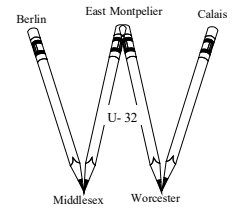


Washington Central Unified Union School District

WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity and power to contribute to their local and global communities.

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Meagan Roy Ed.D.
Superintendent



Washington Central Unified Union School District School Board Meeting (Virtual Only) Central Office

**1130 Gallison Hill Rd. Montpelier, VT
12.21.22 6:00-9:00 PM**

Board Members Present: Diane Nichols-Fleming, Ursula Stanley, Lindy Johnson, Chris McVeigh, Daniel Keeney, Mckalyn Leclerc, Kari Bradley, Flor Diaz Smith, Joshua Sevits, Maggie Weiss, Ursula Stanley, Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Jonathan Goddard, Maya Elliot and Willow Mashkuri (Student Representatives), Natasha Eckart Banning

Administrators Present: Superintendent Meagan Roy, Jen Miller-Arsenault, Kerra Holden, Susanne Gann, Cat Fair, Steven Dellinger-Pate, Alicia Lyford, Gillian Fuqua, Lisa LaPlante, , Amy Molina, Karoline May, Aaron Boynton,

Others Present: Maria Melekos, Michelle Ksepka, ORCA Media, Mark Kline, Elliot Burg, George Cook, Sonya Rhodes, Liz Guilfoyle, Meg Allison, Robin Gannon, Phil Gore, Nancy Reilly, Michael Irwin, Cheryl Ecklund, Michael Close, Rose, M Sutherby, Allison Fayle, Aly, Amber Larrabee, April Davis, Arlyn Bruccoli, Rebekah Mandell, Beth Parker, Bonnie Gadapee, Brian Divelbliss, Carla Messier, David Delcore (Times Argus), David Lawrence, David Hannigan, Drew Junkins, Ellen Dorsey, Erin Mullaney, Hannah Brown, Heidi Schmidt, Jane Coffey, J Campbell, Jen Donovan, Jenn Ingersoll, Jenna Howard, Jes, Jess Barewicz, Jessica Abisla, Josh Dagostino, Justin, Kathryn Biggam, Katy Preston, Katy Chabot, Kristin Freeman, Kyle Landis-Marinello, Lauralee Curavoo, Lydia Faesy, Maggie McGlynn, Maribeth, Mark Brown, Matt Pelkey, Megan McLane, Nichole Schaeffer, Patrick Wood, Priscilla, Rachel Hernandez, Rosemary Leach, Michael Levine, Shannon Miller, Stacy Rupp, Susan Warren, Suzanne Lowden, Tammy Hoermann, Tammy Joslyn, Tony Snow, Tyler Smith, Wendy Freundlich, Alice Angney, John, Karen, Callie Weller, Cathy G, Honi Bean Barrett

1. Call to Order: Flor Diaz Smith called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. **Welcome:** Chairperson Flor Diaz Smith took a moment to acknowledge the fourth night of Hanukkah, to wish everyone happy holidays and to thank, on behalf of the board, the staff at WCUUSD as well as the community. She spoke about humanity and justice, and she spoke about the process of budget planning and the intention for discussion tonight. Are we structured the way we need to be structured in order to serve the needs of our students? She read a statement on behalf of the board around visioning into the future and planning for the budget. She invited feedback from the community via email at any time.
 - 2.1. **Adjustments to the Agenda:** Flor Diaz Smith would like to move public comment after the budget presentation. That being said, she invited any public comment at this time from anyone who wanted to comment on another issue apart from the budget. She would like to move Fund Balance Projections to earlier in the meeting, during “Board Operations” so that the board can discuss this as part of the budget discussion.
 - 2.2. **Reception of Guests**
 - 2.3. **Public Comments:** Elliot Burg stated that, within the presentation, it will be useful for the public to hear what the program impact will be based on the budget as presented.
3. **Presentation and Discussion: *Community Budget Forum Draft # 2:*** Superintendent Meagan Roy and Business Administrator Susanne Gann shared a slide show to present the second draft of the budget, to open discussion. Superintendent Meagan Roy provided an overview that the administration has considered:
 - How to achieve the magnitude of reduction the board asks for and consider thinking creatively?
 - Visioning and strategic planning: what do we want for our students and how do we need to structure to get there?
 - Identify effective models for school counseling and school nurse positions.

Tyler Smith spoke about concerns in making positions less than FTE - are we making these decisions because of money or are we doing what is best for our students? Elliot Burg asked for clarification about 0.5 FTE reduction. Jessica Abisla spoke about historically underserved students - these are the students that are often seen in the school nurse's office. She read a statement from Central Vermont Pediatrics in support of keeping current staffing levels of school nurses. Ellen Dorsey spoke about rejecting proactive supports such as coaches and relying on reactive supports such as interventionists. Pulling the rug out from under the coaching program just as it is getting solid. Rebekah Mandell asked where was the directive to cut \$1M, and why? Bucking an economic reality - what was the thinking behind that? Would like to know the “denominators” for the reductions so there is context to understand the impact. Provide the presentation in the board packet - this would have been helpful as a narrative; provide a written narrative so we can digest and understand and prepare for the meeting. She noted, as a Middlesex parent, she does not want to see the reductions as presented. She would like to understand more of what was meant by creativity. Flor Diaz Smith explained that the board used

6% as a framework for the administration to create the next draft - in the past the board has asked for 3%, so we were trying to stay close to that. Kyle Landis-Marinello stated clarity is needed; this budget as presented would result in Reductions in Force at Rumney. To have this happen in a year when two of the biggest towns are seeing no reductions at all would not be popular to Middlesex community. He stated that the principal does not speak for the people in Middlesex. He read a statement from his daughter who went to Rumney and is currently at U-32. Maria Melekos read a letter from the school nurses across WCUUSD. She shared that the recommended school nurse to student ratio has changed, and the ratio that was shared in the presentation was not accurate. Current recommendation is a full time school nurse, every day, at every school. Rosemary Leach, Worcester resident, stated that in the spirit of equity, we can't cut school nurse positions. As a tax payer, she stated that the best thing to do is not cut taxes, it is to support our schools. Josh Dagostino expressed opposition to cutting Spanish. Jen Donovan as Spanish teacher asked the board to reconsider the idea of cutting Spanish at Rumney School. Kristin Freeman, parent of an elementary school student, spoke in favor of preserving the Spanish program. She also spoke against the idea of cutting the food service staff. She asked, are there budgeted vacancy savings? Could we consider using fund balance? Jen Campbell, art teacher at Rumney and East Montpelier, asked the board to reconsider the position cuts that were presented tonight. Suzanne Lowden spoke against the proposal to decrease school nurse positions as well as cutting the Spanish teaching position. Maribeth Domanski stated that she was astonished when she read about this on Front Porch Forum. She recalled this controversy in the 80s; she can't believe we are back to this. She spoke about what our students have been through over the past several years, with COVID-19; they have already had to settle for less; how can we ask them to settle for even less? She spoke about how the allied arts are connected to literacy. Arlyn Bruccoli, teacher at EMES and Calais resident, spoke about the library and tech integration positions. She wondered how the reduction at Calais for the library position will affect library and/ or tech integration? Alice Angney thanked the board, leadership team, and staff for their work. She would like to focus on creativity and flexibility as the administration had proposed. She asked the board to be flexible; she expressed that she understands the need to balance budget development with student needs. She applauds the administration for starting the conversation around creative thinking. She stated never forget that our teachers are "where the rubber meets the road." Brian Divilbliss spoke about the accounting program at U-32. He hopes that the board will see the relevance of the program. Shannon Miller appreciates the idea of creativity; she is interested in it and wants to work more on it. She noted student enrollment. She stated that the board should consider student voice, e.g. about the experience for students when they are part of a very small grade cohort. She hopes that we can think creatively and also find a way to keep our positions. Aly asked the board to listen to the voice of part time staff and the staff that goes between two schools to find out if these are sustainable. She worries about creating more part-time positions - can we fill them with quality people? She stated that the librarians have been a key part of the humanities and justice work in WCUUSD. Priscilla stated that she is concerned about our children but also concerned about the older members of our community who can't afford to pay higher taxes; she has heard from them at town meetings over the years. Willow and Maya had spoken with students about their experiences in music and

art, and about the importance of keeping opportunities for students around world languages and music and art. Michael Levine stated if the concerns are around test scores, then cutting the positions as presented will likely decrease test outcomes. He feels that somewhere in the quality education/ creativity, it feels out of balance. Patrick Wood appreciates the work the board has done and appreciates the advance notice and opportunity to engage early in the process. He asked why the principal budgets have increased when teaching positions are cut. On the subject of property taxes, he believes that good schools bring people to town; good schools lead to higher property tax revenue, ideally. He spoke about reversing the enrollment trend. Hannah Brown appreciates the work that the board and administration have done around engaging the community. When we are thinking about long term, we need more people in Vermont, yes, but the schools really are a foundational aspect of what draws people. Rumney's integrative art and foreign language program is why her family moved to Rumney. She stated that there have always been different offerings or different things that make each school different (e.g. drama at Doty, music at Berlin). In terms of staffing shortages, she stated that the positions that are being considered for elimination fill in many of the holes that occur especially during staffing shortages. Flor Diaz Smith thanked the community for their input. She invited emails to the board.

4. **Board Operations**

- 4.1. Review and Discuss FY 24 Budget Draft # 2:** Flor Diaz Smith asked Superintendent Roy to clarify some of the questions or comments. Superintendent Roy spoke about reduction in force notices - this has to do with seniority and is part of why we have broad conversations about staffing. Clarification about music: the reduction in music is related to enrollment decline - music will not be eliminated at Rumney. She noted that it has not been decided where the reduction in 0.9 FTE School Nurse position will be distributed. She spoke about the desire to think about creativity - if we think about how we are structured, we might agree that in order to keep some priorities in place (e.g. world languages) then we might have to structure differently. In regards to the library and tech integrationist, she stated that Education Quality Standards do not distinguish between tech integrationist and library.
- 4.2. Board Feedback for FY24 Budget Draft #3:** Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that she appreciates Superintendent Roy's reiterating the leadership team's focus. She asked to clarify what is meant by 6%? Currently all of our tax rates are going down if everything stays constant. The 6% refers to tax rate increase, not necessarily referring to budget increase. Superintendent Roy stated that the original parameter was 6% on the expense budget. But where the board wants to go from here is up to the board. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated we need to be clear about where we want the leadership team to look, right now it appears to be direct line people - where do we create the guidance, if cuts are needed, a percentage should be direct line and a percentage should be administration - if student enrollment is decreasing, should we be considering decreasing administrative positions and central office positions? Chris McVeigh asked Superintendent Roy, when referring to Vermont Education Quality Standards, are they objective standards? Does the leadership team use them in a subjective way? Superintendent Roy stated there is a statute that Vermont will have Ed Quality Standards - these are the standards that are stated at this time

that define what all Vermont schools are required to have. She does not believe we are applying them subjectively; what we have done is identify areas in Ed Quality where we are most discrepant - right now one of them is class size but it is hard to change class size without structural change. Other areas where reductions in staff are presented are those where we are particularly far from the Ed Quality Standards. Chris McVeigh reiterated what Diane Nichols-Fleming had indicated around cutting direct line services, e.g. school nurses and educational coaches. Was consideration given to reducing administrative staff? Superintendent Roy indicated that there are Ed Quality Standards around number of principals. She stated that we could provide the board with a comparison of our central office staff compared to neighboring school districts. She believes that our central office is thinly staffed. Mckalyn Leclerc is not sure that making cuts from the smaller schools is going to make any improvements in the quality of education at the schools. She would be interested to know what it would look like to bring foreign languages to all of the elementary schools. She would be interested in some of the creative ideas that were shared, for example, combining preschool programs. Superintendent Roy stated that, across the district, even with reductions, we have more adults in the system than Education Quality would say that we need. One of the factors is that as a district we are small. She noted that, when wondering whether we should offer world languages to all of our students, we should not do that on the backs of the current structure. The question could be how do we bring foreign language to all of the schools versus how do we “shave” foreign language staff? Daniel Keeney thanked everyone for the input they provided tonight. He is very interested in conversations around creative solutions. He asked Susanne Gann about the excess spending threshold. She noted that, were it in place, we would be below it. Daniel Keeney asked about the administration’s recommendation around fund balance - does this offer us some flexibility? He also asked about considering the concept of vacancy savings - would this keep us within the Ed Quality Standards. Maggie Weiss stated the reality - there is no housing - nobody is moving here because there are no houses available in our district. How do we interface with development review so that we are working together to bring families to our towns? We need to be having those bigger conversations. When we are visioning at the educational level, we can’t have it as an isolated conversation. We have to look at larger scale change. She noted that she shares Mckalyn’s thoughts about hearing the vibrancy about the foreign language program at one school - how can we work as a district to attract new teachers? We have to grow our own? (She spoke about Calais school posting for a foreign language teaching position with no candidates to fill the position, and therefore eliminating the program.) Kari Bradley stated that he doesn’t disagree with anything that was stated tonight, and yet, change is inevitable. He supports exploring creative measures; he would like to get started on that. He would support the board giving direction to consider a 7% increase on net taxes, knowing that the CLA information is coming and will tell a big part of the story. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet clarified that the board did not ask for service cuts, did not ask for RIFs, the board asked for a large decrease in order to explicitly see the impact. We realize we are faced with: (1) start cutting services to limit budget increases (2) don’t cut services and continue to increase budgets (3) consider

structural changes - whether that is closure, consolidation, etc. That conversation is going to take a lot of community involvement. He noted that we had a large number of people present tonight. He stated that the Rumney community has a reputation for being very engaged, and this was on display tonight. It will be important to think of our district as a whole; this concept of community identity will be very tricky. We need to address bigger issues, as Maggie had stated, such as housing. He spoke about the inevitable "right sizing" which will be coming soon. Ursula Stanley thanked Superintendent Roy and the leadership team for the time they have spent on this; she also thanked the community for showing up and advocating for the students. She agreed with every point that Jonas Eno-Van Fleet had made; she agrees that we have very hard work ahead of us. Lindy Johnson stated that the declining student enrollment is a huge consideration. It requires that schools get creative in how they configure personnel. She appreciates what the leadership team has brought for us to consider, and she reiterated that this is not final; this is presented to facilitate discussion. Diane Nichols-Fleming suggested going back to the original budget and then we look to the visioning work that is coming in the new year; we hit it hard immediately and not let it go by the wayside. She noted that change is inevitable. She suggested, if we apply Draft #1, what would our taxes look like? with updated information from the state? And then think about, in the New Year, launching into the discussions about creative visioning for the future. Joshua Sevits reiterated Kari Bradley's idea of considering 7%. He also appreciates the approach in some of the discussion about the possibility of creative visioning; he believes we are going to grow and continue to be amazing, as long as we stay engaged. He thanked everyone for showing up and thanked the administration for the hard work they put into this budget draft. Chris McVeigh stated that each of the small towns have a unique interest because each school is an integral part of the town. If schools close, it has a severe impact on the towns. He would like to know some of the details of the creative thinking. He stated that he fully supports what Diane Nichols-Fleming had suggested, and let our communities tell us (through the vote) what they think. And then go forward after the new year and start the work of engaging the community and creatively considering how to structure education at WCUUSD in the future. Daniel Keeney expressed interest in going back to Draft #1 and considering what the tax impact will be, with what new information we have. First draft reflected 9.7% increase (local education spending). Ursula Stanley supports Kari Bradley's suggestion to look at 7%. We need to remember that we have a responsibility to our community that they can afford to live here. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked if we increase to 7%, how does that affect the positions that were presented tonight for reduction in force? What would be the difference between 6% and 7%? Kari Bradley stated that we won't have enough information until we have CLA figures, to know exactly the impact. Susanne Gann explained that much of the tax impact depends on information that comes from the state legislature. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet stated that he would support going back to the first budget draft and asked the leadership team to identify any budget reductions that they would have considered, and he would support bringing that to the towns. He stated that we heard a lot from Middlesex tonight and a lot from Worcester and other towns. He would be interested in allowing the community to vote, and then get to the work of thinking

creatively about future visioning. Daniel Keeney suggested looking at a 7% increase as well as considering Draft #1, with some more updated information around CLA, and look at both options next time. He stated that he feels indignant that the state of Vermont puts so much responsibility on school boards and yet does not provide the information that is needed in a timely manner. Superintendent Roy stated that the first draft would come back at higher than 9.7% so she would still ask for some parameter from the board. Natasha Eckart Baning stated that the number of people who showed up tonight spoke to the reason this community is so special. She would hate to have to change what we are offering our students; they are part of what makes Vermont so special and makes our district so special. Jonathan Goddard stated that, coming out of the pandemic, any cuts related to school counseling and student nursing would be a mistake. He noted that he does not see foreign languages or art as anything “extra” - he sees them as integral. He does not support reductions in direct services to students. If the needs of students are increasing, then we need the staff. The needs of students right now are greater, not lesser. Flor Diaz Smith stated that going back to the first draft would be “delaying the cliff.” She stated that she does wish for foreign language in each school, and she believes that, thinking creatively, we can get there. She suggested using the 7% parameter, and would like to consider the preschool creative solution that Superintendent Roy had suggested as part of the presentation. She does not think putting a budget to the voters, expecting it to be voted down, and going back to the drawing board, is the way that the board works. Some discussion followed around coaching positions. Superintendent Roy stated that the leadership team would appreciate a new parameter so that we can go back to reconsider. Diane Nichols-Fleming stated that the board was assured that this draft was brought to us so we could consider this 6% reduction, knowing it would likely look stark. She worries that we are giving a parameter that requires creative thinking and we haven’t gotten to the place of having discussions around creative structure. Flor Diaz Smith stated that she supports providing a 7% parameter that will allow for further discussion in January. She also reminded the board that they have decided to hire a facilitator to help with visioning and strategic planning. Mckalyn Leclerc suggested staying within the state parameter of 8.5%. Susanne Gann stated that the 8.5% had been the average of school boards across the state, based on the first budget drafts. Ursula Stanley asked, are there other places, realistically, we could be creative in this budget that might help us further? Superintendent Roy spoke about the possibility of combining grade levels other than preschool - for example, moving a small kindergarten class over to another school. Diane Nichols-Fleming asked, would these creative solutions involve staff reduction? Superintendent Roy stated that it would. Fund Balance Projections: Susanne Gann shared information about projected fund balance; she recognized that one of the factors in the fund balance is vacant positions. Daniel Keeney asked whether these vacancies are this year’s or projecting to next year? Susanne Gann stated that this is based on vacancies up to this point; this does not refer to next year. Daniel Keeney asked, how would this affect the capital plan? Susanne Gann stated that the capital fund is a totally separate account and she feels that it is adequate. Kari Bradley cautioned the board for using the fund

balance for normal operations, because unless something changes in the future, we would have to come up with the money, plus any normal operation increases, in future years. If we are to draw down the fund balance over time, then we need to be mindful of setting a precedent for future years. Diane Nichols-Fleming suggested waiting until we have more information about the next draft of the budget. We don't have enough information at this time to determine an amount. Ursula Stanley would be interested to see the numbers from the fund balance to cover the school nurse positions, but she does worry about coming years when we can cover such things using fund balance. Flor Diaz Smith suggested she would like to see what 7% (or 7.5%) looks like, when considering the preschool proposal and possibly dip into fund balance to fund school nurse positions. Diane Nichols-Fleming reiterated that she is not comfortable asking for 7%; it is even lower than the budget we considered tonight. Flor Diaz suggested considering 9.7%, looking back closer to the first budget draft, seeing where this is in relation to the excess spending threshold. Lindy Johnson stated that she was not under the impression that we are prepared to make a change in preschool for Fall 2023; yet we keep bringing it up as a possibility when we consider the budget. Superintendent Roy stated that it was a fairly "doable" creative solution and she would come back with a more fleshed out consideration around preschool for the board's consideration.

- 4.3. **Education Quality Priorities:** Kari Bradley suggested tabling the discussion. He had shared a written document with the board; he invited board members to share any reactions or additional thoughts about this document.
- 4.4. **Mail in ballots for the WCUUSD Annual Meeting: Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved that in accordance with the votes of the five town Select boards, ballots for the WCUUSD Annual Meeting be mailed to all active-not challenged voters in the School District. Seconded by Daniel Keeney, this motion carried unanimously.**
- 4.5. **Staff Appreciation**

5. Reports to the Board

- 5.1. **Student Report:** Maya shared that the Student Government Association is interested in working with the board. Both Maya and Willow shared some of the student happenings over the past month. Maya shared that we are beginning the college acceptance season.
- 5.2. **Superintendent/Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) Report:** Flor Diaz Smith thanked COLT for this thorough report. She thanked Superintendent Roy for the class size information that was included in this report. Superintendent Roy invited any feedback or comments about class size information, through email if desired. Susanne Gann shared that Virginia Breer has resigned and we are currently searching to fill the vacancy. She thanked Virginia for her work; the board thanked Virginia as well.
- 5.3. **Principal Report:** Flor Diaz Smith thanked the school principals for this written report. She invited questions or feedback from board members.
- 5.4. **Central Vermont Career Center Report:** tabled

6. Finance Committee

6.1. Discussion/Action

- 6.1.1. FY 22 Audit Report:** Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved that The Board accept the audited financial statements for the Washington Central Unified Union School District for the year ended June 30, 2022 from RHR Smith & Company with appreciation to the staff. Seconded by Ursula Stanley. Discussion: Flor Diaz Smith shared that the Finance Committee has reviewed this.
- 6.1.2. Fund Balance Projections:** This was discussed earlier in the meeting.

7. Policy Committee

- 7.1. Second Reading for Policy to be Adopted December 21, 2022: F2 Nondiscriminatory Mascots & School Branding:** Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to approve the second reading for F2. Seconded by Lindy Johnson, this motion carried unanimously.

The following policies are tabled:

- 7.2.** First Reading for Policy to be Approved January 4, 2023: C13 Homeless Students
- 7.3.** First Reading for Policy to be Adopted January 4, 2023: C5 Weapons & Firearms
- 7.4.** First Reading for Policy to be Adopted January 4, 2023: Building Use
- 7.5.** Update: A1: Board Conflict of Interest

8. Consent Agenda:

- 8.1. Approve Minutes of 11.16.22,12.1.22, 12.7.22:** Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to approve the minutes of November 16, December 1, December 7, 2022, with appreciation to Lisa. Seconded by Ursula Stanley. Discussion: Natasha Eckart Baning's name was missing from the December 7, 2022, minutes. This motion carried unanimously with the noted edit.
- 8.2. Approve Board Orders:** Lindy Johnson moved to approve the board orders dated 12-22-22, for a total amount 1,820,676.41. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously.

9. Personnel

- 9.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Leave of Absence, and Changes in FTE:** Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to accept the extended absence request from Daisy Scarzello. Seconded by Ursula Stanley, this motion carried unanimously. Diane Nichols-Fleming moved to approve 0.25 FTE unpaid leave of absence for Kate McCann, January 4 through the end of the legislative session. Seconded by Lindy Johnson. Discussion: Principal Dellinger-Pate shared that the schedule has been configured to allow for her to teach some of her classes, as well as serve on the legislature. He noted that a long term sub has been hired for her other classes. This motion carried unanimously.

9.2. Update on Vacancies: Superintendent Roy shared that vacancies persist in spite of posting these positions and that it continues to be a hardship that administrators and staff continue to grapple with.

10. Executive Session for Negotiations: At 9:46 pm Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing negotiations strategy to include Superintendent Roy. Seconded by Joshua Sevits, the motion carried unanimously. At 9:57 Jonas moved to leave Executive Session. Seconded by Diane Nichols-Fleming, the motion carried unanimously. During Executive Session the Board discussed negotiation strategy.

11. Future Agenda Items

11.1. Board Goals and Calendar

11.2. Central Vermont Career Center Budgeting

12. Board Reflection: Flor Diaz Smith reflected that the meeting was hard but we did a good job and thanked everyone including Superintendent Roy and David Delcore.

13. Public Comments

14. Adjourn: At 9:59 Jonas Eno-Van Fleet moved to adjourn. Seconded by Natasha Eckart Baning, the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Grace, Board Recording Secretary and
Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Board Clerk