

**BOARD OF VISITORS  
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**Special Meeting of  
Wednesday, June 29, 2022  
Merten Hall, Hazel Conference Room (1201)**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Rector James Hazel, Visitors Anjan Chimaladinne, Mehmood Kazmi, Ignacia Moreno, Carolyn Moss, Dolly Oberoi, Jon Peterson, Nancy Prowitt, Edward Rice, and Robert Witeck.

**ABSENT:** Vice Rector Horace Blackman, Secretary Simmi Bhuller, Visitors Juan Carlos Iturregui, Wendy Marquez, Paul Reagan, and Denise Turner Roth.

**ALSO, PRESENT:** Erin Rogers, Staff Representative; Gregory Washington, President; Mark Ginsberg, Provost and Executive Vice President; Deb Dickenson, Interim Senior Vice President for Administration and Finance; David Drummey, University Counsel and Sarah Hanbury, Secretary pro tem.

**I. Call to Order**

Rector Hazel called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m.

Rector Hazel informed the Board that Governor Youngkin requested all public higher education institutions in the Commonwealth that passed a tuition increase for the 2022-2023 academic year to reconsider and rescind the tuition increase, which was the purpose for this special meeting.

Rector Hazel further informed the Board that the newly elected Board student representatives Sophia Nguyen and Ayondela McDole were unable to attend the meeting. Ms. Nguyen and Ms. McDole provided written statements on behalf of the Student Body and the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA) that will be made part of the record of this meeting (**Attachment 1**).

Rector Hazel announced that he would bring a forth an additional option for the Board to consider toward the end of the meeting. He continued to note that if Mason stays the course with the FY 2023 University Operating Budget that was passed at the May 5, 2022 Board meeting, no action would be required, but if any change is considered, an action is required.

Rector Hazel read the following codes of Virginia specific to what the duties of the Board of Visitors are:

- § 23.1-1012. Covered institutions; operational authority; financial operations generally.
  - B. Subject to the express terms of the management agreement, the governing board of each covered institution has the sole authority to establish tuition, mandatory fees, room and board, and other necessary charges consistent with sum sufficient appropriation authority for all nongeneral funds as provided by the Governor and the General Assembly in the general appropriation act.
- § 23.1-1500. Corporate name; name of the University.
  - A. The board shall at all times be under the control of the General Assembly.
- § 23.1-1301. Governing boards; powers.
  - 5. Fix the rates charged to students for tuition, mandatory fees, and other necessary charges.

Rector Hazel concluded that the purpose of reading the aforementioned codes was to remind the Board of their fiduciary responsibility.

Rector Hazel then recognized Mason President, Dr. Gregory Washington, to provide his comments. The highlights of Dr. Washington's comments follow:

- The Governor sent letters to university presidents requesting no raise in tuition.
- When the Governor's request was received, Mason started working in earnest to develop options.

- Mason's financial stability and health were reviewed.
- Commended the fiscal services, student life and government relations staff for the extensive time they committed to the process in order to prepare for proper review of the Governor's request.

## **II. Finance Matters**

### **A. FY 2023 University Operating Budget, Tuition and Fees (ACTION ITEM)**

Rector Hazel recognized Interim Senior Vice President for Administration and Finance, Deb Dickenson, to provide an overview of possible amendments to the FY 2023 University Operating Budget. Ms. Dickenson highlighted the following items:

- During the February 24 Finance and Land Use Committee Meeting, the 3% tuition rate increase was presented.
- The Governor sent a letter to university presidents on May 10, 2022 (**Attachment 2**) and June 23, 2022 (previously provided in the meeting materials) requesting no raise in tuition. Both requests came after Mason's Board approved the university's budget on May 5, 2022 and the second request came after the state budget was signed on June 21, 2022.
- Rector Hazel noted that after Mason's budget was approved on May 5, 2022, a meeting date was reserved on June 13, 2022 should the Board need to reconvene on Mason's budget once the state budget was finalized.
- Visitor Moreno inquired when the Board approved the budget on May 5, 2022 had a formal request from the Governor been received to hold tuition flat? Ms. Dickenson responded that it had not.
- Conversation ensued regarding the purpose of the Governor's tuition request and if Mason consulted other Virginia universities on how they are handling the request. Please refer to the meeting's video recording for specifics: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/8557205/video/725050565>.
- The 3% tuition increase was structured methodically to address Mason's growing needs. The increase was designed to fund the most critical priorities and increased costs due to inflation:
  - Unexpected contract escalations.
  - Academic success initiatives.
  - Faculty and staff compensation.
- In 2022, Mason's undergraduate tuition was the fifth lowest of the six Virginia doctoral institutions while having the highest enrollment and most diverse students.
- Challenges of no tuition increase:
  - Mason is a young university that has experienced tremendous growth. In many instances, Mason's systems and infrastructure have not kept up with the growth.
  - Necessary work has begun to modernize systems. This includes automating and improving business processes so efficient services can be provided.
  - Mason's commitment to increase financial aid and access to excellence.
  - Some of the challenges of the unprecedented inflation follow:
    - Increased insurance fees.
    - Increased legal fees.
    - Increased technology and financial service contract costs.
    - Increased janitorial fees.
  - Other universities are moving into the region and Mason is not able to offer the same level of compensation.
  - Mason experienced significant critical job turnover in 2022. Due to the competitive market, multiple searches had to be made for one position because the competitive salary could not be met. In some cases, because it was critical to Mason's Business operations, offers were made that were 20-40% higher than what was budgeted for that position.
  - Mason has worked hard to sustain financial stability, which puts the university in a good position for the future. However, only a set amount of the Mason reserves can be used to sustain that financial stability.

- The budget that Mason received from the state was about \$2 million higher than expected.
- The following tuition options were presented:

| <b>Option A: 3% Tuition Increase</b> |                                 | <b>Financial Impact</b> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>A</b>                             | • As approved in May; no change | \$0                     |

| <b>Option B: 3% Tuition Increase with Offset</b> |   | <b>Financial Impact</b> |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| <b>B1</b>  | • One-time tuition grant for IS UG* family incomes up to \$70,000   | (\$2,049)               |
| <b>B2</b>  | • One-time tuition grant for IS UG* family incomes up to \$70,000<br>• Allocate additional \$1M to Stay Mason to support FY23 tuition relief for all other UG & Grad students experiencing financial hardship due to tuition increase | (\$3,049)               |
| <b>B3</b>  | • All I/S UG* awarded one-time tuition grant regardless of need   | (\$4,874)               |

*\*Students taking at least 6 credit hours per semester*

| <b>Option C: No Tuition Increase</b> |                       | <b>Financial Impact</b> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>C</b>                             | • No tuition increase | (\$15,094)              |

- A B3+ option was presented as well which would add \$500K to Stay Mason Student Support Fund. This option would have a financial impact on Mason of about \$5.5 million.
- Dr. Washington noted that most Virginia peer institutions have chosen option B3 for all in-state undergraduate students who had a tuition increase.
- Visitor Chimaladinne inquired if option B2 covered international students. Ms. Dickenson replied yes.
- The extra \$2 million that Mason received from the state would be used to offset any extra costs without using reserves.

From this point forward, significant conversation ensued. The meeting video is available for referencing at the link provided above.

Rector Hazel presented a draft resolution as another option for the board to consider which would establish a special tuition committee of four (4) board members to meet and make tuitions recommendations to the Board for the remainder of the 2022-2023 academic year. Rector Hazel noted the purposes of the resolution was to ensure Mason was responsive to the Governor’s request and allow more time to make an informed choice for the Mason community. Rector Hazel continued that there is one edit he would like to make to the resolution which would be for the special tuition committee to report back to the full Board with their findings at the December 1, 2022 meeting. Conversation ensued and some of the highlights follow:

- Visitor Prowitt suggested noting in the resolution preamble Mason’s underfunding.
- Visitor Moss relayed her concern of what impact delaying a decision would have on the students. Dr. Washington responded that by going with the special tuition committee resolution that Option A, the 3% tuition increase, would remain intact and followed for the fall 2022 term.
- Dr. Washington is a proponent of B3+ given the extra \$2 million received from the state as Mason can absorb the one-time cost for this year and not put the institution at future risk. This stance generated a conversation between Dr. Washington and members of the Board.

Visitor Peterson **MOVED** that the board approve the resolution regarding the Governor's letter dated June 23, 2022 with the addition that the special tuition committee will report its recommendations to the Board at its December 1, 2022 meeting. The motion was **SECONDED** by Visitor Moreno. Rector Hazel opened the floor for discussion. Discussion by Visitor Prowitt to add two clauses to the resolution: Mason did not increase tuition for the 2021-2022 academic year and has been underfunded on a per student basis compared to other public educational institutions in the Commonwealth. Visitor Peterson **ACCEPTED** the amendments proposed by Visitor Prowitt (**Attachment 3**). Visitor Moss **SECONDED**.

**MOTION CARRIED BY MAJORITY VOTE.**

Yes – 9

No – 1 – Visitor Kazmi

Absent – 6

### **III. Adjournment**

Rector Hazel called for any additional business to come before the board. Hearing none, he adjourned the meeting at 3:39 p.m.

Prepared by:

Sarah Hanbury  
Secretary pro tem

Attachment 1: Board Student Representatives Written Comments (1 page)

Attachment 2: Governor's Letter Dated May 10, 2022 (5 pages)

Attachment 3: Resolution – Special Tuition Committee Creation (1 page)