

Monday, November 9, 2009

Board of Trustees tackles challenging, encouraging issues

The Oakland University Board of Trustees addressed a series of both challenging and encouraging issues during a formal session on Monday.

Though a discussion had not been planned as part of the agenda, Board Chair Jackie Long challenged rumors on campus suggesting conflicts between board members and President Gary Russi and his administrative team.

"I for one am convinced that this university is headed in the right direction under the leadership of Dr. Russi and his administration," Long said, adding that considerable growth on campus and in the quality of academic programs has been the result of a prudent and ambitious vision. "There should be no doubt that I support this vision under the leadership of Dr. Russi."

Each of Long's colleagues shared similar thoughts. Some elaborated on the various aspects of university management they appreciate, including thorough planning, transparency, open communication and collaboration.

Trustee Dennis Pawley said he understands how some who attend board meetings might get another impression, given that fervent discussions often reveal differences in opinion. He noted, however, that such discussions are critical to successful governance.

"What you end up with is a much richer, better-quality decision," Pawley said. He added, "No one should have any doubt on this campus about the unequivocal support we have for the president and his administration."

Trustee Henry Baskin argued emphatically that both the board and the administration have a long track record of working tirelessly toward the betterment of the university and the opportunities it creates for students.

"Go outside and take a look around," he explained. "The sun's not shining today, but the university is."

Growth continues

Board members on Monday approved a motion to allow administrators to enter into contract discussions with the Lansing-based construction managers The Christman Company for construction oversight of OU's \$62 million Human Health Building.

The facility, which will house the School of Nursing and the School of Health Sciences, will encompass 160,000 square feet of space over five floors and incorporate state-of-the-art educational design and technology. It is slated for completion in 2012.

During discussion, Baskin asked that a potential contract include language specifying that the majority of subcontracted construction companies be from the tri-county area. "We have to help out this area," he explained, referring to workers who have been hit hard by the economic recession.

Trustee Richard Flynn offered similar thoughts relating to the hiring of subcontractors using union-represented workers, and Trustee Monica Emerson wanted to see that minorities and women also are represented. "We do want to have that balance," she explained.

University administrators explained that state law will require that 85 percent of hired companies be from Michigan, and that university administrators will have additions oversight of subcontractors hired.

Pawley stressed that while he, too, would like to see local workers hired and balance in the workforce, the university must also ensure that selection of particular subcontractors does not raise project costs.

With Baskin abstaining, remaining board members voted unanimously in support of allowing administrators to enter into contract discussions.

Growing pains

Student Ashley Gordon spoke to board members about difficulty she and fellow students have in finding a place to park while on campus. She asked administrators to consider building a parking structure on the university's main parking lot in order to answer both current demand and future growth implications.

Board members Baskin and Pawley said they know university administrators are aware of growing demand for parking, and added that they expect to receive proposals outlining potential solutions soon.

Student liaisons to the board said they look forward to seeing possible solutions at an upcoming meeting, particularly because this is among the most frequent concerns they hear from fellow students.

"Hopefully after that meeting, we will have more information to bring back to students," said student liaison Corey Schmidt.

Agreements in place

In three separate motions, the board approved ratified, three-year labor agreements with the OU chapter of the American Association of University Professors, Oakland University Campus Maintenance and Trades, and the Oakland University Professional Support Association.

AAUP members will receive no pay increase this fiscal year, but will receive 1 percent next year and 3 percent the year after. Both OUCMT and OUPSA personnel will receive 3 percent increases in the first year of the contracts and no increase in either of the next two years. Bargaining units ratified the agreements with majorities of 79 percent or more.

Trustee Ann Nicholson acknowledge that contract negotiations were difficult, at least partly due to today's economic challenges, and thanked bargaining teams on both sides for their efforts to reach workable agreements.

Pop re-up

The board on Monday approved a motion that will allow administrators to negotiate a 10-year pouring rights agreement with Pepsi Bottling Group.

Discussions on the issue began last spring among a committee of administrators and students, and a poll of students regarding campus vending preferences followed. After a request for proposals was issued by the administration, Pepsi offered the best deal relative to pricing, product donations, sponsorship and other amenities.

Among other amenities would be replacement of 50 of 76 vending machines on campus. New models would allow cashless transactions, including the opportunity for students, faculty and staff to use Spirit Cards to make purchases.

SUMMARY

Discussion and action on Monday focused on university leadership, the new Human Health Building, labor contracts, parking and new pop machines.

Created by David Groves (groves@oakland.edu) on Monday, November 9, 2009

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