

# SARASOTA MILITARY ACADEMY

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

25 MARCH 2025

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### **Board of Director Members' Attendance**

#### **Present:**

Dr. Thomas J. McElheny, Former Capt, USMC, Chair  
Ben Knisely, COL, USA (Ret), Secretary  
Pete Skokos, Treasurer  
Brent Bogart, Former LT, USN  
Heather Koester, Former SGT, USAR  
Scott Lempe, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)  
Carlos Moreira, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt, USMCR  
Jerry Neff, BG, USA (Ret)  
Ron Skipper, Former Capt, USAF  
Richard Swoope, COL, USA (Ret) (virtual)  
Michael Tollerton, Former CPT, USA

**Absent:** Erica Gregory, Lt Col, USAF (Ret), Vice Chair; Dr. Cheryl Korwin, Head of Middle School; SMA-LTC Abby Williams, Assistant Head of High School; SMA-MAJ Charlie Carver, Athletic Director; SMA-CPT Ellie De Murias, MS Faculty Representative

#### **SMA Administrative Staff in Attendance:**

SMA-COL Christina Bowman, CEO/Head of High School  
SMA-LTC Bryan Burns, Assistant Head of Middle School  
SMA-LTC Caitlin West, Assistant Head of High School (virtual)  
SMA-LTC Steve Kok, Director of Finance  
MAJ (Ret) Russ Osterfeld, SAI

**Guests in Attendance:** Brig Gen Charly Shugg; SFC Ernesto Ramirez, HS Faculty Representative (virtual); SMA-MAJ Dawn Sudbury; SMA-MAJ Marsha Reinig-Umana; SMA-LTC Bryan Burns; SMA-CPT Kathleen Obendorf; Joana Nicolaides (virtual); Rodney Olsen (virtual); BarbarAnn Roberts (virtual); Ms. Nikki Orth, PTCC President

Location: SMA Prep Middle School

The chair called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm.

Chair Thomas McElheny started the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair McElheny requested to move the Nominating and Leadership and Ethics Committees after the approval of minutes on the agenda.

**Motion to Approve the 25 February 2025 Minutes:**

Mr. Ron Skipper moved to approve the 25 February 2025 minutes; Ms. Heather Koester seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.

**Head of Middle School Report:** Dr. Cheryl Korwin provided a read-ahead report. SMA-COL Christina Bowman mentioned the upcoming promotional ceremony, the PTCC Walk-a-Thon and commended the Prep administration and team for their proactive approach in assessing the needs and implementing course recovery early.

**CEO/Head of High School:** SMA-COL Christina Bowman provided a read-ahead report. She stated the need for board approval of the awarded 15-year charter contract prior to district submission.

**Mr. Brent Bogart moved to approve the 15-year charter contract prior to district submission; Mr. Skipper seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

**Nominating Committee:** COL Ben Knisely nominated Brig Gen Charly Shugg as Director to SMA's Operating Board. Chair McElheny requested Brig Gen Shugg to exit the room for the board to vote.

**COL Knisely nominated Brig Gen Charly Shugg to SMA's Board of Directors as Director; Mr. Skipper seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

Chair McElheny requested for Brig Gen Shugg to join at the table as Director.

**Staff Representatives:** SFC Ernesto Ramirez provided a read-ahead report.

**SAI Report:** MAJ Russ Osterfeld provided a read-ahead report. He discussed upcoming JROTC events, such as the Flag Retirement Ceremony on 4 April and the Change of Command Ceremony of the new Regimental Staff during formation on 8 April. MAJ Osterfeld discussed the interruptions in JROTC activities due to the federal spending freeze, upsetting the George Jenkins Drill Meet, but assured the high schools getting together to attempt hosting the event. He discussed the challenges with the Academy Cohort Program in creating more interest with understanding of minimum GPA requirements of 3.5, and mentioned a successful visit with SMA alum, Raphael Fabyanic, currently top in his class at West Point.

**Academy Athletics Report:** N/A

**Treasurer's Report:** SMA-LTC Steve Kok provided a read-ahead report. He discussed current deficit due to changes in FTE numbers, including early graduates who graduated in December. BG Jerry Neff requested a balance sheet regularly and inquired as to how many early graduates, to which SMA-COL Bowman replied twenty to twenty-five cadets every year. Chair McElheny stated the process for finalizing a budget would be a better approach next year.

**Leadership and Ethics Committee:** Ms. Michael Tollerton discussed the mission of this committee in creating the first Leadership and Ethics Conference in Sarasota. She explained that the conference supports SMA's mission and would feature all service academies through a one-day event with panel discussions, workshops, and activities, inviting two students and one staff member from each Sarasota County high school.

Ms. Tollerton discussed the recommendations of the committee from its first meeting with preferred offsite event location and identifying vendors who can participate in this event. She stated the next meeting will address the build-out of the agenda and requests all board members and staff to offer any suggestions.

**Bylaws Committee:** Ms. Tollerton stated Vice Chair Erica Gregory is working with the consultant on the bylaws review.

**Facilities Committee:** Chair McElheny introduced the Facilities Committee to comprise as himself, Lt Col Scott Lempe, SMA-COL Bowman and SMA-LTC Kok and will meet monthly to discuss finances, FTE and foundational elements of the school. He requested to place on next meeting's agenda the affirmation of institutional values. Chair McElheny discussed the three main priorities with student achievement as number one, enhancement of the JROTC program as second, and matching salary pay with Sarasota County as third. He stated there is a new standard with the board's message to administration as to expectations.

**PTCC Report:** Ms. Nikki Orth provided a read-ahead report. She mentioned a successful walk-a-thon, exceeding their 13K goal and book fairs on both campuses this year. Ms. Koester suggested providing businesses a certificate of sponsorship so it could be displayed in their business. SMA-COL Bowman requested end of year totals in grants and fundraising be presented to the board at the June meeting.

**Chair Report:** Chair McElheny discussed future facility planning, noting that preparations must start now for decisions 3-4 years ahead. He explained the visit with South Carolina architects at the high school campus who will provide a facilities assessment proposal and master plan for maintaining and possibly renovating the high school. Chair McElheny discussed another option with Michael Saunders & Company assisting with assessing the current property's value and identifying potential new sites, introduced by former board member Mr. Jim Tollerton.

Chair McElheny mentioned key considerations to include mechanical updates needed for the existing building, comparative costs of renovation versus new construction, and the need for approximately 15 acres if a new high school is pursued. He stated the board would be presented with new proposals on all options in the coming months to guide strategic decisions.

**Old Business:** N/A

**New Business:** Ms. Tollerton stated she expected a 100% board participation with the Leadership and Ethics conference in any way they choose to assist.

**Public Comments:** N/A

**Board Comments:** N/A

**Board Comments:** N/A

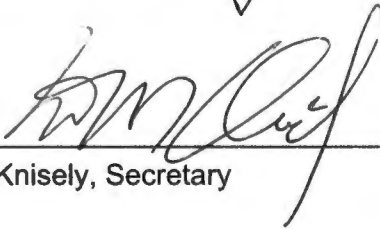
The next board meeting will be on 29 April 2025 at 2:30pm at the High School campus.

The chair adjourned the meeting at 5:35pm.

  
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Dr. Thomas McElheny, Chair

4/29/25  
Date

  
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COL Ben Knisely, Secretary

4/29/25  
Date