



Richard Bland College

BOARD OF VISITORS

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

January 28, 2026 | 10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. | Virtual (Microsoft Teams)

The Board of Visitors of Richard Bland College (“RBC” or “College”) met in open and closed sessions on Wednesday, January 28. Due to Governor Spanberger’s declared state of emergency in response to inclement weather, the meeting was held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

- John Rathbone, Rector
- Albert Poole, Vice Rector
- Vickie Schray, Secretary
- Hon. James Dyke Jr.
- Hon. Kelly Gee
- Hon. Sam Parham
- Charles Patton
- Bouwien Smits
- Hon. Christopher Winslow
- Jason Pode, Faculty Representative
- Lilli Brown, Student Representative

STAFF PRESENT:

- Dr. Debbie Sydow, President
- Dr. Kimberly Boyd, Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer
- Dr. Tiffany Birdsong, Chief of Staff
- Stacey Sokol, Chief Business Officer
- Eric Kondzielawa, Chief Operations Officer
- Justin May, Chief Enrollment Management Officer
- Jesse Vaughan, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
- Charita Johnson, Chief Information Officer
- Vicki Humphreys, Chief Development Officer
- Dr. Adam Zucconi, Interim Chief Academic Officer
- Melissa Mahoney, Controller
- Dr. Evanda Watts-Martinez, Director of Counseling Services
- Christie Clarke, Director, Dual Enrollment and High School Programs
- Dianna Banks, Director of Human Resources
- Dr. Susan Clair, Information Security Officer
- Dr. Ann Ifekwunigwe, Director, University Center
- Ben Thoreson, Director of Student Success
- Brooklyn Bilyard, Interim Director, Student Life
- Ashley Fuller, Data and Compliance Officer
- Terelle Robinson, Associate Director of Government Relations
- Katelinn Davis, Associate Director of Development
- Carolyn Day Pruett, Associate Director of Development
- Jeff Palmore, Principal, Capital Strategies
- Ryan Jackson, President, New Crescent Strategies
- Ernest Bashikako, I.T. Manager, User Services
- Joshua Bolaji, Senior Network Engineer
- Shion Michael, Junior IT Administrator
- Nathan Moberley, OAG College Counsel

- Dr. Eileen Strempel, Strategic Planning and Governance Consultant
- Gerrit Smith, Senior Executive Administrator and Clerk to the Board of Visitors

GUESTS PRESENT:

- Basil Dosunmu, Treasurer, Richard Bland College Foundation Board of Directors
- Scott Fleming, Director, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia
- Bill Boyce, Principal, Design Director of Higher Education Studio, RRMM Architects
- Steve Hostetler, Principal, Public Land Development Division, Timmons Group
- Rich Satmaria, Principal, Public Land Development Division, Timmons Group
- Jeremy Wright, Associate Principal, Higher Education Studio, RRMM Architects

Welcome and Introductory Remarks

Rector John Rathbone called the Board meeting to order at 10:32 a.m., recognizing the presence of a quorum, and welcomed attendees to the meeting. He then read the following statement into the record:

Due to a state of emergency declared by the Governor of Virginia in response to severe winter weather, the Board determined that it was impracticable and unsafe to hold the scheduled in-person meeting on the Richard Bland College campus. In accordance with Virginia Code § 2.2-3708.2, the Board meeting will therefore be conducted by electronic communication means, using Microsoft Teams, which provides real-time audio and video access for members and the public.

Rector Rathbone then asked for a **motion to approve minutes** of the September 24, 2025, and the special October 1, 2025 Board meetings. The motion was made by Secretary Vickie Schray, seconded by Vice Rector Albert Poole, and approved unanimously by voice vote. Rector Rathbone then welcomed Christopher Winslow and Kelly Gee as the newest Board members. He then asked President Debbie Sydow to provide her report.

President’s Report

President Sydow provided an update regarding the interim presidential search, emphasizing that the creation and execution of a Presidential Transition Plan is being developed to ensure a smooth transition. She then introduced Scott Fleming, Director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV).

Director Fleming provided an overview of the Virginia Plan for Higher Education 2026-2032 (“Plan”). The Plan outlines a statewide strategy to strengthen the Commonwealth’s economic future by developing talent through higher education; focusing on student readiness, institutional responsiveness; and emphasizing the relevance of postsecondary education. Director Fleming also identified key challenges to higher education, including declining public confidence, demographic shifts, affordability, and rapidly changing technologies, such as AI. He concluded his remarks by saying that the ultimate goal is to position Virginia as the top state for talent.

Next, President Sydow introduced Bill Boyce, Principal at RRMM Architects, and Steve Hostetler, Principal at Timmons Group, who provided a review of the updated Campus Master Plan. They discussed existing campus conditions, noting significant development and change since the 2014 Campus Master Plan was approved by the W&M Board of Visitors. Key goals for the 2026 Campus Master Plan included reviewing the

condition and utilization of existing campus buildings; accommodating the need for public safety, administrative functions, and the IT hub; and contemplating expanded and improved sports facilities. Other goals included improving vehicular and pedestrian circulation and creating 1,000 parking spaces.

Dr. Eileen Stempel, Strategic Planning and Governance Consultant, provided an update on current status of the report on the future of Richard Bland College due to the General Assembly on June 30, 2026. She thanked Secretary Schray for her input in developing the draft report and noted that the Board will receive a draft report in time for review and adoption at the April Board meeting. Dr. Stempel then reported on the “Debt-Free RBC” initiative designed to generate philanthropic support for scholarships to increase affordability and timely degree completion.

Dr. Sydow; Dr. Tiffany Birdsong, Chief of Staff; and Dr. Stempel then reviewed the 2028 Strategic Plan with Board members. The Plan establishes institutional priorities for the next 18-24 months, focusing on student success, regional development, and sustained momentum during a period of transition. It refreshes RBC’s mission and values, emphasizing agility, belonging, and student-centric services while aligning programs and credentials with market-demand. Dr. Stempel noted that the plan is centered on three pillars: expanding high-value credentials, improving student completion outcomes, and fostering innovation to remain accessible and affordable for students.

Action Items

After the 2028 Strategic Plan presentation, Rector Rathbone asked for a motion to approve **Resolution 1**, 2026-2028 Mission, Vision, and Strategic Goals. The motion was made by Ms. Gee, seconded by Chuck Patton, and approved unanimously by voice vote.

After the passage of Resolution 1, the Board took a 10-minute break. The Board reconvened at 12:30 p.m. and then received a Finance, Audit, and Compliance (FAC) Committee report from Committee Chair Patton. He provided a brief summary of the FAC Committee meeting, including a presentation by the College’s internal auditor, Baker Tilly. Chair Patton shared that the Committee had approved resolutions 2 and 3 during their meeting and moved Board approval. Rector Rathbone then asked for approval of resolutions brought forward by the FAC Committee, specifically **Resolution 2**, Fiscal Year 2026 Internal Audit Plan; and **Resolution 3**, Policy to Delineate the Relationship, Roles, and Responsibilities of the Board of Visitors and the Foundation Board of Directors. Both were approved unanimously by voice vote.

The Rector then asked for a block vote on **Resolution 5**, 2026 Campus Facilities Master Plan; **Resolution 6**, Naming the AIC Boardroom in Honor of Senator Mamie E. Locke, Ph.D.; and **Resolution 7**, Conferral of Honorary Degree. The motion was made by Mr. Patton, seconded by James Dyke, and approved unanimously by voice vote.

Jeff Palmore then provided a brief summary of advocacy efforts to obtain Level II authorization during the 2026 General Assembly session and noted that State Senator Lashrecse Aird and Delegate Kimberly Pope Adams are patrons of the bill. Rector Rathbone then called for a roll call vote approving **Resolution 8** – Level II Authorization. Clerk Gerrit Smith called the roll, and all nine Board members voted in the affirmative.

Rector Rathbone then requested a motion to approve **Resolution 9** – Faculty Leave of Absence. Vice Rector Albert Poole made the motion, seconded by Secretary Schray, and approved unanimously by voice vote.

Rector Rathbone reviewed **Resolution 10** – Conferral of President Emerita Status and Professorship for President Sydow and then requested a motion to approve the resolution. Mr. Dyke made the motion, seconded by Mr. Patton, and approved unanimously by voice vote.

Closed Session

At 12:46, after passage of Resolution 10, Rector Rathbone requested a motion to move the Board meeting into closed session for the purpose of discussing personnel matters related to a potential reduction in force and the selection of the Interim President pursuant to the following exemptions under Va Code § 2.2-3711:

- § 2.2-3711(A)(1): *Authorizes public bodies to convene in closed session to discuss and evaluate the performance of departments or schools of public institutions of higher education when such evaluation necessarily involves the performance of specific individuals, the Board will enter into closed session to review and discuss matters related to a potential reduction in force. This evaluation will require consideration of the roles, duties, and performance of identifiable staff members who may be affected.*
- § 2.2-3711(A)(1): *Authorizes public bodies to convene in closed session to discuss, consider, or interview prospective candidates for employment. Namely, finalists for the position of Interim President.*

The motion was made by Mr. Dyke, seconded by Vice Rector Poole, and approved unanimously by voice vote.

Open Session Resumed

The Board reconvened in open session at 1:54 p.m. Rector Rathbone requested a **motion** that the Board certify by roll call vote that, to the best of each member’s knowledge, only matters lawfully exempted from the open meeting requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act were discussed and only matters identified in the motion to have a closed session was discussed. The motion was made by Vice Rector Poole and seconded by Secretary Schray. Clerk Smith called the roll, and all nine Board members “certified yes.”

Following the certification vote, Rector Rathbone requested a motion to pass **Resolution 4**, Election of Interim President Kenneth Alexander, Ph.D. Vice Rector Poole made the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Dyke. The resolution passed by a 7 to 2 voice vote, with Ms. Gee and Ms. Bouwien Smits voting in the negative.

There being no further business, Rector Rathbone adjourned the meeting at 1:59 p.m.