Board of Trustees

Strategic Planning Committee

October 28, 2026

Zoom Meeting

Present: **Committee Members:** Emily Cain, Chair; John Moore, Barbara Alexander, Patrick Flood, Blake Shepherd, Elise Baldacci & Trish Riley **Student Representative:** Isabella Bouchard **Chancellor**: Dannel Malloy; **System Staff:** Carolyn Dorsey, Jeffrey St. John, Ryan Low, Amie Parker, Heather Ball, Crawford Cleveland, Pamela MacRae & Elizabeth Stickler. **Presidents:** Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Joseph McDonnell, Raymond Rice, Deborah Hedeen, Jen Cushman, Jacqueline Edmondson & Leigh Saufley.

Committee Members Absent: none

Trustee Cain, Chair, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. The Clerk performed a roll call of the Committee members present.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chair Cain explained that the Committee was conducting a midpoint review of the system strategic plan and beginning public review of campus plans at the request of former Chair Riley. Trustee Alexander asked how amendments would preserve the role of stakeholders involved in developing the plan. Chair Cain confirmed that recommendations would go to the Board and that proposed changes should explain their origins and any further consultation needed.

Strategic Plan Updates since October 2025

President and Vice Chancellor Joan Ferrini-Mundy described the research leader's group's work across campuses with differing research identities and the effect of federal changes on priorities. Suggested revisions included monitoring federal actions, revisiting timelines for economic and workforce outcomes, and reconsidering partnership and statewide-convening goals. Trustee Alexander favored retaining goals with explanations of changed circumstances or revised timelines rather than deleting goals simply because they had not been achieved. President Ferrini-Mundy agreed that further explanations could be provided.

Vice Chancellor Ryan Low described potential AI goals: secure and equitable access to approved tools; free employee training; a broader group of trainers; and surveys of use and outcomes to inform the next procurement decision. Trustee Riley asked for educational opportunities addressing concerns about AI and data centers. Trustee Alexander favored Board policy discussion and wider stakeholder engagement before adding AI goals to the strategic plan. Low agreed that policy and timing were Board decisions.

Vice Chancellor Carolyn Dorsey reported progress in workforce development, partnerships, employee well-being and marketing. Some completed initiatives had become continuing

operations. Potential refinements included alignment of employment practices with evolving requirements, reconsideration of sustainability-focused marketing language in light of actual priorities, and a broader wellness approach incorporating financial well-being and retirement planning.

Vice Chancellor Jeffrey St. John reported that most academic and student affairs goals were complete or continuing. The arts and humanities task force was scheduled to begin November 18. He recommended retaining the first-semester student survey while discontinuing a duplicative spring graduating-student survey in favor of established student-engagement and first-destination surveys. He also described overlap between high-impact-practice goals and Alfond-supported research learning experiences, and existing service-learning activity throughout the system. Trustee Alexander recommended documenting how existing programs fulfill these objectives and explaining the survey decision in the plan's comments.

Trustees discussed how best to amend the strategic plan, weighing Trustee Alexander's concerns about legitimacy and stakeholder engagement against the need to respond to practical recommendations from those implementing the plan. Chair Cain emphasized that many suggested changes come from existing stakeholders and that the committee can require additional review before advancing amendments, while clarifying the established governance process in which this committee recommends changes and the full board approves them. Trustee Alexander reiterated the importance of outreach to external stakeholders, and VC Dorsey noted that several contemplated changes have already been agreed with the board in prior years, with the current presentation consolidating these for clarity. Chair Cain also highlighted that recommendations reaching the full board will be subject to public comment, providing another avenue for stakeholder input.

Proposed Strategic Plan Refresh

The Committee weighed accountability to the original plan against the need to respond to changing conditions. Trustees Moore and Baldacci emphasized the ability to adapt. Chair Cain described the Committee's review role and sought consensus on a documented midpoint assessment.

VC St. John raised the implications of a federal earnings test for academic-program processes. President Ferrini-Mundy and General Counsel Cleveland described monitoring of federal actions and legal developments. Trustee Alexander distinguished compliance obligations from endorsement through inclusion in the strategic plan. Chair Cain's summary set that proposed addition aside. References to the federal rule in this discussion are reports of the presenters' understanding, not independent legal conclusions in these minutes.

VC St. John also proposed attention to students' ability to manage interpersonal conflict, particularly in residential settings, and the implications for well-being and retention. Trustees discussed whether this should be tracked in the strategic plan or through Academic and Student Affairs. Chair Cain emphasized that useful work could proceed regardless of whether it was added to the plan.

Chair Cain summarized the next steps: retain explanations of completed, changed or unpursued goals; set aside the federal earnings-test addition; continue AI policy discussion before determining whether to amend the plan; and work with VCs Dorsey and St. John on a memo and revised materials for the upcoming Board meeting. Trustee Riley supported a midpoint-assessment memo identifying progress and emerging issues. Chair Cain asked for objections and, hearing none, agreed to proceed. No formal amendment vote was taken.

Trustee Moore asked where fundraising fits within financial sustainability. Chair Cain noted the predominantly campus-based fundraising structure and offered to explore whether a future system-level discussion was appropriate.

University Strategic Plan Presentations (UMA, UMF, UMPI)

University of Maine at Augusta

President Jenifer Cushman presented UMA's 2025–2030 plan, Building a Sustainable Future through Access and Innovation. Faculty, staff and student review groups began work in 2024, followed by town halls, surveys, external feedback, shared-governance review and cabinet endorsement in March 2026. Six strategies retain UMA's access mission while adding emphasis on efficiency and sustainability.

Priorities include retention and completion, workforce-connected programs, experiential learning, employer partnerships, responsible use of facilities, recruitment, employee engagement, accessibility and neurodiversity. Examples included nursing and cybersecurity facilities, aviation, AI and virtual-reality instruction, and a planned 60-bed residence hall in Hallowell for fall 2027. Cross-campus academic and transfer partnerships support unified accreditation.

Cushman described student-success work in advising, financial wellness, scheduling and entry-year experiences. By 2030 UMA aims to increase six-year graduation for first-time full-time bachelor's students from 27% to 35%, raise first-year retention from 62% to 70%, and halve specified retention gaps. A $400,000 Davis Educational Foundation grant supports AI and virtual-reality integration into at least 20 undergraduate courses over two years, with faculty development and evaluation of learning and persistence.

In response to Trustee Moore, Cushman described building advancement and alumni-relations capacity, improving alumni records and awaiting a system advancement platform before establishing more formal annual giving goals.

University of Maine at Farmington

President Joseph McDonnell described UMF's 2026–2029 plan, developed through an iterative committee process with faculty, staff, students and the President's Council. The plan draws on the system plan, student-success work, financial constraints and changing demographics. Priorities include graduate and online enrollment, scheduling efficiency, interdisciplinary programs, experiential education, faculty collaboration, career competencies, responsible AI use, peer tutoring, advising and financial support for students.

McDonnell described three areas of strategic emphasis: teacher preparation, including online pathways and graduate education; western Maine's environment, supported by regional partnerships; and community health, including allied-health development with local partners and continuing nursing collaboration with UMA. He identified a $1.9 million congressionally designated grant for facility renovation supporting health needs. Community engagement and staff morale remain important amid financial austerity. Further detail on measures and targets is flagged for follow-up rather than inferred.

University of Maine at Presque Isle

President Raymond Rice described a participatory planning process with faculty, staff and students, multiple drafts and feedback cycles, followed by ratification in fall 2025 and a midcourse review in summer 2026. The plan includes four goals—accessibility, institutional sustainability, empowerment and connection—aligned with all five system commitments. It combines national distance education with UMPI's regional role in northern Maine and neighboring Canada.

Rice emphasized flexible and competency-based pathways, adult learners, sustainable budgeting, compensation equity, student voice and belonging, and cross-campus partnerships, including competency-based work with UMF and UMFK. Rapid growth has required repeated reassessment of organizational capacity. UMPI maintains a record of changes and an updated public version of the plan. Rice reported that YourPace subscriptions had already exceeded an original 10,000 target and that several targets had been reset; exact revised undergraduate and graduate measures require verification because the captions are incomplete. Traditional-program growth included teacher education, social work and business. AI work includes instruction, academic integrity and appropriate-use expectations.

Rice described an advancement operation nearing three full-time staff and annual gift revenue of approximately $2.439 million, heavily influenced by one large gift; excluding that gift, the figure was approximately $280,000. He emphasized the importance of the anticipated advancement platform to smaller campuses' fundraising capacity.

The three university plans were presented and reviewed, with no action taken by the Committee.

Adjournment

Additional information about the meeting can be found on the Board of Trustees website: https://www.maine.edu/board-of-trustees/meeting-agendas-materials/human-resources-and-labor-relations/

Kayla Flewelling for
Elizabeth Stickler, Clerk