

Minutes of the  
**Board of Trustees of Northern Illinois University**  
**Regular Meeting**  
September 17, 2020

**CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order at 9:01 a.m. by Board Chair Dennis Barsema virtually. Recording Secretary Crystal Doyle conducted a roll call.

Trustee Rita Athas: Present

Trustee John Butler: Present

Trustee Montel Gayles: Present

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Present

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Present

Trustee Aidan Shields: Present

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Present

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Present

All members of the Board of Trustees were present.

Also present: President Lisa Freeman; General Counsel Bryan Perry; Board Liaison Matt Streb; Executive Vice President and Provost Beth Ingram; Vice President for Administration and Finance Sarah Chinniah; Vice President for Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications Sol Jensen; Dean of University Libraries Fred Barnhart; Vice President for Research and Innovation Partnerships Jerry Blazey; Vice President for Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Interim Chief Human Resources Officer Vernese Edghill-Walden; Associate Vice President for Information Technology Matt Parks; and University Advisory Council (UAC) Representatives Greg Beyer, Cathy Doederlein, Katy Jaekel, Natasha Johnson, Sarah Marsh, and Kendall Thu.

**VERIFICATION OF QUORUM AND APPROPRIATE NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING**

General Counsel Perry indicated that appropriate notification of the meeting has been provided pursuant to the Illinois Open Meetings Act. Mr. Perry also advised that a quorum was present.

**MEETING AGENDA APPROVAL**

Chair Barsema asked for a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Trustee Gayles so moved, and Trustee Athas seconded. The motion was approved.

Chair Barsema asked Ms. Doyle to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Yes

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

**REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF AUGUST 20, 2020**

Chair Barsema pointed out that it was brought to his attention by Vice President Chinniah and General Counsel Perry, that a correction needed to be made in regards to the action item Classroom

Technology Upgrades that was approved on August 20, 2020 at the BOT Special Meeting. The action item incorrectly listed the vendor BHP Photo as a BEP vendor. BHP Photo is not a BEP vendor, but rather their subcontractor Electrical Resource Management (ERM) is the BEP vendor.

Chair Barsema asked to please correct the minutes to reflect BHP as the vendor and ERM as the BEP subcontractor.

Chair Barsema asked for a motion to approve the minutes of August 20, 2020 as corrected. Vice Chair Wasowicz so moved, and Trustee Pritchard seconded.

Chair Barsema asked Ms. Doyle to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Yes

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

Board discussion followed.

Chair Barsema stated that General Counsel Perry also brought it to his attention that Trustee Gayles has a relationship with the vendor ERM and that it may be a conflict.

Trustee Gayles explained that he is currently the Vice President of Construction Management and New Business Development with ERM.

Chair Barsema asked Trustee Gayles if he had any knowledge whatsoever that ERM was involved with this contract award. Trustee Gayles responded that he had no idea that ERM was involved in this contract.

Chair Barsema asked Trustee Gayles if he personally gained or profited from this transaction. Trustee Gayles responded that he did not whatsoever.

Chair Barsema asked Vice President Chinniah, if she could please explain the process on how this contract was awarded. Vice President Chinniah explained that the award was not one item that went solely to BHP Photo, rather BHP Photo was one of eight vendors used to procure the needed classroom technology. She explained that to date, NIU has used approximately \$503,000.00 across the eight vendors of the \$600,000.00 funding granted by the Board. Of the \$503,000.00 spent in support of classroom technology only \$3,982.00, that is less than 1%, was expended on BHP Photo. Further, the two purchases from BHP Photo made in late July and early August were made by a NIU staff member utilizing a University Commercial Card in accordance with University guidelines, and because the purchases were made using a commercial card there were no contracts or transactions to review.

Chair Barsema asked Vice President Chinniah if the money had been spent on this contract, and Vice President Chinniah confirmed that the money has been spent.

Chair Barsema asked Trustee Gayles if he was aware of any other contracts that may come before the Board where he or his company would be involved. Trustee Gayles responded with saying he is not aware at this time of any other contracts but will be very vigilant to identify potential conflicts in the future.

Chair Barsema reminded all the Board members to please go back and double-check and see if there are any transactions, regardless of how remote, that may come before the Board that involve the Board member themselves, or their company, that would need to be disclosed by our bylaws. If a Board member has any future transactions where they or their company are involved, the Board member would need to recuse themselves from voting on the item. The Board member would immediately need to inform the General Counsel so he can work with the Board on a conflict management plan.

Chair Barsema asked the trustees, that after hearing Trustee Gayle's disclosure and the University's explanation of the process, is there any trustee that has heard anything that makes them want to now change their vote on the Classroom Technology Upgrades Item. Based on the information presented, the trustees did not feel it necessary to revisit the item approval.

### **CHAIR'S COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Chair Barsema welcomed the members of the University Advisory Council who were present and asked for their comments.

UAC Representative Thu commented that he appreciates and supports the goals that President Freeman has formed and that they seem to be taking the University in the right direction. He stated the University Council and Faculty Senate have had their first meetings of the year and they are going well. Last year they revamped the shared governance system and processes and are in the process of implementing those changes. In the meetings faculty have discussed returning to campus and are very pleased and supportive with the way leadership has handled COVID-19. It reflects very well on leadership and the faculty with how well they have dealt with all the changes. Shared governance is working on looking at assessment practices at the university and how any of the processes or practices can be simplified.

UAC Representative Thu also mentioned they will also be reviewing and revamping the Academic Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) this year. Further, he stated they are committed to dealing with social justice issues at NIU. A survey was completed to look at recommendations that came to us from students for dealing with social justice issues. The results of that survey will be circulated as the next Faculty Senate meeting approaches.

UAC Representative Doederlein stated that when asked about increment raises by other Supportive Professional Staff (SPS) colleagues, she responds by saying two things: first, that the President, senior leadership and the Board feel strongly about providing fair and equitable benefits for non-represented employees, and second, that the President, senior leadership and Board have been open to engaging active dialogue when there have been concerns, and there are no barriers to doing so directly. UAC Representative Doederlein thanked the President and Board for bringing the action item regarding the FY21 Non-Represented Staff Salary Increment Allocation Guidelines forward. She stated the SPS non-representative staff appreciate the strong signal that is being sent about salary increases in a budget strained environment. The transparency the university has had with different budget saving measures has been very much appreciated across the campus, given the effects on many peoples professional and personal lives. She concluded that the discussions on contingency plans, should they be needed, have also been well received, and the openness is appreciated.

Chair Barsema stated that the Board appreciates the hard work and sacrifice that has gone into the budgeting process, not only by senior leadership but everyone on the NIU campus. As COVID-19

is affecting everything around us, it is important to be flexible this year from a budgeting standpoint. The Board and the administration have agreed to a quarterly review of the budget at Board meetings. Senior leadership is encouraged to have at the ready contingency plans and actions to respond to any further decreases in revenue or increases in expense when COVID-19 related issues on our campus, in our community, lack of COVID-19 relief funds or state appropriations any of which, or all, could happen.

Chair Barsema commented that the Board supports the senior leadership team and President Freeman's actions that were taken last Friday, September 11, that were related to COVID-19 on the NIU campus and in the DeKalb County community. The safety and health of our students, faculty, staff, and our DeKalb County community members must always be prioritized. The Board sincerely appreciates the cooperation and sacrifice that everyone is being asked to make to support Protect the Pack.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chair Barsema introduced the public comment portion of the meeting.

General Counsel Perry indicated that there was no request for public comment.

#### **REPORTS OF THE BOARD COMMITTEES AND BOARD LIAISONS**

Chair Barsema reminded everyone that the reports of the Board Committees and the Board Liaisons are information only.

Trustee Herrero gave an update on agenda item number 7.d. Trustee Herrero gave an overview of the strategic planning process that the IBHE is undergoing. Additionally, Trustee Herrero mentioned the consulting firm UPD was selected to help the IBHE with their engagement and planning work. She noted the work has started and is targeted to conclude in spring 2021.

Trustee Herrero stated that recent IBHE meetings have been packed with very rich data and information about our current state, including perspectives from college and university leaders, national higher education experts, and most importantly students. There have been conversations and presentations informing the board of the opportunity gaps for low income black and brown students that exist across the state, and the work that lay ahead for all of us. At a recent meeting, Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, the Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education, spoke on their approach on closing equity gaps and master planning. The IBHE also heard from Eric Zarnikow, Executive Director at the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, and he shared the state of MAP Grants in Illinois.

Trustee Herrero stated that the Governors Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER Grant) will provide dollars to help overcome barriers created by the pandemic related to the recruitment and retention of students that are most impacted, including underrepresented, first generation, rural and Pell. The state of Illinois received \$108 million, but higher education will see \$49 million, which will be distributed across the colleges and universities in Illinois. Three million dollars was earmarked for grant awards of up to \$500,000 to eligible 4-year Illinois universities, including Northern Illinois University.

#### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT NO. 145**

Chair Barsema asked President Freeman to present the President's Report No. 145.

#### **UNIVERSITY REPORTS FORWARDED BY THE BOARD COMMITTEES**

President Freeman asked whether any Trustees wanted to revisit information items forwarded from the committees. Hearing none, she continued to the items directly from the President.

**ITEMS DIRECTLY FROM THE PRESIDENT**

**Agenda Item 8.b.1. FY21 Non-Represented Staff Salary Increment Allocation Guidelines**

President Freeman presented agenda item 8.b.1. for approval.

Chair Barsema asked for a motion to approve item 8.b.1. Vice Chair Wasowicz so moved, and Trustee Gayles seconded.

Chair Barsema asked Ms. Doyle to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Yes

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

**Agenda Item 8.b.2. Collective Bargaining Agreement for International Union of Operating Engineers Local Union #399**

President Freeman presented agenda item 8.b.2. for approval.

Chair Barsema asked for a motion to approve item 8.b.2. Trustee Herrero so moved, and Trustee Athas seconded.

Board discussion followed.

Chair Barsema asked if the two-year successor agreement was standard for the length of the agreement. President Freeman responded that given these unprecedented times the decision was made to extend existing contract terms for two-years and to renegotiate later once the pandemic is over. President Freeman's response was confirmed by General Counsel Perry.

Chair Barsema asked Ms. Doyle to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Yes

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

**Agenda Item 8.b.3. Collective Bargaining Agreement for Teamsters Local #330**

President Freeman presented agenda item 8.b.3. for approval

Chair Barsema asked for a motion to approve item 8.b.3. Trustee Gayles so moved, and Trustee Butler seconded.

Board discussion followed.

Trustee Gayles asked if the rationale for the one-year successor agreement matched up with the previous bargaining agreement that was just reviewed and approved. President Freeman responded that the same principle will be used for all contracts during this unprecedented period. General Counsel Perry mentioned that this contract is retroactive back to July 1, 2020 and the previous contract for International Union of Operating Engineers Local Union #399 is retroactive back to July 1, 2019.

Chair Barsema noticed that this bargaining unit only had five members and asked if there is a minimum requirement for members for a union. General Counsel Perry responded by saying there is not a minimum requirement for how many members a union must have.

Chair Barsema wondered if in general, smaller bargaining units take less time to negotiate with than larger bargaining units. General Counsel Perry responded that it could depend on the bargaining unit and what topics are being discussed and negotiated. The voting process usually is faster since there are less members that need to vote.

Trustee Gayles asked, as this is a one-year successor agreement, when can they expect negotiations to start up again or have they already started. General Counsel Perry responded that negotiations have already started for this bargaining unit.

Chair Barsema asked Ms. Doyle to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Yes

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

#### **Agenda Item 8.b.4. FY21 Revised General Fee Pricing Recommendation**

President Freeman presented agenda item 8.b.4. for approval.

Chair Barsema asked for a motion to approve item 8.b.4. Vice Chair Wasowicz so moved, and Trustee Herrero seconded.

Board discussion followed.

Trustee Gayles mentioned that during this time with this being a temporary move, that they maintain vigilance over how long they need to redirect those funds. Trustee Gayles is concerned that this could turn into a slippery slope of using dollars to pay for items related to the pandemic, but really the dollars are designated for operational expenses. Trustee Gayles asked the timeframe for redirecting the funds. President Freeman responded that this is for FY21 and expressed hope that the university would not have to bring this forward in FY22. President Freeman stated that leadership has been thoughtful regarding the use of fees in this unprecedented environment, understanding our obligation to take care of our campus community, particularly our students.

Vice President Chinniah added that she and Provost Ingram had the opportunity to talk with the student leaders about the intended and proposed plans to redirect a portion of the student fees. They confirmed their commitment to work with them to ensure that the funding expectations for student government and other types of student organizations would not change, as they set their budgets at the end of last year.

Provost Ingram added that there was a willingness to work with the students to show transparency, and to make sure the students understood where the money was going, and they did. The students made a request to make sure it supported students and it was agreed to the reallocation.

Trustee Butler appreciated the commitment to fund student organizations as planned for FY21. He continued to ask about the debt service that is covered by the fee structure in order to ensure the university is not unduly burdening itself for future increases in debt service due to this decision. Trustee Butler asked if there was confidence that all debt service obligations will be met during this period?

President Freeman stated that the university is committed to meeting the debt obligations of the university, and as our actions over the last several years have shown we're very sensitive to the cost of higher education, and the struggles our students face to pay for those classes. President Freeman also mentioned that tuition and fees have been held flat with even decreasing student fees throughout the past couple of years.

Vice President Chinniah responded to Trustee Butler that yes, they plan to continue to meet the obligations and the numbers that are set forth that provide the flexibility that is needed to do so.

Present Freeman added that they are trying to make decisions in the moment that address our needs to react to the situation at that time.

Chair Barsema asked whether this allocation would prevent critical items from moving forward. President Freeman responded that due to COVID-19, there are items that will not be able to move forward. The reallocation does prevent challenges for units that normally receive fees, however, everyone understands that the additional expenses associated with managing during COVID-19 are not optional.

Chair Barsema asked Ms. Doyle to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Yes

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

### **Agenda Item 8.b.5. FY21 University Revised Internal Budget**

President Freeman presented agenda item 8.b.5.

Vice President Chinniah walked the trustees through the FY21 University Revised Internal Budget item.

Board discussion followed.

Trustees thanked university leadership for continuing to manage the budget to ensure a sustainable future for NIU, its current and future students. Further, they expressed their appreciation for the campus community's work to increase student enrollment and retention.

Chair Barsema asked to see reports showing the miscellaneous items and whether they can be reallocated to direct line items.

President Freeman noted that future receipt of federal aid to the state and the university will make a very big difference. When the university will receive the federal aid is still unknown. She is hopeful that everyone can start to balance the crisis response with the longer-term crisis recovery planning.

Chair Barsema asked about debt services and why it had not gone down more considering the recent refinancing. Vice President Chinniah responded that a savings was seen in FY20 and it is factored in and an additional \$1 million will be saved this year.

Trustee Herrero asked what has impacted the increased amount in contractual services, and whether the GEER grant is reflected in the report. Vice President Chinniah responded that the increase in contractual services has to do with increased costs incurred to be prepared to open campus this fall during the pandemic including PPE, technology needs, and additional services provided. Vice President Chinniah added that the funds that were received through the GEER grant, NIU has currently received \$2.9 million, are not represented due to the timing of the creation of this report and provided additional details regarding the funding reporting

Vice Chair Wasowicz asked what items generally go into the cost of sales area of the budget. Vice President Chinniah respond that it includes all of the items that are purchased for resale on campus, which includes food that is available through our dining units, parts and supplies that are charged out through the campus work order system, cost for paper for our copy service for our Anywhere Prints contract. She noted the initial projection for FY20 would likely be significantly decreased due to planning for campus to reopen and for students, staff and faculty to return. There may also be decreases in the travel line.

#### **Agenda Item 8.b.6. FY20 Report Tuition and Fee Waivers**

President Freeman presented agenda item 8.b.6.

Vice President Chinniah confirmed that the information in this report to the Board needed to be released in preliminary format to honor certain stipulations with the IBHE. NIU is required to disclose and it includes two types of waivers. The top portion provides a summary of mandatory waivers that NIU is required to provide, and these are waivers that may be contributed to certain state requirements or other requirements that NIU needs to honor. These are items that NIU may have to provide but NIU does not necessarily receive funding for, so it is a nice representation of just the summary of activities that NIU does to support different activities, goals, or priorities. The discretion waiver category are waivers that NIU provides based on benefits made available to employees based on typical offerings that a research institution would provide. So, you may see things like graduate assistantships, research assistantships, and teaching assistants that are considered a cost of doing business.

#### **Agenda Item 8.b.7. University Libraries Overview**

President Freeman presented agenda item 8.b.7. Dean Fred Barnhart presented on the University Libraries.

Board members thanked Dean Barnhart for his presentation and discussion followed. Discussion centered on ways in which the Library is utilizing technology to support students through the Learning Commons, which will bring in new technology and support technology exposure for students that may not have experiences working in a makerspace, on a 3D printer, or on a high processing computer. Further, there was discussion on utilizing the library as a community space and a cultural space.



*Trustee Veronica Herrero left the meeting at 11:05 a.m.*

Chair Barsema thanked Dean Barnhart for a wonderful presentation and all he does for NIU.

#### **CHAIR'S REPORT NO. 95**

Chair Barsema presented the Chair's report.

#### **Agenda Item 9.a. Board of Trustee 2021 Meeting Dates Approval**

Board Chair Barsema presented agenda item 9.a. for approval.

Chair Barsema asked for a motion to approve item 9.a. Trustee Athas so moved, and Trustee Shields seconded.

Chair Barsema asked Ms. Doyle to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Absent

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

#### **OTHER MATTERS**

No other matters were discussed.

#### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

Chair Dennis Barsema announced that the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Trustees will be held December 10, 2020.

#### **CLOSED SESSION**

Chair Barsema stated that the Board needed to go into closed session and would not take up new business following the closed session. He asked for a motion to close the public meeting to conduct closed session to discuss the following subjects as authorized by the Open Meetings Act: personnel matters as generally described under sections 2(c)(1)(2)(3) and (21) of the open meetings act; collective bargaining matters as generally described under section 2(c)(2) of the open meetings act; litigation and risk management matters as generally described under sections 2(c)(11) and (12) of the open meetings act; and closed session minutes matters as generally described under section 2(c)(21) of the open meetings act.

Trustee Gayles so moved, and Vice Chair Wasowicz seconded.

Chair Barsema asked Ms. Doyle to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Absent

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

The meeting closed at 11:14 a.m.

At 2:01 p.m. the Board returned from closed session.

Chair Barsema asked Dr. Streb to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Present

Trustee John Butler: Present

Trustee Montel Gayles: Present

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Present

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Present

Trustee Aidan Shields: Present

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Present

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Present

The motion was approved.

## ADJOURNMENT

Chair Barsema asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Trustee Pritchard so moved, and Trustee Herrero seconded.

Chair Barsema asked Dr. Streb to conduct a roll call vote.

Trustee Rita Athas: Yes

Trustee John Butler: Yes

Trustee Montel Gayles: Yes

Trustee Veronica Herrero: Yes

Trustee Bob Pritchard: Yes

Trustee Aidan Shields: Yes

Vice Chair Eric Wasowicz: Yes

Board Chair Dennis Barsema: Yes

The motion was approved.

The meeting adjourned at 2:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Crystal Doyle

Recording Secretary

*In compliance with Illinois Open Meetings Act 5 ILCS 120/1, et seq, a verbatim record of all Northern Illinois University Board of Trustees meetings is maintained by the Board Recording Secretary and is available for review upon request. The minutes contained herein represent a true and accurate summary of the Board proceedings.*