

MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

May 09, 2023

10:00 a.m.

Livestreamed, via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education (BHE or Board) was held virtually on Tuesday, May 09, 2023, via teleconference (Zoom).

The following Board Members were present:

Chris Gabrieli, Chair

Mary Burns

Ann Christensen

Veronica Conforme

Alex Cortez

Patty Eppinger

Travis Lawrence

Robert (Bob) LePage, Secretary of Education Designee

Paul Mattera

Judy Pagliuca

Bill Walczak

Andrew Whitcomb, non-voting Student Advisor, UMass segment

Robert Huttig, non-voting Student Advisor, State University segment

Noe Ortega, Commissioner and Secretary to the Board

The following Board Members were absent:

Paul Toner

I. CALL TO ORDER

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Department of Higher Education (DHE or Department) Chief of Staff Elena Quiroz-Livanis took roll call attendance (see above for attendance roster).

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chair Gabrieli reported that the Board did not receive requests for public comment.

III. BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

List of Documents Used

[BHE 23-48](#)

Chair Gabrieli turned to the first item on the agenda, **BHE Motion 23-48** through which the Board is being asked to approve a presidential appointment at Holyoke Community College (HCC). He requested Commissioner Noe Ortega to introduce the presidential candidate, Dr. George Timmons, and the HCC Board of Trustees chair, Robert Gilbert.

Commissioner Ortega stated that he, Secretary Patrick Tutwiler, and student advisor Robert Huttig interviewed Dr. Timmons and the other finalists. Commissioner Ortega stated that based on Dr. Timmons' perspective on higher education and what he would bring to the position, Dr. Timmons is a candidate who possesses all the qualities and guiding principles that align with the Board's priorities. Commissioner Ortega then asked Mr. Gilbert to share his thoughts about the candidate and the process.

HCC Chair Gilbert stated that an exhaustive search conducted by the Pauly Group yielded four finalists and resulted in the recommendation of Dr. George Timmons as Holyoke Community College's fifth president. After highlighting some of the steps in the search process, he invited Dr. Timmons to share remarks. Dr. Timmons expressed his gratitude and excitement to serve as Holyoke Community College's next president. Commissioner Ortega thanked Dr. Timmons and HCC Chair Gilbert before turning the meeting back to Chair Gabrieli.

Chair Gabrieli opened the floor for questions and kicked off the discussion by asking Dr. Timmons what community colleges can do to adapt to the growing and distinctive role of online education. Dr. Timmons responded that because community colleges are typically more mobile, they are in the vanguard of institutions that can respond to higher education needs. Dr. Timmons stated that in the northeast, where traditionally aged student populations have declined, there are opportunities to expand our services to adult learner populations by providing adults with some college credit or a high school diploma, as well as the opportunity to switch careers or advance in their current career. Dr. Timmons stated that, based on his years of experience, community colleges are well-positioned to do so by providing accelerated classes and services that encompass the adult learner to ensure student success and holistic support.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-48- Holyoke Community College Presidential Appointment was approved unanimously by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes

- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Travis Lawrence – Yes
- Robert LePage – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-48 HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the April 25, 2023 recommendation of the Holyoke Community College Board of Trustees recommending Dr. George Timmons as President of Holyoke Community College. Such appointment is effective on or about July 15, 2023, is subject to the successful and satisfactory completion of a State Police background check and is subject to and in accordance with the attached Terms of Appointment.

Authority Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(q) and 21

Contact:
 Constantia T. Papanikolaou, Chief Legal Counsel

IV. WELCOME

Chair Gabrieli congratulated Dr. Timmons on assuming the presidency and welcomed the Board to the fifth BHE meeting of the fiscal year. He briefly reviewed the items to be discussed on the agenda, including a motion for Salem State University's Strategic Plan and another involving Middlesex Community College's property transfer.

V. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chair Gabrieli then asked for a motion to accept the minutes from the special BHE meeting held on February 14, 2023. With no further discussion, the motion proceeded to a roll call vote and passed unanimously by all members present, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes

- Travis Lawrence – Yes
- Robert (Bob) LePage, Assistant Secretary – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

VI. REMARKS & REPORTS

A. Chair's Remarks

Chair Gabrieli stated that today the Senate provided a preview of a portion of their anticipated budget. Given that the Board spent most of 2022 discussing a framework for considering further investment in higher education finance, having the Governor's proposal, the House version, and now the Senate version is helpful. Even though there are apparent differences between the different versions, he stated that they all represent a commitment to investing in higher education.

Chris Gabrieli reported that he and Commissioner Ortega have agreed on September 2023 as the target date for the BHE retreat. The agenda will include items such as reviewing Board operations and effectiveness, the Equity Agenda, and other priority topics. The specific dates and agenda items are in the process of being determined. Chair Gabrieli then turned to Commissioner Ortega for his remarks.

B. Commissioner's Remarks

During the most recent meeting of the Council of Presidents, Commissioner Ortega was pleased to learn that, after several years of decline, enrollment is increasing at several institutions. He congratulated Secretary Tutwiler and his team on the inaugural STEM Summit's success. Commissioner Ortega stated, in reference to the Senate budget, that Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll have demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring equitable access to high-quality postsecondary opportunities for all students, and that the legislature has also demonstrated its support in this area. Commissioner called the attention of Board members to the Department's current online job postings for a Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Director of Strategic Communications and encouraged them to share the link with their networks.

In his concluding remarks, Commissioner Ortega highlighted and provided his thoughts and reflections on the fact that April is recognized as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and that May is recognized as Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, and Mental Health Awareness month. Commissioner Ortega then turned to Chair Gabrieli for the next agenda item.

C. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education's (EOE) Remarks

The Secretary of Education's designee, Bob LePage, acknowledged the dialogue between the Department, its Board, and the Commissioner throughout the process of budgetary review and emphasized the significance of remaining proactive. Assistant Secretary LePage then turned to Chair Gabrieli for the next agenda item.

D. Reports from Presidents

Community College Segmental Report

[*For a copy of President Podell's full remarks, please see:*](#)

President of David Podell of MassBay Community College ("President Podell") began his remarks by welcoming Dr. George Timmons to his new position, and thanking and bidding farewell to former Holyoke Community College President Christina Royal for her service.

President Podell reported that the Community Colleges are thrilled to learn that the Senate's budget for the fiscal year 2024 will include funding and authorization language for Mass Reconnect, for implementation beginning in the fall of 2024, as well as funding for free community college for nursing students. President Podell urged the Board to expedite the development and approval of Mass Reconnect program guidelines in anticipation of a fall launch, as colleges can only begin programming their internal financial aid systems once the guidelines are finalized.

President Podell announced that this meeting would be his last as Chair of the Community Council of Presidents (COP). Mount Wachusett Community College President James Vander Hooven will represent the COP during the upcoming academic year.

State University Segmental Report

[*For a copy of President Keenan's full remarks, please see:*](#)

President John Keenan of Salem State University ("President Keenan") expressed his appreciation to the Board and the Department facilitating the transfer of Bay State College students to other institutions. President Keenan highlighted the House budget, which included \$1.4 billion in funding for public higher education, an increase of 3% compared to the previous budget. The State University COP reportedly met with the Senate to discuss budget priorities not included in the House budget, such as infrastructure investments, the performance-based funding formula, the strategic plan for racial equity, student mental health services, and student success reports. President Keenan added that the State Universities are committed to a tuition and fee stabilization plan for one academic year, and that the State University COP is urging the Senate to invest \$17 million in a fee freeze initiative for all nine institutions. Underfunding of campus fringe benefit liabilities will result in fee increases for students, so they are actively lobbying both the House and the Senate for full funding. President Keenan extended an invitation to the Board to join the lobbying efforts.

E. Report from Student Advisory Council

BHE student Member Travis Lawrence reported that the SAC intends to lay the groundwork for future Board-related progress during the upcoming academic year. Mr. Lawrence thanked everyone for the chance to serve on the Board and confirmed that SAC is preparing for new leadership.

VII. ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORTS

A. Academic Affairs & Student Success

Academic Affairs and Student Success Advisory Council (AA&SS) Co-Chair Patty Eppinger reported that the AA&SS Advisory Council met and received updates on two initiatives: Open Enrollment Resources (OER), and Higher Education and Workforce Development initiatives.

Co-Chair Eppinger confirmed that OER is an equity approach that increases access and affordability, diversity of teaching and learning materials, and improves student learning outcomes. The Department tracks faculty and student participation in low- to no-cost classes. The estimate is that OER has saved students at least \$7.6 million. Every dollar invested results in \$120 returned to students.

Co-Chair Eppinger reported that they discussed the benefits of a combined program of credentials versus obtaining a degree. The Education and Training Fund grants \$15 million to address the high demand for high-skill jobs in healthcare, IT, biotech, and STEM throughout the region. The BHE Retreat agenda will include a review of high-demand opportunities and how to incorporate flexibility into our programs.

VIII. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORTS & MOTIONS

List of Documents Used

[BHE 23-47](#)

[Attachment A - SSU Strategic Plan Transmittal Letter 3-31-23-signed](#)

[Attachment B - Strategic Plan 2023-2028](#)

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-47**, *Approval of Salem State University Strategic Plan*. Chair Gabrieli opened the floor for questions from the Board. He kicked off the discussion by asking President Keenan if Salem State University would soon apply for USDOE Hispanic serving status.

President Keenan confirmed that, within the next 12-24 months, Salem State University anticipates being the first four-year public Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)-designated in Massachusetts. Member Paul Mattera recused himself from the vote as a member of Salem State University's own board of trustees.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-47 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Travis Lawrence – Yes
- Robert (Bob) LePage, Assistant Secretary – Abstained
- Paul Mattera – Abstained
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-47 APPROVAL OF SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves Salem State University Strategic Plan 2023-2028 and authorizes the Commissioner to forward the same to the Secretary of Education for final approval pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(l) and 22(l).

Authority Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 7, 9(f), 9(l) and 22(l); BHE By-Laws, Article I, Section 3 and Article III.

Contact: Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D.
Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Planning and Public Program Approval

IX. MOTIONS

A. Board of Higher Education

List of Documents Used

[BHE 23-49](#)

[Exhibit A](#)

[Exhibit B](#)

[Exhibit C](#)

[Exhibit D](#)

[Exhibit E](#)

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, **BHE 23-49**, *Motion to Assign and Confirm Right, Title, And Reversionary Interest in Property to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by and through its Division of Capital Management and Maintenance on behalf of Middlesex Community College.*

Chief Legal Counsel Dena Papanikolaou provided the background of the motion. She stated that in June of 1991, the BHE approved the project proposal of Middlesex Community College (MCC) to use Massachusetts Higher Education Facilities Authority bonding to support the development of the Health Science and Technology Center on its Lowell Campus. The project is complete, and the property is now reverting to the Commonwealth. The motion seeks to confirm for deed and title purposes that the BHE claims no possessory interest in property that's reverting to the Commonwealth upon the full payment of bonds that were used to finance the project. To complete the transaction, MCC's title counsel is seeking to clarify, for title purposes, that the premises now reverts to the Commonwealth through the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance for the benefit of MCC. . The Board's objective is to confirm that it is not claiming any reversionary interest in the premises and has no possessory property interest.

Assistant Secretary LePage confirmed that the motion will be part of the calculation of the square footage of the campus regarding deferred maintenance and critical repairs.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-49 was approved unanimously by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Travis Lawrence – Yes
- Robert LePage, Assistant Secretary – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-49 BHE 23-49 A MOTION TO ASSIGN AND CONFIRM RIGHT, TITLE, AND REVERSIONARY INTEREST IN PROPERTY TO THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS BY AND THROUGH ITS DIVISION OF CAPITAL MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE ON BEHALF OF MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

VOTED:

The Board of Higher Education (Board) hereby recognizes and acts upon the request from Middlesex Community College (MCC) and the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (DCAMM-f/k/a Division of Capital Planning and Operations) to memorialize and confirm ownership of certain parcels of land, and buildings and structures, identified hereto in Exhibit B (the "Premises") following the full payment of Allocable Bonds referenced herein, and hereby votes as follows.

The Board hereby:

1. assigns and releases to MCC all of its right, title and reversionary interests to (i) that certain Deed recorded on April 13, 1992 with the Middlesex County, Northern District, Registry of Deed (the "Registry") in Book 5891, Page 309 (the "First Deed"- Exhibit D), (ii) that certain Deed recorded on April 1, 1998 with the Registry in Book 9177, Page 90 (the "Second Deed"-Exhibit E and together with the First Deed, the "Deeds") and any other interest, if any, to the Premises, provided that, MCC (or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, acting by and through DCAMM on behalf of Middlesex Community College) assumes in writing all of the Board's right, title and reversionary interest and any other interest, if any, in the Premises; and
2. authorizes and consents to the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency (as successor to HEFA) taking all actions, and entering into all documents and instruments, necessary to effectuate the transfer of the Premises to MCC. Upon the advice of counsel to the Board, the Board further authorizes and delegates to the Commissioner the authority to take all actions and enter into all documents and instruments necessary or desirable to effectuate the foregoing Votes, including, without limitation, executing an assignment, assumption and release agreement in recordable form.

Upon the advice of counsel to the Board, the Board further authorizes and delegates to the Commissioner the authority to take all actions and enter into all documents and instruments necessary or desirable to effectuate the foregoing Votes, including, without limitation, executing an assignment, assumption and release agreement in recordable form.

Authority:

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 6, 9(m) and 10-14.

Contact:

Joe Wallerstein, Interim Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance
Constantia T. Papanikolaou, Chief Legal Counsel

IX. OTHER BUSINESS

Judy Pagliuca suggested that the Board should define tuition and fees for the benefit of students and stakeholders.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Gabrieli adjourned the meeting at 11:10 a.m.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Noe Ortega, Ph.D.
Commissioner and Secretary to the Board*