already on staff. The next President needs to be a good communicator, focused on diversity, and an engaged leader.

M. Fiorentino said the President going forward, in public higher education, needs to be a role model and guide people and someone who is decisive, be actively engaged and be visible on campus and the community. We also need someone who is an example of public and government relations.

The Board talked about what they would like to see in the next President:

- A good collaborator
- Genuine
- Personal integrity
- Creative in meeting the demands of the workforce
- Innovative
- Expand current programs such as the Honors Program
- Create new programs
- Adaptable
- Decisive
- Understand the union environment

G. Duyck asked what is the appetite for international students?

A discussion ensued. The more exposures to other cultures and learning types is good for all students. We need to be cautious that we have support for students from other countries and do we have the infrastructure to support those students, and understand the culture they are coming from.

There was a discussion on support services on campus.

R. Crawford asked with a new Governor, is there a concern about state support?

E. Gregoire responded that the percentage of our state support is not keeping pace with costs. Our revenue depends upon the economy and it doesn't go much deeper.

G. Duyck asked what will be different in five years with a different President?

D. Tiernan hoped for more programs and increased enrollment.

M. Fiorentino said a university with a community that engages with each other as individuals and as groups. A place where people feel free to express their opinions, and are recognized for their work. Having a real sense of community that demonstrates to students that it's a healthy place where they can thrive and grow.

E. Gregoire said the financial perspective and an alignment with strategic planning that provides stability. A focus on a long-term financial planning.

D. Phillips expressed her hope that the next President would not make any drastic moves for the first six months.

M. Fiorentino said the next person needs to understand data. There could be missed opportunities, and data leads us, we are currently not in a serious financial crisis but we need to avoid that.

D. Phillips stated data and analysis is very important.

G. Duyck asked what are the personal qualities needed for the next President?

M. Fiorentino responded someone comfortable and excited walking throughout the campus and being able to talk to everyone and having conversations. Being able to speak in the community about Fitchburg State. Someone who respects the decisions of people on campus and listen to opinions even if they disagree. To not take a different opinion as a personal issue. Someone who is self-confident and a consensus builder and able to make decisions in a timely manner.

L. Barrieau responded someone that would keep the Trustees informed, and look at them as part of a team. We can only do that if we have all the information and this is important part of the discussion. An effective listener, and confident in themselves but not over confident. Someone open to feedback and intellectually curious, and able to translate opportunities.

M. Fiorentino said someone who takes advantage of the strengths that are here, utilize the Provost and the Deans. People who want to participate in some way, take advantage of their eagerness to contribute. A team builder based on strengths and weaknesses. This is a good institution with people who care about the school and want to part of solutions.

E. Gregoire said someone passionate for the mission and wanting to contribute to the institution's overall success.

G. Duyck thanked the Trustees for the engaging discussion and encouraged them to send any nominations to the email address provided.

M. Fiorentino thanked the Trustees, faculty, staff and students who voiced their willingness to be on the Presidential Search Committee.

III. 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 9:48 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
D. Phillips