

**LOWER COLUMBIA COLLEGE
BOARD OF TRUSTEES REGULAR BOARD MEETING**

MINUTES

JANUARY 21, 2026

CALL TO ORDER (DETERMINATION OF QUORUM)

Chair Silva called the special meeting of the District 13 Board of Trustees to order at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 21, 2026, in the Heritage Room 100 in the Administration Building of Lower Columbia College. The LCC Board of Trustees meeting was also offered virtually via Zoom. When the meeting was called to order, the following individuals were present, ensuring a quorum.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES:	Marc Silva, Chair Bogi Kim, Vice Chair Liz Cattin Alice Dietz Mike Karnofski
COLLEGE PRESIDENT:	Kristen Finnel, Interim President

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS:

Guests: Mark McCrady, Sheila Timm, and Leszek Cromwell.

Others in Attendance: Nolan Wheeler, Wendy Hall, Dan Ruiz, Shelley Williams (AG), Thomas Herold, Mara Slabu, Michal Ann Ure, Tracy Stanley, and Tracy Powell.

Virtual Attendees: Paula Stepankowsky-CCCA, (2) Emilee, Rheba Rukkila, (5) Anonymous, Nickie Arce, Griffin, Ted Sprague, Andrew Hamilton, Christopher Wood, Confused user, Garry Lienhard, Kara Mathers, Minka Atkinson, Austin Bosgraaf, Dave Andrew, LM, Guest, Dean Boening, Jessica Harris, Jeffery Chao, X, and Laura Sampson.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Silva called for a motion to approve the agenda. A motion was made by Trustee Karnofski and seconded by Trustee Dietz to approve the agenda as presented.

MOTION:	By Trustee Karnofski, seconded by Trustee Dietz
OUTCOME:	The motion carried unanimously

CONSENT ITEMS

The following consent items were offered for the Board's consideration.

- Minutes of the December 10, 2025, Regular Board Meeting
- Minutes of the December 17, 2025, Special Board Meeting
- Minutes of the January 6, 2026, Special Board Meeting
- Minutes of the January 9, 2026, Special Board Meeting

Chair Silva called for a motion to approve the consent agenda. Trustee Karnofski requested a modification to the *Approval of the Agenda* section of the December 10, 2025, minutes to correct a spelling error. Trustee Dietz requested a modification to the *Meeting Access and Connectivity* section of the December 10, 2025, minutes to correct a spelling error and remove inaccurate language.

A motion was made by Trustee Cattin and seconded by Trustee Kim to approve the consent agenda as presented, with the noted revisions to the December 10, 2025, minutes.

MOTION: By Trustee Cattin, seconded by Trustee Kim

OUTCOME: The motion carried unanimously

COLLEGE INPUT (REPORTS)

President's Report

Kristen Finnel, Interim President and Vice President of Instruction, provided a brief overview.

Highlights included:

- Upcoming WACTC meeting in Olympia to meet with legislators and learn about potential policy changes that might impact LCC.
- The Minthorn Gallery reception
- Strong Continuing Education enrollment, with nearly 200 registrations for winter quarter classes.

Trustee Cattin acknowledged that Interim President Finnel has assumed additional responsibilities and inquired whether further support was needed. Kristen outlined her current strategies and indicated that she does not require additional support at this time.

Wendy Hall, Vice President of ECR and Student Access, provided a brief overview. Highlights included:

- Interim President Finnel and Vice President Hall will attend the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) accreditation meeting on January 26, 2026, in Seattle, with the NWCCU expected to issue a letter in February finalizing the college's accreditation recommendations.
- The formal strategic planning processes scheduled for February will be postponed to a future date.

Nolan Wheeler, Vice President of Administration, provided a brief overview. Highlights included:

- The CVTS waterline replacement on Mark Morris Court was completed during Christmas Break to minimize impacts on students.
- LCC was one of four colleges selected to convert a major capital project to an “intermediate project,” the renovation and refurbishment of the Admissions Building.
- The FY25 Financial Statement Audit will begin next week.

Dan Ruiz, Executive Director of DEI, Student Programming, and Housing, provided a brief overview. Highlights included:

- Disability and Access Services staff presented at a Mark Morris High School resource fair in October to help support the transition of students with disabilities.
- Two student veterans from the Veterans Alliance Club attended the Colorado Springs National Conference, the largest gathering of student veterans worldwide, where they shared experiences, networked, and gained insights to help shape veterans' education and career pathways.

Sheila Timm, Foundation Director of Development and Major Gifts, provided a brief overview. Highlights included:

- The Opportunity Can't Wait Capital Campaign surpassed its \$15 million goal, reaching 102.22%.
- The 2026 LCC Hall of Fame is scheduled for February 18, 2026, with inductees Terry Gragg (Men's basketball), Alice (Fox) Dietz (Women's Soccer), Mike Anderson (Track & Field), Sheldon Andrews (Baseball), and the 1991 Women's Volleyball Team.
- The 2026-27 Scholarship Cycle 1 opens March 1, 2026, with nearly \$700,000 in scholarship support available to students.

Mara Slabu, Executive Director of the Associated Students of LCC, provided a brief overview.

Highlights included:

- Four ASLCC students will participate in the D.C. Leadership Conference in early February.
- The creation of an ASLCC Instagram Account by the Marketing Director.
- The ongoing approval process for three new student clubs, including a car club, a coding club, and an artists-and-writers club.

Michal Ann Ure, Vice President of the Faculty Association of Higher Education of LCC (LCCFAHE), provided a brief overview. Highlights included:

- Faculty in Language and Literature are working to publish an Outstanding Student Essay from English 102, with plans to grow this into an annual, department-wide project.
- Faculty collaboration has resulted in the first STEM Advising Night, supported by the RAISE grant and LCC Foundation funding.

- Faculty continue to support workforce alignment and applied learning across the college. Machine Trades successfully reintroduced an evening section for the first time since the pandemic, enrolling 22 students, including many from local industry.

Tracy Stanley, President of the Washington Federation of State Employees of LCC (LCCWFSE), provided a brief overview. Highlights included:

- Transparency, shared governance, and ethics.

Head Start/ECEAP/EHS Written Report, Budget Status, and Program Report

- A written report was provided.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Joe M. Fischer submitted written public comments related to the President’s Administrative Leave, which were read aloud by Thomas Herold.
- Kurt Spiegel, Executive Director of WFSE/AFSCME Council 28, submitted written public comments related to recent Board actions, which were read aloud by Thomas Herold.
- Mark McCrady provided public comments related to Fundraising.
- Stephen Fuller & Michelle Trekas, LCC Foundation Board members, submitted written public comments related to Foundation Stewardship, which were read aloud by Thomas Herold.

Trustee Dietz asked whether comments received during a phone conversation with a community member could be shared during the public comment period. Shelley Williams clarified that per policy, public comment closes five minutes before the board meeting begins.

BOARD BUSINESS

Resolution 92 - Delegation of Authority to Name Facilities: Nolan Wheeler clarified that Resolution 92 renews the existing delegation of authority to the LCC Foundation, and does not modify current practice.

Chair Silva called for a motion to approve Resolution 92. A motion was made by Trustee Cattin and seconded by Trustee Karnofski to approve the resolution as presented.

MOTION: By Trustee Cattin, seconded by Trustee Karnofski

OUTCOME: The motion carried unanimously

February Retreat Planning: In preparation for the annual February Board Workshop, Trustees requested that the agenda include discussion of male enrollment, the budget, and Google technical support.

POLICY GOVERNANCE (ACTION)

- Policy 2.08 - Bylaws

Chair Silva requested clarification in the Quorum section of the policy. Vice President Hall confirmed that while the policy language had been clarified, the underlying process remained unchanged. Trustee Karnofski requested that the following language be added: "In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair, the Board shall select another member to serve as the presiding officer."

Chair Silva called for a motion to approve Policy 2.08. A motion was made by Trustee Dietz and seconded by Trustee Kim to approve the policy as presented with the noted revision.

MOTION: By Trustee Dietz, seconded by Trustee Kim

OUTCOME: The motion carried unanimously

- Policy 3.01 - Delegation to the President

Vice President Hall recommended tabling Policy 3.01, as the draft was not ready for presentation.

Chair Silva called for a motion to table the policy discussion. A motion was made by Trustee Karnofski and seconded by Trustee Cattin to table Policy 3.01 until a future date to be determined by the Board. The Board will continue the policy review process as established on the Board calendar.

MOTION: By Trustee Karnofski, seconded by Trustee Cattin

OUTCOME: The motion carried unanimously

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 5:54 p.m., Chair Silva called for an Executive Session to receive and evaluate complaints against a public officer or employee, to review the performance of a public employee, and to discuss with legal counsel representing the agency, litigation, or potential litigation to which the agency or the Board is likely to become a party. The Executive Session was anticipated to end at 6:30 p.m.

At 6:30 p.m., Chair Silva announced the Executive Session would be extended until 7:00 p.m.

At 7:00 p.m., Chair Silva announced the Executive Session would be extended until 7:20 p.m.

ADJOURN EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chair Silva reopened the public meeting at 7:21 p.m. No action was taken during the Executive Session.

ACTION AS A RESULT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

No action was taken as a result of the Executive Session.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Trustee Cattin expressed appreciation for the efforts of those supporting the college and its students, including staff, the Foundation, and the broader community. She affirmed her full support of the college and noted that her service is guided by a commitment to the institution’s mission. Trustee Silva echoed these sentiments, stating that the college will move forward together.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, at 7:22 p.m., Chair Silva called for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Trustee Karnofski and seconded by Trustee Kim that the Board meeting be adjourned.

MOTION: By Trustee Karnofski, seconded by Trustee Kim

OUTCOME: The motion carried unanimously.

On February 18, 2026, the Board of Trustees of Community College District 13 approved the minutes of the January 21, 2026, Regular Board Meeting.

Kristen Finnel
[Kristen Finnel \(Feb 19, 2026 08:52:36 PST\)](#)
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Kristen Finnel, Interim Secretary to the Board

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

My name is Joe Fischer. I was honored as the Lower Columbia College Foundation's Benefactor of the Year in 2019–2020. I have a long history of providing both financial support and volunteer service to the Foundation and the College, because I believe deeply in the mission of community colleges and their impact on students and the broader community.

I know college campuses well. I spent nearly three decades at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where I designed and planned a new Craft Center facility and supported programs in pottery, weaving, photography, and jewelry. My work included recruiting and orienting faculty and staff, coordinating exhibitions and community education programs, and serving as Art Gallery Director. I also taught as an adjunct professor with Empire State College for many years. My professional life has been dedicated to higher education, arts education, and institutional excellence.

It is from that perspective that I share my deep concern regarding the Board's recent decision to place President Seimears on leave. I am not alone in feeling frustrated, concerned, and deeply disappointed by this action. Members of both the College campus and the broader community are beginning to question what the Board's agenda is, as the process does not appear transparent or honest. This lack of clarity has created unrest and eroded trust among those who care deeply about this institution.

I have already informed Kendra Sprague and Sheila Timms of the LCC Foundation that I will no longer provide financial support to the College. If actions taken by the Board result in the termination of President Seimears' career at LCC, I will remove LCC from my Will: A planned gift of two million dollars.

I urge the Board to reflect carefully on the consequences of its actions, not only for leadership, but for institutional stability, community confidence, and long-term support.

Thank you,

Joe Fischer


To the Lower Columbia College Board of Trustees,

I am writing on behalf of the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE/AFSCME Council 28), which represents classified employees at Lower Columbia College. Our members care deeply about this institution, its students, and its role in the community. It is precisely because of that commitment that we must formally and clearly express our growing concern about recent Board actions and their consequences for the college's stability, workforce, and public trust.

WFSE's concern is not personal, political, or reactionary. It is grounded in our responsibility to protect lawful working conditions, professional standards, and the integrity of public institutions. Over recent months, employees have experienced increasing disruption and uncertainty stemming from governance decisions that appear to depart from established roles, procedures, and legal requirements. That uncertainty is now affecting morale, confidence in leadership, and the ability of staff to focus on serving students.

Under Washington law, the Board's role is governance: setting policy, providing strategic direction, and evaluating the president. It is not to manage day-to-day operations. Information brought to our attention suggests that these boundaries may have been crossed, including instances in which senior administrators appeared to bypass the president and communicate directly with the Board. This breakdown in the chain of command creates confusion, places employees in untenable positions, and undermines institutional leadership.

We are also deeply concerned by allegations of Open Public Meetings Act violations, including serial communications and deliberations occurring outside public meetings. Transparency is not optional for public institutions. Even the appearance that decisions are being shaped outside of public view damages trust and exposes the college, and those who govern it, to significant legal risk.

The Board's handling of the president's evaluation process has further intensified these concerns. Performance evaluations must follow SBCTC guidance and rely on fair, secure, and evidence-based methods. Departures from established evaluation practices, including reliance on informal or unsecured data collection, raise serious questions about procedural integrity and create the appearance of retaliation or predetermined outcomes. These are not abstract concerns; they carry real legal and operational consequences for the institution and its employees.

At the same time, Lower Columbia College is facing substantial state budget reductions. Against that backdrop, reports of expenditures made without clear authorization, transparency, or adherence to established plans are particularly troubling. Classified employees are understandably anxious about job security and program stability, and governance-level decisions that increase financial risk only heighten those fears.

WFSE urges the Board to pause and take corrective action. This includes reaffirming appropriate governance boundaries, ensuring full compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, adhering to SBCTC policies, and committing to decision-making processes that restore stability rather than deepen disruption. Our members want to do their jobs well and support students, not operate in an environment of ongoing turmoil and uncertainty.

We are prepared to engage constructively and in good faith to support a lawful, stable, and respectful working environment at Lower Columbia College. At the same time, we must be clear: WFSE will continue to closely monitor Board actions and will not hesitate to take further action to protect our members and the integrity of the institution if these concerns are not meaningfully addressed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kurt Spiegel', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kurt Spiegel

Executive Director

Washington Federation of State Employees/AFSCME Council 28

Vice President – Washington State Labor Council

1212 Jefferson Street SE; Suite 300

Olympia, WA 98501

(833) 622-9373

My name is Mark McCrady and from 2023 to the end of 2025, I served on the Steering Committee for the Opportunity Can't Wait fundraising drive. Our task was to raise 15 million dollars for the new Vocational Center, athletic facilities upgrades, and scholarships. We reached the 15 million dollar goal in December of 2025 and the group's work was considered finished. It was my feeling that there were more opportunities for support available to LCC. I had hoped to continue to make contact with potential donors that we had not yet been able to secure commitments from. Because my focus was in the manufacturing and industrial areas, I had planned to take Dr. Seimears and Tamra Gilchrist with me to these meetings because that is what I had done in the past.

The present situation at LCC makes it impossible for me to proceed with these efforts. The uncertainty that surrounds this organization at this time has taken center stage and, in my opinion, put the dampers on soliciting community support.

The community values LCC, the fact that the LCC Foundation presently has over 38 million dollars under management and the Opportunity Can't Wait fund raising drive reached their 15 million dollar goal proves that to me. Add to the fact that as you walk around the campus, you see so many places where families and organizations have made substantial donations for naming opportunities. The black cloud presently surrounding LCC has the potential to damage the college's reputation and make garnering needed community support much more difficult. I did not come here today to pick sides or lay blame but to make this point. The present situation needs to be resolved as quickly as possible and with full transparency. I am well aware of the legal and ethical restraints in releasing personnel information but as much as can be released should be released as soon as the processes under way have been completed.

By now, you have heard and/or should have read the letter from Joe Fischer. My concern is that other major donors to LCC are feeling the same way Mr. Fischer is feeling right about now. While I have been out of the public eye for quite a while, I am still active in the community and am out and about on a regular basis. I have heard comments from others similar to the feelings Joe Fischer shared in his letter. Please make every effort to get this situation resolved as soon as possible.

Mark McCrady
1-21-2026

January 21, 2026

Board of Trustees
Lower Columbia College
1600 Maple Street
Longview, WA 98632

Re: Foundation Stewardship and Student Impact Report

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

As Chair and Vice-Chair of the Lower Columbia College Foundation Board, we are honored to formally share an update on our recent milestones and the profound impact of donor philanthropy on our campus community. At the heart of our work is an unwavering commitment to improve educational opportunities at LCC, ensuring that every dollar entrusted to us by our donors directly advances the success of our students and the college.

To that end, we are proud to report that we have just completed our annual independent financial audit for the 2025 fiscal year. The audit was completed without any findings or deficiencies. In today's philanthropic landscape, where donors increasingly prioritize measurable impact and fiscal clarity, this "clean" result serves as a critical benchmark of our commitment to transparency and high-level donor stewardship.

This successful audit confirms that our internal controls and financial reporting processes are robust, ensuring that every gift entrusted to the Foundation is managed with the utmost integrity. We remain dedicated to maintaining this standard of excellence as we steward our donors' trust and support the long-term mission of the Foundation.

Our culture of accountability has empowered us to provide life-changing direct student support. Over the last 10 years, the Foundation has successfully provided emergency grants and scholarship support to more than 2,587 students. These scholarships do more than just cover tuition; they remove significant barriers to education, provide critical student emergency support, and allow our students to focus fully on their academic and professional goals.

As we look forward through 2026, we remain committed to strengthening the bridge between philanthropic vision and student achievement across LCC's campus. We are grateful for your continued partnership in fostering an environment where LCC students can thrive.

Sincerely,

Stephen Fuller
Chair, LCC Foundation Board

Michelle Trekas
Vice-Chair, LCC Foundation Board