

Public Session Minutes

The special meeting of the Morgan State University Board of Regents was called to order by Chairman Kweisi Mfume at 7:03 p.m.

Present: Hon. Kweisi Mfume, Chairman, Regent; General (Ret.) Larry Ellis, Vice Chair, Regent; Hon. Tracey Parker-Warren, Secretary, Regent; Dr. Harold Carter, Regent; Dr. Linda Gilliam, Regent; Dr. Burney Hollis, Regent; Dr. Shirley Malcom, Regent; Mr. Stanley Nwakamma, Student Regent; Mr. Wayne Resnick, Regent; Ms. Shelonda Stokes, Regent; Mr. Carl Turnipseed, Regent; Dr. Marquis Walker, Regent; Mr. Winston Wilkinson, Regent; Dr. David Wilson, University President; Mr. Thomas Faulk, Principal Counsel for Morgan State University, Office of the Attorney General

Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming the Regents and members of the public in attendance; and offered an overview of the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

The Chairman opened the floor for a motion to adopt the minutes from the November 10, 2020 Board meeting. It was MOVED by Regent Hollis and SECONDED by Regents Stokes and Turnipseed. The MOTION CARRIED unanimously.

Policy on Student Housing Residency Requirement for Freshmen and Sophomores

Chairman Mfume yielded the floor to Mr. Evans for a brief overview on the proposed policy. Mr. Evans stated that as a follow-up to the University's housing plans to require freshmen and sophomores to live on-campus, the Board of Regents' approval of the University's new Thurgood Marshall student housing project, and the University's report of the bond rating for the new student housing project, the University desires to formally adopt a policy and implement procedures that require incoming freshmen and all sophomores to reside in on-campus housing facilities effective Fall 2022 (the "Residency Requirement"). Such procedures for the Residency Requirement shall be developed, approved, and implemented by the President and set forth in the University's housing plan.

Regent Walker asked whether the proposed policy would place any additional strain on the total number of needed rooms and beds. Dr. Wilson stated that it would not, adding that our intent, over time, is to reduce our reliance on the lease at Marble Hall Gardens and at HH Midtown. It was noted that evidence-based research shows that moving in this direction increases freshman to sophomore retention rates and can also drive up graduation rates.

Regent Nwakamma commented that he hopes the policy will provide some flexibility to those students who cannot afford to pay the cost of on-campus housing as well as others who may prefer to reside at home or elsewhere. Regent Parker-Warren echoed those sentiments. Dr. Wilson stated the policy will be flexible to consider those students with extenuating circumstances.

Regent Malcom asked what percent of freshmen and sophomores currently reside in on-campus housing. Mr. Evans stated that roughly 80% of freshmen and between 40-50% of sophomores currently reside on-campus. Regent Malcom also asked whether commuter students would be afforded the opportunity to participate in on-campus living/learning activities to support maturation and personal development. Dr. Banks replied yes.

Regent Gilliam noted that the proposed policy would provide guaranteed housing for freshmen, which is different from current practice. She stated that this is vital and important, and commended the University's efforts. Dr. Banks emphasized that the policy would provide guaranteed housing for the first two years for both freshmen and sophomores.

Chairman Mfume opened the floor for a motion to approve the Policy on Student Housing Residency Requirement. It was MOVED by Regent Nwakamma and SECONDED by Regent Gilliam. The MOTION CARRIED unanimously.

Spring 2021 Campus Reopening Plan

Chairman Mfume stated that the reopening plan was presented to the Board on November 10th as an item for information by the President. At that meeting, it was agreed that the Board would convene again to formally consider the plan for adoption. In the interim, Regents were asked to review the plan in detail and forward any questions, comments, or concerns to the President. Since that time, several questions were received from Regents which, in turn, have all been answered by the university administration and shared with the full Board in advance of today's meeting. The Chairman noted that the reopening plan has been reviewed by Dr. Leana Wen, former Health Commissioner for Baltimore City, who also provided advice to us in August regarding the University's plan for Fall 2020 operations. He emphasized that, while a decision will be made today, we do not know where the coronavirus will be early next year, although we have an idea of where it is headed. Therefore, any plans put in place could very well be derailed. He then yielded the floor to the President to discuss the proposed plan.

President Wilson thanked the Board for the questions raised, which allowed the administration to review the plan and respond to the questions collectively as a team. He briefly summarized the plan that was presented on November 10th, which includes a hybrid model with limited face-to-face (F2F) instruction in lab-based courses (noting that nearly 120 faculty have asked to teach in a F2F mode) and the accommodation of approximately 800 to 1,000 students in university-sponsored housing (students will be housed in their own room to enable them to quarantine, if necessary). Dr. Wilson then yielded his time to Dr. Anita Hawkins, Associate Dean of the School of Community Health and Policy, who presented two slides on the weekly COVID test results and positivity rates of students and employees.

The Chairman yielded the floor to the Vice Chairman for comments, followed by comments or remarks from other members of the Board. Vice Chairman Ellis stated that the proposed plan is decent, adding that while there will always be risk, the President and his team have mitigated as much risk as possible. Regent Parker-Warren noted her consensus.

There was a brief discussion with regard to questions from Regents related to the areas of (1) waivers/liability – Mr. Faulk stated that Regents should refer to the legal opinions (liability issues related to COVID-19) previously provided to the Board in August and again today; (2) testing technology options – PCR and rapid antigen tests; (3) status of reopening should conditions worsen; (4) students' well-being and ways to encourage them to report inappropriate matters; and (5) the format of F2F course instruction.

Chairman Mfume opened the floor for a motion to adopt the Spring 2021 Campus Reopening Plan. It was MOVED by Regent Turnipseed and SECONDED by Regent Hollis. The MOTION CARRIED unanimously.

Closing Remarks

Chairman Mfume reminded everyone about the upcoming Founders Day Convocation. Dr. Wilson indicated that the annual convocation will be held on Thursday, November 19th at 11 a.m. in the Gilliam Concert Hall of the Murphy Fine Arts Center. The keynote speaker will be Professor Larry S. Gibson from the University of Maryland School of Law. The ceremony will be live-streamed and virtual with very limited attendance.

Chairman Mfume encouraged members of the Board to contribute to the MSU Foundation to have 100% giving on the part of the Board of Regents; and thanked those who have already done so.

The Chairman stated that the next quarterly Board meeting is scheduled for February 2, 2021. On behalf of the entire Board, he thanked Dr. Wilson and his entire Cabinet for all their hard work. He wished everyone a happy Thanksgiving and safe holiday season.

Adjournment

The Chairman opened the floor for a motion to adjourn the PUBLIC SESSION. It was MOVED by Regents Gilliam and Resnick and SECONDED by Regent Walker to adjourn the PUBLIC SESSION. The MOTION CARRIED unanimously.

The PUBLIC SESSION adjourned at 8:06 p.m.