

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM
Board of Trustees Meeting

Held Via Zoom
January 26, 2026

Present: Trustees: Trish Riley, Chair; Lisa Eames, Vice Chair; Barbara Alexander, Patrick Flood, Emily Cain, Pender Makin, Donna Loring, Heather Johnson, Roger Katz, David MacMahon, Kelly Martin, Elise Baldacci, William Kemler, Riley Worth, John Moore, Michael Michaud. Chancellor: Dannel Malloy. University Presidents: Leigh Saufley, Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Ray Rice, Jenifer Cushman, Joseph McDonnell, Deborah Hedeon and Jacqueline Edmondson. Faculty Representatives: Colleen Marzilli, Tim Surrette, Clyde Mitchell, William Otto, Libin Thaikattil Louis, and Joe Staples. Student Representatives: Aspen Mitchell, Isabella Bouchard. System Staff: Ryan Low, Jeff St. John, Tracy Elliott, Sam Warren, Gretchen Catlin, Amon Purinton, Carolyn Dorsey, Amie Parker, Miriam White, Gabe Paquette, Jen O’Leary and Elizabeth Stickler

Monday, January 26, 2026

Trustee Riley, Chair, welcomed everyone and called the Executive Session to order.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion by Trustee Michaud which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees present, the Board of Trustees meeting went into Executive Session under the following provisions:

- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-A to discuss the evaluation of personnel and the consideration and discussion of appointments, evaluations, employment and duties. •
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-C to discuss the condition, acquisition or disposition of real property or economic development if premature disclosure of the information would prejudice the competitive or bargaining position of the UMS.
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-D to discuss planning for negotiations and communications with AFUM, UMPSA, ACSUM, Police, PATFA, and Service and Maintenance Units.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees present, the Board of Trustees concluded the Executive Session.

PUBLIC MEETING

Trustee Riley, Chair, called the public meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

Citizen Comment

Public Comment is a time regularly set aside for comments from the public. The following individuals spoke during the Public Comment period:

Crossland Hall/Franco-American Center:

- Tony Brinkley – Reading statement from former Governor Paul LePage
- Severin Beliveau
- Lincoln Tiner – Student, University of Maine
- Alan Grover – University of Maine Student

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- Nick Pelletier – Donor, University of Maine
- Cheryl Pelletier – Bangor
- Danny Deveau – Aroostook County Commissioner
- Debbie Roberge – Franco-American Center Volunteer
- Riley St. Pierre – UMaine Student Government
- Darrin Martone – UM Graduate Student
- Tom Pinette – Community Member
- Mo Drammeh
- Nick Pelletier

Orono Comprehensive Plan:

- Dan Demeritt – Chair, Orono Town Council

Chair Riley acknowledged that the Board had received extensive written materials, petitions, and letters regarding the Crossland Hall issue, all of which had been shared with trustees.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees present, the Board of Trustees meeting went into Executive Session under the following provisions:

- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-A to discuss the evaluation of personnel and the consideration and discussion of appointments, evaluations, employment and duties. •
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-C to discuss the condition, acquisition or disposition of real property or economic development if premature disclosure of the information would prejudice the competitive or bargaining position of the UMS.
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-D to discuss planning for negotiations and communications with AFUM, UMPSA, ACSUM, Police, PATFA, and Service and Maintenance Units.
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-E to consult with its attorney concerning legal rights and duties of the university.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees present, the Board of Trustees concluded the Executive Session.

PUBLIC MEETING

Trustee Riley, Chair, called the public meeting back to order and welcomed everyone.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Riley thanked President Ferrini-Mundy and the University of Maine staff for their work in planning the Board meeting, even though weather necessitated the virtual format.

Chair Riley made remarks about the board moving more items to the consent agenda specifically to free up time during board meetings for engagement and discussion on key emerging issues in higher education. She framed it around the challenging landscape facing higher education and the need for the board to spend more time on substantive discussions. She noted that committees would be doing more of the due diligence work, and that items would move to the consent agenda based on committee recommendation — while retaining the ability for any trustee to pull an item off for full board debate.

Confirmation of Student Representative to the Board of Trustees

To create an environment for interaction between Faculty and Student Representatives, the Trustees and System administration, the Trustees have provided opportunities for participation in the meetings of the committees of the Board.

One faculty member and one undergraduate student from each of the seven universities and one graduate student from the University of Southern Maine, one graduate student from the University of Maine, and one graduate student from the Maine Law School will be appointed by the Board as non-voting representatives to the Board of Trustees and invited to participate as non-voting members on the standing committees.

Normally, the representative is expected to complete a two-year term; therefore, it is expected that the minimum term of service by Faculty and Student Representatives to the Board be two years. The nominations will be forwarded through the Presidents or Dean of the Law School to the Chancellor for submission to the Board for Trustee approval.

President Rice introduced Aspen Mitchell, the new student representative from the University of Maine at Presque Isle. President Rice noted that Aspen is a proud graduate of Mount Abram High School and has done good work in the Carrabassett Valley area with expertise in skiing. He expressed pleasure in having Aspen join the Board

The following nomination is recommended by the campus:

Student Representative

Aspen Mitchell, UMPI - Appointed for a 2-year term – January 2026-January 2028

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees approves the appointment of the Student Representative to the Board of Trustees as presented.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the appointment.

PRESIDENT’S ROUND-ROBIN

Chair Riley asked the Presidents to provide brief updates on what's new and exciting on their campuses.

President Cushman (University of Maine at Augusta): UMA has been designated as a Military Times Best for Vets institution for the 15th consecutive year, marking every year since the rankings began. This

recognition comes from the largest and most competitive field in the program's history, reinforcing UMA's long-standing commitment to serving military-connected learners through access, affordability, and student support. UMA received a Davis Family Foundation grant to support prison education partnership re-entry initiatives, helping students stay connected to education as they transition from incarceration back into communities. The grant addresses practical re-entry challenges including short-term housing needs, access to technology, and financial disruptions. UMA secured a \$400,000 grant from the Davis Educational Foundation to support a two-year initiative integrating artificial intelligence and virtual reality into undergraduate teaching and learning. UMA implemented EAB Navigate Sites, an AI-based student persistent text messaging tool that provides early insight into the student experience and emerging barriers to success. Early results show approximately 40% student engagement with the tool.

President Edmondson (University of Southern Maine): The President reported on the Cyber Security Operations Center that opened in December on the Gorham campus, designed to help students in the cyber security major understand security threats around the world. The space was developed in collaboration with the University of Maine at Augusta. USM held a groundbreaking for the arts building on January 10th, with Chair Riley and Chancellor Malloy attending. The community in Gorham is excited about the arts center. The Forum on American Democracy next session is scheduled for February 4th at 5:00 p.m. in Hannaford Hall, focusing on faculty discussion of pluralism in Southern Maine. The final session on March 25th will feature students presenting their ideas. USM's women's basketball team is number one in the Little East Conference, and the Portland Press Herald featured a positive article about the team.

President McDonnell (University of Maine at Farmington): UMF conducted brainstorming sessions with faculty, staff, and students about adapting to the changing landscape in higher education. This semester, four committees are working through ideas generated last semester: career development and workforce development; general education reform; fostering a culture of high-quality teaching; and the residential experience. The general education committee is examining how to create different programs for different types of students, recognizing that one size does not fit all. Adult completers may need different programs, and students want more coherence and choice in shaping their interests. The residential experience committee is examining how to integrate learning outside the 15 hours per week students spend in the classroom with the 150 hours they spend outside the classroom.

President Ferrini-Mundy (University of Maine/University of Maine at Machias): The University of Maine and UMaine continue to be pleased and honored that organizations and funders have confidence in the universities. The Zilman Art Museum and the University of Maine Honors College benefited from extraordinarily generous gifts from the estate of Don and Linda Zilman: \$2.16 million for the Honors College and \$1.44 million for the Zilman Art Museum. A National Science Foundation grant resulted from team collaboration by earlier career faculty, the Vice President for Research's office, the core instrument program, and other entities. The grant provides a new mass spectrometer (matrix assisted laser desorption ionization time of flight instrument) through the Department of Chemistry. MCEC faculty member Tom Schwarz developed a new way to turn wood-derived sugars from forest biomass into a key ingredient for many prescription drugs, representing a major breakthrough for affordability and sustainability in bio-derived materials. The libraries are preparing to transition from the Digital Commons institutional repository to a new suite of purpose-built tools designed to improve discovery, usability, and long-term use. Chair Riley will receive the 2026 Alumni Career Award from the University of Maine Alumni Association. UMaine Machias opened a new on-campus food pantry in the Student Success Center.

President Hedeem (University of Maine at Fort Kent): The winter THOR (Tourism, Hospitality, and Outdoor Recreation) course had 20 students this year with a waiting list, a nice increase from 12 students a couple years ago. Five institutions had students represented in the course. The course included winter outdoor activities within walking distance: cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, downhill skiing and snowboarding, ice fishing, biathlon shooting, and dog sledding. It also included instruction from small business owners in the outdoor recreation segment. Spring enrollment is up: headcount up 10.2% and credit hour generation up 16.1%. The Can-Am dog sled races are coming up on February 28th, and UMFK will host an open house from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Students return in January with their snowmobiles, and some ride them to the dining hall for lunch. The heritage trails behind campus extend for hundreds of miles. Basketball games are scheduled for tomorrow night: UMPI versus UMFK.

President Rice (University of Maine at Presque Isle): UMPI is seeing wonderful enrollment growth at 40% over last spring at this time, including over 170 students starting in the Master of Science in Business program. Multiple new programs are coming on board this semester, including partnerships with UMF (two new programs and a certificate) and UMFK (RN to BSN program starting this spring). The YourPace program maintains almost a perfect 50/50 split between men and women enrolled across most demographic categories. Dental lab construction is being finished ahead of schedule, meaning the dental assistant program will begin in fall. Professor Sean Graham and the psychology club brought the film "Inhumane" to its first showing in Aroostook County, documenting the homeless encampment in Bangor and addressing issues of the unhoused across Maine.

President Saufley (Maine Law): Maine Law's applications are up over 100% compared to last year, following a 60% increase the previous year. Maine Law seated its largest 1L class in 20 years (105 students) in 2024. The school is approaching its enrollment goal of 300-310 students from the previous level of 260. Success is attributed to the improved facility, geographic location in the center of courts and law firms, connection to the blue economy, and competitive value proposition as the lowest tuition in New England. Maine Law is building excitement for the practice of law through the Maine Pipeline programs, including events at the Bangor Judicial Center and the Law School in Portland that drew 87 students from 11 local schools, with an upcoming event in Presque Isle. Donations are strong in multiple categories supporting both the annual fund and faculty support. Maine Law will gather with alumni on February 28th in Fort Kent, greeting President Hedeem and enjoying the Can-Am dog sledding competition.

Standard Operating Procedure – Items for the Consent Agenda

Trustee Alexander presented proposed changes to the Standard Operating Procedure on Consent Agenda items. The Policy Review Subcommittee reviewed the document and recommended one change: elimination of "new and substantively amended academic programs" from the list of items that should not be included in consent agendas. All other items on the list remain as items that should not be on the consent agenda. This change gives the Academic and Student Affairs Committee discretion to determine whether specific programs should be presented on the regular agenda for public discussion or included on the consent agenda. The procedure retains the provision allowing any trustee to request that an item be moved from the consent agenda to the regular agenda.

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees approve the final version of the edited Standard Operating Procedure on Consent Agenda – Items being forwarded by a Board Committee as provided at the January 2026 Board Meeting materials in final form.

On a motion by Trustee Alexander, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the Standard Operating Procedure.

Fossil Fuel Policy Update

On May 23, 2022, the University of Maine System (UMS) Board of Trustees issued a Fossil Fuel Divestment Statement affirming its recognition of the impacts of climate change while underscoring its fiduciary responsibility to maintain a sustainable and affordable public university system. The statement acknowledged that UMS had already made great progress in reducing exposure to fossil fuels through prior divestment from coal and the incorporation of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors into investment decision-making. The Board recognized its portfolios' structural constraints given the use of cost effective commingled and mutual funds, while committing to ongoing evaluation of investment alternatives.

On April 28, 2022, the UMS Investment Committee approved specific short- and long-term actions to advance fossil fuel divestment consistent with sound investment criteria and its fiduciary obligations. Effective May 31, 2022, UMS committed to divesting all *direct* equity and fixed-income investments in fossil fuels and to making no new direct fossil fuel investments. As a long-term goal, UMS set a target to divest from fossil fuel holdings in actively managed commingled and mutual funds by **2030**, contingent on market availability and prudence. The Investment Guidelines were amended accordingly.

Consistent with the Investment Committee's commitment to providing progress on these goals, Kelly Regan, Partner with NEPC, will present a *Fossil Fuel Exposure Update* at the January 26 BOT meeting, referencing the report included with the meeting materials.

Trustee Martin introduced Kelly Regan from NEPC to provide the annual update on progress toward fossil fuel divestment goals.

Kelly Regan presented the annual report on fossil fuel divestment progress. The University of Maine System adopted fossil fuel divestment in April 2022, with goals to divest from actively managed commingled and mutual fund investments by 2030. Significant improvement has been made. Total fossil fuel exposure across all three portfolios (Managed Investment Pool, Pension, and Operating Fund) is now approximately \$600,000 as of September 2025, down from \$13.2 million in 2016 and \$4 million when reported last year.

Since adopting divestment in 2022, the portfolios have completely eliminated exposure across all equity investments, reflected in this report. After September 2025, all fixed income exposure to fossil fuel investments was also eliminated. If measured as of December rather than September, exposure would be approximately \$89,000 rather than \$600,000, with only one investment remaining across all three portfolios that has exposure to fossil fuels.

The Managed Investment Pool exposure declined from 2.5% in 2016 to 0.1% as of September 2025. In dollar terms, total exposure declined from \$13.8 million in 2016 to about \$600,000, and approximately \$89,000 as of year-end.

Next steps include continuing to work with the University of Maine System Investment Committee to achieve goals by 2030. Only one hedge fund manager remains with fossil fuel exposure. NEPC will

continue to assess marketplace options and work with the investment committee on evaluating options to further reduce fossil fuels while using good investment principles, meeting portfolio return goals, and satisfying fiduciary duties.

CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

Chancellor Malloy provided an update on system activities and priorities. He expressed satisfaction with the return of students for the spring semester, while noting with sadness the loss of a University of Maine student to a car accident early in the semester. He highlighted the collaborative spirit among university presidents and vice chancellors as a positive indicator of the system's direction, emphasizing that the universities are working to support one another rather than compete, particularly in the areas of online programming and academic program review.

Chancellor Malloy noted that each university is engaged in a serious examination of its academic offerings — evaluating whether programs are meeting market demand and remain timely — and expressed pride in the cooperative approach being taken across the system.

He also previewed the NCAA Division III membership applications for UMA and UMFK, expressing strong support for both universities' pursuit of NCAA alignment, noting it sends a positive message about the importance of athletics and will help attract student athletes.

UMA Graduation Dates 2028-2029

President Cushman requested an exception to the system commencement dates for 2028 and 2029. UMA holds graduation at the Augusta Civic Center because the university doesn't have adequate space. UMA has reserved the same weekend for multiple years. When the system moves to a different schedule in a couple of years, that would prevent UMA from using the Civic Center as it already has commitments for those dates. President Cushman requested that UMA be permitted to use different graduation dates to accommodate the Civic Center availability.

By consensus, the Board concurred with President Cushman's request for an exception to the system commencement dates.

Spring 2026 Enrollment Update

Vice Chancellor St. John provided an enrollment update. The census report will be released on February 15. Numbers in board materials were updated last Friday to provide the most current information possible. The system is up 1.8% system-wide on headcount year-over-year and up 2.6% year-over-year on credit hours. Several universities are up on enrollment year-over-year this spring: UMPI, Farmington, Fort Kent, and Maine Law. The University of Maine is up in doctoral-seeking students, as is University of Southern Maine. University of Maine at Augusta has seen an increase in master's-seeking students and students pursuing associate degrees.

Transfer student numbers are strong. Farmington almost doubled the number of spring transfer students. Fort Kent transfer students are up 22% over the previous spring. USM is also up slightly in transfer students year-over-year. At Presque Isle, spring transfer students grew from 91 in spring 2022 to 733 in spring 2026, overwhelmingly YourPace students.

Vice Chancellor St. John identified challenges. The enrollment cliff is no longer a prospective threat—the system is fully in the enrollment cliff period predicted over a dozen years ago by demographers. International students will be an important group to track regarding fall enrollment and ongoing enrollment, given questions about the climate for international students coming to study in the United States. Out-of-state undergraduate students from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut represent the system's principal out-of-state domestic sources. These states are responding to the demographic cliff themselves by increasing their offers and competing more aggressively for their own students.

Approval of Collective Bargaining Agreement, Graduate Student Workers Union

The Board of Trustees delegates responsibility for negotiating collective bargaining agreements to the Chancellor. The Chancellor reports tentative agreements to the Board for approval prior to executing the agreements.

Vice Chancellor Dorsey presented the tentative agreement reached with the Graduate Student Workers Union. The agreement was ratified by that group on December 17th with 99.3% voting in favor of the three-year agreement. The agreement is available, and the final contract language is being completed. The Board is being asked to authorize the chancellor to execute the collective bargaining agreement once finalized.

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees authorizes the Chancellor to execute the collective bargaining agreement, with the Graduate Student Workers Union, having been voted upon and ratified by the members of that bargaining unit.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the agreement.

NCAA Division III Action Items

UMA Presentation – President Cushman

President Cushman explained that UMA is requesting authorization to formally apply to join NCAA Division III and enter a multi-year provisional period, with active membership going into effect on September 1 following the fourth provisional year. She noted that this transition aligns with UMA's mission of serving all populations, will make the university more attractive to prospective student athletes, and presents an opportunity to enhance the experience for all student athletes at UMA. She also noted that alignment with NCAA Division III puts UMA on the same footing as several other universities within the system.

UMFK Presentation – President Hedeem

President Hedeem noted that UMFK is similarly requesting board endorsement of its NCAA Division III membership application. She described the NCAA Division III philosophy as prioritizing educational outcomes, student engagement, and ethical competition — principles consistent with UMFK's emphasis on student development, institutional integrity, and a balanced collegiate experience. She highlighted four areas of positive campus impact anticipated from the transition: alignment with sister institutions already in NCAA Division III; increased campus enrollment; financial savings; and, most importantly, less travel time and more in-class time for student athletes.

Board Discussion

Trustees opened discussion by asking for clarification on what athletic association the two universities are currently members of and why the move to NCAA Division III is being pursued.

Presidents Cushman and Hedeem confirmed that both institutions are currently members of the United States Collegiate Athletic Association (USCAA), competing in the Yankee Conference. Key reasons for the proposed move include greater name recognition of the NCAA brand among prospective student athletes, financial advantages, and the opportunity to compete more regularly with in-state and regional institutions.

President Rice offered perspective from UMPI's experience with the same transition, noting that UMPI saw approximately a 35% increase in athlete enrollment as a result of joining NCAA Division III and the North Atlantic Conference. He clarified that both UMA and UMFk are petitioning to join the North Atlantic Conference, which has scheduling agreements with schools such as Bates, Bowdoin, Colby, Maine Maritime Academy, Thomas College, Husson University, and two Vermont state schools and two SUNY schools, providing a full slate of athletic competition. He noted that UMPI has not needed to raise its athletic program budgets since joining the conference and has seen significant enrollment increases as a result.

Trustees asked about the cost implications, including dues structures and the requirement to offer additional sports under NCAA Division III rules. Presidents Cushman and Hedeem both acknowledged that NCAA Division III requires a minimum number of sports offerings. UMA noted it has been gradually adding sports — including baseball, softball, men's golf, and cross country — and has prepared pro forma budget sheets for each, confirming that the costs are covered. President Cushman confirmed that athletes have specifically enrolled at UMA for baseball and softball, and that overall enrollment has increased each year alongside the addition of these sports. President Hedeem noted that UMFk is similarly close to meeting NCAA sport requirements.

Trustees also asked whether the universities would be able to compete against Division III schools in Maine such as Bates, Bowdoin, and Colby. President Rice clarified that conference membership in the North Atlantic Conference would facilitate regular competition with those schools, though not necessarily every year, with rotation among conference members.

Trustees expressed support for the proposal, noting the practical benefit of having more in-state competition, reducing the burden on bus drivers and cutting down on long out-of-state travel trips — a particular consideration for a geographically remote institution like UMFk.

Chair Riley noted that athletes themselves strongly prefer NCAA affiliation and that NCAA Division III membership will help attract additional student athletes to both campuses.

UMA Joining NCAA Division III Athletic Conference

President Cushman presented the request for UMA to formally apply to join NCAA Division III and enter a multi-year provisional period until the campus is voted into the division as an active member, which will go into effect on September 1 following the fourth provisional year.

This transition aligns with UMA's mission of serving all populations. It will be attractive to potential student athletes and presents an opportunity to enhance the experience for all student athletes at UMA.

Several other institutions within the system are already part of the NCAA, putting UMA in alignment. The transition will have positive campus impact in four critical areas: same association as other universities, increased campus enrollment, financial savings, and most importantly, less travel time and more in-class time for student athletes.

Chancellor Malloy noted that the move is a more attractive alignment for incoming students who want to be student athletes at these universities. It will benefit the attraction of good athletes. Schools will find it easier to play one another.

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees authorizes the University of Maine at Augusta to formally apply to join the NCAA Division III level and enter into a multi-year provisional period under the NCAA until the campus is voted into the division as an 'Active Member', which will go into effect on September 1 following the fourth provisional year.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the resolution.

UMFK Joining NCAA Division III Athletic Conference

President Hedeem presented the request for UMFK to formally apply to join NCAA Division III. The NCAA Division III philosophy prioritizes educational outcomes, student engagement, and ethical competition, consistent with UMFK's emphasis on student development, institutional integrity, and a balanced collegiate experience. Participation at Division III will have positive campus impact in four critical areas: same association as other universities, increased campus enrollment, financial savings, and less travel time and more in-class time for student athletes. Because UMFK will have more in-state games, they will travel less out of state. NCAA also provides financial support for some competitions. President Rice noted that as a member of NCAA Division III, Farmington and Presque Isle benefit from substantial surplus in the organization. Schools have not paid to be in the North Atlantic Conference for three years and will continue not paying for at least another two years. Athletes know the difference between NCAA and lesser-known organizations and would prefer to be in an NCAA program.

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees authorizes the University of Maine at Fort Kent to formally apply to join the NCAA Division III level and enter into a multi-year provisional period under the NCAA until the campus is voted into the division as an 'Active Member', which will go into effect on September 1 following the fourth provisional year.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the resolution.

Brief Updates on Mission Statements and Key Strategic Planning Actions

Chancellor Malloy asked presidents to address three questions regarding their mission statements: unique qualities of each university, how strategic plans align with the system strategic plan, and distinctive elements.

President Hedeem (University of Maine at Fort Kent): UMFK is a university small by design that values its diverse student population, takes pride in experiential learning and career-focused mission, and embraces its northern location and beautiful setting to live, learn, and work. The motto is LIFE at UMFK: Learn, Innovate, Find, and Engage. The UMFK strategic plan resulted from work from 2021 to 2024 when faculty and staff revised the 2016-2022 strategic framework to align with the University of Maine System strategic plan. The plan includes six focus areas with strategies and indicators of success, including alignment to NECHE accreditation standards. Unique qualities include the small size by design, diverse student population, experiential learning focus, career-focused mission, and northern location.

President Rice (University of Maine at Presque Isle): UMPI's strategic plan highlights the unique position as a regional institution providing essential programming, training, and graduates for Aroostook County while delivering competency-based education at a national scale. The institution operates in what Renee Brown would call the paradoxical moment of higher education, doing both A and B rather than just A or B. UMPI provides national-based degree completion programming, especially through partnerships with other institutions, while simultaneously providing unique and essential graduates that Aroostook County and adjoining areas need. The strategic plan intentionally aligned with all five major areas of the University of Maine System strategic plan. UMPI recommended small changes to mission and vision, including a shortened mission statement and an adjusted vision to incorporate competency-based education and its national and international platform.

President Ferrini-Mundy (University of Maine/University of Maine at Machias): The University of Maine's mission statement is quite long and has been in place for some time. The primary strategic document has been the Strategic Vision and Values document. Current strategic reinvisioning work will inform any revisions, mainly a shortening of the vision statement. Four areas of focus are emerging: academic portfolio program review, research portfolio review, an administrative excellence committee, and an accelerator for bringing together cutting-edge work in advanced manufacturing, AI, and workforce development. These areas are completing final reports in coming weeks.

The University of Maine is distinctive as a land grant university that has also become a space grant and sea grant university. It is the only public R1 university in Maine, bringing expectations of being internationally competitive in research and creative activity. Strategic reinvisioning has brought forward the notion of becoming known as a learner-centered R1 university, combining deep commitment to learners and excellence in teaching with thriving research at the highest levels. University of Maine at Machias, the regional campus of the University of Maine, has long focused on its coastal location and integration of that location with its mission. Machias is part of strategic reinvisioning, with work integrated into the University of Maine's strategic vision and values. Primary distinctions include undergraduate focus, commitment to preparing students for careers, and integration with the coastal mission evident in programming and activity.

President Cushman (University of Maine at Augusta): UMA's mission statement has served for over a decade: "transforms the lives of students of every age and background across the state of Maine and beyond through access to high-quality distance and on-site education, excellent student support and civic engagement, and innovative professional and liberal arts programs." The mission underpins every strategic decision. The strategic plan follows this mission and UMA's 60-year history of helping adult learners enter or return to the workforce through distance and in-person education.

Last spring, committees revised the 2020-2025 strategic plan based on what has not yet been accomplished and what remains relevant given drastic changes since 2020. The plan now includes six

strategic areas: strengthen student success, transform lives, advance academics, enhance marketing and recruitment, cultivate reputation and resources, and a new area, strive for efficiency and sustainability. UMA organizes distinctiveness within the system around three core areas supporting history and mission: access to education for all populations, meeting Maine's workforce needs, and advancing innovative educational technologies, all focused on transforming lives. Access is foundational—UMA meets students where they are online and in person across multiple locations. UMA leads the system in early college participation, serves a high population of adult learners (only 39% traditional age), and prioritizes support for all populations including veterans, neurodiverse students, justice-impacted students, and transfer students.

UMA delivers high-demand workforce-aligned programs in aviation, architecture, dental education, cyber security, and allied health closely connected to employer and state needs. UMA advances innovative educational technologies, with over half of credit hours delivered online. UMA is recognized nationally in US News and World Report's top 100 for online undergraduate bachelor's, online undergraduate business, and veterans bachelor's programs. Recent grants support engagement in AI and virtual reality.

President McDonnell (University of Maine at Farmington): UMF has been working on its strategic plan for the last year and submitted it last week for 2026-2029. UMF is the oldest public university in Maine, starting as a normal school training teachers for Maine, and has stayed true to that original mission. Premier teacher education and public liberal arts are the two main focus areas. Education at the undergraduate level represents more than a third of students; at the graduate level, 85% of students; and education represents half of all credit hours. Training teachers for Maine addresses a huge workforce need through early childhood education, elementary education (the largest program), middle and secondary education, special education, and graduate education in math education, leadership, and special education. UMF increasingly reaches out to ed techs to provide more workforce for Maine education. Liberal arts represents the second area. Training teachers means training them in liberal arts, which is what they will be teaching. UMF has a reputation as a public liberal arts university with distinctive programs: the only undergraduate program in creative writing, the only program in actuarial science, and the only one in business and outdoor recreation. As AI becomes more ubiquitous, liberal arts skills become more relevant: critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, teamwork, creativity, innovation, communication, data analysis, inquiry, and curiosity.

UMF is primarily a residential university, becoming a more distinctive feature as online has been the growth area throughout the system. Teaching matters at UMF—it is not a wannabe R1. Students are attracted to the university for specialty programs, particularly education, and also based on size and sense of community. UMF plays an important role in Western Maine as an anchor institution with the Emery Community Arts Center serving the entire Western Maine region, the fitness and recreation center, the Mainely Outdoors program, senior college, Gold Leaf, the Western Maine Chorus, the Chamber, the Rotary, and the American Legion all centering around the university.

President Edmondson (University of Southern Maine): The mission statement before the Board was approved in September 2022, just weeks after President Edmondson's arrival. Last year, USM worked on its strategic plan focused on people, purpose, and place, presented to the Board in July 2025. Departments and units are currently working on specific plans due at the end of March 2026.

USM functions as a primary catalyst for education, growth, cultural development, and workforce sustainability within Maine. USM is successfully transitioning from a traditional regional university to an embedded urban-suburban academic hub serving as the nexus for the system's broader objectives. Current

trajectory is marked by significant capital investments in the arts, data-driven alignment with workforce requirements and economic goals, and unprecedented inter-institutional collaboration facilitating seamless pathways from secondary education to professional practice.

Unique assets include the Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education, the Southworth Planetarium, and the Cutler Institute. USM is distinguished among peers in Northern New England. USM occupies a unique position within the system, defined by location in the state's economic and cultural heart and commitment to an embedded educational model. USM doesn't just exist alongside Southern Maine—it is fully integrated into it. The geographic advantage is a shared asset for the entire system, as 80% of Maine's employers are located within 75 miles of one of USM's campuses. USM serves as a critical bridge between academia and the workforce, leveraging reputation and proximity to create pathways for students and to partner with sister institutions.

A vibrant economy requires a vibrant culture. Significant investments in visual and performing arts, highlighted by the state-of-the-art Crewe Center and commitment to the arts building in Gorham, are designed to increase reputation of academic programs while inviting the community into the university experience. Through unified accreditation and a culture of partnership, USM helps create a more responsive and resilient educational continuum. The culture thrives on partnership rather than competition, leading and inviting through shared services, academic agreements, and collaboration with sister universities, community colleges, and the Roux Institute. Collaborative programs exist in education, nursing, GIS, business, engineering, and cyber security.

The student experience at USM offers a rare combination: intimate relationship-driven faculty mentorship of a small residential college paired with experiences, career possibilities, and applied research opportunities of a major urban university. Whether serving first-generation students, degree completers, or career-bound interns, USM provides high-value education resulting in low student debt and immediate professional relevance.

President Saufley (Maine Law): When Maine Law established its mission statement two years ago, there was no idea how prophetic it would be. The mission is a single sentence: "Maine Law's mission is to advance justice and leadership in a changing world." The world is changing very fast. Maine Law has completed a brand new strategic plan ready for the Board's review.

Maine Law, Maine's only law school, occupies a unique position among New England law schools as the most financially accessible and community-centered program of legal education in the entire region, rated within the top 100 law schools in the country. With the lowest tuition in New England, small size, and geographic placement in the middle of a thriving business community on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean within blocks of state and federal courts, Maine Law is a terrific value. Adding collaboration with the universities of Maine, focus on Maine's needs, solid bar passage and employment rates, practice-ready preparation through extraordinary clinic and externship programs, and distinctive programs in business law, privacy and cyber security law, environmental law (including a unique Arctic law fellowship), rural practice program, and public interest certificate, it is no wonder applications have increased by more than 100% this year.

Trustees engaged in discussion following the presentations. Trustees emphasized that while all institutions are important and trustees want all to survive and thrive, the board needs to adopt system-wide criteria, policies, and directives to ensure all thrive to the best of abilities. Individual mission statements don't help the board do its fiduciary job for the system as a whole. The question is what to do with all this

information to help make decisions as a board while the system takes into account individual distinctiveness without stepping on toes in what will be some pretty tough decisions over the next couple of years.

Trustees found the statements tremendously helpful, much more so than the brief mission and vision statements in board materials. He requested the transcription of presentations be sent to all trustees, as they help the board think about the kinds of issues trustees raised.

Trustees agreed, noting the presentations conveyed life and energy not captured in written mission statements. She appreciated hearing how presidents talk about themselves and their campuses, suggesting this helps ensure the board's official documents capture the same life and energy. Mission statements should be inspirational and aspirational as well as reflective of offerings on each campus.

President Rice noted that strategic plans, not mission and vision statements, provide the full portrait of institutions that is most valuable for making decisions on short-term or long-term plans for the university system. Mission and vision statements provide encapsulation, but prospective students don't look at mission and vision statements when choosing institutions.

Trustees found the presentations useful, calling them a nice start to potentially changing how the board does its work. The presentations gave life to strategic plans and demonstrated that the system has presidents who really love their jobs and do great work.

CONSENT AGENDA

On a motion by Trustee Eames, which was seconded by Trustee Michaud, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the Consent Agenda items – Acceptance of the Minutes and Honorary Degrees. The Consent Agenda items are Tabs 4, 5 & 6 in the meeting materials.

Acceptance of Minutes
Honorary Degree for 2026
Honorary Degrees for 2027

VICE CHANCELLOR FOR ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS REPORT

Vice Chancellor St. John presented the evaluation plan for 90-credit hour programs. When the Board approved five pilot programs last year, trustees asked for an evaluation plan addressing how programs are being assessed academically and evaluated for overall efficacy including retention, graduation rate, and all measures applied to all programs, with special attention to the unique nature of 90-credit programs. On parallel tracks last fall, Vice Chancellor St. John's staff wrote the report request to NECHE required for NECHE consideration of programs and began drafting the evaluation plan trustees requested. In December, the system received a letter from the NECHE Commission approving three of the five programs (one at UMPI, one at Fort Kent, and one at Augusta) and deferring action on two programs (one at Machias and the second UMPI program).

Thanks to timely and effective advocacy by the chancellor, the system picked up information about what additional information would be needed to resubmit the two deferred programs. With help from Provost Margeson at UMPI and Dean Walsh at Machias, the system will resubmit proposals at the end of next week with the goal of getting back on one of the commission meetings ideally in spring semester.

Three programs approved will launch in either summer or fall 2026. The two remaining programs are in process for what is hoped will be a positive outcome. After submitting the lengthy request to NECHE last fall, attention turned to finalizing the evaluation report announced at ASA in December for presentation to the full board in January.

The evaluation report has three pieces: an overview, the evaluation or academic assessment plans trustees have already seen and approved at ASA and full board meetings when program proposals came forward, and the third piece addressing evaluation questions where best practices haven't yet been established. The system doesn't yet know what questions will be most appropriate to ask employers or what questions will best assess student satisfaction from graduates of 90-credit programs.

The report represents current understanding of all content put forward by universities that will be the backbone of evaluation, plus an archive the system has created of every publicly available 90-credit program proposal, every publicly available article, and plans to cull from employer surveys, student satisfaction surveys, and data on retention and persistence as students regionally and nationally begin graduating from these programs.

Trustees noted that while the plans are granular and detailed, she had some higher-level system questions: What are student demographics of people attracted to 90-credit hours? How does it affect enrollment? What are revenue implications? Are these students who would have come for 120 hours, or what's the impact on revenue of offering degrees with fewer credit hours?

Vice Chancellor St. John responded that the system is looking at all three questions. More will be known about who is attracted as students respond to marketing, apply, and enroll. The system will track future enrollment behavior with unusual scrutiny: whether students persist, transfer into 120-credit versions, transfer out to different 120-credit programs, leave the system, or opt into certificate programs. Regarding revenue, Vice Chancellor St. John will have modeling conversations with Vice Chancellor Low about taking a look at differences. If the system does volume business with adult degree students otherwise not attracted, enrollment will be on the plus side. If that doesn't happen, the system will come back to the board to report and consider future steps.

Trustees wanted a uniformly obtained database defining data the same way that will answer questions and allow the board from a system point of view to decide pros and cons of moving forward. She requested a list of common data sources the system will obtain from all programs, confident the data is being gathered the same way, to answer specific questions.

Vice Chancellor St. John confirmed that everything in the report—individual assessment plans developed for five programs already reviewed and approved at ASA and by full board, plus the set of measures just discussed—is empirical data the system will track and report program by program for the board. This includes demographics.

VICE CHANCELLOR FOR STRATEGIC INITIATIVES REPORT

Vice Chancellor Dorsey provided a brief update on the small campus fundraising initiative supported by the Chancellor's strategic investment funding, noting that the work is progressing well overall. Most campuses have met benchmarks or are trending positively toward their goals, approximately halfway through the funding period. She noted that some institutions experienced slight delays due to staffing and hiring timelines, but expressed no significant concerns. Participating universities are also meeting as a

cohort, strengthening collaboration, discussing shared events, and looking for efficiencies to maximize impact across the system. She noted that the universities will provide a more thorough update at a future board meeting. She confirmed that the funding is one-time funding, structured over three years to allow time to build programming and institutionalize support before the funding concludes.

Vice Chancellor Dorsey then introduced Jenna Klein from Blaze Partners to provide an update on the University of Maine System's marketing and branding efforts.

Jenna offered an overview of approximately one year of work, covering the brand rollout, website updates, and campaign strategy. She framed the brand rollout as a modernization effort rather than a splashy launch moment, designed to build confidence and credibility while leading with mission and impact. The new logo and updated website were presented, including a sizzle reel video produced from campus visits conducted in fall 2025. She noted the video will be shared with trustees following the meeting due to audio difficulties during the Zoom presentation.

Jenna described a three-phase rollout strategy:

- **Internal rollout** (current phase): Building awareness and alignment through a Chancellor's office memo with FAQs, collateral updates (business cards, letterhead, etc.), and engagement from system and campus leadership.
- **External rollout** (beginning this week): Website launch, social media profile updates, and email signature availability for system employees. The focus is on demonstrating modernity through updated digital touchpoints rather than a formal announcement.
- **Brand activation/campaign**: A digital campaign is in development and planned for launch in April, running through December 2026, with some quiet periods. The campaign will focus on prospective students, their influencers (parents, trusted adults), and taxpayers, emphasizing the distinct advantages of Maine's public universities without competing with individual campus admissions efforts.

Website updates cover seven priority system pages with new imagery, navigation, and footer. Phase two will address additional priority pages based on site traffic and strategic considerations. Trustees were noted to have weighed in on design decisions throughout the process.

Trustees expressed appreciation for the work, noting the video conveyed pride in the system. Discussion included the importance of highlighting affordability alongside quality, the need for targeted pathways for non-traditional students and transfer students, and plans for data-driven feedback once the campaign launches. Vice Chancellor Dorsey noted that funding is secured through the current fiscal year ending in June, with additional funding set aside beginning July 1.

VICE CHANCELLOR FOR FINANCE AND STRATEGIC AI INTERGRATION REPORT

Vice Chancellor Low acknowledged the passing of former Trustee and FFT Committee Chair Carl Turner, noting his significant contributions as a state legislator, longtime board member, and mentor.

Investment Returns

Vice Chancellor Low reported on investment results as of November:

- **Managed Investment Pool**: Market value of \$410 million; gain of 0.3% for the month; up 4.5% year to date; estimated additional gain of 6% for December.

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- Pension Fund: Market value of \$16 million; gain of 0.3% for the month; up 2.6% fiscal year to date; estimated additional gain of 0.3% for December.
- Operating Fund: Market value of \$272 million; gain of 0.5% for the month; up 3.4% year to date.

Net of fees returns total \$8 million fiscal year to date, exceeding the \$2.8 million annual budget by \$5.2 million at approximately the halfway point of the fiscal year.

Budget Update and Schedule

Vice Chancellor Low provided an overview of the budget planning timeline. Campus budgets are due to the Board Office over the coming weeks, with internal review to follow. Key upcoming milestones include:

- Mid-March: FFT Committee meeting with budget forecast for FY26.
- March 25: All-day FFT budget meeting; each campus will present their budget in detail (available via YouTube for those unable to attend in full).
- Mid-April: FFT budget work session.
- Approximately two weeks later: Second FFT meeting, with a committee vote anticipated.
- May 18: Full board meeting for final budget approval, if all proceeds as planned.

Trustee Kates encouraged board members to submit campus-specific questions in advance of the March budget sessions to ensure they are addressed during presentations.

The following action items were presented and voted upon under the Finance and Strategic AI Integration report:

Bailey Hall Façade Replacement

USM President Edmondson requested authorization to begin a multi-year renovation project at USM's Gorham campus, starting with the chilled water plant. The board authorized expenditure of up to \$4,450,000 for Phase 0 design and construction and Phase 1 design for the Bailey Hall façade replacement and addition of a chilled water plant, funded through ENG funds.

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees authorizes The University of Maine System acting through the University of Southern Maine (USM), to expend up to Four Million Four Hundred and Fifty Thousand (\$4,450,000) for Phase 0 design and construction, and Phase 1 design for the Bailey Hall Façade replacement and addition of a chilled water plant.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the resolution.

Barrows Hall ESRB Wing Replacement Chiller

UMaine President Ferrini-Mundy requested authorization to replace the failing Barrows Hall ESRB wing chiller, which presents an imminent risk of catastrophic failure. The board authorized expenditure of up to \$1,000,000 for the replacement, funded through ENG funds.

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees accepts the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee and authorizes the University of Maine System, acting through the University of Maine (UMaine), to expend up to \$1,000,000 for the replacement of the Barrows Hall ESRB Chiller.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the resolution.

Morse Arena Funding Increase

UMaine President Ferrini-Mundy requested authorization to increase spending for the construction of the Morse Arena to \$16 million. Previous board actions had enabled Phase 1 and design and site preparation work. The athletic multi-purpose arena, now named the Morse Arena, will serve basketball and other athletic and community uses, with construction planned to begin in early 2026 and tentative completion in time for the 2027–28 basketball season. Funding is from the Harold Alfond Foundation grant and matching gift contributions, with potential short-term internal borrowing for cash flow needs to be repaid through Alfond fund disbursements. The board authorized expenditure of up to \$106 million for construction.

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees accepts the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee, and authorizes the University of Maine System, acting through the University of Maine, to expend up to \$106 million for the construction of Morse Arena.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the resolution.

North Campus Infrastructure Improvements, UMaine (including Crossland Alumni Center)

The University of Maine System, acting through the University of Maine (UMaine), requests authorization to spend up to \$3,000,000 for improvements to the north campus infrastructure. This includes removal of Crossland Alumni Center, rebuilding of the Dunn & Corbett parking lots, expansion of the Wells parking lot, improvements and partial realignment of Long Rd from Alfond Arena to Ferland Engineering Education and Design Center (EEDC), improvements to Gym Drive and Gym Drive parking, and repaving of the University Mall walking pathways.

President Ferrini-Mundy presented the request for authorization to spend up to \$3 million for improvements to the north campus infrastructure. The list of improvements includes the removal of Crossland Alumni Center, the rebuilding of the Dunn and Corbett parking lots, expansion of the Wells parking lot, improvements and partial realignment of Long Road from the Alfond Arena to the EEDC, improvements to Gym Drive and Gym Drive parking, and repaving of the University Mall walking pathways. This is a comprehensive project to improve north campus infrastructure. The request would be funded by E&G funds.

Finance, Facilities and Technology Committee Review:

The FFT Committee chair provided background on the committee's review of the proposal. The committee had received many public comments with themes similar to those heard during the public comment period. The committee was very much aware of questions about the university's commitment to continuation of the Franco-American Center in a vibrant way and about commitment to the important work the center does and its availability as a gathering place for programs.

The committee learned from President Ferrini-Mundy and other presenters that there is absolutely a commitment to the presence of the center somewhere on campus, recognition of how important it is to the Franco-American community not just at the university but throughout the state of Maine, and commitment to the actual work that goes on at the center with recognition that it needs to continue. The committee was reminded that it doesn't have control or voice in where programs take place within the university community, and neither does the board. But the board does have the ability to approve changes with respect to facilities.

Several things stuck out from the hearing. For several years, the board and chancellor have had as one of the top priorities finally facing the fact that system-wide there is seriously aging infrastructure that needs to be addressed, particularly as the number of students on campus goes down and the system moves more to online. The system needs to invest funds in dealing with this both in deferred maintenance to buildings which are appropriate to fix and, if not, where appropriate, demolition.

The staff provides analysis through a company called Gordian that is very data-driven. It takes a look at each and every individual building on campus and comes up with a percentage number of its useful life. If a building is brand new, it gets a 100% rating. If a building is at the end of its useful life, it gets a zero, with everything in between.

This particular building, despite its sentimental attachment on campus, has a Gordian value of zero. That tells the committee that further investment in that property makes very little if any sense, and to pour much more money into renovations and upgrades would be a poor decision. This is analysis the committee has used for years.

Taking down this building is not a new idea. It's been on the radar of the University of Maine for years going back as far as 2008, but certainly in 2020 when this building was identified as a candidate for demolition. In the 2023 five-year capital plan, this building was included on that list as appropriate for demolition as part of the five-year capital plan.

The committee considered the cost of repairing the building. The cost given to really get it in shape for the future was over \$10 million. There has been criticism of that number, but whether the number is \$10 million, \$8 million, or \$4 million, the point is the same: it doesn't make sense to pour that money into a building which has zero useful life left. This will result in continuing the center and continuing the programming.

The committee was convinced of two things: one, that to demolish this building makes sense in the overall plan for this part of campus as well as the plan to deal appropriately with aging infrastructure; and two, that to relocate the Franco-American Center, although there will be considerable inconvenience along the way, will actually result in a brighter future for the Franco-American Center, the role it plays within the campus and community, and the important programming it does.

The committee voted unanimously to support this motion. The committee didn't do so lightly. This got more attention than anything the chair could remember as a member of that committee in five years. The Gordian group is well recognized and used by every university and state government. It's the gold standard among major organizations and institutions.

Budget and Affordability Concerns:

A trustee raised the budget concern about cynicism regarding whether the system can continue to sustain the Franco-American Center and the notion that the university is in the middle of a budget-cutting exercise yet investing money to tear down this building.

President Ferrini-Mundy affirmed commitment to the Franco-American Center, to its programs, to its activities, and to finding space that will be suitable, inviting, and accessible for community members who take great advantage of that center and depend upon it. That is a clear commitment for her and for the leadership in her cabinet. The university is in the midst of all that discussion and planning in concert with Franco-American Center leadership and the dean.

Regarding affordability, the university really cannot afford to maintain Crossland now, and it is not in the best interests of students, faculty, staff, and community partners to do so given its condition. The removal has been planned for many years, at least since 2018. The university will use university resources responsibly, and this long-planned project reflects that intention.

It has been budgeted. The university has spent \$241,000 over the past four years on reactive maintenance when repairs or burst pipes needed fixing simply because the building is not functionally viable. The university is confident in estimates from Gordian as well as on-campus detailed estimates that have been provided. The university has budgeted for and planned for this demolition as well as for renovations that will be needed to move the Franco-American Center to a suitable location.

Delay Considerations:

A trustee asked what a delay would entail if that was an action the board wanted to take.

President Ferrini-Mundy responded that the university believes a delay would be problematic in many ways given the condition of the building right now, particularly facing cold weather and potential for burst pipes. There are very important documents and materials in the archives there, and the university is already needing to make arrangements to be sure those are well protected at the current time.

The university has looked at variety of concerns with the building: its advanced age, its susceptibility to flooding, to rot, and to pest infestations, and inadequate accessibility. Any delay in demolition of the building simply prevents the university from removing those challenges from campus and moving ahead toward successful move of the Franco-American Center to a suitable location and then to its final excellent location over time as the university is able to work and plan together with them.

The university is not certain with a delay exactly what that would entail, but the university believes the move would still be needed given the condition of the building. The cost to maintain the building and the condition of the building drive this decision.

A trustee asked whether the university is confident that budget projections are adequate to make the upgrades in the buildings where the Franco-American Center will move.

President Ferrini-Mundy confirmed the university is confident. They are part of estimates for both the north campus infrastructure plan, which the university has been working on including the demolition, and work that has gone into both Libby but more particularly into ESL, which would be the home—the full building would become the home of the Franco-American Center. The university's very competent facilities management team has worked with other partners to make those estimates. They are budgeted in the plan, and the university is confident in them at this point. The university wants to be clear it can also run into unexpected problems in some of these renovations, but this is what the university has at this time.

Fundraising and Community Support:

A student representative asked about the suggestion offered during public comment that the community might be willing to fundraise to relocate the building, and whether there's been conversation around that option or if it's unrealistic.

President Ferrini-Mundy responded that the notion of demolishing this building has been put forward in a variety of plans over many years. There has been, to her knowledge, no particular community demonstration of interest in mounting some sort of campaign to try to move the building. The university does not have estimates at this moment of what a move would cost, but it would likely be quite substantial. At the same time, the university is very committed to understanding the important pieces of the building that in some way can be memorialized or preserved in any kind of move that might be continued. But at this time, there's been no particular launch to a campaign to try to raise funds to move the building or preserve it.

Board Discussion:

One trustee expressed going back and forth on this issue. The trustee noted hearing somebody talk about fundraising and thinking the Franco-American community deserves a chance to do something to raise funds. The trustee thought it needs more thought and more time. The trustee heard President Ferrini-Mundy say that's not a good idea to give it more time, but the building has been there this long, and a little bit longer is not going to hurt. The trustee thought it important to listen to people from a cultural traditional perspective a little bit more. The trustee didn't know how many people of color or people from a French tradition are on the committees but thought it only fair to maybe have a hearing and listen to what they have to say and present the university's research. The trustee thought there's a need to come to an understanding and stated that if there were a vote, the trustee would have to vote against it.

Chair Riley expressed frustration that this has been on the list of buildings to demolish because they're too costly to sustain since 2018 and has been in public meetings before FFT. It's frustrating that at this point there are suggestions that there can be money or salvation of this building.

Another trustee stated what was heard from President Ferrini-Mundy is that steps are underway to implement moving people out of this building now. Plans have been negotiated. Facilities have been identified. Material needs to be protected. The trustee didn't understand what role the board has with respect to any decision by the university to move facilities within their campus to suit their needs and to take care of their expertise about appropriate buildings and significant deterioration in existing buildings. The trustee expressed concern about suggesting at this point there is any desire to delay this decision based on what had been heard. The trustee asked the president about what value would be had given the decisions that have been made already to implement a smooth transition to an excellent facility in the long run for the organization in question.

Chair Riley noted the board is conflating two issues. The issue of the Franco-American Center, which the board all supports, and where it's placed and housed is an issue for the university. That it exists is an issue for the board, but where the university houses it is not a board decision. The board's decision is what to do with a building that's been on the demolition list since 2018, understanding that obviously moves a program, but that's a different issue.

President Ferrini-Mundy appreciated the conversation and the care everyone is taking. As one trustee was speaking, she thought of a variant of perhaps the trustee's suggestion, which might be a strong and immediate effort to launch a fundraising campaign for the Franco-American Center—for the activities of the center, for the materials of the center, for the kinds of programmatic activity that might be more possible with additional external funding. That would be something that could be a very good step, and

she would assume it would have a lot of support internally. The university would work with the University of Maine Foundation to step that up.

As far as a delay on the building, President Ferrini-Mundy agreed with the chair that these are separate issues in some sense because of the many things she listed that are part of this north campus infrastructure improvement—this is one piece of a set of related activities that have to do with sequencing and availability of space. The university anticipates this would delay being ready by fall of 2026 for campus to come back and see some of that north campus infrastructure back in place in more accessible and safe ways. The university could analyze the details of what a delay would mean, but it would be a separate discussion from the current plan for the Franco-American Center.

One trustee stated that while respecting the suggestion about delay, the trustee would need to vote against it. The board has asked presidents repeatedly over time to look at their infrastructure and make recommendations. This has been on the table since 2018. The trustee thought the board needs to move forward with a vote today and needs to support President Ferrini-Mundy.

Another trustee responded that there are a lot of people out there, as evidenced by the letters and concerned people, who really want more input. The trustee didn't think maybe another three or four months is going to hurt to get their input, or maybe even another month, but just an opportunity for them to understand and to talk and to let them talk and hear them. Instead of cutting their argument short, the trustee thought that's the least the board can do.

Chair Riley asked whether the issue might be more time to sort of plan for the future of the Franco-American Center and maybe even some fundraising and to really build it as it moves to a new location. Isn't the issue making sure the system has a sustainable and strong Franco-American Center well into the future rather than where it's located, which is in the board's business?

The trustee responded that Chair Riley is right, but also noted that it's been in the works since 2018—that's a long time—so why not let it go for another few months to listen to these people that have something to say?

Chair Riley responded that the board has certainly read all the materials and heard from people. But the issue of spending more time to think about what the future of the Franco-American Center is and its sustainability seems to be the place to address that. To delay the demolition of the building would delay the parking, would probably mess with graduation because there would be construction underway about then. President Ferrini-Mundy has spoken about that.

One trustee spoke about the process mattering and loving input, but expressed concern that in a building where there are very clear indicators that the conditions are bad, more time makes them worse. The trustee felt it's not going to get cheaper to fix or move. The trustee has been part personally of things moving locations on campus and it always comes with feels like loss—it feels like loss when that kind of moment changes when you're familiar with a space until you find your new home. It's extra complicated here because there will be an interim spot for the Franco-American Center before it moves to its final home that will have the amenities and support it needs. The concern is that a delay doesn't necessarily change the circumstances of the building that is in really tough shape. The trustee recalled that when a student, the Franco-American Center was not in that building—the trustee used to have meetings in that building, the alumni association was there. Things move and have new homes on a campus. The hope is the system can get to a place where it can move the Franco-American Center more quickly into its newest

home. There'll be an interim spot, but the trustee would like to see that move as quickly as possible so that new home portion can get moving when, again, waiting doesn't change the realities of the building that are so stark.

Another trustee emphasized the importance of the Franco-American Center—its mission, its people, its work deeply meaningful to the university community as well as the greater broader community. The trustee sees two issues: having a vibrant Franco-American Center is very vital, and then the building. The trustee acknowledged people become attached to buildings and everything that's happened in the past, but it's not viable. As a board with fiduciary responsibility, the board needs to make sure it's not putting money into buildings that are requiring so much—there's disrepair and they're so old. The board needs to make choices of where to put money best. The trustee noted there's a place where the Franco-American Center is going, where the center will still exist but in a different location. The hope is the center will still be strong and vibrant in a different location and there will still be great effort to keep up with the heritage and culture. The trustee trusts that and knows it'll be a smooth transition with University of Maine in the different areas, the two-step transition. This is a tough decision, but the trustee agreed with the previous comments that a delay is not going to change the circumstances. The trustee thinks there's life after this transition and the system could come out of this stronger.

Another trustee agreed with previous commenters, stating the problem is that people who have come to the board in good faith and raised their concerns have conflated the building with the center. While the board knows that distinction, they don't think the public does. The trustee asked whether anyone thinks that if the Franco-American Center was not in this building, there would have been this uproar about that building. The trustee doesn't think so. There was a visceral fear, unfounded, that somehow that building was of the essence of the Franco-American Center. The board needs to help educate and promise and deliver its unified commitment to that program, to its facilities, and to its improvement and better facilities compared to where they are now. To think that this board, made up of so many dedicated Maine public servants, would have any interest in denigrating or denying or deteriorating this important program is a shame. But the board needs to make sure the public understands that's not what's going on. It's not decimating the program. It is eliminating an old building and moving people into better quality facilities. That's really all that's going on.

Proposed Amendment:

Chair Riley suggested an amendment to the proposal: that the Board of Trustees supports the importance of a vibrant Franco-American Center, that the University of Maine will make biannual reports to the board of trustees regarding the transition and the sustainability of the Franco-American Center, and adding that to the resolution.

One trustee saw no problem adding the language suggested and noted President Ferrini-Mundy's suggestion about additional fundraising for the Franco-American Center is a good offer. The suggested language would provide that additional fundraising be done to benefit the Franco-American Center as relocated.

Chair Riley proposed the language: "The Board of Trustees supports the importance of a vibrant Franco-American Center. The University of Maine will make biannual reports to the board of trustees regarding the relocation of the center and the sustainability of the Franco-American Center." Nobody objected to adding the language as an amendment.

The student Trustee noted being torn because the point of student trustees is to represent students. The Trustee wished the argument was as correct as it was impassioned. All figures and statistics cited are from non-accredited individuals not part of larger organizations—people walking by the building saying it can stand for another 20 years. As a fourth or fifth generation French Canadian, the representative was slightly insulted by comments saying if the board does this, the center will be destroyed. This makes the representative feel speakers don't understand the culture of Franco-Americans and how resilient they are. If the Franco-American Center and Franco people are so weak that shifting the building 500 feet back on campus gets rid of the entire project, that's not the Franco-American culture the representative knows or the people met at the center in Lewiston. The comments would be very impactful if every single one was right, but when you test each assumption or proposal, they are either financially or statistically incorrect or don't reflect the Franco-American culture experienced. The representative values the input of graduate students and thinks this is a great time for them to reach out and have input directly on the board, but it has to be correct as well as being passionate. It only met one of those two criteria.

Chair Riley read the amended resolution:

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees accepts the recommendation of the FFT committee and authorizes the University of Maine system acting through the University of Maine to spend up to \$3 million for the removal of Crossland Alumni Center, make improvements and expansion to the Wells, Dunn, and Corbett parking lots, and realignment and improvements to Long Road, Gym Drive, and the University Mall walking pathways.

Further, that the Board of Trustees supports the importance of a vibrant Franco-American Center. The University of Maine will make biannual reports to the board of trustees regarding the relocation of the center and the sustainability of the Franco-American Center.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the resolution, with one trustee voting no.

President Ferrini-Mundy thanked the board for an incredibly thoughtful, careful discussion through FFT, in the interim, and today. She thanked all who provided comment, which she read every sentence of. She understands the complexity and high emotion. She makes herself available going forward to fulfill what the board just asked regarding biannual reports and discussion about relocation and sustainability. She pledged to do her best to make this work through what is clearly a set of competing and difficult circumstances but appreciates the board's carefulness.

Authorization to Exercise Purchase Option, 7 Custom House, Portland

Vice Chancellor Low presented the authorization for the \$20 million purchase of 7 Custom House, Portland, Maine. He noted the purchase is entirely funded through Harold Alfond Foundation grants, using an internal loan initially, with the loan to be repaid through Alfond fund disbursements expected through the early 2030s. The purchase also includes the land under 300 Fore Street, providing the university ownership of the entire city block. Seth [University counsel/facilities representative] noted that approximately 20,000 of the 60,000 square foot building generates commercial rental revenue from tenants outside the UMS, strengthening long-term financial sustainability.

Trustees expressed interest in seeing the building's financial sustainability report, anticipated for the March board meeting, prior to voting, while acknowledging enthusiasm for the acquisition. Vice Chancellor Low confirmed the report is scheduled for March and indicated that financial modeling has been conducted through and beyond the Alford payment period, with strong projected occupancy rates. Trustees requested that the March report include risk analysis, including worst-case scenarios around tenancy and commercial real estate fluctuations.

TEXT OF PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

That the Board of Trustees accepts the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee, and authorizes the University of Maine System to exercise its purchase option for 7 Custom House, Portland, Maine, at the contract price of \$20,000,000, with all final terms subject to review and approval of the University of Maine System Treasurer and General Counsel.

Additionally, the Board accepts the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee and authorizes the University of Maine System to issue an internal loan for an amount up to the contract price plus relevant closing costs.

Further, the Board accepts the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee and approves the Reimbursement of Project Expenditures resolution.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Cain, and approved by all Trustees by roll call vote, except with one trustee abstaining, the Board of Trustees approved the resolution.

VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION REPORT

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy provided an update on the University of Maine System's research and innovation activities, framing the work around a newly named "research ecosystem" — a term credited to Professor Lisa Goranov of the University of Southern Maine. She noted that a VCRI Research Leaders Group meets quarterly and conducts ongoing work between meetings.

Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF)

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy highlighted the annual MEIF performance report. Key metrics for the year include a return on investment of 7.3 to 1, partnerships with 378 Maine companies, and support for approximately 1,400 students. Base investments are made at UMaine and USM, with growing small campus initiative opportunities. She described MEIF as a critical vehicle for leveraging system resources in support of the state's seven strategic economic sectors.

Research Highlights

Notable areas of activity highlighted include:

- **Veterans' Health:** A partnership between the University of Maine and VA Maine is expanding health care services, advancing medical research, and improving clinical education, with a focus on rural access, aging, mental health, and chronic disease. MEIF is supporting this work.
- **Arctic Research:** The system is recognized as a leader in Arctic-related research and education. USM faculty and President Edmondson participated in the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik. UMaine earth science faculty lead the Juneau Icefield Research Project. Maine Law's Arctic Law

program was also noted as unique among law schools nationally, with a professor currently teaching on the history of Greenland.

- **Life Sciences:** UMaine Augusta and USM recently joined the Maine IDeA Network (Maine INBRE), now making all system universities part of this NIH-funded network based at the Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory, focused on developing the life sciences workforce.
- **Translational Research:** The system is building capacity in moving research from application to real-world use, including public health practices and product development.

Federal Landscape

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy noted ongoing engagement with changes in the federal funding environment. A systemwide grant review task force continues to meet regularly to monitor agency priorities, appropriations, and earmarks. She noted that the President recently signed the CJS appropriations bill, which funds major science agencies and includes earmarks relevant to the system, including a \$45 million health and life science complex. The system is also tracking federal rulemaking around workforce Pell, graduate loan caps, and IPEDS reporting changes.

Campus Research Examples

Two campuses provided brief examples of their research activities:

- **Maine Law** (Dean Softley): Highlighted growing collaborations with sister universities in areas of privacy law, cybersecurity, AI, environmental law, and the rural practice clinic. The Arctic Law program and international environmental law initiatives were noted as distinctive strengths, supported in part through partnerships with UMaine and UMFK and backing from Senator Jackson and the Maine Attorney General's office.
- **University of Maine at Machias** (Dean Walsh): Highlighted applied, interdisciplinary coastal research projects currently underway, including a farm-raised mussels study, a herring fisheries project in partnership with the Downeast Salmon Federation, a soft-shell clam database developed in collaboration with Maine College of Engineering and Computing faculty, and a soundscapes and coastal trusts project with an exhibit currently on display at the College of the Atlantic.

Emerging Systemwide Research Themes

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy identified several topical areas emerging as genuine systemwide research priorities: biology and health; education and learning; sciences and engineering (including intersections with agriculture); and Arctic and environmental research. She also highlighted place-based inquiry and undergraduate student engagement in research as cross-cutting distinctions of the system's research culture.

Trustee Alexander commented that the presentation was an excellent model for how systemwide themes and collaborative activity could be organized and communicated, and suggested that a similar approach might be applied to other areas such as teaching or nursing as the board works to better understand systemwide programs and priorities.

Update on Medical School Study

Chancellor Malloy, President & Vice Chancellor Joan Ferrini-Mundy and Chief External & Government Affairs Officer, Samantha Warren, offered an update regarding the recent conclusion of a study conducted by the nation's leading medical education consultant, Tripp Umbach, regarding the feasibility of establishing a public allopathic medical school linked to the University of Maine.

At the request of the legislature and Governor Mills, work began in 2024 with Tripp Umbach conducting extensive research culminating in a comprehensive report that included a statewide environmental scan

and financial modeling to introduce discussions about alternative approaches to medical education worthy of consideration in the state of Maine. The study was rooted in interviews with key stakeholders across Maine's healthcare, higher education, policy, and community sectors, as well as a comprehensive online survey. These conversations and survey research highlighted the significant and ongoing efforts in Maine to strengthen the physician workforce, address primary care shortages, particularly in rural areas, and improve overall access to and quality of care. The feasibility study builds on this context, providing objective findings and recommendations informed by Maine's existing medical education and research landscape and future workforce demands.

Details of this specific study were highlighted before the Trustees, with discussion by both Chancellor Dannel Malloy and President Ferrini-Mundy regarding crucial next steps that will positively impact the dire need of the state of Maine in educating and training the future healthcare workforce.

Chancellor Malloy and Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy provided an update on the medical school feasibility study, which has been delivered to the Maine Legislature.

The study confirms a significant and growing shortage of physicians in Maine, with the state experiencing persistent difficulty recruiting and retaining non-Maine-trained physicians in practice. Hospital systems expressed concern about the trajectory of physician supply. Chancellor Malloy noted that when projected physician shortages are combined with a projected nursing shortage of approximately 2,800 by 2030, the state faces a substantial health care workforce crisis.

The cost of establishing a traditional medical school was identified in the report as likely underestimated and currently out of reach. However, the report acknowledges the University of Maine System's existing capacity and strengths in health-related fields and outlines potential pathways through which the system could begin to address health workforce challenges short of establishing a full medical school. Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy expressed hope that the report provides a springboard for continued discussion about what the system can contribute, positioning the institution for a future reassessment of the medical school question.

Chancellor Malloy noted that the report does not sufficiently address the potential impact of artificial intelligence on medical diagnosis, advice delivery, and other dimensions of health care, and suggested this will need to be considered as the system continues to evaluate health workforce needs going forward. Chair Riley suggested that a forthcoming report from a USM researcher on nursing shortages — including root causes, clinical and teaching pipeline issues — could serve as a valuable educational session for the board and inform thinking about how the system can expand its contribution to nursing and nurse practitioner education.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees will be held at the University of Maine at Augusta on March 15-16, 2026.

Additional information about the meeting can be found on the Board of Trustees website:
<https://www.maine.edu/board-of-trustees/meeting-agendas-materials/board-of-trustees/>

Adjournment

Board of Trustees Meeting
January 26, 2026
Elizabeth Stickler, Clerk