

**Minutes of the
Gaston College
Called Board of Trustees Meeting
Myers Center Board Room
March 8, 2017**

Members Present: Mr. Stephen Campbell, Secretary
Sheriff Alan Cloninger
Mr. John Dancoff
Ms. Jennifer Davis
Mr. Ron Hovis
Mr. Brett Keeter
Mr. Brad Overcash
Dr. Jim Ragan, Vice Chair
Ms. May Gray Robinson
Mr. James Smith
Mr. Randy Vinson
Dr. Jim Watson, Chair
Ms. Madison Knowles, SGA President

Dr. Patricia Skinner, President

Members Absent: Judge Craig Collins
Mr. Tracy Philbeck

Others Present: Ms. Julia Allen, Mr. Todd Baney, Dr. Dewey Dellinger, Ms. Mary Ellen Dillon, Ms. Lynda Ellington, Mr. Travis Hogue, Ms. Renita Johnson, Dr. Joe Keith, Ms. Cynthia McCrory, Dr. Dennis McElhoe, Ms. Stephanie Michael-Pickett, Dr. Silvia Patricia Rios Husain, Mr. Chris Thurley; and Mr. Carl Stewart, College Attorney.

- **Board Chairman Dr. Jim Watson called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and declared a quorum present.**
- **Invocation – Ms. Davis**
- **Ethics Awareness and Conflict of Interest Reminder**

Chair Watson reminded Trustees of the ethics requirements of public servants and also requested they identify any conflicts of interest or appearance of conflicts of interest present. None were identified.

A. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Chair Watson asked if there were any changes, additions, or corrections to the agenda. None were identified. Mr. Hovis made a motion, seconded by Dr. Ragan, to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried.

B. EVOLVING STATE GOVERNANCE AND LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

Chair Watson thanked the members of the Board for attending the Called meeting as he felt an open discussion as a group concerning the evolving issues surrounding governance of the boards of trustees by the legislature and the State Board of Community Colleges would be more productive than communications through emails.

Legislative House Bills 12 and 14

Chair Watson recognized Mr. Vinson and asked him to provide the Board with some background on the history of NC House Bills 12 and 14. These proposed Bills would change the appointing power of trustees from the Governor's office to the General Assembly, two appointments upon recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and two appointments upon recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. Additionally, HB 14 would also require appointed trustees to have particular sector experience.

The origination of House Bills 12 and 14 came about in an effort by representatives from Stanly and Montgomery counties, who in a previous session of the General Assembly, attempted to run two local bills with the proposed changes mentioned above, for their respective counties only. That attempt failed. However, in the current session of the General Assembly, when House Bills 12 and 14 were presented, the Bills not only included changes in appointing powers for community college trustees for Stanly and Montgomery counties, but they also included several other counties/community colleges, one of which was Gaston and Lincoln counties/Gaston College. This time, the legislature voted unanimously to support to the Bills.

Gaston College's Board of Trustees was very surprised that Gaston and Lincoln counties/Gaston College were included in House Bill 12 and reached out to its local legislative delegation to question why they were not consulted before this happened. Upon inquiry, Representative Kelly Hastings reported he had been contacted by Representative Justin Burr and that the legislative delegation for Gaston and Lincoln counties had talked ahead and had determined to support these Bills. It is a point of contention with our legislative delegation that neither Gaston College's Board of Trustees Chair, Dr. Watson, nor any of the other trustees on Gaston College's Board were contacted prior to this determination.

Mr. Vinson did relay some comments that proposed a positive side to this decision: 1) appointments to the Board may be timelier, 2) appointments would be made with the best interest of the College in mind, and 3) the College may be given some input into the selection of trustee appointees. Gaston College's trustees were unconvinced of these positive points of view.

State Board of Community Colleges Governance Proposals

Mr. Vinson went on to provide information on current action taken on part of the State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) related to community colleges. Currently, changes have been proposed to G.S. § 115D-13 Terms of Office of Trustees, G.S. § 115D-18 Organization of Boards; Meeting, and G.S. § 115D-19 Removal of Trustees. It is believed these changes were recommended as a result of a situation at Martin Community College where issues arose regarding a lack of leadership on behalf of the president and Board of Trustees with the State Board determining that more authority to handle these types of situations going forward was needed.

Mr. Vinson relayed that limiting terms of trustees' appointments will greatly affect Gaston College's Board as several trustees have been a part of the Board for over 12 years and would be forced to step down under the new term limits. Dr. Watson distributed a listing of Gaston College's Board members that detailed the Trustees' years of service on the Board; Mr. Campbell, Sheriff Cloninger, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Vinson would be affected. Gaston College currently has a Board made up of both new and seasoned Trustees, so a change in length of terms is not in its best interest.

Additionally, Mr. Vinson felt that the various appointing authorities of trustees, as the law has specified for the last several decades, has served the College System well and that giving power of trustee appointment to the SBCC is not a prudent move. Likewise, it is not practical for the SBCC to set the number of Board meetings an institution should hold each year since individual colleges require different operating procedures.

The SBCC also seeks to extend its authority to approve or deny a college's selection of a president, initiate the removal of a local community college trustee or president under prescribed conditions, define trustee training, and establish internal audit positions at the System Office to investigate complaints against colleges. Mr. Vinson felt approval of these General Statutes undermine and effectively compromise the governance of the boards of community colleges. The State Board currently has the authority to withdraw or withhold State financial and administrative support of any community college, so the question stands as to why they would need more power. Mr. Vinson felt community colleges would need to enlist the help of their legislators to stop this extension of the SBCC's authority.

Chair Watson reiterated that he had not brought the Board together to take some type of action regarding these concerns, but rather to conduct an open discussion so all were aware of the current legislative issues and evolving governance concerns. However, after much deliberation, the Board agreed to go on record in opposition of the changes to governance proposed by the SBCC.

Upon a motion made by Sheriff Cloninger, seconded by Mr. Campbell, the Gaston College Board of Trustees voted to go on record in opposition to the proposed changes recommended by the State Board of Community Colleges regarding G.S. § 115D-13 Terms of Office of Trustees, G.S. § 115D-18 Organization of Boards; Meetings, and G.S. § 115D-19 Removal of Trustees. The motion unanimously passed. (A copy of the above mentioned statutes will be included with the minutes.)

The Board discussed the best way to advise the SBCC of their displeasure with the ensuing governance proposals. A recommendation was made to draft a letter from Dr. Watson to the Chairman of the SBCC relaying the motion passed by the Board in objection to the proposed SBCC governance proposals. The letter would be copied to the State Board members, the College's legislative delegation for Gaston and Lincoln counties, the president of the NCCCS, the president and CEO of the Association of Community College Trustees, and Gaston College's Board members.

Announcement

Mr. Brett Keeter asked that he be recognized by Chair Watson as he wanted to make an announcement. In follow-up to the Advocacy discussion at the Board of Trustees Retreat, Mr. Keeter relayed news that an email would soon be coming to Board members with a poll in which they could indicate whether they wanted to pair up with a Lincoln County Commissioner, Gaston County Commissioner, or State Legislator as a Trustee Liaison. Trustees would be asked to list their first, second, and third choices. Chair Watson thanked Mr. Keeter and encouraged Board members to reply to the poll.

C. AJOURNMENT

In closing, Chair Watson thanked Mr. Vinson for his efforts to advocate for community colleges and provide information to keep the Trustees informed. He thanked Board members for attending as he wanted the Board to be a transparent Board, respectful of others thoughts and feelings while keeping in mind their mission and purpose to enhance educational opportunities for citizens in the College's service area.

He relayed that the College is strongly tied to economic and workforce development, and this will continue with many first generation students and many students who need to be trained and/or re-tooled for positions in the 21st century economy. He feels Gaston College is a strong college and is vital from a quality-of-life standpoint and that it is important from a governance standpoint to have a local Board that provides its president and staff guidance and counsel. He then thanked the Board members for a good discussion.

There being no further business to come before the Board, Chair Watson entertained a motion by Ms. Davis, seconded by Mr. Vinson, to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried.

Chair Watson declared the meeting adjourned at 5:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen D. Campbell, Secretary

Dr. Jim R. Watson, Chair

Mary Ellen Dillon, Recording Secretary

(College Seal)