

Maine Maritime Academy

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Date: May 2, 2025

Location: Holmes Heritage Room

Chair: Wayne Norton

Recorder: Rachael Cotoni

Attendees:

Trustees: John Webb, Liz True, Paul Mercer, Miles Theeman, Sue Loomis, Katy Longley, Wendy Morrison, Morten Arntzen, Mark Gardner, Bill Eisenhardt, Alaina Adams, Bob Somerville, Hailey Fardon. Faculty Representative: Jennifer Haddock

On Zoom: Gregory Johnson

Administration: President Johnson, VP Noel, VP Williamson, VP Waldron, VP Markow and other MMA faculty and staff.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Norton thanked President Johnson for his 1st board meeting as president and Anthony Hall and welcomed new Trustee Hailey to the board. He noted the intent to streamline board communications and highlighted the need for committee chairs to brief the Board on their activities regularly. Committee updates to 30 minutes per committee.

President's Report

President Craig Johnson opened the meeting discussing state funding which is our most pressing need and thanked Mark Garnder and Bill Eisenhardt for attending the state house for their testimonials for additional funding.

State Funding: MMA continues to advocate for increased state support, having been level-funded at \$8.6M for many years. Engagement with legislative leadership is ongoing, though challenges remain in committee negotiations.

Federal Funding: MMA is collaborating with other state maritime academies and federal agencies to position itself as a leader in national maritime education and workforce development.

Training Ship Update: The ship's christening is scheduled for August 20, with delivery expected in early September. A larger public event is being planned in Portland to mark the

ship's arrival. The shipyard has accelerated production, and MMA's 2025–26 cruises will include coordination with Texas Maritime.

Athletics Report

MMA hosted its annual athletics banquet last week, with over 300 attendees, celebrating team and individual accomplishments.

Men's lacrosse will compete in the semifinals on Saturday, with women's championship game that evening and potential men's championship on Sunday—both teams have strong chances of advancing to the NCAA tournament.

Recruitment efforts remain strong, with approximately 115 deposited student-athletes, including 52 for football, exceeding the original target of 40 for the upcoming year.

The long-term goal remains to increase the football roster to 100 players within the next two years.

Monthly collaboration meetings between the athletics and admissions teams continue to support recruitment and enrollment strategies.

The Houston golf tournament was a success, and preparations are underway for the next tournament in Florida during the first week of June.

Commandant's Office Report

Cruise Departure: 246 total (234 students, 12 staff) depart on May 5 via two charter flights from Portland.

Ports of call: Galveston, New York City ,Belfast (Ireland), Halifax, returning to Portland.

The cruise ends on July 15.

New Commandant: Captain Justin Cooper will begin as Commandant on May 5. He is a retired naval officer and local resident.

Incoming Class: Regimental student enrollment is tracking well, with numbers exceeding 150, consistent with prior years.

Acknowledgment: Thanks, extended to Commander Christian and his team for outstanding leadership and logistical coordination during his interim term.

Strategic Plan Update

- Strategic planning efforts are progressing well and wrapping up key campus-based work.
- The team has been working closely with the Vice Presidents over the past 2–3 weeks.

- The Governance Committee has been briefed, with broader engagement expected in the next 2–3 weeks.
- Off-site sessions are planned for the summer.
- The plan is on track to align with the ****next budget cycle****.

State Funding & Grant Updates

Trustees inquired about potential risks to federal grant funding. In response, a matrix outlines current grants and funding status.

Although \$5.2 million in earmarked funding was lost last year due to Department of Defense (DoD) budget cuts, the same proposals have been resubmitted through Senator Collins' office. There is cautious optimism that this funding will be reinstated in the next fiscal year, with an expected delay of approximately 9–10 months.

The Academy is actively pursuing \$8.2 million through a new Maritime Defense Industrial Alliance (MDIA) submission, along with an additional \$500,000 request for equipment via the maritime industrial base.

If the \$5.2 million is not reinstated, operations will continue as planned. The funding would have been used for equipment upgrades on the ship—not for capital projects—so older equipment would continue in use.

\$2 million is included in the request for the BIW project and is also being sought through other federal channels.

Overall, the administration is confident in the Academy's ability to secure federal grant funding, with multiple applications in progress.

It was noted that funding is due to a loss of initial federal sources; however, alternative funds are being used to fulfill financial commitments.

AD-HOC Enrollment Committee Report

- **Acknowledgment:** The Chair recognized and thanked Trustee John King for his past leadership on the Enrollment Committee.
- **Current Enrollment Status:**
 - As of May, the Academy has 288 deposits, with a target of 348 to account for the expected summer melt (approx. 20%).
 - The enrollment funnel is strong, and confidence is high in meeting fall enrollment goals.

- **Retention Concerns:**

- Curtis Hall's triple-occupancy rooms may be impacting on both recruitment and retention.
- Students have voiced concerns during open hours.
- A target of 85% retention has been set.
- The Dean of Students is actively surveying students and working on KPIs for retention.

- **Competitive Pressures:**

- Massachusetts Maritime and Texas A&M are offering significantly higher financial aid packages.
 - Example: Mass Maritime covers 63% of direct costs for high-need students; MMA covers ~30%.
 - Texas A&M offers in-state tuition to all U.S. students, which significantly lowers their cost.
- These institutions are actively targeting MMA students, including non-traditional transfers.

- **Financial Aid & Discounting:**

- MMA's total discount rate is 18.37%, with an unfunded discount rate of 11.43%.
- Financial limitations and lack of state funding constrain MMA's ability to compete on aid.

- **Strategic Goals:**

- The committee is working to align 5 key objectives with the Strategic Plan, with the long-term goal of reaching 1,000 students.
- Increasing enrollment is key to financial sustainability (every 30 students = ~\$1M in revenue).
- Greater state support and expanded philanthropy will be critical.

- **Marketing & Outreach:**

- Expanded use of alumni is occurring strategically due to logistical constraints.
- Discussion of holding regional open houses and using the training ship as a recruitment tool when docked in Portland.
- Emphasis on improving the marketing of ROI for MMA programs, especially compared to competitors.

Advancement Committee Report

- **Fundraising Progress:**

- The Annual Fund goal for FY24 is \$1.5 million, an increase of \$300K over last year.
- As of April 29, the Advancement team reached 85% of the goal, with \$220K remaining and 8 weeks left in the fiscal year.
- Based on prior years, a strong final push in May–June is expected to close the gap.

- **Campaign Strategies:**

- Active campaigns include a successful athletics appeal and Live on Sideline initiatives.
- A large number of first-time and young alumni donors are engaging through recent outreach.
- A text-to-give system has been implemented to improve engagement with younger alumni and current parents.

- **Alumni Participation:**

- Current alumni participation is at 8%, with a goal of reaching 11–13% by fiscal year-end.
- Historical highs in FY19 and FY20 were influenced by looser definitions of “participation”; more rigorous counting is now in place.
- Trustee giving stands at 80% a significant improvement but still below the 100% benchmark often expected by major foundations.

- **Marketing & Communications:**

- Operating on a limited \$180K annual marketing budget, with \$120K allocated to digital ads.
- The team compensates through strong earned media coverage and targeted storytelling.
- Continued focus on improving visibility and outreach via social media and regional engagement events.

- **Events & Engagement:**

- A successful Portland fundraiser drew over 200 attendees, highlighting potential in parent and community engagement.
- Planning is underway for FY26 and potential capital campaign strategy discussions.

- **Staffing & Resources:**

- Advancement operates with only 3.5 full-time staff, which limits growth capacity.
- A staffing review is planned in coordination with the President and Finance to assess long-term needs.
- Future plans include more strategic donor engagement, foundation relationships, and event-driven fundraising.

- **Alfond Foundation & Strategic Planning:**

- Conversations with the Alfond Foundation are ongoing. The Advancement team is working to define long-term partnership goals.
- Advancement efforts are being aligned with the broader Strategic Plan and Foundation Board planning sessions in June.

Presidential Initiative Fund

- An update was shared on the Presidential Initiative Fund, which was launched last year to provide the new President with dedicated funding for student-centered initiatives outside the classroom. The fund currently has a balance of approximately \$82,000.
- Last semester, the fund participated in the Betsy Cushman Matching Initiative, with Betsy Cushman—an enthusiastic supporter of the Academy—contributing significantly to several campus programs, including the recent ROV project.
- On the day of the meeting, Betsy Cushman donated an additional \$10,000 to the initiative.
- The committee discussed that the third night of the student shuttle service is a potential and appropriate use for this gift, and additional funds may be applied depending on end-of-year balances.

Board Participation and Shuttle Support

- Trustee [Name] emphasized the goal of reaching 100% board participation in Advancement efforts and encouraged trustees to contribute to the shuttle program or other priority funds.
- Trustees were reminded they can make donations online or coordinate directly with Kate to earmark gifts for specific initiatives.
- Discussion included exploring partnerships with local car dealerships, such as Darlings or Lee Auto, to support or donate shuttle vehicles in exchange for visibility and promotional benefits—similar to arrangements at other institutions like Bates.

Education Policy Committee Report

- Chair acknowledged and thanked faculty and staff for their continued dedication, particularly as 211 students prepare to graduate—87 of whom are new mariners.

- **USCG Exam Pass Rates:**
 - 93% pass rate for engineers
 - 87% pass rate for deck students
 - Improvement contributed to the new Coast Guard practice exams.
- **New Academic Program & Endowed Chair:**
 - A new Nuclear Engineering Technology minor has launched with positive reception.
 - Dr. Paul Wlodkowski was named the inaugural Edward Mossman Endowed Chair, funded by alumnus Guy Mossman in honor of his father.
- **Accreditation Update:**
 - Preparation for the 2026 NECHE accreditation review is underway.
 - Draft of self-study is expected by summer.
 - Three new policies have been implemented (attendance, student identity verification, and complaints/grievances) in compliance with NECHE standards.
- **Grants and Infrastructure:**
 - Vessel Optimization Grant (\$2.5M) is enabling digital transformation across the curriculum with major investments in simulation equipment (e.g., \$650K for electrical switchboards).
 - Faculty integration and lab upgrades (especially in electrical engineering) are progressing well.
- **Academic Program Review:**
 - A detailed program-level review is being conducted to evaluate student-to-faculty ratios and program efficiency.
 - Emphasis on preserving program viability by bundling small programs where appropriate.
- **Student Housing & Licensing Exam Support:**
 - Deck students are utilizing practice exams with positive results; efforts are underway to expand similar support to engineering students.
 - Concerns about triple occupancy in Curtis Hall were noted as a factor in recruitment and retention.
- **Maritime Industrial Base Proposal:**

- MMA is submitting a joint \$45M proposal (with University of Maine and Maine Community Colleges) to the Maritime Defense Industrial Alliance (MDIA) despite recent leadership changes within the organization.

Operations Committee Report

- **General Overview:**

- Trustee Mercer commended the Facilities, Finance, and Student Services teams for their ongoing efforts amid significant construction activity across campus.
- Two major capital projects—Curtis Hall Renovation and the Waterfront Pier Project—are progressing, with many other campus maintenance and improvement projects continuing simultaneously.

- **Curtis Hall Renovation:**

- Total Cost: \$33.6 million
- Timeline: Completion targeted for August 2027 in four phases
- Major Upgrades: Heat recovery ventilation system, fire safety/code upgrades, electrical/plumbing infrastructure replacements, and a new 175kW backup generator.
- Work allows for partial occupancy during the academic year; limited summer use expected in 2025, with none in 2026 due to infrastructure tie-ins.

- **Waterfront Pier Project:**

- Total Cost: \$105.2 million
- Completion: May 2027
- Progress: Over 100 of 354 pilings installed; visible construction underway. Phase 1 (outer pier and mooring systems) expected by May.
- Challenges: Minor delays in piling shipments due to rail transport constraints; no major issues to date.
- Compliance: Project is on track with “Buy American” and “Build America” requirements.

- **Facilities Master Plan:**

- Huron Consulting presented plans for a Facilities Master Plan, launching in May.
- A steering committee including Trustee Mercer will guide development.
- The plan will align with the Strategic Plan and help define long-term capital priorities.

- **IT Project Review (Upcoming Agenda Item):**

- Committee plans to review key Information Technology projects and initiatives at a future meeting.
- **International Engagement:**
 - President's proxy attended the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) Board meeting in India.
 - MMA was the only U.S. State Maritime Academy present; a joint grant proposal submitted by an MMA faculty member was selected among two for IAMU funding consideration.
- **Staff Acknowledgment:**
 - The committee recognized Ed Scott (Colliers) for his expertise and leadership in managing capital projects.
 - Trustee Mercer and committee members emphasized realistic expectations, acknowledging that despite smooth progress, unexpected construction challenges are inevitable.

Finance Committee

- **Finance Committee Meeting:**
The committee met on April 24. The meeting was notably shorter than previous ones, yet productive.
- **Investment Performance:**
 - MMA's endowment portfolio exceeded \$71 million as of the end of April.
 - Despite a market decline of 8.6% (Q1 2025), MMA's portfolio only declined by 2%, showing a strong defensive performance.
- **FY25 Financial Update:**
 - The current projected operating deficit for FY25 is approximately \$2.2M–\$2.4M, driven primarily by an unbudgeted fuel adjustment related to the TS State of Maine.
 - Without that adjustment, the Academy would have outperformed budget expectations.
- **FY26 Budget Planning:**
 - The FY26 budget will not be presented at this meeting due to ongoing uncertainties.
 - A special Finance Committee meeting and Board meeting will be held in late May or early June to approve the FY26 budget.

- Key budget issues include a structural deficit, uncertainty around state funding, and unresolved legislative actions.
- **State Appropriation & Legislative Outlook:**
 - MMA has requested:
 - A 4% appropriation increase
 - \$5M for Curtis Hall
 - Coverage for the new Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) costs (approx. \$260K annually)
 - Legislative negotiations remain stalled, with the supplemental budget pending resolution.
- **Budget Planning & Reserves:**
 - The FY26 budget will be based on known revenues, with risks and unknown clearly identified.
 - MMA maintains approximately \$19M in reserves, which can support near-term deficits but are not sustainable for repeated use.
- **Audit & Compliance:**
 - MMA received a clean, unmodified audit opinion for FY24, including the Uniform Guidance Audit.
 - Preparations for the FY25 audit are underway.
- **Human Resources & Payroll:**
 - All three bargaining unit contracts have been finalized and approved.
 - A resolution to approve the faculty contract will be presented at the full Board meeting.
 - Payroll and HR have handled the retroactive adjustments efficiently.
 - Years of service recognition events have resumed, positively impacting morale.
- **IT Systems & Future Planning:**
 - MMA's student information system, financial system, and financial aid system will reach end-of-life within 3–5 years.
 - Planning for replacements has begun, with IT actively engaged.
 - Additional tech upgrades, including AV and Brunswick connectivity, are ongoing.
- **Cost Containment:**
 - Original FY25 budget reductions remain in place.

- No new spending freezes have been issued, but end-of-year spending behavior is being monitored.
- **Notable Program Performance:**
 - The Automation Program continues to perform exceptionally well, generating both enrollment and revenue growth.
- **Purchasing Activity:**
 - The purchasing office processes approximately \$23M annually in procurement, supporting campus-wide operations.

Student Affairs

Ad Hoc Committee Status

- The committee discussed the future of the Ad Hoc Enrollment Committee.
- It was noted that the committee's objectives and strategies are expected to be reported to the Board in August.
- Pending Board acceptance of those objectives, the Ad Hoc Committee may transition its work under the Student Affairs Committee.
- The Student Affairs Committee will reassume oversight of related enrollment and student success strategies, unless the Board determines that a standalone Ad Hoc Committee is still necessary.

Shuttle Program

- The student shuttle program continues to receive high praise from students, faculty, and parents.
- Currently runs Thursday through Saturday evenings, recently expanded due to high demand.
- Cost: approximately \$26,000–\$28,000 annually.
- Supported operationally by student government and, during special events, by faculty/staff volunteers.
- Considered vital for student safety and well-being, especially for first-year students without personal transportation.
- Discussion included exploring sustainable funding options outside the Student Affairs budget (e.g., voluntary contributions or targeted fundraising).

Counseling & Mental Health Services

- Notable increase in counseling needs, with a 16% year-over-year rise.
- 210 students served in 2024–25; 80% receive regular counseling.

- Counseling team for 2025–26 will include one full-time, one part-time, and two interns.
- Telehealth options were explored but found less effective due to student preference for in-person sessions and continuity of care.
- Additional funding for a counselor was requested by the state but not approved.

Enrollment Strategy & Outreach

- Recruitment expanding in Washington and Florida through Sea Scouts, maritime high schools, and athletic channels.
- Alumni engagement in Washington has been helpful in increasing enrollment from that region.
- The renewed Bullard scholarship supports increased enrollment from Alaska.
- Trustee Greg Johnson emphasized the importance of marketing to Maine high school students, citing MMA's superior ROI compared to other in-state institutions.

Student Affairs Programming

- Dean Blossom shared her vision for expanding student programming and improving orientation.
- Emphasized the importance of institutional support for key programs like the shuttle and counseling services.
- Noted the strength of MMA's mid-level leadership team and their impact on student success.

Next Steps & Considerations

- Await Board action on strategic objectives in August to determine the future of the Ad Hoc Committee.
- Develop a sustainable funding plan for the student shuttle.
- Continue tracking counseling demand and advocate for expanded resources.
- Maintain focus on targeted enrollment strategies and student support infrastructure.

Governance Committee Report

Strategic Planning Update

- The committee received an update on the Academy's ongoing strategic planning efforts.
- Trustee Johnson commended the inclusive approach being taken, with significant input gathered from faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders.

- The planning process is focused on articulating a renewed mission and vision, and defining five key strategic goals, along with success metrics to monitor implementation.
- A complete draft of the strategic plan is expected to be distributed to the Board in early August.
- A Board Retreat is scheduled for the afternoon of August 6, 2025, to provide trustees with the opportunity to thoroughly review and discuss the plan in advance of formal consideration at the August board meeting.

Bylaws Review and Update

- The committee continues to make progress on the third amendment of the MMA Bylaws, with the goal of finalizing changes prior to the August 2025 annual meeting.
- Trustee King and his intern were recognized for their extensive assistance in organizing and refining proposed amendments.
- The review process includes ensuring compliance with updated legal requirements and aligning with current governance the best practices.
- A recommendation is forthcoming regarding the structure and future role of the Board of Visitors, which will be addressed as part of the bylaw revisions.

Board Membership and Nominations

- The committee discussed upcoming Board turnover and nomination planning.
- Names proposed for submission to the Governor's Office for appointment consideration include:
 - Paul Gallagher
 - John McDonald
 - Jill Morgan
 - Brett Witham
- One board seat is currently vacant, and another trustee is graciously continuing service beyond term limits until a successor is appointed.
- Significant turnover is anticipated in 2026, with five trustees reaching term limits or completing their first term. The committee emphasized the importance of timely nomination submissions.
- Letters of recommendation for nominees will be jointly signed by the Board Chair, the President, and the Governance Committee Chair to support their candidacy.

Officer Elections

- Per bylaws, officer elections for the Board Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer will be held at the August 2025 annual meeting.

- The Governance Committee will present a recommended slate of officers to the full Board.
- The committee also discussed a governance best practice observed in the university system wherein the institution's CFO or equivalent serves as Board Treasurer. This practice enhances fiduciary oversight and limits liability due to operational familiarity.
- The committee agreed to review this possibility and may present a recommendation for consideration.

Additional Notes

- Trustee Johnson reminded members that these updates reflect progress aligned with the committee's charter and the institution's strategic governance objectives.
- The committee will continue to monitor the strategic planning timeline, nominations process, and governance structure leading up to the August board meeting.

Executive Session

Motion to Enter Executive Session

Motion: Chair Norton moved that the Board of Trustees enter Executive Session pursuant to applicable state statutes for the purpose of discussing personnel matters and collective bargaining updates.

Second: The motion was seconded by Trustee Longley

The motion passed unanimously, with no opposition.

The Board entered Executive Session at 11:48am.

Resolutions:

Resolution #1

To Accept the Meeting Minutes of February 13th, 2025, Board Meeting [Governance]

On a motion by Trustee Norton and seconded by Trustee Somerville, the Board unanimously voted to accept the minutes of the meeting held on February 13, 2025.

Resolution #2

To Accept the Meeting Minutes of March 19, 2025, Board Meeting [Governance]

On a motion by Trustee Norton and seconded by Trustee Webb, the Board unanimously voted to accept the minutes of the meeting held on March 19, 2025.

Resolution #3

To Accept Gifts, Grants, and Donated Property [Advancement]

On a motion by Trustee Norton and seconded by Trustee Mercer, the Board unanimously voted to approve the acceptance of gifts, grants, and donated property.

Resolution #4

To Accept the Conferral of Degrees (Educational Policy)

On a motion by Trustee Norton and seconded by Trustee Arntzen, the Board unanimously voted to accept hereby accepts the recommendation of the faculty and the President to confer degrees upon the students who have successfully completed all academic and program requirements, as certified by the faculty and listed in the official graduation roster.

Resolution #5

To Accept the Edward Mossman Endowed Chair (Advancement)

On a motion by Trustee Norton and seconded by Trustee True, the Board unanimously voted to accept hereby accepts the recommendation of Professor Paul A. Wlodkowski.

Adjournment

On a motion by Chair Norton and seconded by Trustee Theeman, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 1:58 pm.

