

## STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY SENATE

### University Environment Committee

Meeting of December 18th 2020, 1:00 - 2:30 pm

Online meeting (Zoom)

Version 3, updated 1/13/2021 (maybe) no updates.

Attendance: Thomas Wilson, Carlos Colosqui, Heidi Hutner, Michelino Puopolo, Ria Bhutra, Richard Stein, Sarah Battaglia, Malcom Bowman, Clifford Knee, Mona Ramonetti, Joanna Kaczorowska, Hiya Panja, Matthew Eisaman, Frederick Walter, Jeanne Charoy.

Call meeting to order at 1:15 pm.

Ria Bhutra is a new undergraduate student representative. Richard Stein was appointed as liaison between the Senate and this committee - he works at DoIT and joined the Senate this summer where he stands in as the Senate's secretary treasurer.

**Election of the chair for 2021.** The Senate requires that the chair be reelected each year. Thomas Wilson was reelected to be chair of this committee and, at the moment, no one else has expressed an interest in the position. Wilson entertained motion to be reelected as Chair. Malcolm Bowman moved. Sarah Battaglia seconded. None opposed. Wilson is the chair of the committee for this year.

**Considerations of the August minutes.** No one expressed concerns or asked for modifications. Willson entertained a motion to accept the minutes. Battaglia moved. Mona Ramonetti seconded. The minutes were approved with no opposition.

**Chair report.** A year into the Covid-19 situation, we have good news: The vaccines are becoming available (distribution has started in the UK). Although the coming months may be difficult, in about a year everyone who wants to be vaccinated will be. As we come back to normal, there is an opportunity to think about the kind of normal we go back to. This is an opportunity for the committee to exert a positive influence on the university. The committee should develop an agenda for the coming six months and the coming year. Ideally, each committee member would participate in at least one and possibly two of the working groups.

#### **Working groups.**

*Natural Environment and Preservation working group* (coordinator: Thomas Wilson). The main two projects of this group are 1) the Lake Brianna/East Recharge Basin project and 2) the permanent protection of the Ashley Schiff reserve. Lake Brianna has become naturalized and the group has been monitoring it for the past year or so to make sure that it does its function as a basin and is effective as a storm water run off. In addition, Lake Brianna has a fauna (migrating birds use it) and it could be developed over time as an outdoor classroom. Wilson shared his screen to show the committee the data that has been collected so far (over 15 months). Wilson and Bowman will ask their students to analyze the data and relate water levels in the basin to rainfall amounts - the idea is to see if/when the basin overflows and what it can

hold. Bowman added that the group could also observe how variations in water levels depending on rain events affect the wild life - the quantitative assessments will allow the group to see how functioning the basin is and if it can be safely used as an outdoor lab space. Clifford Knee asked whether the group was able to actually identify what the volume of the water body is. Wilson answered that at the moment they weren't, but the group recently bought a real time kinematic (RTK) GPS which can be used to measure the surface area of the lake with good precision (within a centimeter). Next they can trace elevation and with the two measures they will be able to estimate the volume of the lake. This would be a good exercise for students. Knee mentioned that this information is required for some of the permits and he would like to have an accurate measurement of the lake's volume.

As for the Ashley Schiff permanent protection project, last year the Senate passed our committee's resolution unanimously. However, President Bernstein refused to endorse the project because, while he favored it, he didn't want to tie the next president's hands. Now that we have a new president the group is hoping to approach her sometime in the next year to get her endorsement. The next step would be to go to the local legislator who has been involved with this over the years (he has been reelected). Bowman mentioned that this legislator is an SBU employee and a scientist who is very active in the environmental field on Long Island. Wilson said that last year there was an issue because of a university policy that state employees must obtain permission before lobbying a legislator. But members of the University Senate can bypass this by identifying their conversations as senate discussions. And students are not required to get permission so they could be sent to represent the committee. The goal is first to talk with SBU's president to protect the Ashley Schiff Preserve and then get it included in the state park system which would give it formal protection.

*Transportation working group* (coordinator: Mona Ramonetti). This group had been focusing on parking, with a secondary emphasis on things like bicycle and pedestrian safety. During the Covid-19 situation, parking is not a problem, but that is not going to last. How can we prevent the parking crisis from coming back? Wilson's suggestion is that this group works on issues of remote work - this would help in reducing parking problems, net emissions on campus, etc... Ramonetti will continue to serve as coordinator for this group. She agreed that using remote work as a solution to the parking problem is an interesting idea and that the group could gain a lot of momentum to push in that direction given that the university has been able to function more or less well under these new conditions. Wilson added that this is an opportunity to reduce SBU's carbon footprint and it could help campus reach its goals and become carbon neutral over time (although there are arguments that remote work doesn't necessarily reduce our carbon footprint due to people using their lights at home etc...). The transportation group could start looking for facts on these questions to build an argument. There is another group part of a "reimagining SBU" effort that is working on remote work - these are people the committee could engage with to gather information. Heidi Hutner added that she sees public transportation on campus as a big issue - in particular the train which is infrequent and not great. The university could have a voice and push Governor Cuomo into action. Wilson said that this is something the committee has worked on in the past and that he will send Hutner the information they had collected, including recommendations for the LIRR to run better. There are many students who commute from the city on the train.

*Efficiency, recycling, and liveability* (coordinator: Jeanne Charoy). Under the current conditions it is not easy to advocate for some of the things this group works on. The group could think of ways to communicate about using less non reusables. And once activity on campus resumes the group could go back to projects like the campus gardens. Michelino Puopolo mentioned that in his lab, they are only able to collect glass separately and nothing else (e.g., plastic) - he asked whether we could push for better recyclable garbage collection in the labs. Frederick Walter added that it is also not clear what to do with old electronics (e.g., computers, cables, etc...). Wilson said that it is possible to recycle e-waste, for example during recycle mania in February. Puopolo also mentioned that his department offers a day to drop off e-waste for recycling.

*Research* (coordinator: Michelino Puopolo). Wilson said he wants to rename this group as "Best Practices" group, which would collect information about what other campus are doing and get ideas from them.

Suggestions for other projects and/or groups are welcomed.

**Open discussion on Covid-19.** As everyone knows the virus is ramping up. It has spread across the US - New York state is perhaps in a better place than it was in March but it's unclear whether it will stay that way. Stony Brook University is the only SUNY that has stayed open the whole semester which is a remarkable achievement. There has been no cases of classroom transmission, not just at SBU but anywhere, indicating that distancing and wearing masks in classrooms work. All college and university outbreaks appear to have originated in students breaking rules, having parties, not wearing masks etc... Walter added that much of the credit for SBU staying open goes to the students, who were very responsible. Knee concurred with Walter's comment, saying that students on campus were really compliant and it played a big part in keeping campus open. Bowman said that we should not be complacent with winter coming - we have to be careful about bringing teachers and students back to campus.

**Old and New Business.** No old business. Wilson had some new business: Heidi Hutner has received an email from a program called TIAA Divest! that is interested in lobbying to have TIAA divest itself from what they consider environmentally irresponsible investment. This includes a gas plant in New York which operates on frack gas, and other things. TIAA Divest! Would like the support of the University Senate. Wilson said he would bring the issue to the committee but he thinks this is a complicated issue and not a cut and dry deal. He will send the committee information from TIAA Divest! so the committee can discuss at the next meeting. Hutner said this sounds good to her. Wilson added that while he is not a fan of fracking (and he sees the same arguments against any kind of regulations for fracking the way it happened for coal, resulting in coal having a very negative impact on the environment), natural gas is cleaner than coal. He suggested that the committee discuss this again and decides if it wants to make a proposition to the Senate. Walter said that natural gas is methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas that survives in the atmosphere for 100 years or so; fracking is messy and gas escapes into the atmosphere. Given that we have limited time to get greenhouse gas under control, then in a

sense coal is better for the environment than fracking. Bowman added that methane's half life is about 10 years while CO2 is 100 years - but methane is seeping through the permafrost and we do have a problem with gas leaks.

Committee meetings have been scheduled for the second Wednesday of every month at 1PM so far. Unless there are any objections, the committee will keep this schedule for now. The committee will meet on the 13th of January (there were no objections to this proposition).

Wilson entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bowman seconded and Battaglia made the motion. None opposed.

Meeting adjourned at 2:18PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jeanne Charoy