

MINUTES OF MEETING
WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM (WTCS) BOARD

December 17, 2020

Teleconference

Members Present: Eve Hall, Douglas Holton, Sr., Becky Lezvow, Terry McGowan, Rodney Pasch, Cooper Richason, John Schwantes, Carolyn Stanford Taylor, Kelly Tourdot, S. Mark Tyler, Stephen Willett, Mary Williams.

Members Absent: Danielle Williams.

System Office Staff Present: Dan Arneson, Judy Barbian, Terese Craig, Monique Currie, Julie Drake, Morna Foy, Mandy Johnson, Colleen McCabe, Alejandro Nunez, Anna Richter, Dan Scanlon, Lenard Simpson, Conor Smyth, Brandon Trujillo, Angie White, Jim Zylstra.

District/Others Present: Bruce Barker, Chippewa Valley Technical College; Vernon Jung, Angie Lawrence, Layla Merrifield, District Boards Association; Susan May, Fox Valley Technical College; Paul Carlsen, Tanya Wasmer, Lakeshore Technical College; Shelly Mondeik, Mid-State Technical College; Kate Ferrel, Scott Foster (Nicolet Trustee), Diane Lazear (Nicolet Trustee), Richard Nelson, Anne Wiedmaier, Nicolet Area Technical College; David Mayer (NWTC Trustee), Jeff Rafn, Kathryn Rogalski, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College; Sharon Wendt, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction; Ann Ilagan, Wisconsin Student Government.

Board President Lezvow called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. Julie Drake read the open meeting statement and roll call indicated that a quorum was present.

Board President Lezvow thanked board members for attending the special meeting of the board.

The Township of Townsend and Township of Lakewood petitioned the board to be detached from the Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) district and attached to the Nicolet Area Technical College district (Nicolet).

Pursuant to Wisconsin administrative rule, board members considered the following when making their decision:

- The estimated fiscal effect of the petition reorganization upon the affected district including the effect of the apportionment of assets and liabilities.
- The educational needs of students enrolled in the affected districts and the impact of the petitioned reorganization upon those needs.
- The information obtained from the public hearing and any studies and investigations, the comments from the affected districts and citizens of the affected districts, and any other information the board receives which it determines to be relevant to its decision.

Executive Vice President, Jim Zylstra explained that there were six townships that petitioned to be detached from NWTC. Of the six, only two, the Township of Townsend and Township of Lakewood, met the statutory requirements of being contiguous to the Nicolet district.

The process included a 45-day public comment period with notifications published in newspapers; letters sent to district Presidents affected by the petitions; and although not required, the WTCS office also provided notification letters to the Township of Townsend and Township of Lakewood.

System President Foy informed the Board that if it approves the reorganization petitions, WTCS staff estimate changes to the distribution of general state aid would affect all technical college districts.

District reorganizations also require a process for the adjustment of assets and liabilities. The affected technical college district boards or committees are required to assign the receiving district the appropriate proportion of assets and liabilities. If the college boards or committees are unable to reach an agreement, the circuit court of either county may make the adjustment of assets and liabilities.

Board action to approve the reorganization petition may also influence the likelihood of additional requests for reorganization, as local governing bodies may seek to move to districts with relatively lower mill rates.

The public comment period for the Township of Townsend began October 2, 2020 and closed on November 17, 2020. The public comment period for the Township of Lakewood began on October 16, 2020 and closed on December 1, 2020. No public comments were received. However, the NWTC and Nicolet districts commented on the estimated fiscal effect of the proposed reorganization upon the districts, as well as the impact of the proposed reorganization on the education needs of students enrolled in the districts in accordance with Section TCS 1.05(4), Wisconsin Administrative Code.

At the end of the public comment period, the WTCS Board is required to hold a public hearing, which was held via Microsoft Teams on December 7, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. for the Township of Townsend and at 1:00 p.m. for the Township of Lakewood. Notifications of the public hearing were published in newspapers; letters sent to district Presidents and Board Chairs affected by the petitions; and although not required, the WTCS office also provided notification letters to the Township of Townsend and Township of Lakewood.

There was no testimony received during the public hearings.

ITEM A: Reorganization Petition from the Town of Townsend

Policy Advisor Brandon Trujillo shared the eight issues raised by the petitioner, along with the responses from NWTC and Nicolet.

Board Member Hall joined the meeting at 9:20 a.m.

Board Member Tyler strongly supports denial of the request. Tyler stated that to be good stewards of taxpayer funds, colleges must adjust program offerings in response to low enrollments. In addition, Tyler said, the complexity and costs of making boundary changes typically far outweigh any benefit and approval of such changes would encourage a proliferation of requests.

Board Member Holton requested clarification on “cut scores” and asked NWTC President Rafn why the township disengaged from planning discussions with NWTC.

President Rafn stated that he was made aware of the issues only in writing. Rafn then met with Township officials and proposed that along with Dr. Kathryn Rogalski, NWTC’s Vice President of Learning, he would meet with Township officials to plan a year of programming. NWTC also offered to add refresher courses online to prevent travel.

Board Member Holton expressed disappointment in the absence of the petitioners from the Board meeting.

Board Member Willett stated his belief that dissatisfaction with NWTC’s mill rate, relative to Nicolet’s, is the central issue. Willett asked where Presidents Rafn and Nelson stood on the petition.

President Rafn stated his opposition, While President Nelson is neutral.

Board Member Pasch stated his belief that there must be an issue that has not been resolved to the Township’s satisfaction, and that rural communities in Wisconsin often face difficult fiscal and service challenges. He stated his support for the Township’s petition.

Board Member Hall agreed that thoughtful analysis and discussion took place and is opposed to the petition. Hall recommended continued NWTC follow-up to address the Township’s concerns. Board Member Richason, while recognizing the challenges faced by rural communities, and Board member Williams concurred.

Board Member Stanford Taylor, acknowledging System President Foy’s comments, stated that she has experienced similar issues in her work with the Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) structure. Stanford Taylor is opposed to the petition, concurring that NWTC follow-up is recommended to address issues.

Board President Levzow also acknowledged and sympathized with the resource challenges fact by small, rural communities, including EMT training challenges. However, she has been impressed with outreach and training provided by technical colleges in rural areas, despite the cost. She would like to see more discussion with Townships and was encouraged that both districts are committed to addressing the concerns.

It was moved by Board Member Tyler, seconded by Board Member Stanford Taylor, to deny the petition presented by the Township of Townsend to be detached from the Northeast Wisconsin Technical College district and attached to the Nicolet Area Technical College district. Board Member Pasch opposed. Motion carried.

ITEM B: Reorganization Petition from the Township of Lakewood

Policy Advisor Brandon Trujillo pointed out the differences for the Township of Lakewood petition.

Board Member Tourdot left the meeting at 9:56 a.m.

Board Member Willett asked if Oconto County was in favor of NWTC’s April 2015 \$66.5 million referendum to cover facilities projects at its campuses. President Rafn confirmed that Oconto County

was in favor but could not confirm referendum results specific to the Township of Lakewood. Willett again state his belief that mill rate, not service levels, is the underlying issue.

System President Foy noted that previous requests for district reorganizations had significant public comment and letters of input/support. The petitions before the Board did not.

Board Member Carolyn Stanford Taylor left the meeting at 10:01 a.m.

Board Member Tyler concurred with System President Foy's observation. He researched but did not find referendum results by Township on Oconto County's website. Regardless, he is opposed to the petition for the Township of Lakewood.

Board Member Pasch stated that he would vote in support the petition from the Township of Lakewood.

NWTC President Rafn expressed his appreciation for the Board's support. He recognizes challenges in serving rural areas and takes it very seriously, which is why NWTC has five regional centers despite the lack of a business case for that type of presence in rural areas.

System President Foy stated that the Governor's Blue-Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity report acknowledged many of the challenges faced by technical colleges, including supporting protective services training in rural areas and the need to increase broadband access.

Board Member Holton again expressed disappointment with the absence of the petitioners and the resulting inability of Board members to ask questions.

Board President Levzow supports denying the petition for the Township of Lakewood.

It was moved by Board Member Schwantes, seconded by Board Member Mary Williams, to deny the petition presented by the Township of Lakewood to be detached from the Northeast Wisconsin Technical College district and attached to the Nicolet Area Technical College district. Board Member Pasch opposed. Motion carried.

ITEM C: Announcements and Adjourn

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board will convene in a virtual format on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 8:00 am.

System President Foy thanked everyone for participating and shared that communication will go to the Township of Townsend and Township of Lakewood on behalf of the Board.

It was moved by Board Member Schwantes, seconded by Board Member Tyler, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:16 am

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Drake
Recording Secretary