State University of New York

College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Board of Trustees Meeting

May 8, 2020 - 9:00am

Syracuse, New York – Zoom

# MINUTES

**Attendees:**

* **Voting Members**: Attending: Matthew Marko, Chair, John Bartow, Linda Brown-Robinson, Vita DeMarchi, Rick Fedrizzi, William Fisher, Daniel Fitts, and Student Representative Edward Wozny. Not in Attendance: Stephen Sloan
* **Non-Voting**: Not in Attendance: John Liu, Vice Chancellor and Provost, Kent Syverud, Chancellor Syracuse University, Shannon Tahoe, Commissioner of Education, Kathleen Hochul, Lieutenant Governor, Kristine Johnson, SUNY Chancellor, Basil Seggos, Commissioner of NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
* **College Personnel in Attendance**: David Amberg, Interim President, Justin Beslity, Malika Carter, Debbie Caviness, Doug Daley, Maureen Fellows, Brenda Greenfield, Kevin Hayden, Mark Lichtenstein, Anne Lombard, Joanie Mahoney, David Newman, Chris Nomura, Joseph Rufo, Gary Scott, Stephanie Specchio, Ragan Squier

## Call to Order:

Chair Marko called the meeting of the ESF Board of Trustees to order at 9:04 am via zoom platform. He welcomed everyone and reminded the Trustees that the microphones were live and that all Board meetings are open meetings and will be live streamed, digitally recorded and the video would be available soon after the meeting on the ESF web page. Chair Marko asked Secretary Rufo to begin roll call for those attending the meeting. With eight voting Board members in attendance, a quorum was confirmed.

Chair Marko called for a moment of silence for David “DJ” Lang, an ESF student, who passed away on May 5th.

## Approval of the Consent Agenda:

* Approval of the Minutes of the February 28, 2020 meeting
* Personnel Actions Presented for Board Review
* Candidates for Graduation Presented for Endorsement – May and August, 2020

Trustee Fitts made a motion to advance the consent agenda, seconded by Trustee Brown-Robinson. Chair Marko called for a vote – 8 yes; 0 no; motion carries unanimously.

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

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

* As everyone is well aware, since our last BOT meeting on February 28, the entire world has changed. Instead of the pomp and circumstance of graduation ceremonies, we are facing numerous challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Regretfully, with over 328,000 cases of novel coronavirus and 19,877 deaths in just New York State alone, it is inevitable that members of our ESF community – students, faculty, staff, alumni, foundation members, trustees, and others, have all had some direct impact from this insidious disease. Please know you are in our thoughts and we wish you the best. I would also like to recognize and applaud our first responders, including our own Campus Police force, for the immeasurable positive impact and sacrifice they make every day. Another thank you to the many members of our College community who have volunteered to assist those in need.
* In March we witnessed our campus migrate from social distancing to a completely remote learning experience. The words “never been done before” seem to be heard nearly every day. And yet, we did it; we adapted, and we continue to meet the coronavirus challenge head on. There has been pain, there will be more pain, but let me remind you that ESF endured the Spanish Flu of 1918, the Great Depression, World War II; and we will emerge from this. If you look at my remarks from the last 3 years, I talk a lot about change, and how hard it is. Be there no mistaking this now, there will be change.
* Governor Cuomo put it best in a speech on Friday, March 27.  He said, “you are living a moment in history. This is going to be one of those moment they're going to write and they're going to talk about for generations. This is a moment that is going to change this nation. This is a moment that forges character, forges people, changes people -- make them stronger, make them weaker -- but this is a moment that will change character.”
* I really wish we had time to hear the entire speech. It was truly remarkable and in many ways, a call to arms. Ask yourself, as I have asked myself – what are you doing during this difficult time to embrace change and come out better for it?
* We as an institution, have changed; there will be more change. We will also be better for it as we will emerge leaner, more nimble, and pound for pound stronger. Nothing has changed with the FACT that our college provides a product that is highly valuable and needed now, more than ever. Today we will be talking about some of the actions we are taking to sustain ourselves through New York State on PAUSE, the opportunities that are before us, and how we will emerge in the “new normal.”
* Another subject that I know people are interested in getting an update on, is the Presidential Search. I am pleased to inform you that since our last Trustee meeting, the Search Consultant has been contracted, the Search Committee formed, and we have met now twice. We are developing a website that will provide status updates to the campus community as we progress. The timeline we have developed will ensure that the 5th President of ESF is on campus for the start of the Spring, 2021 semester.
* I also want to update you that in accordance with our bylaws, we will need to elect Board Officers at our next annual meeting, which is typically in February. A new Chair will be elected as my term comes to an end. Therefore, I will consult with Past Chairs DeMarchi and Fitts, to seek nominations, and present the candidates to the Board at our Fall Meeting.
* I will end by thanking our faculty, staff, and administrators who have gone above and beyond during the last half of this semester. While not at all a desirable situation, you pushed through your comfort zone and gave your all for our students. And finally, to our students, thank YOU as well. You hopefully learned what is possibly the most important lesson of all, articulated well by author and educator Charles Swindoll, that “Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.” Never, absolutely never, underestimate the power of a positive attitude. Congratulations to the Class of 2020. We know this is not how you wanted to end your time at ESF, but here we are. Better days are ahead, and we look forward to celebrating with you in the future.

## Committee Reports

* Sustainable Finance Committee – *Trustee Fisher, Committee Chair -*Committee met Wednesday, May 6, 2020, 12 pm via zoom. In attendance – Trustee Fisher, Trustee Bartow, Trustee DeMarchi, Chair Marko as ex-officio along with Interim President Amberg, CFO Rufo, COS Mark Lichtenstein, Provost Newman, and COO Mahoney.
* The Committee reviewed the College’s finances and spent time making recommendations. The committee will ask for action on these recommendations after CFO Rufo makes his presentation to the Board; during New Business.
  + Review of current fiscal year forecast – we will not be able to achieve the 4.8 m deficit that had been discussed at the February BOT meeting and may be larger by more than a million dollars. A few large unknowns will have a substantial impact on how we finish the year – whether the state budget that began April 1 will remain the same and whether we will receive the Federal Legislation’s Cares Act money to offset student fees.
  + Upcoming 2020-21 budget – Due to the current situation with COVID-19, the State Budget Director has been given the power to change the 2020-21 budget that was recently adopted if necessary. The goal of a $3.2M deficit (half of this year’s projected deficit of $6.4M) is no longer realistic. The financial risk of not having on campus instruction is huge; we must do everything possible to ensure that we are open for on campus instruction in September. It will make a significant difference in freshman enrollment and may likely affect retention. There is no 2020-21 ESF budget today because SUNY has not given any instruction on what level of support to expect. SUNY has asked all campuses to prepare three budget scenarios – 1) 10% reduction in direct state tax support, no change in enrollment and $100 tuition increase for in-state students; 2) 25% reduction in direct state tax support, 16% decrease in enrollment, and tuition rates stay the same; 3) No change in direct state tax support, 16% decrease in enrollment and $200 tuition rate increase for in state students and 5% increase for out of state students. Administration has been working on these scenarios, but until we know which one will play out, budget preparation is difficult.
* ***Recommendation #1 - Focus the College’s resources on enrollment and retention for Fall 2020 Semester to ensure on-campus instruction and to meet enrollment goals for first year students.***
  + Task the Administration to focus on ensuring we are open for on-campus instruction for the Fall and to come up with a plan to deal with social distancing, quarantining, cleaning practices, hygiene, travel, dorms, campus visits, satellite campuses, etc. Priority needs to be the main campus. Laser focused effort by administration to hit enrollment and retention goals, and use whatever resources are necessary to meet this goal.
  + Discussion on how to move forward with meeting this recommendation. There is a need to prioritize spending, cut where we can and liquidate assets. There will be a significant need to help both graduate and undergraduate students with funding for them to be able to return to campus. There may also be a need to refund tuition money to students. The College Foundation has been working closely with the Financial Aid office – recognizing that students are going to have to appeal their existing financial aid packages – they have created a new scholarship campaign starting next week to help aid students impacted by COVID-19.
* ***Recommendation #2*– *Board of Trustees to get more involved in fundraising and revenue generation for the College.***
  + The Committee will reach out to the Development team and let them know they are ready to help with fundraising and revenue generation.
  + Schedule a brainstorming charrette where the Board can come up with additional revenue opportunities.
* ***Recommendation #3*–** ***Expedite Phase 2 of the Satellite Properties Task Force***.
  + The first phase, a deep financial audit of all assets, has been completed and a final report has been generated. The 2nd phase will be for the task force to identify cost saving strategies and new revenue generation strategies to reduce negative financial impacts to the College while maintaining the unique value proposition of the properties. Due to COVID-19 the 2nd phase work has not yet started and some of the current task force members will not be available after May. We need to find a way to expedite Phase 2. Joanie offered to assist Maureen with putting a plan together for Phase 2.
* ***Recommendation #4– Reduce accessory instruction by $1M and increase the numbers of classes SU students take at ESF.***
  + This year accessory instruction cost the College 2.1 M. Recommend reducing to 1.1M for next year.
  + More successfully market our classes & minors to SU students, and put hard caps on ESF students taking courses at SU for the next year. Discussion about types of courses students are taking at SU; approximately 50-60% of the accessory instruction is physics and other Gen Ed courses. Provost Newman will share accessory instruction report with the Board. Discussed possibility of providing Physics at ESF in the future.
  + CFO Rufo went over some high-level trend data. The current contract with SU went back to the credit hour per net, which gives us more opportunity to control cost.
  + Ability to take classes at SU is a big part of how we sell ESF and why students choose to come to ESF.
* ***Recommendation #5– Endorse the spending constraints plan sent to the Campus Community on April 23 from Interim President Amberg***
* President Amberg sent a message to the campus community on April 23 outlining a spending constraints plan that the committee would like the Board to endorse and help ratify if necessary.

### Sustainable Operations – Trustee Fedrizzi, Committee Chair

* No Report – a meeting has not been held since the last BOT mtg. Trustee Fedrizzi will meet with Trustee DeMarchi to develop a plan for the committee going forward. There will be a baseline report presented at the next BOT meeting.

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

* No Report – a meeting has not been held since the last BOT mtg. Chair Marko has tabled any actions over the last couple of months due to the need to focus on the College’s finances and other issues on campus.

### Land and Trust Ad Hoc Committee – *Trustee Fisher, Committee Chair*

* Trustee Fisher suggested with no additional work for this committee, it may be time to disband. Kevin Hayden reported that the status of the previous work is tied up in a contractual issue and is a confidential matter. Chair Marko decided to table disbanding the committee at this time and will reconsider later in the agenda.

## President’s Report– David Amberg

Thanked everyone on the call for their support to the College. Thanked faculty; TA’s and open academy for the swift move to online instruction, and thanked our great students for hanging in there and dealing with this much less than optimal situation.

* COVID-19 and Effects on College (including Operations, Graduation, Research (PhD metrics) and Summer Semester)
* Reviewed the timeline of how events unfolded throughout the semester during COVID-19 and the proactive approach taken.
* The Ranger School Story –Students chose to stay on campus, skipping their spring break, and faculty moved onto campus in order to be able to finish out their semester and graduate early. As a result, they were able to graduate 53 students on April 17.
* Challenges/Opportunities – Dr. Amberg went over the challenges ESF is facing due to COVID-19 and the opportunities that have come out of this crisis.
* Our Priorities - Being the Best Environmental College in a “New Normal” – college finances, resident instruction for fall 2020, safe occupation of Centennial Hall, summer field work and getting the research labs back up and running.
  + Approaching these priorities by establishing 8 working groups to deal with various issues related to our challenges, particularly to on campus instruction. These groups are: Fall 2020 Instruction, Strategic Financial Management, Academic Success, Enrollment and Retention, Research, Student Housing, Student Support, Facilities and Operations, and Wellness and Faculty/Staff Support.
* Graduation – Saturday, May 9 there will be a pre-recorded event that can be watched through ESFTV. The Inclusive Excellence ceremony was held on Thursday, May 7 and was a very nice event. Total eligible graduates for April, May, and August 2020 are 490.
* Recent Research Awards – Dr. Amberg highlighted the recent research awards.
* SUNY ESF/Earth Day – April 22
* Proclamation – Thanks to the efforts of Paul Otteson with key help from Joanie Mahoney, Earth day was also named as SUNY ESF Day by Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse.
* Discussion regarding challenges that we are facing, what practices will need to be put in place for a safe return to campus, and faculty/staff concerns about returning.

## Provost’s Report*– David Newman*

* Undergraduate, Open Academy and Graduate Admissions Update
  + Dr. Newman gave an update on the undergraduate admission outcomes for 2020 and the challenges that staff are facing with implementing slate, banner and degree works. The staff quickly moved to social media to continue contact with potential students, and the deposit deadline for incoming student has been extended to June 1.
  + Open Academy Outcomes – highlighted open academy outcomes for Sustainability Management BS degree, Solar Energy course and two graduate certificate programs.
  + Fall Graduate Admissions as of 4/29/20 –Fall 2020 was going to be the best year with 96 students accepted and coming; another 30 with possible funding; 17 with no funding, and 6 with funding accepted. Thirty-eight are international students, most Chinese or Iranian, and with our embassies not open in those countries, getting VISA’s is going to be a real problem.
  + There are 36 BUCT international students that we are working very hard to get here. About 75% accepted into the graduate program.
  + Financial aid – The greater need, rising fees and OOS tuition are going to negatively impact enrollment.
* The search for the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management is almost finalized and went remarkably well. Both candidates interviewed have ties to CNY.
* Discussion about the Carnegie rating and graduate enrollment. Stephanie highlighted the specifics of the marketing plans for both graduate and undergraduate recruitment.
* Chris Nomura and John Waisal are working with faculty to find a safe solution for graduate students to get back into the labs so they are able to continue their research.

## USA Reports – Trustee Wozny

* USA held their elections and the new President is Lexi Chipules and Vice President is Jessica Divens. A challenging year for the student body as a whole from the fall semester racial incidents to spring semester with COVID. There is going to be a new normal and students will be resilient during this time period of change.

## GSA Report – Justin Beslity

* GSA shares in the opinions of how well the Administration has done with moving forward through this crisis. Graduate students who haven’t been able to work in their labs, have come up with other alternatives. Based on what Justin has heard one of the biggest concerns for graduate students is loss of summer funding. Any flexibility or leniency to get through this together would be appreciated. GSA has postponed their elections until the beginning of next year.

Break – 12:08 pm be back at 12:15 pm

## College Finances – *Joseph Rufo*

* 2020-21 Enacted NYS Budget
* The 2020-21 enacted budget shows no change from last year, however the budget included expanded powers for the State Budget Director. Tax receipts will be significantly less for the state due to COVID; therefore, the director has the power to adjust/reduce operational funding as necessary. The projected shortfall of $13.3 billion or 14% in revenue will have to be made up across the State. The Executive Budget forecast estimates a $61 billion shortfall through 2024.
* Impacts from COVID-19
  + Delay in April State Support Payment – more than half of our aid comes in the last 3 months of the fiscal year (April, May, June). We haven’t heard yet when we will receive these payments or how much we will receive. The delay is a testament to the uncertainty we face going forward.
  + Financial Planning – In response to the anticipated state budget, all SUNY State-Operated Campuses were asked to develop a spending constraints plan due to SUNY by April 20 and to run state support reduction scenarios for 10% and 25% due by April 27.
    - ESF Spending Constraints Plan – Joe went over the plan with specific mandates from SUNY and the State DOB. He highlighted hiring decisions moving forward, and the criteria/procedures for general purchases, large scale purchases and travel. Operating funds used to support capital projects should be placed on hold unless directly related to health and safety, revenue generating or are considered essential for future academic mission. We will be moving forward with Marshall Hall Renovation as it is an essential project.
    - State Support Reduction Response Scenarios – SUNY asked us to look at how each scenario would impact ESF and how we would address those impacts. Joe went over the process of how they came up with the three reduction scenarios and the potential impacts to ESF.
* 2019-20 State Operating Budget – 3rd Quarter Update –
* CFO Rufo discussed with possible 10% reduction in state allocation, a drop in tuition revenue due to no summer classes and with scholarships and campus revenues up slightly, it brings the total state operating revenues down about $1.3 M. Expenses are down about $2M, the operating deficit is $5.6M and projected cash balance on 6/30/20 will be negative $3.1M.
* Discussion regarding next year’s budget. The process is directed by SUNY and as a result there is not a completed budget to present to the Board. Joe will put together high, medium and low scenarios before July 1 and present to the Sustainable Finance Committee for review and then distribute to the Board of Trustees.

## Executive Session

Chair Marko called for an executive session to discuss personnel matters. All Trustees in attendance, Joseph Rufo, Secretary to the Board, David Amberg, Interim President, Kevin Hayden, College Counsel, Mark Lichtenstein, Chief of Staff, Joanie Mahoney, Chief Operating Officer, and David Newman, Provost, were also asked to attend to discuss personnel and contractual matters.

Chair Marko asked for a motion for the meeting to move to Executive Session. Trustee DeMarchi made a motion; seconded by Trustee Fedrizzi & Trustee Bartow. The meeting moved to executive session at 1:15 pm.

Dr. Amberg had to leave at 3 pm. The meeting returned from Executive Session at 3:15 pm

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

**Sustainable Finance Committee Recommendations from their May 6, 2020 meeting:**

* **Resolution to adopt 3 recommendations pertaining to Revenue**
* Recommendation that the Administration focus all College’s resources on the goal of ensuring on-campus instruction ls for Fall 2020.
* Recommendation to accelerate Phase 2 Report of the Satellite Properties Task Force to identify new revenue generation strategies.
* Recommendation to encourage greater trustee involvement with fundraising and the development of other revenue.

Chair Marko made a motion to advance the resolution; Trustee DeMarchi seconded the motion. Chair Marko called for a vote – Trustee Bartow was absent during the vote of the resolution, but expressed support of the resolution to Chair Marko via email. 7 yes; 0 no – motion carries unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that this resolution is approved as presented.

* **Resolution to adopt 2 recommendations pertaining to Expenditures**
* Recommendation to accelerate Phase 2 Report of the Satellite Properties Task Force to identify cost saving strategies.
* Recommendation that the Board endorse the spending constraints plan sent to the campus community by Interim President Amberg on April 23.

Chair Marko made a motion to move forward with the resolution, Trustee Brown-Robinson seconded the motion. Chair Marko called for a vote – Trustee Bartow was absent during the vote of the resolution, but expressed support of the resolution to Chair Marko via email; 7 yes; 0 no - motion carries unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that this resolution is approved as presented.

* Trustee Fisher withdrew the recommendation to reduce accessory instruction by $1M for next year. It will require more discussion.
* Chair Marko thanked Trustee Wozny for his contributions to the Board as USA representative.
* Chair Marko thanked Interim President David Amberg for his service to the College. His appointment is coming to an end at the end of May.
* **Resolution proposed by the Board: SUNY Elect an Officer in Charge**

WHEREAS Dr. Amberg’s appointment as Interim President is scheduled to end at the end of May 2020,

WHEREAS the Memorandum from Office of General Counsel regarding legal status of temporary campus chief administrative officers was circulated on May 1, 2020 to ESF trustees and identifies circumstances by which an Officer-In-Charge is necessary,

RESOLVES, that the ESF Board of Trustees request the SUNY Chancellor appoint within one (1) week an Officer-In-Charge to begin their term starting June 1, 2020.

Trustee DeMarchi made a motion to move forward with the resolution; Trustee Brown-Robinson seconded the motion. Chair Marko called for a vote – Trustee Bartow was absent during the vote of the resolution, but by email expressed support of the resolution. 7 yes; 0 no – motion carries unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that this resolution is approved as presented.

Next official board meeting September 25, 2020.

## Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:31 pm

Respectfully submitted by Robin Perkins