



CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Friday, October 3, 2025
Zoom Meeting
APPROVED MINUTES

Board Members Present:

Laurie Branch, Matt Benson, Veronica Biggins, Rick Evans, Nancy Gibbs, Paul Hagman, Terry Horner, Mamie Kanfer Stewart, Steve Messinger, Bob Obee, Rich Osborne, David Peckinpaugh, Jill Penrose, Sara Ponkow, Lisa Turbessi,

Board Members Absent:

Michelle Adelman, Karen Goodell, Izumi Hara, David Pelton, Ronn Richard, Larry Thompson, Steve Zenczak

Others Present:

Sebby Baggiano, Kyle Keogh, Ron Kilpatrick, Dana Lundberg, Tim Renjilian, Karen Schiavone, Angela Schuettler, George Snyder, Deborah Sunya Moore, Vanessa Weinert

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Dr. Branch called the meeting to order. Ms. Schiavone conducted a roll call and established that a quorum was present.

II. Status Update of the Financial Sustainability Working Group (FSWG)

Dr. Branch stated that FSWG's focus remains on three main areas for cost reductions: personnel, operations, and programming. The board was reminded that the overall target was \$5.7 million in reductions, with \$3.3 million coming from personnel, \$1.6 million from operations, and \$678,000 from programming. Dr. Branch explained that while the personnel and operations targets were nearly met, there was still work to be done in programming to close the remaining gap.

Mr. Keogh provided a detailed update on the personnel plan and restructuring. He reported that twenty separation meetings had been held, with fourteen agreements returned and six still outstanding. The reduction in force was managed carefully, with follow-up communications to staff and a focus on updating job responsibilities and compensation where necessary. The executive staff was streamlined from fourteen to seven members, and a new head of advancement position will soon be posted. The board discussed the importance of this new role and confirmed that it aligned with previous decisions regarding hiring during the interim executive period. Mr. Keogh also clarified the rationale behind certain split roles, such as those held by Amit Taneja and Mark Wenzler, to maximize talent and efficiency.

Further personnel initiatives included reducing the pension plan contribution for 2026 from ten percent to six percent, resulting in significant savings. Executives voluntarily reduced their pay, and a one percent bonus pool was set aside for after the 2026 season, contingent on results. The board acknowledged the collective sacrifices made by staff and leadership to achieve these financial goals.

Ms. Schuettler provided an overview of housing-related operational changes. By eliminating on-grounds housing and moving staff to Jamestown Community College (JCC) housing, the Institution will be able to return forty-five houses to the market and save on costs. A partnership with The Resource Center was established to provide transportation for staff between JCC and Chautauqua. These changes are expected to yield substantial savings and provide valuable data on whether housing availability is a constraint on growth.

Ms. Sunya Moore then reviewed programming changes, noting that some programs were being paused or canceled not only for cost savings but also to better allocate staff time and resources. The board was reminded that these changes were confidential until official communications could be made to stakeholders.

Ms. Sunya Moore also discussed changes to religious programming, including new formats for some services in the Hall of Philosophy, with a focus on faith journeys and interfaith dialogue. The board was informed that an Abrahamic Council continued to provide input and that a communications plan is in place to ensure key stakeholders were informed in the proper sequence.

Ms. Sunya Moore acknowledged the resignation of Kwame Alexander as artistic director of literary arts, and the board was assured that the relationship remained strong, with ongoing creative collaborations planned. Stephine Hunt will serve as interim director of literary arts. A communications plan is in place.

Attention then turned to ongoing financial challenges, particularly in the areas of the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra (CSO) and the Chautauqua Theater Company (CTC), both of which required reimagined futures to ensure sustainability. The board discussed the importance of balancing artistic innovation with audience preferences and financial realities.

Mr. Evans provided an update on the DC office lease, noting that a subtenant had been found to take over the lease, which would help reduce costs. Mr. Keogh discussed efforts to reduce lobbyist expenses and credit card fees, including exploring ACH transfers and passing credit card fees on to patrons. Mr. Keogh and Mr. Osborne will explore whether CUD is paying any of the lobbyist expenses.

The FSWG also considered the possibility of increasing the Capital Improvement Service charge as an emergency measure, though this was not the preferred course of action.

The board engaged in a robust discussion about housing strategy, including the potential for higher-density developments and the role of the annual service fee in lieu of a homeowners association fee. The importance of aligning housing development with the Institution's financial and attendance goals was emphasized.

Ms. Weinert addressed ticketing system complexities, including efforts to reduce fraud and improve efficiency. The board discussed benchmarking ticketing costs and the potential for further operational improvements.

Dr. Horner, chair of the Budget and Finance Committee, outlined the path to adopting the 2026 budget. The board's goals included reducing annual operating expenses by \$5–6 million, investing \$4.2 million annually in capital preservation, and maintaining a minimum cash balance of \$3.5 million. Dr. Horner explained the timeline for budget adoption, with the goal of approving the budget at the regular board meeting on November 8. He highlighted the benefits of early budget approval, including more time for planning, communications, and implementation of changes.

III. Presidential Search Update

The board then received an update on the presidential search. The search committee was actively engaging with five candidates and had identified twenty-four additional prospects. The board was encouraged to consider key requirements, as the process could move quickly. The goal was to have a new president in place before the next season, with the search firm engaged through the following fall.

IV. **Executive Session**

A motion duly made to move to executive session, passed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen E. Schiavone, Esq.
Corporate Secretary
Chautauqua Institution Board of Trustees