

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY SENATE

University Environment Committee

Meeting of January 15, 2024, 12:30-2:00 pm
Virtual meeting on Zoom.

MINUTES - rev 1, 2/18/2025 (draft)

MEETING MINUTES

Attending: Mona Ramonetti (co-chair), Christopher Sellers (co-chair), Abena Ansare, Barbara Boyle, Josh Dubenau, Jennifer Gilday, Angela Gupta, Gary Kaczmarczyk, Clifford Knee, Justin Johnson, Christopher Percival, Giacinto Piacquadio, Sian Piret, Sara Poon, Michelino Puopolo, Ana Topolovec, Frederick Walter, Thomas Wilson.

1. Co-chair Ramonetti called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Attendees introduced themselves.
2. Minutes from November 20, 2024 were considered. Sellers moves and Ramonetti seconds draft minutes be approved. There was no objection.
3. Socially responsible investing.

a) Co-chair Sellers introduced Abena Asare, Josh Dubnau, and Justin Johnson, who presented on the initiative regarding socially responsible investing by the Stony Brook Foundation. The letter can be accessed at:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1o7AndjKfsxnNkvT-xLP-WCVPcJtS1N-vuEhuprrMFEA/viewform?edit_requested=true

b) Ansare: Investment strategy should be public, transparent, inclusive, and reflect SBU's values. SBF has declined to produce information on investments. Want to create a structure to have a discussion on ethical investment. First step is to have a speaker event in the spring, inviting the Environment Committee to co-sponsor.

c) Johnson: Climate has a historical connection to investment strategies. TIAA-Divest! was supported by a University Senate resolution.

d) Dubneau: All members of the University community have a stake in this question, as do citizens.

e) Wilson: What was the date of the Senate resolution on TIAA-Divest! Dubenau: April 2021. [Considered April 5, 2021, resolution passed with 85% approval, available at https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/univ-senate/senate/_other-reports/SBU%20TIAA%20Fossil%20Fuel%20Disinvestment%20Resolution.pdf]

Finances of the Stony Brook Foundation have been a historic issue with the Senate but have been historically rebuffed. Is there a plan to press SBF regarding the 2007 advisory opinion from the Committee on Open Government [available at <https://docsopengovernment.dos.ny.gov/coog/ftext/f16851.htm>]

Asare: we are the plan. We have been stonewalled, that is not being ignored. We are gathering a group of folks who take this up and bring it to admin in a respectful way. One point we will make is that transparency is important in seeking more donors.

f) Walter Senate has tried to learn about SBF over the years. The University's position is that it's an independent foundation and not FOIL-able. The Senate has tried, low pressure tactics have not worked. Recourse may be the courts.

Dubneau: One never knows whether public action and shining a light is sufficient to prevent stonewalling, but it cannot hurt.

g) Ramonetti: do we have any points of reference for other public institutions who have gone this way? Ansare: yes there are other schools that have frameworks around ethical investment. Suny ESF has made clear moves as regarding climate and fossil fuel investments.

h) Wilson: does Rutgers have some kind of framework? It might help to engage our current acting President. Gilday: If other SUNYs have done this, why not us? We are the anchor institution for NYCE. Ansare: Climate is a point of growth for us.

i) Sellers: Is there an IRS 990 filings for SBF? Percival sent the following link:
<https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/foundation/about/financials-1.php>

j) Ansare: Proposing town hall in March or April, would the Environment Committee be a core partner?

k) Sellers: Endpoint might be a lawsuit but we need to build collective action first.

l) Ansare, Dubenau, and Johnson left the meeting.

m) Extended discussion followed regarding the Environment Committee's involvement in the proposed town hall. Sellers moved that a working group be formed to work on the issue and the committee co-sponsor the upcoming town hall. The motion failed for want of a second.

n) Sellers moved that a working group be formed to work on this issue and write draft language regarding co-sponsorship for future consideration by the full committee. Ramonetti seconded the motion, which passed with no opposition.

4. Composting: Sara Poon

a) Poon: Roth composter has been removed, chemicals have been leaching into soil. Working with ASA to make a budget, make plans, find land to run a hand-cranked composter with student volunteers. Hopes to have this in spring semester, one on east campus and one on west campus, with two residence halls on each side. Start with upperclass instead of first year dorms because of lower staff turnover. Requesting input on how to build education and investment and better operations.

b) Kaczmarczyk: concerned about the composting issue and what chemicals are leaching into the soil. Poon: contact Dawn Vilachi, not sure of specifics.

c) Discussion followed that it is important to discover specifics of what "chemicals" could be leaching from pre-consumer food waste. Is it toxins or simply high nitrate leachates which can be dealt with any number of ways.

5. Plastics Use on-campus.

a) Gilday: have to leave for another meeting but shared the following [Plastics Use on Campus](#)

6. Ashley Schiff preservation update:

a) Wilson: We have received the text of the two SB Council resolutions and one SUNY Trustee resolution:

<https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/sbcouncil/resolutions/index.php>

https://www.suny.edu/about/leadership/board-of-trustees/meetings/webcastdocs/Reso_Naming_Schiff_Preserve_Oct2024.pdf

b) Wilson: The SBC resolutions explicitly call for permanent protection and according to President MsCormick are binding on University - but could potentially be rescinded in future.

c) Wilson: Trustee resolution only names preserve. President had said he would inquire why it was no more than that. Walter: Senate Exec has not heard back regarding this question.

d) Wilson: it would seem that further action would be wise while there is momentum:

1. Make sure Preserve is explicitly protected in the Campus Master Plan.
2. Addition of ASP to State Nature and Historical Preserve law.

e) Wilson: We have communicated with some experts, will report on their feedback. We may want to give a report to the full Senate later this year and perhaps sponsor a resolution.

f) Wilson: request authorization to communicate status to the Friends of Ashley Schiff Preserve. Co-chair Seellers authorized Wilson to proceed.

7. Tree cutting on campus:

a) Ramonetti: reports received from Dept. of Environmental Conservation people (received by Ramonetti and Sellers) that numerous trees have been cut near tennis courts. Why was there no consultation and transparency issues? Beehives in area, are they in jeopardy.

b) Walter: this is the area where the modular dorms are going. Senate exec was under the impression that construction was not going to start until engineering studies are complete.

c) Wilson: beehives imply a beekeeper, contact them for recommendations on whether and where the hives should be moved.

d) Sellers: what about the process. How should the community be informed about construction and forest clearing?

e) Wilson: University has not been forthcoming about past clearing, the community usually is notified when the chainsaws start up.

Meeting adjourned at 2:00pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Thomas Wilson.