

University System of New Hampshire



BOARD OF TRUSTEES Regular Meeting March 20, 2026

Meeting Held at Plymouth State University
Merrill Conference Center
Plymouth, NH

Meeting Minutes

DRAFT

In Attendance: In attendance at the meeting location: Chair Mike Pilot, Vice Chair Kass Arding, Secretary Kevin Knarr, Matthew Ash, Maureen Beauregard, Donald Birx, Jamie Burnett, Elizabeth Chilton, Caitlyn Davis, Ethan Dupuis, Brendan Finn, Patrick Griffin, George Hansel, Tim Hoheneder, Shawn Jasper, Rick Ladd, Brian McCabe, Joël Nkounkou, Peter Paul, Jennifer Higgins Pitre, Catherine Provencher, Wayne Semprini, Gregg Tewksbury, Christiana Thornton, and David Westover. Trustees participating remotely: James Gray. Trustees absent: none. Others in attendance: Governor's representative Paul Dean.

Call to Order: At 8:30 am, Chair Pilot called the meeting to order and noted the presence of a quorum sufficient for the conduct of business.

Chair's Welcome: Chair Pilot introduced Trustee Burnett, who spoke in memory of former trustee Bob Baines, who passed away recently. Trustee Burnett spoke of Bob's service to the System and the State, his fellowship with and mentorship of many members of the Board, and shared stories from Bob's life.

Host Campus Presentation: PSU President/Interim KSC President Don Birx led a presentation on future planning at PSU and KSC. President Birx noted that changes in demographics and college-going rates have driven enrollment declines at PSU. Those changes have been matched by faculty and staff headcount reductions at PSU, particularly among administrators, enabling a decade of positive operating margins. However, further cuts would risk the fabric of the university. He then reviewed PSU's cluster model, which emerged from a more traditional, compartmentalized structure, and the vision for a new integrated liberal arts cluster. PSU has also started three-year applied bachelor's degree programs in select areas in an effort to offer an alternative to potential students. President Birx also highlighted recent facilities upgrades that will support the revised programs. PSU has identified opportunities for growth, including increased retention, monetization of underused physical plant assets, partnerships with industry, and partnerships with Keene State.

President Birx then moved to discussion of Keene State. He began by noting that Keene State's brand identity as solely a public liberal arts college may have limited its reach in the market given that it also has a variety of strong applied programs. The presentation noted that Keene has had negative operating margin over the past decade despite significant turnaround work in recent years. He noted that a

proportionally larger share of Keene's enrollment decline is attributable to loss of market share, which also creates an opportunity for growth if perceptions can be changed. Like PSU, KSC has reduced faculty and staff, with total reduction of faculty over the last decade approaching 50%.

In an effort to allow for growth, Keene is reorganizing into three schools: Arts & Sciences, Applied Sciences and Technology, and Education, Health, and Social Sciences. This will allow Keene to more clearly communicate the breadth of its offerings while maintaining a liberal arts core. President Birx sees significant opportunities for growth in the Applied Science and Technology area given recent enrollment trends. Opportunities also exist for expanded industry partnerships. Trustees asked a number of follow-up questions and expressed optimism about the opportunities for Keene following its reorganization. Trustees also noted that the Keene community is engaged in the future direction of Keene State and is working with KSC and System leadership on opportunities.

Comments by UNH Graduate Student Union Representative: Jed Silber spoke on behalf of a group of members of the UNH Graduate Student Union, which is in the midst of negotiating an initial collective bargaining agreement with UNH. Silber expressed the urgency of the need to conclude those negotiations and set out some of the union's bargaining goals including increased pay and benefits. UNH Provost Jen Riley thanked the group and noted that the two sides are meeting again next week and that UNH expects to have counterproposals ready for consideration.

Nonpublic Session: At 10:20 am, the following motion was moved by Trustee Burnett, seconded by Trustee Tewksbury, and approved by roll call with no dissenting votes:

VOTED, pursuant to RSA 91-A:2.I(a) and RSA 91-A:3.II(b) and (j), that the Board enter nonpublic session for the purposes of (1) discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining (2) considering confidential commercial information and (3) considering the hiring of a person as a public employee.

Return to Public Session: At 11:05 am, by motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously voted to return to public session.

Report of Actions Taken in Nonpublic Session: System Secretary Chad Pimentel reported that the Board took the following actions in nonpublic session:

Appointment of Interim Executive Vice President of Finance at Plymouth State University: The following motion was made by Trustee Tewksbury, seconded by Trustee Knarr, and approved with no dissenting votes:

VOTED, on recommendation of President Birx and endorsed by Chancellor Provencher that the Board appoints Nathalie Houder as Interim Executive Vice President of Finance of Plymouth State University, effective April 1, 2026, contingent upon NECHE approval, with Houder continuing to serve as Executive Vice President of Finance and Administration of Keene State College, The interim role will be effective through June 30, 2027;

AND FURTHER, the Board hereby delegates to the Chancellor and Board Chair the authority to finalize the terms and conditions for Nathalie Houder's appointment as Interim Executive Vice President of Finance of Plymouth State University and to execute any related agreement in the name of the Board.

Extension of Appointment of Interim President of Keene State College: The following motion was made by Trustee Provencher, seconded by Trustee Knarr, and approved with no dissenting votes (**Trustee Birx took no part in the discussions or vote**):

VOTED, that the Board hereby designates Donald Birx as Interim President of Keene State College through June 30, 2027, with Dr. Birx continuing to serve as President of Plymouth State University during that period;

AND FURTHER, the Board hereby delegates to the Chancellor and Board Chair the authority to finalize the terms and conditions for Donald Birx's appointment as Interim President of Keene State and to execute any related agreement in the name of the Board.

Approval of Consent Agenda: The following motion was made by Trustee Knarr, seconded by Trustee Tewksbury, and approved with no dissenting votes:

VOTED, that the Board of Trustees approves the consent agenda for the meeting of October 24, 2025 as presented in the materials distributed with the agenda for the meeting.

Educational Excellence Committee Report: Committee Chair Griffin presented the report of the committee. He noted that the committee received information on trends in enrollment including demographic decline, changing application behavior, and a decline in college-going more generally. Enrollment management offices across the System are taking steps to moderate the effects of these declines. The committee also received a report from the USSB on its work to coordinate the gathering and dissemination of information to and from students across the System.

Audit Committee Report: Committee Chair Paul presented the report of the committee. He reported that there were no material issues identified in the System's most recent audit. The Committee has accepted the audit and extended the contract of the System's external auditor for an additional year. The Committee also received an update on health and safety and received the required annual report on Title IX and related complaints received by the System's institutions. Chair Paul also noted that the committee received a progress report on the ongoing enterprise software project which is being built for the current structure and encouraged the Board to consider whether additional costs could be incurred if changes are made in the future.

Governance Committee Report: Committee Chair Ardinger presented the report of the committee. The committee received additional information related to governance options for the potential project at The Edge at UNH. After receiving information about options, the committee's consensus was that if the project goes forward in its current form, an affiliated nonprofit model is preferred. The committee also considered an amendment to the policy on board attendance and will bring the item for Board consideration at a later meeting. The committee also received a report on enterprise risk related to governance.

The committee then considered its standing annual item related to the role and structure of the USNH Chancellor position. That discussion yielded a consensus that staff should develop a plan to combine the roles of USNH Chancellor and UNH President and present the plan to the Board at its June meeting. The Board engaged in a lengthy discussion of the concept, including the need to get input from the Presidents' Council and the need to consider how any such move might affect or limit discussions on the structure of the System as a whole. Chair Pilot noted that an item will return for Committee and full Board consideration in June.

Investment and Capital Planning Committee Report and Related Board Actions: Committee Chair Knarr presented the report of the committee. The System's portfolio has weathered the recent volatility in the market well, with total assets at approximately \$700 million. The System's outside portfolio advisors have kept the System's results in the top quartile for higher education institutions.

Following the report, the committee took the following actions:

Morse Hall Renovation: The following motion was made by Trustee Hansel, seconded by Trustee Tewksbury, and approved with no dissenting votes:

VOTED, on recommendation of the Investment and Capital Planning Committee, that the Board of Trustees approve a project budget not to exceed \$11,500,000 million dollars for the Morse Hall R1 Research Infrastructure Renewal – Phase 1 project with source of funds intended to be \$11,500,000 in UNH operating reserves.

PSU Physical Education Center HVAC/Life Safety Project: The following motion was made by Trustee Hansel, seconded by Trustee Semprini, and approved with no dissenting votes:

VOTED, that the Board of Trustees approve a project budget not to exceed \$11.2 (+\$1.3) million dollars for the PSU PE Center HVAC Upgrades, Life/Safety & Envelope Improvements, with source of funds intended to be \$5M BOT, \$3.575M Federal DOE Grant, \$2.576M PSU reserves (+\$1.3M for a total of \$3.876M PSU reserves).

Financial Affairs Committee Report: Committee Chair Tewksbury presented the report of the committee. The committee began by receiving an update on the System's recent bond issuance. Approximately half of the proceeds will be used to fund renovations at Christiansen and Williamson Halls at UNH, with the other half available as new capital for the System. The committee also received an update on the ongoing project to create key performance indicators to monitor the System's finances. The committee also received a preview of the FY 27 budget, which is forecast to be challenging. Finally, the committee received an update on the proposed project at The Edge.

Chair's Closing Remarks: Chair Pilot thanked the student trustees and USSB members for attending the meeting in person despite the fact that all are on spring break. He then acknowledged the difficulty of the work facing institutional leadership and thanked leadership for the hard and good work being done to address those difficulties. Finally, he thanked the trustees for their attention to the Board's meeting and the System's needs.

Adjourn: Chair Pilot called for further business and, seeing none, adjourned the meeting at 12:16 pm.